Approaching the Empty Space of Power: Revolutions and Political Order

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Introduction

The central idea of this paper is that experiences in dramatic contexts of highly disruptive events influence the articulation of political order. Introducing some elements of a political anthropology of transformative experiences, it suggests that the question of political order cannot be limited to one source or foundation such as the idea of a natural right of individuals in pursuit of their rational interest of self-preservation. As the pioneering studies by Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Weber, Eric Voegelin, Michel Foucault, or Claude Lefort suggested, leadership is related to the constitution of subjectivity as a response to historical inflection points that entailed fundamental changes in consciousness. It is in the extreme conditions of existential crisis, in the exception, that meanings are reformulated. Historically, the articulation of representation as the foundational act of modern political order depends on the leadership’s capacity of symbolically and existentially representing the ‘people’, which becomes both the actor and the object of power. In a first part, I shall delineate the empty space of power as a concrete experience in historically dramatic situations that shape existential attitudes, representations, and memories. In a second part, I shall exemplify this argument by looking at the French Revolution, the October Revolution, and the challenges to communist power in Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Poland in 1980, which embody the process of democratic revolution in Eastern Europe. In the last part of this paper, the communist experience and democratization are used to dispel some tenets of democratic essentialism.

A Political Anthropology of Transformative Experiences

Subsequently, I shall approach the empty space of power historically by conceptualizing revolutions as transformative experiences. I refer to transformative experiences from two angles. Substantially, transformative experiences refer to the living through of exceptional circumstances of crisis by contemporaries and the conjunctural emergence of new states of consciousness. Despite the chaotic historicity of such ‘conjunctural structures’ or ‘fluid conjunctures’ certain regularities of thought, behavior, and symbolic ‘structures’ can be identified. Analytically, transformative experiences can be considered as a methodological tool by which dramatic situations of large-scale social crisis can be grasped. Thus, the breakdown and the consolidation of a regime can be set in the context of an irruption in the perceived and symbolically
sustained ordered course of life. In the tradition established by Nietzsche and Wilhelm Dilthey, a political anthropology of transformative experiences conceives of the constitution of political subjects, collective and individuals, through experiences. The dual-faceted approach characteristic of the modern *episteme* either reduces experience to sense-perception such as empiricism and positivism, or conceives of experiences as chaotic, unstructured, and therefore only conceivable through the categories of the mind. Conversely, it is contended that dramatic experiences are not synonymous with anarchy or social void but are in themselves structured, intelligible and can be analyzed on their own terms.

A central concern for a new science of politics such as suggested by Tocqueville, Voegelin, or Lefort was to show that the existence of political societies should not be measured by opposing order against disorder. In this view, the history of human arrangements has not been a series of variations in outcomes but an open-ended process of tensions between order and disorder, between truth and the deformation of reality. Social and individual life proceed somewhere between the imaginary extremes of absolute order, and chaotic, often anarchic conflict. There is an endless tension between the two, and also remarkable synchrony. History is not primarily a sequence of well-articulate and stable political orders or a continuous stream of meaningful existence. Rather, it is characterized by significant disruptions, where meaningful existence, truth, and the sense of reality are deformed. “Existence has the structure of the in-between, of the Platonic *metaxy*, and if anything is constant in the history of mankind it is the language of tension between life and death, immortality and mortality, perfection and imperfection, time and timelessness; between order and disorder, truth and untruth, sense and senselessness of existence.”

An experiential approach to political transformations assumes that discontinuity, rupture, and dissolution of order make up the essence of history. If there is continuity and repetition, it is the repetition of disarticulation, which should be at the roots of the articulation of political forms. This is not due to the fact that rupture is the rule but that the exceptional condition of dis-articulation of order and the accelerated rhythms of life will influence articulation of power most profoundly. Eventalizing (*événementialiser*) history emphasizes the need to disentangle the social foundations of underdetermined moments of disorder, to take into account a rupture of evidence or of the taken-for-granted. In Foucault’s terms, “history becomes ‘effective’ to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being – as it
divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself.”

An understanding of the political as experience goes beyond a scientific approach in which knowledge finds its self-assurance by defining political reality in terms of a sovereign distance between the subject and the social. „Any system of thought, which takes up the question of the institution of the social is simultaneously confronted with the question of its own institution. It cannot restrict itself to comparing structures and systems once it realizes that the elaboration of coexistence creates meaning, produces markers for distinguishing between true and false, just and unjust, and imaginary and real; and that it establishes the horizons of human beings’ relations with one another and with the world. It attempts to explain itself, and, at the same time, to explain its object.“ Political forms of domination are historically constituted in a process of communion between people dependent on a common cause, aspiring to a collective identity, which is constructed in a cultural space and is determined against the outside.

Approaching the Empty Space of Power

Much of democratic theory has focused on constituted power as the limiting effects of power through accountability and rule of law. It has assumed that power relations are fundamentally about controlling responses and behavior of citizens in society. Similarly, constitutionalism includes determinants of governmental decisions and prescribed rules that influence the legitimate distribution, types, and methods of control among government officials. Historically and logically, however, the constitution of power in a revolution means not the limitation but the foundation and correct distribution of power. In the struggle about the American constitution, the main question was not about ‘limited’ government but about how to establish power. Montesquieu’s suggestion according to which ‘power arrests power’ is not synonymous with a claim that the power of laws checks the power of man. Laws do not pre-exist their formalization in the sense of imposed standards, commands, or positivist legality.

A political anthropology of transformative experiences transcends the domain of politics as constituted power and based on classificatory schemes such as regimes, classes, or political systems. Following Claude Lefort’s distinction between la politique (politics) and le politique (the political) one must differentiate between two
realities. On the one hand, a pre-constituted domain of politics as delimited with the social order against the non-political fields of society or the economy. On the other hand, the conditions under which a political order is instituted in social and historical reality with the aim at constituting order on the basis of constitutive principles. The essence of politics is not in the constituted order of norms and rules but is found in the exception, where the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition. This exceptional situation harbors the structure of sovereignty, which is perpetuated into the constituted power. The essence of sovereignty is not in the monopoly of sanction or power but the monopoly of the decision. The state’s possibility of waging war and disposing of the lives of people implies the double possibility of expecting from its own members the readiness to die and unhesitatingly to kill enemies. The authority to decide in the form of a verdict on life and death for the sake of preserving domestic peace requires not only the declaration of an internal enemy but the fight against a real enemy. The exception creates the norm by excluding not a theoretical principle, concept, or objects but by excluding life through violence.

Historically, modern revolutions with their intense collective violence and destructive capacity were such exceptions, where the disruptions of ‘normal politics’ faced the challenge to find a government that puts the law above man. As Claude Lefort has suggested, the birth of modern democracy can be seen in the dramatic context of the downfall of absolutist monarchy, the revolutionary conflict of antagonistic forces over political domination, and its attendant emptiness of the space of power. Democracy’s crucial characteristic consists of the dissolution of ‘markers of certainty’. Whereas before the 19th century, political society relied on largely determined relations between corporate parts of society, the ‘democratic moment’ introduces radical indeterminacy by disentangling the legitimate basis of political power, the sources of moral and legal norms, and the production of knowledge. The modern democratic revolution is about the transformation from power incorporated in two kinds of bodies, the body of the king and the corporate social body. In monarchies, power was incorporated in the body of the king, as the body of the king gave the body to society. Conversely, democratic rule is not entitled to incorporate or appropriate power, as the exercise of power becomes subject to a periodical competition for this power. Being the rule of the people in their own interest, power in a democracy emanates from the people but it is the power of nobody. This empty
space of power comes along with the ‘disincorporation’ of individuals who are separated from corporate bodies or ‘natural’ hierarchies to become the smallest units of the new type of social relations. This double dis-incorporation of the social body and the monolithic political body suggests breaking with the idea of a continuity of democracy as a transhistorical value. Democracy in the modern era must take account of the depth of historical rupture and the profound reversals in meanings, representations, and symbols due to the situational premises of critical junctures. Conversely, the consolidation of communism and its totalitarian features can only be clarified by its relationship with democracy. The first modern conceptualization of social democracy was characterized by the premonition of its reversal, already presaging that old notions such as despotism or tyranny would not be sufficient to make sense of it.  

In the empty space of power, revolutionary challengers who pretend to establish a constitutional order are themselves unconstitutional. Their authority to set down the fundamental law in the empty space of power is based on the definition of identities and interests of the people. In Rousseau’s words, to establish the validity of man-made laws one actually would need gods. The secularization of politics by the removal of metaphysics brought life into the center not only in terms of inalienable rights but also in terms of the disposition of life for exerting the claim for power. As a metaphysical God was discarded, the reference to the highest value of the collective body, life, substituted the reference to transcendence. For Rousseau, the founding of a general will as the precondition for sovereignty and democratic participation would be paradoxical. In his view, for an emerging people to follow the fundamental rules of statecraft embodied in the general will, the effect (social spirit) would have to become cause, and cause (good laws) would have to become effect. The problem is how to establish either condition without the previous attainment of the other upon which it demands. Siyès’s distinction between constituent power and constituted power suggested that the authority of the constituted power could not be guaranteed by the constituting power, as the latter was prior to the constitution itself. Power and law were anchored in the nation as the constituting power, which was supposed to be in a perpetual state of nature, exempt from the social tissue. This undifferentiation between law and violence is already present in Hobbes’s Leviathan, where the state of nature survives in the person of the sovereign. The sovereign preserves his ius naturale contra omnes and thus is not subject to the civil laws.  

Incorporating the
state of nature in society becomes the basis for sovereignty, thus suggesting an
indistinction between nature and culture, or violence and law. The sovereign
conserves the freedom to repeal the laws that trouble him and thus ‘he that can bind,
can release’. Constituent power opens up the radical potentiality of unknown horizons
of expectation and thus goes beyond the political as far as it applies to the nature of
human beings in its totality. In communist regimes, Trotsky’s concept of the
permanent revolution or Mao’s uninterrupted revolution suggest the continuity of the
constituting power in the constituted power of a ‘system’. The autonomy of the party
and its claim to define law, history, and knowledge coexisted in a parallel fashion
with the constituted elements of the state.

As Giorgio Agamben has recently argued, the fundamental antagonism of
modern politics is not the one between friend and enemy but between bare life (zoe)
and political existence (bios). While in ancient Greece zoe did not belong in the
public realm, modern politics is based on the entry of zoe into the sphere of the polis.
The constitutional foundation of modern democracy in habeas corpus of 1679 did not
make the old subject of feudal relations, the free man, or the future citizen but the
body (corpus) the new subject of politics. The revolutionary rupture of 1789 put
crowd action and the bare life onto the stage of politics. The overthrow of feudal order
resulted in the constitution of sovereign power, which articulated political society by
including the politicization of bare life with its potentially beneficial and destructive
effects. In Agamben’s view, the sovereign structure of law derives its peculiar and
original force from the state of exception in which fact and law are
indistinguishable. If the exception is the structure of sovereignty, then it ceases to be
an exclusively political concept or juridical category. The exception is the originary
structure in which the creation of law refers to life and includes it in itself by
suspending it. Taking up a suggestion by Jean-Luc Nancy, this potentiality in
exceptional situations can be designated by the notion of ban (from the old Germanic
term that designates both exclusion from the community and the command and
insignia of the sovereign). The relation of the exception is a relation of ban. He who
has been banned is not simply set outside the law but rather abandoned by it, that is,
exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside,
become indistinguishable.

At this point, it should be made clear that the exception should not be seen as
an essentialist approach to politics, which would root political order in a foundational
principle. Foundationalist political philosophy has postulated, in a monistic fashion, one source or foundation of politics. Whether this foundation is found in self-preservation (Hobbes), freedom (Locke), reason (Rousseau, Kant), history (Hegel, Marx) or conflict (Schmitt), there seems to be a monism of political reality. A similar foundationalist view is presented by Hannah Arendt’s idealization of the beginning of modern politics in the American constitution as an act of foundation. In her view, for the first time in history such an act of foundation occurred in present times, devoid of all secrets, legends, or mythical imaginations. This event achieved to overcome the historical continuum by postulating an act of foundation that became the starting-point of a new chain of events, and a new consciousness of historical time. Such an idealization of a ‘beginning’ rests upon a triple abstraction, which eludes the question of history, where unexpected occurrences can give significance to formerly meaningless patterns and can generate new forms and styles of existence in the tissue of social life.

The Symbolic Articulation of Political Society

While sovereignty as the animating principle of politics must be looked for in the exception, this exception, however, is not the chaos preceding order but it is the situation that comes about once the previous order is suspended. Thus, the exception should be seen as a permanently present aspect of politics, where the irruption of crisis brings about the dislocation of existing structures, a liminal threshold situation, where the significant upheaval of everyday life and social communication suspends habitualized status patterns and introduces a dramatic dimension on a social scale. In this vein, experiences themselves, in the way they are ‘lived through’ by individuals, have a structure of their own, and therefore do not require the external categories of the cognitive mind for their intelligibility. Liminal occurrences combine the two main aspects of experience, the ‘objective’ character of a major and sudden event, and the ‘subjective’ perspective of how this event was lived through by the individuals undergoing the changes.

To my knowledge, the most far-reaching theory that tries to explain the foundation of culture and social order by connecting the modalities of a historically real violent crisis with a generating principle of collective symbolism that is constantly hidden once cultural and society are instituted, is René Girard’s mimetic theory. According to Girard, cultural and social order is built upon the ritualization
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of a sacrificial unique victim. Social order emanates from an exceptionally traumatic experience where in the absence of binding legal relations the expulsion of bare life and the mutual recognition of responsibility for this act provide the generative principle. Mimetic theory is congruous with the central idea of modern political theory that violence and the fear of violence are generative of order. Although it shares Hobbes’s realism about the a-social nature of man and rejects Aristotle’s claim about the natural sociability of man, it is critical of the assumption of a hypothetical state of nature. Although Hobbes’s biographical background is the experience of dissolution of order in the English civil war, his theory of politics is not based on historical experience but on a philosophical construction in a fictional state of nature. For Girard, violence is thus not a mere philosophical construction such as in social contract theory or a deliberate strategy such as in Freud’s Totem and Taboo. Conversely, mimetic theory conceives of crisis not as an objective force but as in its experiential reality with the realist implications of emotions, bloodshed, or vengeance affecting bodies and minds. At the origin of the pacification of society is a ‘strategy’ to expel violence for the center of the community. The pacifying consequence is not in the physical condition of the victim but in the interpretation by the community.

In the dramatic intensity of the empty space of power, transformations of political order must take into account reciprocity of human interaction and the unconscious processes that produce collective symbolism. Thus, the consequences of mimetic rivalry imply the social foundations of order can be expressed in analogy to Kant’s ‘a-social sociability’. The mimetic hypothesis does not assume man’s innately dangerous nature but conjectures that mimetic behavior is the anthropological constant in human relations. Under conditions of legally guaranteed and culturally sustained order, mimetic relations are unconscious processes of imitation that have a ‘positive’ capacity for the development of culture, education, knowledge. Their ‘negative’ capacity arises in the boundlessness of action, when legal boundaries and hierarchial social differentiations are suspended. The reciprocity of a cycle of vengeance and reprisals is brought to an end by the murder, death or expulsion of a sacrificial victim upon which the guilt is unanimously burdened by the community. The expulsion of the scapegoat is not a mere mythological narrative but is perpetuated in a ritualized commemoration of this original unanimity.

In a Hobbesian reading of the empty space of power, a war of all against all would be the likely outcome. Hobbes’ state of nature is not chronologically prior to
the state but is a principle integral to the state that becomes active once this very state is dissolved. Despite the violence and destruction in the state of nature, a Hobbesian view suggest the continuity of the ontology of subjects. In his view, the autonomy of individual preferences such as claimed by different versions of democratic individualism is not affected by emotions, bloodshed, and vengeance. Hobbes’s deep insights in the psychology of man were achieved at the expense of a bias in his anthropology. In his scathing critique of human passions, Hobbes made human anthropology world-immanent by elevating the disease of self-conceit and pride into the primary characteristic of the individual. While Augustine had distinguished between the amor Dei and the amor sui, Hobbes’s solution is focused on the isolated individual who is not oriented towards a common purpose or collective good but only motivated by his passions.

Hobbes, by contrast to Freud, constructs social order from the perception of the victim, not of the perpetrator. In his model, social and political relations are a means for the pursuit of self-preservation by individuals as an absolute end. The idea that individuals not yet involved in social relations originally know what their interests and what the consequences of their choice are, is logically incoherent. This individualistic theory of social order does not explain how self-preservation as the central interest of the individual emerges under conditions in which individuals are fundamentally insulated from each other. For a social order to be possible, the individuals must first recognize each other’s worth of being preserved. As Alessandro Pizzorno showed, self-preservation is a relational concept as we all need to see the worth of our preservation recognized by other human beings. Most importantly, it suggests that people act and behave in a way that is not guided by the pursuit of self-interest, material gain but even explicitly against their interests. The mimetic cycle of vengeance and violence draws people to follow the collective unconscious drive to persecution, denunciation, or witch hunting. Conversely, people also act against their self-interest if they are willing to sacrifice one’s own position in society, one’s prestige, or even one’s life for the sake of denouncing the sacrificial logic in the name of living in truth.

Modern political theory postulates that social institutions are needed to hedge violence but they will not make violence disappear. Conversely, mimetic theory proposes that the democratization of political order relies upon denouncing the ritualistic sacrificial logic of violence. Analogous to classical myths, in social contract
theory the victim is transfigured both for the worse in terms of scapegoat to be expelled and for the better in terms of bringing peace to the community. The structure of Hobbes’s social contract leaves the sovereign outside the reciprocal contract of everyone with everyone, making this social contract a unity minus one. Rousseau’s idea of a democracy in a nation requires the presence of an enemy as a precondition for a national unity and indivisibility. Mimetic theory does not suggest that violence is the foundation of order but it offers an explanatory account of how this ritualized sacrifice can be overcome by interpretation. The Gospels are the only texts that uncover the mechanisms upon which myths are based. A victim becomes a sacrificial one not due to its physical state but due to the meaning ascribed to this state. This inherent de-mythologization is due to the fact the resurrection of Jesus was followed by a dissident movement in the social world. The dissemination of Christian doctrine through the disciples insisted on the innocence of the victim and thus broke the circle of ritual sacrifice as the foundation myth of culture. If it had not been for this dissident movement, the death of Jesus would have become just another mythical account, which would have assembled the perpetrators around the victim that is both sacrificed and divinized.

From a perspective of political anthropology, the constants in history, and therefore in politics, are not regimes, classes, ideas, or events, but man himself in search of his humanity and his experiences that engender symbols. In current usage, symbols evoke an impression of being representative of something real, turning them into a decorative element. The notion ‘symbolic’ seems to downplay the impact if compared to real occurrences. A symbol stands for, evokes, or brings into being something else, something absent. It denotes a kind of relationship where certain components exist elsewhere but are brought into some sort of connectivity with others that are present. Originally, the etymology of the Greek word suggest that a symbol was a token, the present half of a broken table or coin or medal, that performed its social function by recalling the absent half to which it could have been potentially reconnected. The verb ‘symballein’ meant ‘to try an interpretation, to make a conjecture…to infer from something imprecise, because incomplete, something else that it suggested, evoked, revealed, but did not conventionally say.’

In Eric Voegelin’s view, symbolizations of experiences are attempts at making sense of the fluidity of existence, of in-between situations by attempting to achieve certainty. A deeply going transformation is thus a quest for a new symbolic universe,
which both precedes it, and follows upon it. When structural constraints of political
authority, social control, legal order, or traditional ties are weakened or considerably
reduced, the crisis threatens the basis of human existence and demands an existential
response to it. Therefore, the study of human arrangements with a view to facts, data
and events in the external world is only one important component of ‘political reality’. 
Human arrangements are also a little world, a cosmion, illuminated with meaning
from within by the human beings who continuously create and bear it as the mode and
condition of their self-realization.32 The symbol ‘articulation’ refers to nothing less
than to the historical process in which political societies, the nations, the empires, rise
and fall, as well as the evolutions and revolutions between the two terminal points. If
existential crisis is the experiential background to the articulation of political society,
political transformations, require a study of the conditions of representation, where a
people authorize representatives to act for them.

Political transformations hinge on the political moment through a double
movement of the emergence of constitutional order in the empty space of power and
the concealment of the mode of institution of this political society. Any authoritative
and constitutive act of foundation is bound to reverse cultural representations,
legitimate meanings, and the psychology of public opinion. As Paul Ricoeur has
argued, no political act ever conforms to the standard of being legitimate as reflecting
a previous consent of a sovereign authority.33 As a political act always lack full
legitimacy at the moment of its enactment, sovereignty occurs with a temporal gap
between act and the consent that enables it. A political anthropology of transformative
experiences, therefore, needs to look at three different dimensions of socially
mediated dramatic action and the formation of meaning as a response to an existential
crisis.34 First, the institutional formalization (mise en forme), which suggests that the
dissolutions of political order not only affect law and institutions but also imply the
politicization of bare life, where peoples’ lives, identities, representations, are at stake.
Second, the articulation of meaningful relations (mise en sense), which assumes that
both the politicization of bare life and attempts at overcoming sacrificial logic frame
existential attitudes. Existential representation is the precondition for endowing
political power with a meaningful claim to authoritatively represent society. Finally,
the performative element in the dramatic quest for power (mise en scène), which
suggests that a political society cannot come into existence unless it achieves
instituting the conditions of its own comprehensiveness and in giving itself a quasi-representation through symbols.

The Emergence of the ‘People’: Democratic Revolutions in France, Russia, and Eastern Europe

The modern conception of representation includes the symbol people in two meanings, both as legitimizing the government and as being represented. In Abraham Lincoln’s formulation of democracy as the government of the people, by the people, and for the people, the ‘people’ absorbs three dimensions whose simultaneity is the result of a sequence of several crises. It designates the articulated political society, its representatives, and the membership that is bound by the acts of the representative. By contrast, in medieval language the ‘people’ could be distinguished without emotional resistance as the ‘realm’ and the ‘subjects’. While the representational principle ‘King in Parliament’ preserved the differences of rank, it already symbolized the relationship of head and member in one body politic. Before, such as in the aftermath of the Magna Charta, the ‘people’ originally meant only a rank in society without any possibility and aspiration for articulating representation. It is true that Lincoln’s classical synthesis of democracy derives its democratic credentials not from any trans-historical essence but from Lincoln himself. It has been argued that this phrase defies exact analysis and does not suffice to define democracy because Stalin might have used it first and he might found plausible arguments to justify it.

The liberal critique of the inexactitude of Lincoln’s formula and its possible abuse by Stalin, however, misses the point because it conceives of democracy as a set of political institutions that safeguard liberal values as an end in themselves. Revolutionary ruptures are at odds with such essentialist assumptions on human autonomy. Human power in terms of the potential capacity to form political arrangements is boundless. In the boundlessness of action, however, the actor is never merely a ‘doer’ but always and at the same time a sufferer. In revolutionary conditions, equality can be likened to what Marcel Mauss termed ‘total equality’. As a total social phenomenon, it comprises political, economic, juridical, moral, aesthetic, and psychological realities. Revolutionary events are liminal experiences where the equality of conditions blurs hierarchies of political agency, establishes multiplies sovereignties and structures of dual power, dissolves identities and social
roles, or enhances the reciprocity of desires. Popular sovereignty has not only been a matter of a normatively inspired and constitutionally guaranteed doctrines but it has politically articulated through socially dramatic events. In the boundless potentiality of the empty space of power, the principle of inequality is the driving force at the bottom, as revolutionaries either pursue the consolidation or the destruction of social inequality. The competition for the empty space of power will allow for relativity of values, the permanent contestation of laws, history, and knowledge. Thus, equality of conditions refers not only to a legal prescription laid down in democratic constitutions that would guarantee equal treatment and equal respect for every man. When politics are unbounded, the equality of conditions takes on a meaning beyond an understanding of equality of estimation, which would imply legally enforceable equal treatment and equal respect for everybody. Equality is not only the object of a belief or the principle of social hierarchies and political rights but provides human relationships with meaning as far as it becomes irreversible on the level of thought, even though in reality many inequalities subsist.

The empty space of power as a liminal experience reflects the double-sided effect of the people as being both the source of power and its victims due to the submission of control of individuals’ lives to the state. As Agamben suggested, modern democracy presents itself as a vindication and liberation of *zoe*. The paradox of democracy consists in that it wants to put the freedom and happiness of men into play in the very place – bare life – that before had marked their subjection. The crucial dilemma of modern democracy is that it is ambivalent about its highest value. While it dedicated all its efforts to the happiness of people, it has been incapable of saving *zoe*, as the bare life of the double sovereign cannot be sacrificed yet may, nevertheless, be killed. If certain dates such as 1789, 1917, 1956, 1968, 1980/81, or 1989 arouse emotions even today, this is because the constitution of political authority has not exclusively been a matter of political reason or positivist legality but it generated through the politicization of bare life. The revolutionary ruptures in 1789 and 1917 opened up for ‘democratic politics’, where the dissolution of markers of certainty would establish sovereignty in the nation and the dictatorship of the proletariat. While revolutionary violence excludes specific parts of the people (in terms of bare life) by mass violence and terror, it includes the ‘people’ in terms of articulating the ‘nation’ or the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ as a representational principle with the capacity of constituent power. The politicization of people’s bodily
existence into the rationales of state order has to acknowledge that the democratic
cornerstone is not only about representation but also includes the dark sides of
democracy. The democratic revolution of 1989, for instance, brought about
democratic rights but also includes Bosnia and ethnic cleansing, authoritarianism, as
well as exclusion and discrimination.44

The French Revolution

As recent work on the French and the Russian Revolution has argued, the
legitimization of forms of popular sovereignty is inherently linked to the political
symbolism produced in the liminal empty space of power.45 The articulation of the
‘people’ needs to take into account revolutionary emotions, insurrectionary crowds,
contentious politics and collective violence. The emotional significance of the
bloodshed during the assault on the Bastille and the transformation of power in its
aftermath were described as a ‘transformative sacrifice, an act of sacred founding
violence’.46 The French Revolution was not only the birthplace of democratic politics
and constitutionalism. It was also a social revolution marking the appearance of
crowds in politics. The democratization of social conditions in the contentious politics
of a revolution acquired an autonomy of its own, articulating new meanings of
political concepts. The new concept of revolution with the idea of sovereignty of the
people was produced in the significant upheaval of everyday life and social
communication associated with crowd violence and the attack on the Bastille. The
attack at the Bastille in July 1789 was an act of popular violence that endowed the
concept ‘people’ with a new meaning. The attack at the Bastille was not primarily
based on the intentional consciousness of heroic individuals but generated in the
contingent social context in which the National Assembly forced the King to consent
to popular sovereignty. It was not the physical consequences of this act of violence
but its interpretation by the representative body of the National Assembly that sealed
it as an authoritative expression of popular sovereignty and legitimacy thus converting
it into the constitutive act of the people as a political subject.

Legally sanctioned structural transformation in the French Revolution
occurred in the context of a haphazard configuration of crowd action, whose symbolic
sanction by the National Assembly was driven by the threat of crowd violence and the
desire to avoid the contagion with the mass panic in the Great Fear. The Great Fear as
the most astonishing mass panic in recorded history was decisive for the legislative
act of abolishing feudalism and privilege by replacing them with the equality before the law. The mass panic of the Great Fear interrupted the negotiations in the National Assembly on the constitution and the declaration of rights because of the pressing situation of how to deal with increasing disorder in the provinces. Similarly, insurrectionary peasant violence had a positive effect on emancipation and democracy.\textsuperscript{47}

In the theory of the civilizing process, Norbert Elias stressed the importance of understanding the part played by networks of interdependence and reciprocity as aspects of civilizing processes.\textsuperscript{48} The growing competition and increasing long-term interdependence with others were favorable to greater control of affects and emotions. As moments of intense violence revolutionary ruptures are sources of the mastery of emotions. The change in the pattern of people’s ‘we-and-they feelings’, of identification and exclusion, was a primary condition for the development of nationalist sentiments, values, and beliefs.\textsuperscript{49} While sovereignty in monarchies focused on feelings of loyalty and attachment from person to person, modern nation-states in the wake of the French Revolution relied to a much higher degree on attachments to symbols of the collectivity. Democratization processes in modern politics were the expression of how symbols for a collectivity became focal points for the emotional bonding of persons to this collectivity. This collectivity itself was endowed with ‘numinous existence of its own outside and above the individuals who formed it – with a kind of holiness formerly associated mainly with superhuman beings.’ The attachment of emotions to a sovereign collectivity produced a duality of normative codes, whose demands are inherently contradictory. One can distinguish a moral code which is egalitarian in character with ‘man’, the human individual as its highest value. Conversely, the nationalist code derived from the Machiavellian code of princes and feudal power, inegalitarian in character with the collectivity – state, country, nation - as its highest value.\textsuperscript{50} The development of such a dual and inherently contradictory code of norms has been characteristic of transformation from artistocratic-dynastic into democratic states in the Western World.

\textit{The October Revolution}

Supported by long-standing revolutionary desires and earlier uprisings such as in the Revolution of 1905, the Russian Revolution of 1917 with its two peaks in February and October deepened social polarization and transformed meanings of
democracy. If the outcome of the Bolshevik revolution is seen as ‘totalitarian’ and non-democratic, it is overlooked how the substance of the revolutionary situation was culturally creative in maintaining the democratic credentials of communism. First, it would hardly have occurred to any observer in late 1916 to dispute the socialists’ claim to belong to the ‘democratic club’.

Second, the political viability of a political concept must be related to social foundations. Not surprisingly, meanings of democracy underwent a profound transformation in Russian political discourse in the flow of events.

While democracy was originally associated with a universal political concept and constitutional safeguards against dictatorship, in the mimetic cycle of vengeance of the revolution it acquired a quasi-dictatorial meaning were the socially disadvantaged aimed to expel the enemies of the privileged classes. The political rejection of the ‘bourgeois’ state must be linked to the socially dramatic empty space of power where mob rule imposed logics of class antagonism on the meaning of democracy, thus conflating democratization with the purging of the ‘bourgeois’ elements’ in the state.

Given the combativeness of an absolutist police state and all-pervasive party bureaucracy as well as consistent with Lenin’s contempt for parliamentary democracy, it has been widely agreed that the dictatorship of the proletariat suppressed any kind of meaningful democracy as a constitutional form of government. Against the critique that Lenin’s theory rejects democracy as the rule of the majority, in Lenin’s view the Soviet regime is majority rule. He does not question the majoritarian principle of democracy but adapts the situational premises of total equality to the conceptual meaning of socialist democracy. In his view, the Western conception as one where the liberal (based on individual autonomy and dignity) principle of majority rule is inside the institutional apparatus of the state (parliament, pluralism etc.) neglects the sociological element of the people as potentially participating in the work of government. Faithful to the Marxian idea that the revolutionary class of the proletariat has no class interest, under the dictatorship of the proletariat the people are not any longer separated by division inside society, and the division between society and state has also been removed. The fundamental distinction between Soviet power and the former organs of power is that the old regime was a dictatorship of the minority based on police force and the feudal separation of society from the government. Conversely, the new power as the
dictatorship of the overwhelming majority could and did maintain itself only by winning the confidence of the great masses, only by drawing, in the freest, broadest, and most energetic manner, all the masses into the work of government.54

Revolutionary communism in Soviet Russia sacrificed the human individual for a collective code of a rationally designed ‘new socialist man’. Soviet communism required an unconditional subordination of the individual to the moral code of the collective. Adapting the English maxim ‘right or wrong my country’, Trotsky underscored that history did not provide another way to prove the correct line than to go with and through the party. The absolute loss of individuality is best documented in the true confessions of the accused party functionaries in the Moscow trials. If the dictatorship of the proletariat claimed the rule of the people as a collective body, the techniques of communist power all but eliminated the influence of the ‘people’ on political choices. Mass mobilization in post-revolutionary and Stalinist Russia was intended rather in the conservative sense of keeping the ideological claim on a society without division alive. The symbolism of the identification of the enemy reinforced the practices of communist power by which the collective was called upon disciplining, surveilling, and constructing the Soviet-type individual.55

*The ‘Democratic Revolution’*

Communist power claimed to exercise sovereignty through the non-political claim of embodying both the social spirit, consciousness and the source of laws. By destroying any sphere of open conflict and political alternative, communist systems caused the center of gravity of any potential political threat to shift towards the existential and the pre-political.56 In such an environment, political impulses could hardly come from professional politicians that have adopted the political habits and techniques of communist power but need to come from outsiders. The small revolutions in Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, and Poland 1980 introduced the empty space of power, as they constituted revolutionary situations where the symbolic unity of the ‘people’ challenged the authority of communist power. Although it refused to engage with political institutions, anti-communist dissidence was aware of the stakes of genuine political reality. Dissidence was not ‘democratic opposition’ in terms of a political opposition in a constituted power system. Dissidence was an existential option for detachment from practices of Soviet power, which aimed to lay bare the confusion of power, the humiliation of human beings, and the atomization of
social life. Its democratic character consisted in formulating consciousness and social spirit as representative for an existential alternative to the logic of communist power. Ethic individualism or moral perfectionism were criticized as a retreat into the private realm, allied with irresponsibility to the social cause. The preference for an individual moral code against the socially inclusive code of the nation derived from the experiential basis of living under the logic of communist power. If the foundation of communist power was based on the surveillance of the individual by the collective, overcoming this double-bind meant to exclude oneself from the collective. The articulation of dissidence was not only deliberately conducted in the ‘hidden’ sphere, it was also going against one’s own self-interest. The immense investment of time for underground pursuits went at the expense of developing professional careers or benefiting from some liberties such as occasional travels to the West. Many dissidents served long prison sentences, had to work in menial jobs, exposed to public denigration and abuse in the official media. Most of all, there was pervasive uncertainty about the possible absurdity of one’s own resistance with no guarantee whatsoever about a possible ‘success’.

Although anti-politics in Eastern Europe was dismissed by many due to its manifest denial of reforming the political system of communist government, it revealed the emptiness of power as it credibly established an ‘anti-political’ spiritual movement. The dissident project was based on building a ‘hidden’ sphere, where citizens would be liberated from the mental constraints imposed by the institutionalized logic of official politics. As James Scott has suggested, in the absence of a public space for the articulation of voice, the power of voice articulates through the infra-politics in the hidden sphere. The infrapolitics of dissidence by means of the hidden transcript exerted constant pressure, much as a body of water might press against a dam. The amount of pressure varies according to the degree of shared anger and indignation but also on the degree to which parts of the hidden transcript leak through and increase the probabilities of a complete rupture. Breaking the silence is not only a psychological release for the one who speaks on behalf of others, it is also a moment of political electricity. The compulsory emigration of Solzhenitsyn, for instance, was not due to this power position but rested on his writings that were ‘dreadful well-spring of truth’ with the risk of ‘incalculable transformations in social consciousness’, which in turn might one day produce political debacles unpredictable in their consequences. The ‘power of the powerless’
with its claim to moral perfectionism attempted to develop a moral code of the individual based on an existential attitude of subjectivity, not of idolatry of the collective.

Problems of Democratic Essentialism

In the last part of the paper, I shall take issue with essentialist assumptions of ‘democratic consolidation’ on the grounds of a cultural approach to the emergence of democracy. Two fundamental assumptions have been influential in democratic theory. As an institutionalized form of government, democracy is based on state sovereignty and the rule of law. As a political value, much of democratic thought suggests that democracy works on the premise that autonomy of preferences is rooted in democratic individualism. Normative or typological dimensions of democracy describe the legitimization of decisional outcomes in a given constituted system of power. Empirical theories of democracy see democracy as a complex set of operative guidelines that rest upon rules of prudence, not on deeply ingrained habits of tolerance, moderation, mutual respect, fair play, readiness to compromise, or trust in public authorities.59 The argument implies that due to a long and uninterrupted period of democratic stability, civic institutions and civility have been produced. According to this view, democracy institutionalizes ‘normal’, limited political uncertainty. Thus, a civic culture is the product of institutions whose complex set of rules and the prudence of actors keep uncertainty bounded.

Democratic Individualism and the Dissolution of Order

Such a view of democratic consolidation subordinates logics of historical experience to logics of outcome. Any definition of ‘what democracy is’, however, seems to be flawed if democratic transformations are released from outcome-oriented logical constructions and attuned to the experiential basis of the empty space of power. In a monistic fashion, theories of democratic consolidation have assigned the totality of representation to liberal democracy. Democracy has become a developmental goal, where values such as freedom, equality, or representation are disconnected from historical experience and their contingent articulation. Major exponents of such views suggest that the potentiality of and the obstacles to democratization are determined not by different points of departure but by a common destination and the imperative of convergence.60 This presumed universality of liberal
democratic arrangements as a developmental goal has obscured that the evolution of democracy both as an idea and a constitutional form of government has not been a goal of history, but an ‘accident’. The consolidation of democratic order consolidation is postulated not as a socially endogenous process of historical articulation but as based on abstract foundations of human autonomy and the rule of law. Such democratic essentialism judges historical evolution by the outcome. It implies that political transformations are somehow rooted in democratic individualism, autonomous preferences, or the institutionalized rule of law.

Following methodological individualism, democracy as a system of political authority generates in reflective preferences, which occur internally, within each individual’s head and not primarily in an interpersonal setting. Democracy as a system of procedural rules and institutionalized political authority is rooted in individual self-interest and the representation thereof on the aggregate level of party politics. Joseph Schumpeter’s ‘realist’ theory of democracy discarded the idea of a public good embodied in a general will. The general will is manufactured not by reason but by appeals to the subconscious, which makes the thinking of normal citizens affective and extra-rational, menacing with ominous consequences such as indulging into dark urges or paving the way for radical groups. Rather, he grounded his vision of democracy as a political method in a specific rationality according to which only the division of labor between the people and its representatives - which presupposes the insulation of governors from fickle public opinion - can promote the long term interest of the state. This view of empirical democracy as rooted in the political rationality of a division of labor echoes the development of interest as an individually based check to the passions, which was crucial for the development of modern capitalism. According to Albert Hirschman, capitalist behavior was not only a desperate search for individual salvation, as argued by Max Weber. It also owed much to an equally desperate search for a way of avoiding society’s ruin, permanently threatening at the time because of precarious arrangements for internal and external order.

The democratic moment of the empty space of power questions precisely the assumption of such an individualistic self-interest. The idea of autonomy as the individual’s capacity to act on the basis of rational and self-interested attitudes towards constitutionally guaranteed claims and rights cannot be detached from context, history, and culture. The crucial point is that the autonomy of individuals in
institutionalized settings of liberal democracy differs from the autonomy in the empty space of power. In such situations, democratic institutions themselves can fall prey to contagion with passions and turn from bounded uncertainty and contingent consent into a persecuting crowd. If liberal capitalism is largely sustained by individual self-interest, it tends to deny that markets are not only ruled by this exogenous force (interest). In a liberal view, markets are social settings where consumers nurture their *amour propre* (self-love) by a focus on the *amour de soi*, the radical pursuit of genuine self-interest. It is this individual self-interest that avoids the menace of contagion with the possible disintegration of markets in panic and disorder. However, the situational logic of action may deceive a presumed ontological stability.

Rousseau’s important distinction between *amour de soi* in the hypothetical pre-social state of nature and *amour propre* as contaminated by social order and generated out of envy, desires, and passions lacked the anthropological insight that in historical reality the formation of genuine self-interest cannot be detached from the bodily passions, violence.

As Jean-Pierre Dupuy’s extensive analysis of the influence of economic thought on the current political philosophy of liberalism has suggested, major exponents of liberal thought systematically avoid confronting the real menace of contagion, disorder, and sudden breakdowns of capitalist markets such as in mass panics. Thus, markets contain the crowd and the potential disintegration into panic. The autonomy of self-actualizing individual self-interest is menaced by the contagion in the reciprocity of emotions. Markets endogenously *contain* the mechanism, which threatens them most. Etymologically rich, the double meaning of ‘to contain’ is more than only a game of words but simultaneously connotes inclusion and exclusion. Market contains the contagion of panic in two ways. While the market impedes panic from breaking out due to the pursuit of self-interest, the interest-based logic of the market dissolves in outbreak of passions such as in panics at stock markets or rampant inflation. In this vein, Adam Smith’s concept of self-love includes the reciprocity of passions and interests. Concerned with the ‘great mob of makind’, i.e. with the behavior of the average person, Smith defined self-interest as relying upon the craving for honor, dignity, respect, and recognition.

Thus, even democracies become prey to this logic of annihilating the enemy by all means, when they are existentially threatened. In Schumpeter’s thought experiment on the use of anti-democratic means in order to defend democracy, the
crucial question is whether members of a community that would satisfy the reader’s criteria of democracy would subscribe to eradicating a – however defined evil such as religious or political dissent– by applying non-democratic means. If they would, they would behave exactly as did the Bolsheviks when they tried to eradicate their declared enemy – the capitalist order – by non-democratic means. Socrates was condemned by the democratic institutions of Athens. The rampant liberalism characteristic for the McCarthy era showed how democratic institutions can turn into the persecuting crowd, forcing the accused to make confessions of collective guilt, suggesting one great and unique enemy to the people of the United States. The deliberative filter of non-communication established in the Cold War reinforced a universalist conception of liberal democracy that excluded any other values than those of Western liberalism. Consequently, forms of socialist democracy could only be reformed by liberalization before being institutionally transposed into liberal types of democracy. This is reminiscent of Carl Schmitt’s point according to which waging wars in the name of humanity is not a war for the sake of humanity. Rather, usurping the universal concept of humanity can be used by a state for the purpose of self-identification with humanity, peace, justice, progress, or civilization, thus denying these to the enemy or military opponent. The contest for power in a political moment makes no difference between ‘naturally inclined’ democrats or communists but follows the situational logic of annihilating the enemy. The stand-off between the Supreme Soviet and Russian president Boris Yeltsin in autumn 1993 pointed to the absence of a national mythology that would have attenuated the extreme polarization of two institutions that had signified the turn for democratization in 1989 and 1991.

Civil Society and Violence

The collapse of communism seemed to confirm the importance of civil society as a trailblazer of the largely non-violent collapse of communist regimes. The valuable work on civil society recognized the connection between a strong civil society and the avoidance of violence. Their fundamental point is that institutionally crafted political democracy generates spaces of civility that account for dual autonomy and independent deliberation. Under authoritarian rule, it is suggested, such civility remains uncultivated. Empirical democratic theory has thus made a case for considering civic culture as a product rather than as a producer of democracy. A related claim suggests that democracy can potentially tame or pre-empt outbreaks of incivility. As John Keane has recently argued democratic efforts to constitutionalize
political power and ‘civility politics’ are sustained by anti-violence campaigns or peace movements.\(^{71}\) This attempt to think ‘democratically about violence’ suggests that violence can be democratized through the public accountability of the means of violence. In this view, the civilizing features of democracy rest upon the stability of the institutionalized logic of modern liberal demoracies where attitudes and behavior patterns are impervious to the irruption of ‘incivility’.

Although there is a legitimate case for civil society as the bearer of liberty against the mechanical application of majoritarian politics, the antagonism between institutional democracy and violent incivility is flawed from an experiential perspective. Discussing it at length, Keane misinterprets mimetic violence as a ‘natural’ and ‘deep-seated predisposition in every individual.'\(^{72}\) The underlying assumption is that democratic constitutionalism with its principle of rule of law is fundamental for keeping passions and incivility in check. The limitations of the law are never entirely reliable safeguards against action, just as the boundaries of the territory are never entirely reliable safeguards against action from without. This boundlessness of action is only the other side of its tremendously productive capacity.\(^{73}\) The claim about the self-enforcing strength of democracy rests upon the assumption that all the relevant political forces find it best to continue to submit their interests and values to the uncertain interplay of the institutions.\(^{74}\) However, this institutionalization of democratic ‘uncertainty’ is connected to a high level of certainty about the enforcement of laws against subversion. This is precisely what political societies such as the Russian federation lack.\(^{75}\)

What is ‘natural’ is not violence but that mimetic contagion with a propensity to cycles of vengeance and violence threatens when the boundaries of law and civility do not hold any longer. Human aggressiveness arises as a socially generated relational process and not as an innate attribute of mankind.\(^{76}\) Montesquieu defined laws as relations between different beings, as he was less concerned with laws as defining boundaries and limitations but with the actions their spirit would inspire.\(^{77}\) For him, the principle of governments is in the human passions that set it in motion and make it act by virtue of laws. In critical situations, these passions may infringe upon the boundaries of law. It is the social magic of violent acts, not the normative imperative of preserving legal ends that can be considered as the foremost motivation for law’s interest in a monopoly of violence.\(^{78}\)
Democracy as a Process of Meaning-Formation

From a cultural perspective, the articulation of democracy cannot be about being, essence, or identity but needs to thematize existential crisis, the brokenness of political reality, contested memories, and challenges of identification in the formation of political authority. Modern politics has not only been the realm of the *raison d’état*, which would come down to taming the passions by the interests. The symbolic articulation of political society suggests that existential representation goes beyond representation in the constitutional sense. It requires that power must be accepted subjectively as representative in the existential sense of realizing the idea of the institution. In order to be authorized to act, a representative needs to rely upon a credible reciprocity with those who conferred this authorization. In the dissolution of markers of certainty, authority is not about a prescribed conceptually coherent and collectively imposed ‘meaning of the symbol’ but about the symbol’s power to evoke feelings or attitudes. The articulation of political order has been an open-ended sequence of such lines of meaning, which transform and ‘structure’ subjectivity through the generation of a new culturally empowered political symbolism.

The grounding of democracy as a system of legal-rational domination is a key element in the analysis of regime change. As Max Weber saw, bureaucratic rationalization can be a revolutionary power against traditional forms of domination. Its revolutionary force comes from outside, as it rests upon technical means that affects the order of things first before modifying and increasing the conditions of adaptability of human beings to the external world by means of rational goal-setting. Conversely, charismatic authority consists of beliefs of revelation and heroic creativity. This belief revolutionizes from inside, grasping the spirit of human beings and then tries to shape things and orders according to the revolutionary spirit. The opposition between external and internal spheres is not in the person or the experiences of the creator of ideas or deeds. Rather, the differences are in the modalities of how they are internally appropriated by the dominated and led, how they are lived through. The formalization of power, therefore, is an unconstitutional act whose existence beyond the boundaries of law in the boundlessness of action illuminates the individual with beliefs, images, and symbols.

Methodologically, the positivistic effort of democratic essentialism adapts political reality to the classificatory certainty of causes, stages, or sequences of political development. Any claim about discovering the roots, origins, or foundations
of communist or democratic ‘identity’ is, however, problematic. Political regimes generate in historically and geographically concrete spaces and can be in utter antagonism to the collective symbolism of a revolutionary event. Revolutionary experiences socially and culturally create new meanings as they reverse taken-for-granted meanings, thus achieving mergers of formerly exclusive or contradictory meanings of symbols. Meaning-formation suggests that man as a historically constituted being can keep ‘pasts’ available, while ‘futures’ can exert a spell on the collective imagination. Beyond material and institutional ruptures, fundamental transformations of power also modify symbolic worlds by articulating a new form of representation, a new spirit, but also by changing attitudes towards the past and the future.

As the case of communism and challenges to its power suggest, democratization has not been equivalent to a meaningful pattern of growth of a new regime or the breakdown of an old one but a lengthy process of social construction that is bound to be open-ended and contingent upon the conquest of the empty space of power, upon an on-going process of narrative construction. Given the infinitude of existential judgments in an endless number of events, it would be futile to claim that any event has a definite meaning for different groups or societies at different times in history. Contrary to ‘historicist’ arguments about the uniqueness of every society, every culture, and every epoch, it provides generalized propositions on the grounds of an analytical correlation of historically unique and circumstantial cases. Unlike positivist ‘hypothesis-testing’ its propositions cannot be verified by ‘objective’ measurement. The validity of the propositions can only be ‘tested’ by placing them in the historical field of experiences and their symbolizations, i.e. in the time dimension of the empty space of power and the articulation of political society itself. As work in cultural anthropology has claimed, circumstantial understanding and historical detail does not escape theoretical generalizations. Drawing general propositions from particular phenomena is the basis of any scientific theory, especially of one that tries to make out man’s actions in their infinite variety.

The test of the hypothesis, therefore, is the lack of originality epitomized in the equivalence of symbolizations in different historical experiences. The emergence of democracy is followed through a typology of experiences in the empty space of power, where the situational premises reconfigure political symbolism. The conditionality of the origins of political order suggests that that the world we know is
not this ultimately simple configuration where events are reduced to their essential
traits, their final meaning, or their initial and final value. Despite the observer’s
tendency to assume profound intentions, meanings, and immutable necessities at work
in historical processes, the true historical sense confirms our existence among a
profusion of entangled events without landmarks exogenous to the situation. Such
‘lines of meaning’ appear as structuring and self-reflecting movers of action in
dissimilar and non-contemporaneous circumstances. They can potentially give rise to
‘traditions’ with a fully developed identity, or even to ‘movements’ which are
politically active within history and whose future becomes an explicit concern of its
members. Lines of meaning are not defined through the similarity of symbols or ideas
but emerge from the chaotic historicity of experience. They command authority as
they culturally create new symbols in response to the means-to-end-contexts of
situational premises, when thinkers, political leaders, social movements, or regimes
refer to each other in order to clarify their concerns to themselves and to others.

1 This applies, for instance, to Max Weber’s study on the spirit of capitalism, Norbert Elias’s work on
the court society and the civilizing process, Eric Voegelin’s work on the gnostic revolt, or Michel
Foucault’s technologies of the self and the care of the self. For a recent conceptualization of common
research problems of ‘reflexive historical sociology’ in recasting modernity, see Arpád Szakolczai,
Reflexive Historical Sociology (London: Routledge, 2000), and The Genesis of Modernity (London:
Routledge, 2002).
2 Michel Dobry, Sociologie des crises politiques (Paris: PUF, 1986); William Sewell, ‘Historical
Events as Transformations of Structures:Inventing Revolution at the Bastille’, Theory and Society, 25
4 Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, vols I and II. (New
of Politics. An Introduction (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Claude Lefort,
5 Eric Voegelin, Published Essays 1966-1985. The Collected Works, Vol.12 (Baton Rouge and
7 Michel Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, in Paul Rabinow, ed., The Foucault Reader
11 Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press,
14 Claude Lefort, The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism
15 Tocqueville, Democracy in America, p.869.
17 Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, Political Writings, ed. by Michael Sonenscher (Indianapolis and
18 Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, chap. 26, II.
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23 Arendt, On Revolution.
28 René Girard, The Scapegoat (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).
31 Don Handelman, Models and Mirrors. Towards an Anthropology of Public Events (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.12-3
34 Lefort, Essais sur le politique, pp.282-3.
36 This part of Lincoln’s Gettysburg address of 1863 is considered to include the classical synthesis of democracy: ‘That from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”
37 Sartori, The Theory of Democracy Revisited, p.35.
40 Tocqueville, Democracy in America, p. 878.
41 Tocqueville, Democracy in America, p.796.
43 Agamben, Homo Sacer, pp.9-10.
51 Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy. p.235.
54 Lenin, Selected Works, Moscow 1936, VII, p.252.
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66 See Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy, p.240-2. In post-World War II West Germany this self-defense became constitutionally sanctioned favoring a spirit of ‘wehrhafte Demokratie’ (self-defensive democracy).
70 Schmitter and Karl. ‘What Democracy is....and is Not’, p.58.
71 Keane, Violence and Democracy, p.90.
72 Keane, Violence and Democracy, p.8.
81 Whitehead, Democratization, p.247-51.
83 In Weber’s terms, if there is any meaningful usage of ‘object’ at all, it can only be a historical individual, that is a complex set of correlations in historical reality that can be connected under the aspect of its cultural meaningfulness. Thus, a concept must be composed from its elements to be found in historical reality (Max Weber, Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssozioologie (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988, pp.30-1). The spirit of capitalism goes beyond what we tend to attribute as being essential to it.
85 Voegelin, Published Essays 1966-1985, pp.121-2.