Reconceiving Revolution: Towards Micro-Revolutions of Becoming

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Abstract: What does revolution mean, and is it still possible today? For Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, philosophical critique opens space for future revolution but it is not currently available. For Herbert Marcuse, revolution remains a greater possibility through marginalized communities and the dissemination of revolutionary potential into non-proletariat classes. Michel Foucault alternatively relativizes revolution by reframing it through the notion of micro-powers. By interpreting micro-revolutions as providing potential for macro-revolutions' ongoing emergence, and by reading Foucault through Alfred North Whitehead, Catherine Keller, and Jung Mo Sung, revolution becomes possible, even as it is never-ending in duration and non-totalizing in effect.

Keywords: become, network, possible, power, revolution

For many theorists and activists on the political Left, the vision and promise of "revolution" has helped to motivate movements for social transformation. However, what is meant by revolution and to what extent is revolution possible today? To explore these questions, I will first describe the answers of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, namely Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, as well as the related position of Herbert Marcuse. This first section summarizes what the Frankfurt School and Marcuse meant by revolution and how their position compares with Karl Marx's stance. In the second section, I will show that for Horkheimer and Adorno, philosophical critique opens up the necessary though insufficient space for future revolution, which is an indescribable potential that is not currently available. For Marcuse, revolution remains a greater possibility through the actions of marginalized communities and the dissemination of revolutionary potential into classes beyond the proletariat. While these Marxist

thinkers provide great insights on revolution, they overly fetishize a once-and-for-all revolutionary event, which impinges upon their analysis. The third section examines Michel Foucault's alternative that affirms revolution but is reimagined through his notion of micro-powers. By doing so, he avoids a totalizing approach to revolution, but it is unclear how social structures can in fact change. The final constructive section defends a conception of revolution as a series of ongoing micro-revolutions in light of Michel Foucault's description of micro-powers, but this conception of revolution is interpreted through the processive lenses of Alfred North Whitehead, Catherine Keller and Jung Mo Sung. These last thinkers offer a trajectory of thought that indicates a viable and compelling alternative to the previous approaches. By reading micro-revolutions as offering up the potential for the emergence of macro-revolutions, one can assert that revolution is indeed possible, even as it is never-ending in duration and non-totalizing in effect.

Revolution of the Proletariat

Before one can declare whether "the revolution" is possible, one must clarify what one means by that very term. When thinking of a socialist revolution, the classic articulation comes from Karl Marx. At its most basic level, revolution means that the proletariat casts off its chains and takes over the means of production from the bourgeoisie. Class antagonisms become the necessary motor for historical change. The clash between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is necessary to arrive at a new stage of society: socialism. Summarizing the forthcoming process, Marx identifies revolution with the development of the proletariat, where eventually what was once a hidden conflict becomes open violence and revolt, resulting in the

overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the rule of the proletariat.[1] For him, the seeds of the new society were already present in the conditions of the present one, precipitating its collapse. That said, "The communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional relations."[2] With the proletariat in place as the ruling class, its control of the means of production end the condition of class antagonism once and for all.[3] The revolution would be complete and total.

According to Herbert Marcuse's reading of Marx, "the proletariat is the liberating historical force only as revolutionary force; the determinate negation of capitalism occurs *if* and *when* the proletariat has become conscious of itself and of the conditions and processes which make up its society."[4] However, a socialization of the means of production will not automatically liberate people. If this new control does not work towards the free individual's self-fulfillment and actualization, it will become simply another way to subsume the individual into an overwhelming collectivity.[5] This is a fair reading of Marx, who himself describes the goal thusly: "We shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."[6] Previous revolutions have not been as utterly transformative as the one Marx predicts. He refers to changes in industrial production as revolutionary innovations, like the introduction of steam and

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[1] Karl Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Portable Karl Marx*, ed. and trans. by Eugene Kamenka (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 216
[2] Ibid, 226
[3] Ibid, 228
[4] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 222
[5] Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), 283
[6] Marx, 228

machinery.[7] Past groups and events were revolutionary in a provisional way, such as parties that strove for the revolution and the revolts in Europe in 1848. Yet the revolution to come would be the final revolution realized as socialism and communism.

Unlike Marx, Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno of the Frankfurt School do not frequently or explicitly write about the hoped-for-and-necessary revolution. And, the way they name the problem indicates they have added elements that were absent in Marx's framework. Revolution is more than a change in economic structures that will result in changes to the cultural superstructure. The latter superstructure is not utterly dependent on the former economic structures, but rather has a life and logic of its own. Therefore, it also needs to be directly confronted. Horkheimer and Adorno believe revolution must be cultural as well as material. One of their frequent targets is instrumental rationality, meaning the logical organization of ideas for purposes that serve illogical ends. What was originally used out of the desire to liberate the oppressed has actually resulted in destruction, with the use of Enlightenment abstraction resulting in the liquidation of quality or meaning.[8] The idea of progress becomes a logic of domination even as it pretends to be neutral. With the development of the Enlightenment, "thought, stripped down to knowledge, is neutralized, harnessed merely to qualifying its

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[7] Ibid, 205

[8] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectics of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 9

practitioner for specific labor markets and heightening the commodity value of the personality," thus reducing value to utility for the market.[9]

Humanity's relationship with nature aptly expresses this dialectic. By objectifying nature, humans became its masters, but in doing so they also made it possible for humans to treat other humans as mere objects to be mastered. In the process of objectifying nature, both the external world and internal human nature, what was thought to be a path to salvation has lead to the enslavement of everything. Francis Bacon's early attempt to use knowledge in order for humanity to dominate nature resulted in the knowledge of how to dominate humans as well.[10] The entire Enlightenment project, including technological development, logical positivism and the destruction of nature, needs fundamental—indeed revolutionary—reworking. The whole of Western civilization has culminated into making "the control of internal and external nature… the absolute purpose of life."[11] Revolution for Marx was the overthrow of capitalism with all its secondary cultural effects, but for the Frankfurt School it becomes the overthrow of the Enlightenment project as well. Their expansion of the revolution's target impacted the extent to which Horkheimer and Adorno believed it could be achieved.

Herbert Marcuse sees the revolution-to-come as an earth-shaking, utterly transformative event. This threat, or potential revolution, "would be the most radical of all historical revolutions. It would be the first truly *world-historical*

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[9] Ibid, 163
[10] Ibid, 1-2
[11] Ibid, 24

revolution."[12] In this, Marcuse follows Marx in noting its qualitative difference from past revolutions. It is the revolution that ends the need for future revolution; the cycle would be complete. This would be possible because the revolution would not simply usher in a change in material conditions, but also a moral and aesthetic change. Not only would needs be met in order to abolish poverty, but there would be a change in "the needs and satisfactions themselves."[13] Marcuse contrasts quantitative changes for a truly qualitative change. Everyone would escape from material poverty, but the perpetual desire to acquire more would also be extinguished, replaced by a non-exploitative relationship with the earth and a sense of "enough." Again, this is a revolution unlike past ones, for "what is at stake in the socialist revolution is not merely the extension of satisfaction within the existing universe of needs, nor the shift of satisfaction from one (lower) level to a higher one, but the rupture with this universe, the *qualitative leap*."[14]

Marcuse recognized that even if the working classes took over the means of production in his day, there would not be a necessary change in society because of their internalized oppressive needs. Thus, in order for the flourishing of human self-determination, basic necessities must be produced and distributed through some fundamentally social mechanism.[15] This may require a limited form of centralized control. Particularly regarding vital goods and services, "centralized control is rational if it establishes the preconditions for meaningful self-determination."[16] In

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[12] Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 2
[13] Ibid, 3
[14] Ibid, 16
[15] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 251
[16] Ibid, 251

such instances where laboring classes have internalized bourgeois life-patterns, they cannot immediately direct productive control, as this would prolong the prevention of qualitative change.[17]

Marcuse's understanding of revolution contrasts markedly with what he considers a "minimum goals" approach to social change. Marcuse criticizes those who see socialism as promoting minimum goals to achieve improvements on an incremental basis through parliamentary participation. He notes that the revisionist Marxists who abandoned revolution replaced it with "a peaceful evolution from capitalism to socialism, [and] attempted to change socialism from a theoretical and practical antithesis to the capitalism system into a parliamentary movement within this system."[18] In that approach, changes happen in a gradual way through the existing system without major struggle. Such changes would not constitute revolution at all for Marcuse, for revolution must be a radical break with current systems.

On the Feasibility of the Revolution

With their methodology of negative dialectics, the possibility of revolution was highly suspect for Horkheimer and Adorno. As they understood it, there was a moment after World War I when revolution was realistically available. However, that historical moment had passed and would not return anytime soon. Instead of liberation, they found themselves in the 1930s and 40s surrounded by the barbarism of both Fascism and mass commodity culture. Horkheimer and Adorno offered the tool of negative dialectics to deny what *is* without knowing what will

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[17] Ibid, 252
[18] Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 398

happen. They are Marxists not expecting the revolution.[19] As there is no obvious class capable of challenging either the economic structures or the cultural industry, no agents exist who can actualize the needed revolution. Using Homer's *Odyssey* to contextualize their argument, they recognize that "the powerlessness of the workers is not merely a ruse of the rulers but the logical consequence of industrial society."[20] In effect, industrial society dominates workers to such an extent that simply awakening the latter will not lead to the revolution. Instead of workers, can intellectuals bring about the revolution? No, for while they develop critical theory as philosophers, Horkheimer and Adorno do not claim that theory will lead to revolutionary change. Such grand claims would be a mistake, and it would be wrong to merely instrumentalize the value of philosophy in its application.[21]

While Horkheimer and Adorno do not say that revolution is perpetually impossible, they do believe a critique of the present configuration and understandings of society is a more modest and therefore realistic goal. One can appropriately describe what they are promoting as an apophatic revolution. They cannot speak concretely or positively about what revolution is or what it will look like in the context of the present society because it is not currently possible. As Martin Jay interprets them, maintaining and expanding the remnants of negation against the culture industry was the only option left when they concluded that there was not a clear mandate for change.[22] Horkheimer and Adorno were convinced that

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[19] Santiago Slabodsky, "Introduction: Sources and Theory," (Class discussion, Claremont Lincoln University, Claremont, CA, January 26, 2012)

[20] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, 29

[21] Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 266

[22] Ibid, 276

revolution was impossible in their time, but the role for philosophers like themselves was to critique their situation so that it may yet become possible again in some indeterminate future.

For Horkheimer and Adorno, the agent of revolution is weaker, yet the problem has become grander. Philosophy on its own will not lead to revolution, and the proletariat has been co-opted into the culture industry. There is no longer an historical subject available to lead the revolution when the problem becomes the relationship of man and nature, both internally and externally. Praxis suffers a death of sorts where "theory… was the only form of *praxis* still open to honest men."[23] Philosophy is the only option left, but it will not be enough. Nevertheless, even though the Frankfurt School recognizes that utopian hopes can never be fully actualized, they must still be held onto.[24] As they see it, the revolution is not possible now, but it may become available again in an unspoken future. The result is that Horkheimer and Adorno focus more on avoiding being dominated by the prevailing system than on offering marching orders for constructive action.[25] With revolution not currently possible for them, they attempt to leave space for future openings for revolution. They do this by maintaining critical understandings of what is so that society does not collapse into an absolute affirmation of Fascism, Stalinism or the Western culture industry.

Rather than the apophatic critical stance of the Frankfurt School, Marcuse remains more optimistic regarding certain possibilities. He maintains a greater

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[23] Ibid, 280
[24] Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 278
[25] Ibid, 279

emphasis on praxis than Horkheimer and Adorno, and so one is not surprised to find that he is more willing to affirm an actualizable revolution. Marcuse does not view the system as solely having internalized resistance so that it is domesticated for the culture's own uses. Instead, Marcuse maintains that "the inner dynamic of capitalism changes... the pattern of revolution: far from reducing, it extends the potential mass base for revolution, and it necessitates the revival of the radical rather than minimum goals of socialism."[26] Rather than reducing the sources for revolutionary action through worker co-option into the system, the potential for revolutionary praxis has counter-intuitively spread like a virus beyond the traditional laboring class.

Marcuse acknowledges that there are significant barriers to revolution. He does not see any revolution as immanent even as counterrevolution preempts it. Even for him, revolution's prospects are different from a traditional Marxist teleology. Mixed-systems of redistributionist welfare and capitalism improve the situation of the working classes, making them less eager to seek liberation.[27] Inverting Marx's famous call to action, the proletariat now has much more to lose than its chains.[28] Instead of opposites producing a clash as Marx expected, they have been unified into a totality. Thus, Marcuse asks, "How can the administered individuals—who have made their mutilation into their own liberties and

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[26] Marcuse, *Counterrevolution*, 5
[27] Ibid, 4
[28] Ibid, 6

satisfactions, and thus reproduce it on an enlarged scale—liberate themselves from themselves as well as from their masters?"[29]

Unavoidably, one must break the unity of opposites in order for the revolution to occur. Extending the movement and raising awareness among the middle classes and intelligentsia "is the constant task of the still isolated radical groups."[30] Rather than causing the revolution, the material conditions provide space for ideas to push the revolution into high gear. Seeing oneself in a new way can connect the disparate groups in a non-hierarchical organization. Aligning the education of these groups to their situation is mandatory for large-scale social movements to be born.[31] That said, the liberating potential of the New Left is not unambiguously positive. For example, they hold onto a misplaced anti-intellectualism as part of their cultural revolution.[32] Marcuse laments this anti-intellectualism, for there must remain a place for critical thinking. In spite of this drawback, the New Left of the 1960s and 70s "is still the most advanced counterforce" to the Establishment.[33]

With regards to the United States, Marcuse believes that "the highly centralized and hierarchically structured revolutionary mass party is outdated… [and now] all radical opposition becomes extra-parliamentary opposition."[34] This means that the revolution will be more decentralized; there will be no vanguard party. The coming revolution will look different from the Russian Revolution in its

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[29] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 250-251
[30] Marcuse, *Counterrevolution*, 132
[31] Ibid, 134
[32] Ibid, 126
[33] Ibid. 129
[34] Ibid, 42

membership and tactics.[35] Specifically, unlike past revolutions, it will have neither "the leadership of an 'ideologically conscious avant-garde,' the mass party as its 'instrument,' [nor] the basic objective [as] the 'struggle for state power.'"[36]

Marcuse offers the option of the Great Refusal, where one rejects the system as a whole. There are groups for whom this is possible, for not everyone has become one-dimensional or internalized the values and benefits of the cultural and liberal order. A genuine opposition can come from the substratum of society: "the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and unemployable" who constitute a revolutionary opposition that "hits the system from without and is therefore not deflected by the system... which violates the rules of the game."[37] As they initiate the revolution, middle-class groups can join too, especially radicalized students who feel disaffected from the dominant culture. For Marcuse, the revolution is available, and it only awaits the New Left's radical refusal.

Foucault and Power

May 1968, a critical point in the history of French social movements, involved protests and massive general strikes that included a huge cross-section of the population. Nonetheless, this unrest ultimately strengthened Charles de Gaulle's government. Following the disillusionment of many activists on the political Left, a number of people began searching for alternative perspectives, including Michel Foucault. Foucault's position differs in key ways from the Frankfurt School and

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[35] Marcuse, *Counterrevolution*, 8
[36] Ibid, 8
[37] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 256-257

Marcuse, even as important similarities remain. I will use Foucault's understanding

of power to ground an eventual affirmation of micro-revolutions.

Foucault defines power in such a way that it deconstructs the traditional

Marxist binary between oppressed and oppressor. For him, "Power" does not mean

those structures of the state that ensure compliance from its citizenry.[38] Power is

not a thing that one group possesses and another group lacks, nor is it " something

that is acquired, seized, or shared…[Power] is exercised from innumerable points."[39]

Instead of being unicausal, or descending down upon reality as a single thing, power

bubbles up from everywhere; the phenomenon we observe as "Power" comes

through ongoing repetition of these "mobilities."[40] Simply put, power is the ability to

act—an ability all subject possess. Better yet, power is the means by which subjects

become who they are.

According to Foucault, there are many micro-powers or centers of activity

and agency. This means that resistance does not come from one location or pure

group. Rather, a multiplicity of points of resistance act as adversaries to, or targets

for, larger power dynamics. The result is that there is no single Marcusean Great

Refusal or source for revolutionary action.[41] Struggles against power have more

proximate targets: "they look not for the 'chief enemy' but for the immediate enemy.

Nor do they expect to find a solution to their problem at a future date."[42] Such points

of resistance do not remain an enduring network but are in a fluctuating process,

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[38] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980). 92

[39] Ibid, 94

[40] Ibid, 92-93

[41] Ibid, 95-96

[42] Michel Foucault, *The Essential Foucault: Selections from The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: New Press, 2003), 129

each with different concerns and motivations that may impact enduring solidarity. In this plurality of resistances, there are those "that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial."[43] Coalitions are unstable. As situations change, groups fall out or join in. However, Foucault does not deny that there are moments when a shifting constellation of power networks can solidify into what may be experienced as a binary opposition. However, most of the time one faces a fluid, shifting network of resistance such that divisions and regroupings are a constant fact.[44] In other words, greater power networks are not stable, but rather are prone to persistent reconfigurations.

This localization of struggles poses risks of which Foucault is well aware. Larger organizing networks may manipulate more limited, local struggles, and there is the danger of local struggles failing because of the absence of a larger strategy or support from outside groups.[45] If power is expressed as a network of points, an isolated micro-politics can be overpowered and eventually subsumed into that greater network. This understanding   is analogous to Marcuse's concern for a collapse of opposites into a unity. Instead of resisting the system, the anomalies are absorbed into the system. Foucault also complements Marcuse's recognition that there are multiple and separate radical groups that do not originate from a single source.

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[43] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 96
[44] Ibid, 96
[45] Foucault, *The Essential Foucault*, 315

One cannot separate "becoming a subject" from its relationship with exploitation and domination, yet these "do not merely constitute the 'terminal' of more fundamental mechanisms."[46] By this, Foucault means that formation of the subject is not merely deterministic, but that becoming subjects retain a mode of agency in their subjectification. People have not just internalized an oppressive structure that is delivered top-down; they produce within themselves in their partially self-constituted subjectivity those very elements that when mutually reinforced over a multiplicity of the microcosm, emerge as a larger system. Yet this system is easily objectified as the thing that controls as if it is from above. This is also partially the error of most conspiracy theories: they take the network of decisions that produce a larger pattern and see a unifying source that controls or initiates the pattern itself. Foucault indicates his agreement here when he invites us to not search for a hidden yet centralized leadership apparatus governing from afar, for oppression's logic can have clear goals and aims without any single group having concocted them.[47]

Foucault is often criticized for claiming that he makes it difficult to affirm that social structures can change. If the social structures' multiple power relationships construct what human beings are and how they relate to their environment, then how can these products change their producers? Or, if power does not come from one source but from everywhere, how can its destructive organization in the form of marginalization or exploitation be resisted? How can one fight something that is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere? The final section

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[46] Ibid, 131
[47] Foucault, *A History of Sexuality*, 95

will seek to address some of these issues from a process thought perspective utilizing the work of Alfred North Whitehead, Catherine Keller and Jung Mo Sung.

Perpetual Micro-Revolutions of Novelty

Alfred North Whitehead was not a critical theorist, nor did he analyze in any explicit way like Foucault the role of power in social structures and individuals. However, Whitehead can be understood as making a proto-Foucaultian move through his analysis of the relationship between an environment and its individuals. By environment, one should not be confused to think he means simply the outdoors. For Whitehead, environment constitutes the total context in which an individual finds itself (an individual need not be human). Reading Whitehead with Foucault, one encounters a similar insight into the multifariousness of power understood as influencing relationships. These relationships themselves constitute what subjects are in great part because they constrain the possibilities of what an agent of power can become. Note the dialectical relationship between the micro and macro here:

> The world is a community of organisms; these organisms in the mass determine the environmental influence on any one of them; there can only be a persistent community of persistent organisms when the environmental influence in the shape of instinct is favourable to the survival of the individuals. Thus the community as an environment is responsible for the survival of the separate individuals which compose it; and these separate individuals are responsible for their contributions to the environment.[48]

Both the environment as the amalgamation of power organisms and those individual organisms that constitute the environment are in a relationship that enables the endurance of the greater network and the presence of new relational

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[48] Alfred North Whitehead, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect*, 1927, reprint (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985), 78

powers. This is only possible if the singular organisms or centers of power are not utterly determined by their environment. In effect, there remains a space from which power relationships converge but then are responded to outside of efficient causality. There remains an element of indeterminacy; one can call it freedom or decision, even self-transcendence.

As mentioned earlier, Marcuse asserts that revolution will allow for the cultivation of individuals' gifts while equalizing the material condition such that all have their basic needs met. This approach affirms neither the radical autonomy of Robert Nozick's libertarianism nor the totalizing statism of Stalinism. The same can be said with Whitehead read in light of Foucault. As Whitehead puts it, the two aspects work dialectically: "one is the subordination of the community to the individuals composing it, and the other is the subordination of the individuals to the community."[49] This is only possible if there remains a space for decision, of micro-power and micro-revolution.

Whitehead sees space for revolution in society's cultural symbolism, which includes cultural assumptions and attitudes residing therein. He writes, "The successful adaptation of old symbols to changes of social structure is the final mark of wisdom in sociological statesmanship. Also an occasional revolution in symbolism is required."[50] Whitehead thus makes space for proposing a revolution in the meaning of "revolution." It is the case that though symbols like revolution can help us connect across time and space, in their very abstractness they run the risk of

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[49] Ibid, 88
[50] Ibid, 61

including problematic elements.[51] A symbol that improperly objectifies what should not be objectified, will likely issue forth negative consequences in attempts at its symbolic maintenance. I believe this is the case with the symbol of "revolution," especially in its totalizing conceptualization understood as a once-and-for-all event.

Revolution as a final overturning of society is not possible because "revolution" and "society" are abstractions of smaller processes; instead, there can be micro-revolutions. One can identify numerous injustices, structural and cultural, in the United States alone: lack of decision-making in workplaces, ownership of the means of production, instrumentalization of planetary life, racism in its varied forms, sexism, heteronormativity, the absolutizing of economic value in consumption, neo-liberal multinational globalization, the military industrial complex, the sensationalism and corporatization of the mass media, and many other areas of exploitation and oppression. Each of these injustices is an interlocking network of power; each and all need radical changes to them. Is it possible to qualitatively change them all more or less at once? Perhaps. But this does not mean that the only meaningful change is a once-and-for-all thoroughgoing transformation of them. It is appropriate to have *a* (not *the*) revolutionary vision of where society needs to go, grounded in a comprehensive critique of the problems that are present in society without demanding a wholesale rejection of everything at once. As changes happen, they never achieve an ideal perfection but are always pen-ultimate, yet we are urged ever onward by new critiques that arise from our new context.

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[51] Ibid, 87

It is certainly the case that if one of these dynamics were structurally altered, the remaining interlocking network would compromise its transformed framework. If all power relations are interconnected, the change of one will be minimalized by the persistence of the remaining networks. On the other hand, a change in one will impact the others. Whitehead recommends that we should be aware that "it may be impossible to conceive a reorganization of society adequate for the removal of some admitted evil without destroying the social organization and the civilization which depends on it."[52] This is not to say that radical reorganization is not worth doing, but rather that one must count the cost. Indeed, "it may be better that the heavens should fall, but it is folly to ignore the fact that they will fall."[53] In order to address the multiplicity of injustices in some final way, they would all need to be replaced at once. But if all structures, however unjust, are destroyed simultaneously, society will collapse. Is this what revolution should strive to accomplish?

Whitehead seeks to maintain enough stability to prevent the total collapse of a structure. He concludes his book *Symbolism* with a reminder that:

> the major advances in civilization are processes which all but wreck the societies in which they occur—like unto an arrow in the hand of a child. The art of free society consists first in the maintenance of the symbolic code; and secondly in fearlessness of revision… [for] those societies which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision, must ultimately decay either from anarchy, or from the slow atrophy of a life stifled by useless shadows.[54]

Accordingly, there must be vigorous, even radical, changes, but they must be made in such a way that other aspects of life remain stable in order to prevent these

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[52] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, 1933, reprint (New York: Free Press, 1967), 20
[53] Ibid, *Adventure of Ideas*, 21
[54] Whitehead, *Symbolism*, 88

changes from being fleeting. Change without endurance is nothing but the flux of occasions arising and perishing without a trace of continuity, like outer space. The change of everything at once is akin to nothing.

Constructive theologian Catherine Keller recognizes that the tendency to reject the world as it is remains part of the "dualism of apocalypse itself... the righteous rage for justice... the impatient hope for a qualitatively and materially transformed future, soon and very soon."[55] This corresponds closely with the recognition that a totalizing revolution equals total collapse: apocalypse now. In contrast, Keller supports a perspective affirming multiple perspectives or visions of what can be instead of an ultimate unified vision.[56] She proposes that we should not strive for the independently new world, pure and clean—what we have seen characterized earlier as the "qualitative leap" of revolution. In her alternative, "we absorb [our own] impurities as the very building blocks of a New Jerusalem worth inhabiting."[57] In this complex web of power, "all your relations are a potential for your next moment of becoming... and *your* becoming *now* is potential for the future becomings of your world."[58]

By reworking Keller's idea of a theology of becoming, it is possible to view micro-revolutions, cumulatively, as a revolution of becoming. By replacing the term "theology" with "revolution," we read this: "Precisely because of its uncertainty principle, then a [revolution] of becoming is not a process of voiding, of answer-

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[55] Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 56

[56] Ibid, 91

[57] Ibid, 108

[58] Ibid, 146

avoidance, but of gathering our relations and our resources into fresh and flowing compositions."[59] Revolution "itself is a chaosmos of new beginnings."[60] Revolution is therefore the ever-flowing series of micro-revolutions, for by taking in the complex web of micro-powers, there emerges the open space for the novel act.

Micro-revolutions and their synthesis into macro-movements are indeed evolutionary, but not evolutionary in a gradualist sense. This does not mean the incremental working out of small changes over time, which itself is a narrow understanding of evolution. In recent years, there has been a growing shift in how many biologists understand evolution. Before, evolution was considered a slow, gradual process, akin to how wind wears away a mountain over eons. However, more recently evolutionary history has come to be understood as long periods of relative stability punctuated by near-sudden shifts in the composition of species.[61] Therefore, evolution looks more like a revolutionary shift than a reformist crawl, more emergent than linear.

One may be tempted to dismiss this perspective as overly dependent on Eurocentric resources: Foucault, Whitehead and Keller. However, this vision also mirrors the position of Jung Mo Sung, a contemporary Brazilian liberation theologian. Sung is part of the leading edge of Latin American theologians currently reformulating liberation theology in light of some of the weaknesses of past liberationist configurations on themes like revolution. He cautions people that it is

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[59] Ibid, 150
[60] Ibid, 151
[61] Arild S. Foss, "Evolution: giant leaps or half measures?" ScienceNordic, Accessed May 17, 2013, http://sciencenordic.com/evolution-giant-leaps-or-half-measures

not possible to model the world off of our most passionate desires for full justice.[62]

Many see revolution as an all-or-nothing endeavor, where either "it is possible to

construct the utopia of a perfect world or it is not worth thinking about social

commitments and utopian horizons."[63] Sung offers a complementary alternative not

unlike a processive micro-revolution of becoming.

Sung sees the value of utopian horizons as offering horizons of meaning, but

that does not mean these horizons can be historically actualized.[64] Following Hugo

Assmann, Sung urges people to recognize that "after 'the' revolution, people are not

going to be totally in solidarity, nor will they be free of the desires that are beyond

social or historical possibility."[65] Sung critiques the modernist assumption about the

historical subject as the secularization of God as subject in premodern worldviews.

In dialogue with complexity theory, notions of "autopoiesis" and self-organization,

Sung affirms the possibility of building a more equitable and compassionate world.

He warns, however, that far from a once-and-for-all utopian revolution, the

revolution will inevitably involve new mistakes and imperfections that will need

remedying.[66]

It is important to acknowledge that there are some differences in the way

terms are used for Sung. Most strikingly, Sung rejects the notion that struggles

should only occur at the microsocial level, which he defines as local, face-to-face

encounters. His rationale is that new properties emerge as one moves to the

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[62] Jung Mo Sung, *The Subject, Capitalism, and Religion: Horizons of Hope in Complex Societies* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 2

[63] Ibid, 3

[64] Ibid, 21

[65] Ibid, 23

[66] Ibid, 40

macrosocial level, so changes cannot happen simply through the linear extension of local justice expressions to greater entities. At first, one might be inclined to think that this contradicts a processive reading of revolution. However, Sung uses a different conception of the micro than Foucault. While Sung equates the micro with the local, which is consistent with his affirmation of complexity theory, they define the micro as that which is partial and non-totalizing.

Why is Sung against realizing utopias historically? Because he is against any theoretical justifications for sacrifice for the sake of the system, and the best way to subvert the ideology of necessary sacrifices is to deny the reality of any final historical utopia.[67] If the revolution is guaranteed or total, then any number of sacrifices can be justified for that eschatological end, whether it is the radically free market of neo-liberalism or the total abolition of the market through full communism. According to Sung, it is not out of certainty of victory that we should perform acts of solidarity; rather, acts of solidarity should be our primary response in our face-to-face encounters with others.[68] When society has not been transformed with our projections, Sung notes that it is very easy to become disappointed and scapegoat:

> Today one of the favorite scapegoats is neoliberalism and its representatives. It seems that neoliberalism is the cause of everything bad that exists in the world, even those things that had existed before neoliberalism and that will continue to exist following the end of the neoliberal hegemony.[69]

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[67] Ibid, 66
[68] Ibid, 93
[69] Ibid, 142

However, to make *them* "the" culprits for everything is to absolutize the market in reverse and reproduce the same logic. If there is no single culprit, then there can be no single solution. In light of this, we can make strides towards a more just, harmonious and human society, but we can never say that it will be fully just.[70] Even if and when what initially seems to be a complete revolution occurs, the struggle for more just relations will not end. Whether one likes it or not, successful struggles for changing economic systems will produce side-effects that result in a novel tension between dynamic economic structures and justice commitments.[71] Complexity theory necessitates that the results of one's actions extend beyond one's intentions.[72] Solutions to past problems will lead to the emergence of new challenges that require their own novel struggles. Revolution will always be in the making, or becoming.

Conclusion

Revolution is never finished, nor can it end. As soon as one thing becomes a final fact, a new process of decision, appropriation, power relation and resistance begins. And begins. And begins. Does this mean that nothing new can emerge, that we are forced into an eternal return of the same? By no means! The return of novelty prevents the eternal perpetuation of even the most seemingly static structures. Networks of power—what could also be described as a grassroots organization of divergent communities, individuals, and interests—can emerge to construct a novel environmental structure that produces less marginalizing

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[70] Ibid, 143
[71] Ibid, 122
[72] Sung thus believes there will be *some* role for *a* market, though not one that totalizes all value.

patterns. Sometimes networks emerge that express a set of influences that are insufficient to overthrow established recurring patterns. Sometimes those networks lose certain elements: one group gets co-opted or bribed into the hegemonic pattern, thus strengthening its stability. This is consistent with Marcuse's insights. Thus we see labor unions collaborate with the CEOs of Detroit car companies. Still, nothing can be absorbed without altering the pattern of power; the negative is brought into the positive in an unstable relationship. What looks like a gradual evolution can explode into a rapid revolt against dominant patterns only to enter a new stabilizing moment with its incremental alterations.

Revolution is possible, but it happens regularly as a non-linear series of micro-revolutions (these are not primarily driven by a parliamentary or Congressional process). Indeed, the latter tend to be reactive responses to revolutionary movements. Those who expect radical change to issue from this arena are waiting in the wrong direction. An example was the aftermath of the 2008 presidential election: once Barack Obama was elected president, too many people and groups went into hibernation as if the eschaton had arrived. As it is said colloquially, "change happens from below," but this change comes as micro-revolutions that actualize new power relationships and set up coordinating systems that can shift power flows in more egalitarian directions.

Sometimes one may wish that revolution in some pure and absolute sense was possible. However, as a descriptive analysis into how relationships form, nothing is ever pure; nothing comes *ex nihilo* from a vacuum. A new heaven and earth do not simply replace a shoddy product for a static Platonic ideal. While this

may feel insufficient given the presumed urgent and critical need for an overthrow of dominant structures, that feeling emanates from a fundamental lack of hope. Like Horkheimer and Adorno, it may be useful to hesitate in naming what a radically different world will look like. Even as this position touches on the apophatic and remains clear in its critiques, like Sung one can still point to a horizon of hope beyond what currently is. This position differs from the Frankfurt School the most in its recognition of the pluralization of power networks; even the most colonized communities retain power in their very becoming and are never totalized by influential macro-systems. The affirmation of micro-revolutions is consistent with how the world becomes. When those networks of relations sync together, rapid changes can occur in what is traditionally called "revolution." Yet we will avoid idealizing those expressions of novelty, for there is always more to come.

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