

# MULTITUDE

WAR AND DEMOCRACY  
IN THE AGE OF EMPIRE

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## 3.1 THE LONG MARCH OF DEMOCRACY

A pure democracy may possibly do, when patriotism is the ruling passion; but when the State abounds with rascals, as is the case with too many at this day, you must suppress a little of that popular spirit.

—EDWARD RUTLEDGE TO JOHN JAY,  
NOVEMBER 24, 1776

Al Smith once remarked that “the only cure for the evils of democracy is more democracy.” Our analysis suggests that applying that cure at the present time could well be adding fuel to the flames. Instead, some of the problems of governance in the United States today stem from an excess of democracy. . . . Needed, instead, is a greater degree of moderation in democracy.

—SAMUEL HUNTINGTON, 1975

## CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY IN THE ERA OF ARMED GLOBALIZATION

The end of the cold war was supposed to be the ultimate victory of democracy, but today the concept and practices of democracy are everywhere in crisis. Even in the United States, the self-proclaimed global beacon of democracy, such central institutions as electoral systems have been seriously drawn into question, and in many parts of the world there is barely the pretense of democratic systems of government. And the constant global state of war undermines what meager forms of democracy exist.

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Throughout much of the twentieth century the concept of democracy was both reduced and bolstered by cold war ideology. On one side of the cold war divide, the concept of democracy tended to be defined strictly in terms of anticommunism so as to be synonymous with the “free world.” The term *democracy* thus had little to do with the nature of government: any state that stood as part of the bulwark against what was considered to be communist totalitarianism could be labeled “democratic” regardless of how democratic it really was. On the other side of the cold war divide, socialist states similarly claimed to be “democratic republics.” This claim too had little to do with the nature of government and instead referred primarily to the opposition to capitalist control: any state that formed part of the bulwark against what was considered to be capitalist domination could claim to be a democratic republic. In the post-cold war world, the concept of democracy has been unanchored from its rigid cold war moorings and set adrift. Perhaps for that reason, it has some hope of regaining its previous significance.

The crisis of democracy today has to do not only with the corruption and insufficiency of its institutions and practices but also with the concept itself. Part of the crisis is that it is not clear what democracy means in a globalized world. Certainly global democracy will have to mean something different than what democracy meant in the national context throughout the modern era. We can get a first index of this crisis of democracy from the voluminous recent scholarly writings on the nature of globalization and global war in relation to democracy. Support for democracy remains a presupposition among scholars, but they differ widely on the question of whether the present form of globalization increases or decreases the powers and possibilities of democracy across the world. Furthermore, since September 11 the increased pressures of war have polarized the positions and, in the minds of some, subordinated the need for democracy to concerns of security and stability. For the sake of clarity let us sort out these positions according to their stance on the benefits of globalization for democracy and on their general political orientation. This gives us four logical categories dividing those who think that globalization fosters democracy from those who think it is an obstacle, on the left and the right. Keep in mind, of course, that there is a great deal of slippage in

these various discussions about what is meant by globalization in addition to what is meant by democracy. Designations of right and left are only approximate, but useful nonetheless for sorting the various positions.

Consider first the *social democratic* arguments that claim democracy is debilitated or threatened by globalization, defining globalization usually in strictly economic terms. These arguments maintain that in the interest of democracy nation-states should withdraw from the forces of globalization. Some arguments that fit into this category claim that economic globalization is actually a myth, but a powerful myth with antidemocratic effects.<sup>1</sup> Many such arguments hold, for example, that today's internationalized economy is not unprecedented (the economy has long been internationalized); that genuinely transnational corporations (in contrast to multinational corporations) are still rare; and that the vast majority of trade today is not really global but takes place merely among North America, Europe, and Japan. Despite the fact that globalization is a myth, they say, its ideology serves to paralyze democratic national political strategies: the myth of globalization and its inexorability is used to argue against national efforts to control the economy, and it facilitates neoliberal privatization programs, the destruction of the welfare state, and so forth. These social democrats argue instead that nation-states can and should assert their sovereignty and take greater control of the economy at national and supranational levels. Such action would restore the democratic functions of the state that have been eroded, most importantly its representative functions and its welfare structures. This social democratic position is the one that was most seriously undermined by the events from the September 11 attacks to the war on Iraq. The state of global war seems to have made globalization inevitable (especially in terms of security and military affairs) and thus any such antiglobalization position untenable. In the context of the state of war, in fact, most social democratic positions have tended to migrate toward one of the two proglobalization positions outlined below. The policies of Schröder's Germany are a good example of how the social democratic defense of national interests has come to rely fundamentally on multilateral cosmopolitan alliances; and Blair's Britain is the prime illustration of the way national interests are thought best served by lining up in support of the United States and its global hegemony.

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Opposed to the social democratic critiques of globalization, but still maintaining a left political position, stand the *liberal cosmopolitan* arguments that view globalization as fostering democracy.<sup>2</sup> We do not mean to suggest that these authors have no critique of the contemporary forms of globalization, because indeed they do, especially the most unregulated activities of global capital. These are not, however, arguments against capitalist globalization as such but rather arguments for the better institutional and political regulation of the economy. These arguments generally emphasize that globalization brings positive effects in economic and political terms, as well as means of addressing the global state of war. In addition to greater economic development they envision globalization bringing a great democratic potential primarily due to a new relative freedom *from* the rule of nation-states—and in this respect their contrast to the social democratic positions is clear. This is particularly true, for example, in discussions that focus on the question of human rights, which has in many ways taken a greater role against or despite the power of nation-states. Notions of a new cosmopolitan democracy or global governance similarly rely on the relative decline of the sovereignty of nation-states as their condition of possibility. The global state of war has made liberal cosmopolitanism into a major political position and seemingly the only viable alternative to U.S. global control. Against the reality of unilateral U.S. actions, multilateralism is the primary method of cosmopolitan politics and the United Nations its most powerful instrument. We might also include at the limit of this category those who argue simply that the United States cannot “go it alone” and must share its global ruling powers and responsibilities with other major powers in some sort of multilateral arrangement in order to maintain global order.<sup>3</sup>

The various right-wing arguments that focus on the benefits and necessity of *U.S. global hegemony* agree with the liberal cosmopolitans that globalization breeds democracy, but they do so for very different reasons. These arguments, which are omnipresent in the mainstream media today, generally assert that globalization fosters democracy because U.S. hegemony and the expansion of the rule of capital themselves imply necessarily the expansion of democracy. Some argue that the rule of capital is inherently democratic, and thus the globalization of capital is the global-

ization of democracy; others hold that the U.S. political system and the “American way of life” are synonymous with democracy and thus the expansion of U.S. hegemony is the expansion of democracy, but usually these turn out to be two sides of the same coin.<sup>4</sup> The global state of war has given this position a newly exalted political platform. What has become known as neoconservative ideology, which has been a strong foundation for the Bush administration, seeks for the United States actively to remake the political map of the world, overthrowing rogue regimes that pose potential threats and creating good ones. The U.S. government emphasizes that its global interventions are not based merely on national interests but rather on the global, universal desires for freedom and prosperity. It must for the good of the world act unilaterally without the constraints of multilateral agreements or international law.<sup>5</sup> There is a minor debate among these proglobalization conservatives between some, generally British authors, who view current U.S. global hegemony as the rightful heir to the benevolent European imperialist projects and others, predictably U.S. authors, who view U.S. global rule as a radically new and exceptional historical situation. One U.S. author, for example, is convinced that U.S. exceptionalism has unprecedented benefits for the entire globe: “For all our fumbling, the role played by the United States is the greatest gift the world has received in many, many centuries, possibly all of recorded history.”<sup>6</sup>

Finally, *traditional-values conservative* arguments contest the dominant right wing view that unregulated capitalism and U.S. hegemony necessarily bring democracy. They agree instead with the social democratic view that globalization hinders democracy, but for very different reasons—primarily because it threatens traditional, conservative values. This position takes rather different form inside and outside the United States. Conservative thinkers outside the United States who view globalization as a radical expansion of U.S. hegemony argue, in common with the social democrats, that economic markets require state regulation, and the stability of markets is threatened by the anarchy of global economic forces. The primary force of these arguments, however, focuses on the cultural, not the economic, realms. Conservative critics outside the United States claim, for instance, that U.S. society is so corrupt—with its weak social cohesion, its

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decline of family structures, its high rates of crime and incarceration, and so forth—that it does not have the political strength or the moral fortitude to rule over other countries.<sup>7</sup> Conservative traditional-values arguments within the United States see the growing U.S. involvement in global affairs and the increasing unregulated rule of capital as detrimental to the moral life and traditional values of the United States itself.<sup>8</sup> In all these cases, traditional values or social institutions (or what some call civilization) need to be protected and the national interest preserved against the threats of globalization. The global state of war and its pressure to accept globalization as a fact has quieted but not eliminated expressions of this position. Traditional-values conservatism now generally takes the form of a skepticism about globalization and a pessimism about the benefits that U.S. hegemony claims to bring its own nation and the world.

None of these arguments, however, seem sufficient for confronting the question of democracy and globalization. What is clear, rather, from all of them—from right and left, proglobalization and antiglobalization—is that globalization and global war put democracy in question. Democracy, of course, has been declared to be “in crisis” many times in the last few centuries, usually by liberal aristocrats afraid of the anarchy of popular power or by technocrats disturbed by the disorder of parliamentary systems. Our problem of democracy, however, is different. First of all, democracy is confronted today by a leap of scale, from the nation-state to the entire globe, and thus unmoored from its traditional modern meanings and practices. As we will argue later, democracy must be conceived and practiced differently in this new framework and this new scale. This is one reason why all four categories of arguments outlined above are insufficient: because they do not confront adequately the scale of the contemporary crisis of democracy. A second, more complex, and substantial reason that these arguments are insufficient is that even when they speak of democracy they always undercut or postpone it. The liberal aristocratic position today is to insist on liberty first and democracy perhaps sometime later.<sup>9</sup> In vulgar terms the mandate for liberty first and democracy later often translates into the absolute rule of private property, undermining the will of everyone. What the liberal aristocrats do not understand is that in the era of biopolitical production liberalism and liberty based on the virtue of



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the few or even the many is becoming impossible. (Even the logic of private property is being threatened by the social nature of biopolitical production.) The virtue of everyone is becoming today the only basis for liberty and democracy, which can no longer be separated.

The enormous protests against political and economic aspects of the global system, including the current state of war, which we will consider in detail later, should be seen as powerful symptoms of the crisis of democracy. What the various protests make clear is that democracy cannot be made or imposed *from above*. The protesters refuse the notions of democracy from above promoted by both sides of the cold war: democracy is neither simply the political face of capitalism nor the rule of bureaucratic elites. And democracy does not result from either military intervention and regime change or from the various current models of "transition to democracy," which are generally based on some form of Latin American *caudillismo* and have proved better at creating new oligarchies than any democratic systems.<sup>10</sup> All of the radical social movements since 1968 have challenged these corruptions of the concept of democracy that transform it into a form of rule imposed and controlled from above. Democracy, instead, they insist, can only arise *from below*. Perhaps the present crisis of the concept of democracy due to its new global scale can provide the occasion to return it to its older meaning as the rule of everyone by everyone, a democracy without qualifiers, without ifs or buts.

## THE UNFINISHED DEMOCRATIC PROJECT OF MODERNITY

Today's crisis of democracy throws us back to the early period of European modernity, and particularly to the eighteenth century, because then too the concept and practices of democracy were put in crisis by a leap of scale and had to be reinvented. At the end of modernity reappear the unresolved problems of its beginnings. Advocates of democracy in early modern Europe and North America were confronted by skeptics who told

them that democracy may have been possible in the confines of the Athenian polis but was unimaginable in the extended territories of the modern nation-states. Today, advocates of democracy in the age of globalization are met by skeptics who claim that democracy may have been possible within the confines of the national territory but is unimaginable on a global scale.

The eighteenth-century democratic revolutionaries, of course, did not simply repropose democracy in its ancient form. Instead their task, aimed in part at addressing the question of scale, was to reinvent the concept and create new institutional forms and practices. Representation, as we will see in detail shortly, was central to the modern attempt to address the crisis of democracy. That an old problem reappears, however, does not mean that the old solution will be adequate. Modern forms of representation, in other words, will not necessarily be able to be expanded to respond successfully to our new problems of scale. (This will be a theme of chapter 3.2 below.) Rather, like the revolutionaries of the early modern period, we will once again have to reinvent the concept of democracy and create new institutional forms and practices appropriate to our global age. That project of conceptual and practical invention is the primary object of the remainder of our book.

The problem of democracy in a global world appears together, as we said, with the problem of war, another unresolved problem of modernity. As we saw in part 1, one face of globalization reveals that war is again a problem today—or, rather, disorganized and illegitimate violence poses a problem for the existing forms of sovereignty. We are faced with a global state of war in which violence can erupt anywhere at any time. And most important from the perspective of sovereignty, there is no secure means of legitimating the use of violence today and no stable groupings of that violence into friend and enemy camps. The theory and practices of modern sovereignty were born by confronting this same problem, the problem of civil war—and here we are thrown back primarily to the seventeenth rather than the eighteenth century. Hobbes's reflections on the civil wars in England and Descartes's meditations on the Thirty Years' War in Germany are founding moments of the dominant stream of modern Euro-

pean thought. Civil war is the negative instance against which the modern notion of political order is buttressed. The violent state of nature—the war of all against all—is really just a distilled, philosophical conception of civil war, projected back either into prehistory or into human essence itself. Modern sovereignty is meant to put an end to civil war.<sup>11</sup>

We should keep in mind, however, that Hobbes's solution to the problem of civil war is an ambivalent, incomplete one. On one hand, Hobbes states that the central objective of his Leviathan is putting an end to England's long civil wars and thus the sovereign power he proposes will be constituent, producing and reproducing the people as a peaceful social order and bringing an end to the war of all against all that is synonymous with social and political chaos. On the other hand, war—the violent state of nature, the forces of civil war, and the threat of foreign war—necessarily remains as an ever present possibility for Hobbes, in part because that threat of war and death is the primary weapon used to coerce the multitude to obey the rule of the sovereign: *protego ergo obligo*, that is, protection is the basis of obligation to the sovereign. Modern sovereignty, we should be clear, does not put an end to violence and fear but rather puts an end to civil war by organizing violence and fear into a coherent and stable political order. The sovereign will be the only legitimate author of violence, both against its own subjects and against other sovereign powers. This is how the sovereign nation-state serves modernity as an answer to the problem of civil war.

Today the problem of civil war reappears on a much larger, global scale. The current state of war, which has become continuous police activity that supports the regulative foundation of administration and political control, similarly demands the obedience of subjects who are plagued by violence and fear. That the problem is similar, once again, does not mean that the same solution will be effective. The reenforced sovereignty of nation-states will not succeed in putting an end to the global state of war. A new global form of sovereignty is instead necessary. This is the object, for example, of Samuel Huntington's proposed paradigm of global civilizational conflict that we discussed earlier. Recognizing how the cold war succeeded in organizing global violence into coherent blocs and a stable

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order of power, Huntington seeks a similar ordering function for civilizations: civilizations will make global conflict coherent and divide nation-states into stable groups of friend and enemy. The “war on terrorism” too seeks, along somewhat different lines, to organize global violence. The so-called alliance of the willing and the axis of evil designate strategies for grouping nation-states into blocs and thus making their violence coherent. (As we saw in chapter 1, however, the definition of terrorism used here varies greatly depending on the perspective of the one making the accusation.) None of these solutions seems to us adequate, but they at least address the problem that global civil war poses for imperial power. Once again, from this perspective, putting an end to civil war does not mean putting an end to violence and fear but rather organizing them into a coherent order and gathering them into the hands of the sovereign.

The fact that contemporary problems of democracy and war bear similarities to those faced in the early modern period, we should repeat, does not mean that the old solutions will prove successful again. When we look back at the early modern conceptions of democracy we should appreciate both what a radical process of invention they accomplished and also how that modern project of democracy remained unfinished. Eighteenth-century revolutionaries in Europe and the United States understood democracy in clear and simple terms: the rule of everyone by everyone. The first great modern innovation on the ancient concept of democracy, in fact, is this universal character, this absolute extension to everyone. Remember, for example, how Pericles had defined democracy in ancient Athens as the rule of the many, in contrast to the rule of the few (in aristocracy or oligarchy) and the rule of the one (in monarchy and tyranny).<sup>12</sup> In modern Europe and North America between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this inherited notion of the democracy of the *many* was transformed into the democracy of *everyone*. The ancient notion of democracy is a limited concept just as are monarchy and aristocracy: the many that rule is still only a portion of the entire social whole. Modern democracy, in contrast, has no limits and this is why Spinoza calls it “absolute.”<sup>13</sup> This move from the *many* to *everyone* is a small semantic shift, but one with extraordinarily radical consequences! With this universality come equally radical conceptions of equality and freedom. We can only all

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rule when we do so with equal powers, free to act and choose as each of us pleases.

We should note, parenthetically, that the “democracy of everyone” should not be confused with the concept of ochlocracy, that is, the power of all or the whole, which has continually been denounced in the history of political theory as a false derivative of the power expressed by everyone. The critiques of totalitarianism that emerged in the mid-twentieth century rightly protested against any such confusion.<sup>14</sup> These critiques, however, even when they denounced tyranny (grounding their analyses in the ancient Greek notion of the corruption of the forms of government in the polis), never managed to arrive at the point where they could support democracy as a paradigm of good government. The dominant European tradition has certainly been against tyranny but almost always from an aristocratic standpoint; against totalitarianism but also against the expression “of everyone,” that is, the democracy of singularities and the multitude.

Modern revolutions did not immediately institute the universal concept of democracy even within the national space. The exclusion of women, the propertyless, the nonwhite, and others negated the universal pretext of “everyone.” In fact, this universal notion of democracy has never yet been instituted, but it has served notwithstanding as a goal toward which modern revolutions and struggles have tended. One can read the history of modern revolutions as a halting and uneven but nonetheless real progression toward the realization of the absolute concept of democracy. It is a North Star that continues to guide our political desires and practices.

The second great innovation of the modern concept of democracy is its notion of representation. Representation was thought to be the distinctively modern practical mechanism that would make republican government feasible in the extensive territories of the nation-state.<sup>15</sup> Representation fills two contradictory functions: it links the multitude to government and at the same time separates it. Representation is a *disjunctive synthesis* in that it simultaneously connects and cuts, attaches and separates.<sup>16</sup> Many of the great eighteenth-century revolutionary thinkers, we should note, were not only reserved about democracy but actually feared and opposed it

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in explicit and concrete terms. Representation serves them as a kind of vaccine to protect against the dangers of absolute democracy: it gives the social body a small controlled dose of popular rule and thereby inoculates against the fearsome excesses of the multitude. Often these eighteenth-century authors will use the term *republicanism* to mark this distance from democracy.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, in his *Social Contract* treats democracy and representation in a complex, ambivalent way. On one hand, the people of a republic, he claims, must be absolutely sovereign and everyone must participate in an active and unmediated way in founding and legislating political society. On the other hand, this full political participation is tempered by the fact that only in some special cases is democracy the appropriate form of government to execute the will of the sovereign people. Different forms of government are suited to different nations, but elective aristocracy is in his view the best and most natural political order.<sup>17</sup> “If there were a nation of gods, it would be governed democratically,” Rousseau claims. “So perfect a government is unsuited to men.”<sup>18</sup> So, at least on first reading, whereas representation is not admissible in the realm of sovereignty for Rousseau, in the realm of government representation it is acceptable and even in most cases preferable.

And yet on closer inspection we can see that, despite Rousseau’s insistence to the contrary, his notion of sovereignty too contains a strong conception of representation. This is most clear in Rousseau’s explanation that only the “general will” of the people is sovereign, not the “will of all.” The will of all is the plural expression of the entire population, which Rousseau considers to be an incoherent cacophony, whereas the general will stands above society, a transcendent, unified expression.<sup>19</sup> We should recognize in Rousseau’s conception that the general will itself is a representation that is simultaneously connected to and separated from the will of all. This relationship of unity, transcendence, and representation is illustrated by Rousseau’s distinction between the people and the multitude. The people is only sovereign for Rousseau when it is unified. The people, he explains, is constructed by maintaining or creating unitary habits, customs, and views such that the population speaks with one voice and acts

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with one will. Difference is an enemy of the people. A population, however, can never really eliminate difference and speak with one voice. The unity of the people can be created only through an operation of representation that separates it from the multitude. Despite that the people all meet in person to exercise sovereignty, then, the multitude is not present; it is merely represented by the people. The rule of everyone in Rousseau is thus paradoxically but nonetheless necessarily reduced to the rule of one through the mechanism of representation.

The authors and defenders of the U.S. Constitution were much more explicit than Rousseau in their fear of democracy and the need for the separation provided by representation. For James Madison, for example, coauthor of *The Federalist*, the concept of democracy is defined, as popular sovereignty was for Rousseau, by the fact that “the people meet and exercise the government in person” such that all the people govern directly, freely, and equally.<sup>20</sup> Madison considers such democracy dangerous because, like Rousseau, he fears that there will be differences within the people—not only individual differences, which can be easily controlled, but collective differences, that is, factions. A minority faction, Madison reasons in *Federalist*, no. 10, does not pose a serious problem for a democracy because the majority can control it, but democracy has no mechanism to control a majority faction. The democratic multitude itself, in Madison’s view, has no mechanism of intelligence, prudence, or virtue that could organize differences: differences are immediately and inevitably expressed as conflict and oppression. Madison argues that the representative schema of the U.S. Constitution is an effective guarantee against the oppression of the majority in a republic.

Here the question of scale becomes primary. Democracy may have been feasible in the limited spaces of the ancient city-states, the argument goes, but the practical demands of the size of modern nation-states require that democracy be tempered with mechanisms of representation: democracy for small populations; representation for extensive territories and populations.<sup>21</sup> Many of the anti-Federalist writers in the eighteenth-century United States use this opposition between democracy and representation as an argument against the proposed Constitution and against a

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strong federal government. They favor small sovereign states because the small scale provides the conditions for democracy or, at least, representation of small proportions, where each delegate represents relatively few people.<sup>22</sup> The Federalists agree that representation is an obstacle to democracy—to the universal, equal, and free rule of everyone—but support it for that very reason! The enormous size of the modern nation-states, the United States in particular, is not an impediment to good government but instead a great advantage! Representatives who are too close to the represented do not provide an adequate protective barrier against democracy; representation has to be distant enough to hold the dangers of democracy at bay and yet not so distant that representatives have no contact with the represented. It is not necessary that representatives have detailed local knowledge of the represented (*Federalist*, no. 56); rather, what is most important is “to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of society.”<sup>23</sup> Madison insists that this representative schema whereby the few rule is neither an oligarchy (no. 57) nor an aristocracy in the British style (no. 63). We might characterize it best perhaps by what Rousseau calls an elective aristocracy, as opposed to natural or hereditary forms of aristocracy. Madison certainly agrees with Rousseau’s view that “it is the best and most natural order of things that the wisest should govern the multitude.”<sup>24</sup> Once again in these discussions we can recognize the essence of representation: it connects the citizens to government and at the same time separates them from it. The new science is based on this disjunctive synthesis.

One element that is refreshingly lucid about these eighteenth-century deliberations is that they recognize so clearly that democracy and representation stand at odds with one another. When our power is transferred to a group of rulers, then we all no longer rule, we are separated from power and government. Despite this contradiction, however, already in the early nineteenth century representation came to define modern democracy to such an extent that since then it has become practically impossible to think democracy without also thinking some form of representation. Rather than a barrier against democracy, representation came to be viewed as a necessary supplement. Pure democracy may be beautiful in theory,



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the argument goes, but it is relatively weak in practice. Only when democracy is mixed with representation does it form a sufficiently strong, resistant substance, as iron is mixed with carbon to make a steel alloy. The “new science” that the Federalists announced as their contribution to the new nation and the new era became something like a theory of modern metallurgy. By the 1830s Alexis de Tocqueville could call “democracy” in America the same representative schema that the founders, fifty years before, had conceived as a bulwark against the dangers of democracy. Today the dominant notion of democracy is even more distant. Consider, for example, the definition given recently by Joseph Nye, a leading liberal political thinker: “Democracy is government by officials who are accountable and removable by the majority of people in a jurisdiction.”<sup>25</sup> How far we have strayed from the eighteenth-century conception!

Since representation has come to monopolize the field of political thought to such an extent, it is useful in summary fashion to distinguish the different types of representation. Following Max Weber, we can distinguish three basic types according to the degree of separation between the representatives and the represented: appropriated, free, and instructed.<sup>26</sup>

*Appropriated representation* (approprierte Repräsentation) is the form with the weakest link and the strongest separation between the representatives and the represented. In this type the representatives are not selected, appointed, or controlled in any direct way by the represented; rather the representatives merely interpret the interest and will of the represented. Weber calls this form of representation appropriated because the representatives appropriate all decision-making powers for themselves. We should point out that these representatives are not completely autonomous because representation, like all relations of power, is two-sided, and the represented always have some means to refuse or modify the relationship, but in this case their means are the most indirect and distant. We can also call this type *patriarchal representation* because it defines the sense in which a feudal lord represented the peasants of the estate. This is similar, in fact, to how black slaves, women, and children were thought to be represented in the U.S. Constitution.<sup>27</sup> In a rather different context, patriarchal or appropriated representation also defines the way that today supranational organizations like the IMF and the World Bank represent

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the interests of nations like Thailand and Argentina, as we will see later. In all these cases, the representatives stand clearly separate from, and interpret the interests of, the represented, who can exercise only weak and indirect forms of influence.

*Free representation* (freie Repräsentation) stands in the middle position, typical of parliamentary systems, in which the represented have some direct connection to the representatives but their control is constrained or limited. In most electoral systems, for example, the choice or control that the represented exert is limited primarily in temporal terms, since the represented exercise their connection only every two or four or six years. Between elections representatives act relatively independently without the instruction or consultation of the represented, and thus Weber calls this form "free" to emphasize the relative autonomy of the representatives. The freedom of the representatives, of course, is inversely related to the degree of choice or control of the represented. The power of the represented is also limited, for example, by a constrained range of representatives to choose from. Their power is increasingly limited or partial too, of course, and the representatives correspondingly are more free with every additional degree of separation from the represented, the way a political appointee, for example, represents those who elected the appointing official. The delegates to the General Assembly of the United Nations might thus be said to represent the various national populations with a second degree of separation. The more limited or partial the representation becomes and the stronger the separation between representatives and the represented, the more it approaches a form of patriarchal or appropriated representation.

When the represented constantly control the representatives, the system is defined by what Weber calls *instructed representation* (gebundene Repräsentation). The various mechanisms that create stronger connections and bind the representatives to obey constantly the instructions of the represented all serve to lessen the autonomy of the representatives.<sup>28</sup> Frequent elections, for example, or even the constant revocability of delegates undercut the temporal limitation imposed on electors by periodic elections. Expanding the possibility of all members of the society to serve as representatives also lessens the limitations on the power of the represented. Finally, increasing the opportunities for all citizens to participate

in governmental decisions reduces the separation of representation. The participatory procedures for determining budget allocations in some Brazilian cities, such as Porto Alegre and Belem, is one example of such a mechanism to reduce separation.<sup>29</sup>

This Weberian typology of representation might immediately suggest a political task: work to transform all patriarchal or appropriated forms of representation into limited, liberal forms, and transform those limited forms into more directly instructed ones, making ever stronger the connection between the represented and their representatives. Such attempts can undoubtedly improve our contemporary political situation but they can never succeed in realizing the promise of modern democracy, the rule of everyone by everyone. Each of these forms—appropriated, free, and instructed—brings us back to the fundamental dual nature of representation, that it simultaneously connects and separates. The three forms designate different proportions of the two functions, which are necessary for sovereignty. The institutions of political representation must allow (at least some) citizens to express their plural desires and demands while at the same time allowing the state to synthesize them as one coherent unity. The representative is thus, on one hand, a servant of the represented and, on the other, dedicated to the unity and effectiveness of the sovereign will. As we will see in more detail later, according to the dictates of sovereignty, in the final analysis only the one can rule. Democracy requires a radical innovation and a new science.

## DEBTORS' REBELLION

*Abigail Adams, wife of John Adams, was furious with Thomas Jefferson. It was easy for him to write such pretty phrases while away in France. Back home in Massachusetts things were a mess.*

*The young United States was undergoing its first serious domestic rebellion. In the summer of 1786 the Court General of the state of Massachusetts began to foreclose on the property of indebted farmers in Hampshire County, seizing their cattle and their land. The farmers called on Massachusetts to print more money as Rhode Island had done to relieve their debt, but the state legislature*

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*was deaf to their demands. A militia of fifteen hundred armed farmers, many of who were veterans of the Revolutionary War, blocked the courts from meeting and taking away their property; in the town of Great Barrington they broke open the county jail and set free the debtors. Daniel Shays, a former captain in the Continental Army, eventually became known as its leader.*

*Abigail Adams wrote from London to her friend Thomas Jefferson, who was serving as ambassador to France, and described in dramatic terms the tumults created by the debtors in her native state: "Ignorant, restless desperadoes, without conscience or principles, have led a deluded multitude to follow their standard, under pretense of grievances which have no existence but in their imaginations." Thomas Jefferson was untroubled by the events and responded, to Abigail Adams's great consternation, in high-minded terms: "The spirit of resistance to government," Jefferson wrote, "is so valuable on certain occasions, that I wish it to be always kept alive. . . . I like a little rebellion now and then."<sup>30</sup> Abigail Adams broke off her regular correspondence with Jefferson for several months after that, and the rebellion indeed ended badly for everyone involved. The Massachusetts legislature suspended habeas corpus and allowed indefinite imprisonment without trial to facilitate the suppression of the rebellion. Over the course of the next year the rebel farmers were pursued, many of them arrested, and a dozen executed. Thomas Jefferson's positive view of the rebellion, however, was undiminished by news of the violence. To Colonel Smith, the Adamses' son-in-law, Jefferson wrote, "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is a natural manure."<sup>31</sup>*

*We do not have such a positive view of bloodshed and rebellion under any and all circumstances as Jefferson seems to in these letters. Indeed there is no reason to celebrate Shays's militia of armed farmers as a force for democracy in the young republic. What is more useful, instead, is to recognize the rebellion as a symptom of an economic contradiction immanent to the United States from its beginning. The rebellion, after all, was about debt—debts that the farmers could never hope to repay. The United States, despite all its rhetoric of equality, was a society divided along class lines, and its constitution was designed in many respects to maintain the wealth of the rich.<sup>32</sup> The rebellion of the indebted farmers was a powerful symptom of this contradiction.*

*This is one instance in which the formation of the global system today is re-*

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*peating elements of the history of the formation of the United States. One of the contradictions of the global system today is that the poorest countries, including most of sub-Saharan Africa, suffer from the burden of national debts that they can never hope to repay. Debt is one of the factors that keeps the poor poor and the rich rich in the global system. It is not impossible to imagine that someday soon this contradiction could inspire something like a Shays' Rebellion of debtors on a global scale that would not only horrify the likes of Abigail Adams but also wreak enormous destruction. Perpetual indebtedness in an economic system designed to maintain the divisions of wealth is a perfect recipe for desperate, violent acts. One would be hard pressed to muster any Jeffersonian optimism about such a possibility. The spilled blood of such a conflagration is not likely to nurture the tree of liberty. We would be much better served by searching for other means to address the systematic inequalities and contradictions of our global system before any such violent event arises.*

## THE UNREALIZED DEMOCRACY OF SOCIALISM

Socialist political representation has run parallel to liberal and constitutional representation in the history of modernity and finally failed in a similar way. Despite various efforts socialism did not succeed in constructing independent and original ideas or practices of political representation to avoid the unhealthy mystifications that plagued representative institutions throughout the history of modern sovereignty. There were certainly from the beginning promising elements in the socialist tradition. First of all, socialist movements criticized the notion of the "autonomy of politics" that supported the bourgeois conception of the state. Democracy would have to be constructed from below in a way that could neutralize the state's monopoly of power. Second, socialist movements recognized that the separation between political representation and economic administration was a key to the structures of oppression. They would have to find a way to make the instruments of political power coincide democratically with the economic management of society. Despite these promising beginnings,

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however, the history of socialist politics often led down different, less auspicious avenues.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, socialists and communists, social democrats and Bolsheviks, in different but corresponding ways, proposed the idea of the party as an alternative to the traditional forms of institutional representation. They conceived the modern state, even in its representative forms, as a dictatorship of the ruling class, a political apparatus designed to dominate the working class. The party was to be a vanguard, an organization that could bring together the working class with intellectuals and activists outside the working class to form a political power to compensate for the workers' lack of representation and address their miserable condition. The party was to represent those who lacked representation. The party was thus thought to be separate from the working class and outside the logic of both the capitalist economy and the bourgeois social order narrowly understood. This conception of the vanguard party clearly links socialism and communism with the Jacobin tradition insofar as they re-created the guiding role of the elite that the radical and progressive part of the bourgeoisie had expressed in Jacobinism. The party of the working class, from this perspective, had to raise the flag of Jacobinism, stripping it of its bourgeois class interests and making it coherent with the new interests of the proletariat: power to the proletarians, the state to the communists!

The most radical segments of the socialist, communist, and anarchist traditions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were united in their critique of parliamentary representation and their call to abolish the state. Instead of parliamentary representation, they proposed more complete, instructed forms of representation and even forms of direct democracy. The 1871 Paris Commune was the primary example of a new democratic experiment of government for Marx, Lenin, and many others. The Commune was still, of course, a representative government, but what inspired Marx so much were the mechanisms it instituted to reduce the separation between the representatives and the represented: the Commune's declaration of universal suffrage, for example, the fact that representatives to the Commune could be revoked by their electors at any time, that they were paid the same wages as workers, and the Commune's

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proposition of free and universal education.<sup>33</sup> Every step that narrows the separation between representatives and represented was thought to be a step toward the abolition of the state, that is, *the destruction of the separation of sovereign power from society*. We should note that the conceptions of representation and democracy inspired by the Commune were not really fundamentally different than those of the eighteenth-century revolutionaries. In fact, one of the most striking elements of Marx's and Lenin's writings on the Paris Commune in retrospect is how similar their rhetoric of democracy is to that of the earlier period. Marx hailed the Commune, for example, as a government "of the people by the people" and Lenin saw it as a step toward a "fuller democracy" in which the representatives are "directly responsible to their electorate."<sup>34</sup>

Another avenue for finding new modes of political representation involved creating mechanisms to give the proletariat a *direct* role in economic management and social administration. The most important experiments of this kind of democratic representation in the socialist and communist traditions were the various "council" forms of management and government, including the soviets and the so-called Rat forms.<sup>35</sup> The councils and soviets were conceived as mechanisms to increase dramatically the multitude's connection to and participation in government. The industrial workers, the soldiers, and the peasants would all be represented by their soviets. Both in the social democratic experience, stuck between corporative labor organizations and the illusions of self-government, and the Bolshevik experience, constantly struggling for economic and political survival, the councils never really succeeded in constructing a new model of representation. In the council or soviet the social base was called to make greater sacrifices for the factory, society, and the state, and in return were promised greater participation in their management, but that participation was always kept separate, at a distance from sovereign authority, and in time the participation and representation became even more ephemeral. The anti-authoritarian initiatives and demands of direct democracy of socialist and communist movements were thus ground down.

We should note that the demands for direct democracy and self-management were strongest in the socialist and communist movements during the phase of industrial development when the professionalized

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industrial worker occupied a hegemonic position in the organization of capitalist production, roughly from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. The industrial workers then knew each aspect of the productive process and understood the entire cycle of production because they were its pivot. As the industrial revolution continued in the twentieth century, as assembly lines were introduced and workers were progressively deskilled, the call for worker self-management seemed almost naturally to evaporate. The project of self-management thus gave way to the notion of planning, which was a mechanism to correct (but not displace) the capitalist organization of labor and the market.

As the twentieth century developed, the democratic socialist parties, in Europe and elsewhere, integrating themselves into the capitalist system, abandoned even the pretense of representing or defending the working class. The majority of communists, for their part, were swept up in the new proletarian states; leading the way was the Soviet Union, which, to guarantee its own legitimacy, pretended to represent all people and the future of humanity as a whole. Listen, for example, to the hopes of a utopian communist future the Soviet Union inspired in the French poet Louis Aragon. Walking the streets of Moscow, Aragon writes, “ici j’ai tant rêvé marchant de l’avenir / qu’il me semblait parfois de lui me souvenir.” (I dreamed so much of walking in the future here / that sometimes I seemed to have remembered it.)<sup>36</sup> In the Soviet Union and other socialist states, however, representation did not even remain at the level of the bourgeois tradition but was in the course of time degraded and reduced to a fiction of demagogic control and populist consensus, drained even further of its elements of connection to the multitude. This degradation of representation was one important factor that contributed to the bureaucratic implosion of the Eastern European socialist regimes in the late 1980s. This failure was due to not only historical circumstances but also a conceptual lack. Even in their most radical expressions, socialism and communism did not develop fundamentally different conceptions of representation and democracy, and as a result they repeated the founding nucleus of the bourgeois concept of sovereignty, trapped paradoxically in the need for the unity of the state.<sup>37</sup>



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We do not mean to suggest that communism and socialism did not contain profoundly democratic strains or that these were not often expressed in powerful and tragic ways. In the early years of the Soviet Union, for example, there were numerous social, political, and cultural experiments that imagined the creation of a new and more democratic society, particularly in terms of women's liberation, transformation of the peasant world, and artistic innovation.<sup>38</sup> Early Soviet legal theorists, such as Eugeny Pashukanis, saw the possibility of going beyond private law and transforming public law into an institutional system based on the common.<sup>39</sup> In China and Cuba too there were numerous similar examples. In various different periods each of these countries witnessed new experiments in the democratic management of production and society that rejected the bureaucratic, Stalinist model. They also created projects of technical and economic assistance to struggles against colonialism and imperialism throughout the Third World. Long before most of today's humanitarian NGOs, Cuban doctors were treating tropical diseases all over Latin America and Africa. The utopian desires of communism and socialism at times guided the institutions of the socialist regimes and forced them to make social justice the primary criterion of government. And more generally, communist and socialist movements and parties often defended democracy—both in Europe and the Americas as well as in Asia and Africa, and on both sides of the iron curtain—from fascist and reactionary attacks, from Stalinism and McCarthyism. In the end, however, the dreams of socialist and communist representation proved to be an illusion. Once again, Aragon: “On sourira de nous d’avoir aimé la flame / au point d’en devenir nous même l’aliment. (They will laugh at us for having loved the flame / to the point of being consumed by it.)”<sup>40</sup>

Max Weber, for one, perfectly understood that the socialist organization of labor would end up having the same laws as the capitalist one and that they would correspond to analogous concepts of representation.<sup>41</sup> This analogy was not merely grounded on his observation of the convergent models of the organization of parties and their bureaucratic legacies (an observation of Robert Michels, which Weber certainly shared). Weber's insight went to a much deeper level of the problem and sprung from the

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fact that, according to him, one cannot speak of politics (and democratic representation) without speaking of social politics and thus representation remained an essential organ of the mediation and expression of social interests in every complex system of the management of society, either socialist or bourgeois. Socialism, in every form, thus necessarily involves the *management of capital*—perhaps in a less privatist or individualist way, but always within the same relentless dynamic of the instrumental rationalization of life. Since the modern concept of representation necessarily corresponds to that dynamic of rationalization, socialism could not do without it. Neither could it substitute for it a form of labor representation based on trade unions or councils. In the framework of the management of capital, Weber concludes the contradiction between worker democracy and representative democracy could only be solved in favor of the latter. That said, despite this impossibility we can also recognize in Weber a kind of nostalgia for that fantastic power of social transformation contained in the Russian Revolution and the entire socialist tradition.

Weber's critique of socialism and its mechanisms of representation because it helps us see how the various right-wing forms of populism have sprung, perversely, from the socialist tradition. A stream of the modern tradition of democratic representation breaks off and ends up in a swamp. Various elements of the authoritarian right, from the National Socialists in Germany and the Peronists in Argentina to France's Front nationale and Austria's Freedom Party, attempt to resolve the contradictions of the socialist idea of representation in populist fashion by imposing on it the most traditional theories of sovereignty. Here, on the right, the construction of representation as an external function, as a complete delegation of one's rights, reaches an extreme point. Political consciousness is entirely grounded in and nourished by tradition, and mass participation is invoked on the basis of a defensive and redemptive identification. All of these right-wing projects, be they aristocratic, clerical, or sectarian, imagine an identification of minds or spirits that legitimates its form of representation on the basis of tradition. Carl Schmitt indeed demonstrates how the reactionary idea of representation from Juan Donoso Cortés to Georges Sorel is constructed on the identitarian and traditionalist idea of sovereign legit-

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imacy. This is how all fundamentalisms are born. Such contemporary forms of right-wing populism and fascism are deformed offsprings of socialism—and such populist derivatives of socialism are another reason for which we have to search for a postsocialist political alternative today, breaking with the worn-out socialist tradition.

It is strange now to have to recall this amalgam of ideological perversions that grew out of the socialist concept of representation, but today we can finally preside over its funeral. The democratic hopes of socialist representation are over. And while we say our farewells we cannot but remember how many ideological by-products, more or less fascist, the great historical experiences of socialism were condemned to drag in their wake, some merely useless sparks and others devastating infernos. There is no longer any possibility of going back to modern models of representation to create a democratic order. We need to invent different forms of representation or perhaps new forms of democracy that go beyond representation.

### REVOLT, BERLIN 1953

*If we now have a socialist regime, the Berlin workers reasoned, then we should no longer suffer under the weight of production quotas. When Benno Sarel recounts the revolts of the construction workers along Stalinallee and throughout Berlin, which on June 16 and 17, 1953, spread to the big factories, the workers' neighborhoods, and then the suburbs and countryside of East Germany, he emphasizes that the most important demand of the factory worker was to abolish the production quotas and destroy the structural order of command over labor in the factories. Socialism, after all, is not capitalism!<sup>42</sup>*

*In spring 1953, in the newborn German Democratic Republic, the socialist regime developed a long-term plan and proposed the intensification of work in the factories and all other work sites. It was a matter of reconstructing Berlin and founding a socialist state. On a four-kilometer stretch of the great boulevard Stalinallee, the old Frankfurterallee, there was an enormous concentration of construction workers and their workshops. They had already cleaned*

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*up the rubble from the war, working day and night by the light of electric flood lamps to reconstruct their city. After the planning decisions were announced in spring 1953, production quotas were raised. In the first trimester of the year, in fact, the construction industries had met only 77 percent of what the plan required. Now the timekeepers assiduously controlled the workers, and the party activists and foremen actively supported raising the production quotas, often passing them off as voluntary.*

*Resistance began in the workshops. The rise of production quotas was accompanied by a cut in salaries. Friday was payday, and the first Friday in June there were conflicts, protests, and numerous incidental acts of resistance. Faced with this growing unrest, the party bureaucrats and the management bureaucrats, who in the workshops were often the same people, reacted only with more discipline: they promised individual punishment and collective sanctions for those who disobeyed. The workers responded by threatening strikes. The party rank and file, who had the pulse of the workers' sentiments, tried quickly to find a compromise, and many of them moved over to the workers' side. June 12, the second payday after the raise of the production quotas, salaries were lowered even further. Worker assemblies were formed to express their outrage.*

*Monday, June 15, central leaders of the party's union visited the workshops to open discussions. The workers, however, organized a delegation to protest directly in front of the House of Ministers. A small demonstration of about three hundred workers was led by a banner that called for an end to the production quotas. The demonstrators passed in front of other workshops and called the workers to join them. The original three hundred was quickly transformed into a flood of thousands. On the following day and late into that night workers' committees blocked production in the workshops and went through the neighborhoods to explain their demands. The Berlin metallurgy and chemical factories quickly joined the struggle. As news of the Berlin revolt spread to the other industrial cities of East Germany the strikes spread too—Brandenburg, Halle, Bitterfeld, Merseberg, the great industrial centers of Saxony, and finally Leipzig and Dresden.*

*Why were those trade union and party leaders, many of whom had been part of the heroic resistance against the Nazi regime and who now claimed to be representing a socialist, worker republic, unable to convince or even reason with those workers who shared their common history and emancipatory project?*

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*When, in front of the House of Ministers, the Minister of Industry, Selbmann, a former worker himself with calloused hands, referred to the strikers as "comrades," they responded, "We are not your comrades!" Why was there such a lack of solidarity? We know the history of how the political system of East Germany later developed into a kind of police state, but at this point in 1953 that had not yet happened. This was an instance of class struggle in the construction of a "workers' state" in which representation should have resembled a direct form of democracy. Why instead did the representatives not represent anything but the authority and quotas of the plan? When President Grotewohl declared during the strikes that "we are flesh of the flesh of the working class," no one disputed the fact. Why then had the faith in representation so quickly and completely evaporated?*

*The morning of June 17 demonstrators converged on the House of Ministers. The general population joined the workers, and the revolt transformed into an insurrection that involved many of the cities of East Germany. In Berlin the police blocked the demonstrators in front of the House of Ministers, and the multitude quickly found a new symbolic convergence point: Marx-Engelsplatz. At 1:00 p.m. the Soviet leadership in Moscow declared a state of siege. Late into the evening the rebels desperately fought against armored vehicles with nothing but their bare hands. Worker delegates were sent from the Eastern sector of Berlin to the Western sector, knocking on the doors of the West German administration asking for assistance, arms, and strikes in solidarity, but to no avail. The worker revolt in Berlin thus came to an end, the first of many often silent worker revolts against socialist regimes.*

*We do not know what reduced representatives in the German Democratic Republic to a parody of that communist dream of democratic representation, what corrupted them to the point of becoming merely emissaries of disciplinary power, not much different from the agents of bourgeois sovereignty, as the old communist militants would say. (Those who had no illusions about the fact that "really-existing socialism" had in its closet the skeleton of capitalism call this an example of socialism as a form of state capitalism.) And yet, faced with the decline of the revolutionary utopia and its constituent power, a revolt emerged that pointed toward the future. The workers sang the verses of the old hymn: "Brothers toward the light! Toward freedom!" This hymn was part of the practices of resistance, the strikes, and the barricades erected against the*

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*bureaucratic regimes in the name of a future democracy. In the case of Berlin 1953 the new form of organization was the strike committee. The strike committee united the trade union function of managing labor (immediately taking command of the factory) with the political function of the organization of the revolt. As the hegemony of the working class spread in society they called on other social groups to join the rebellion. They demanded a democracy of the workers by the workers, everywhere. The members of the strike committee were a broad social mixture: there were those workers in the workshops who were the first to express their indignation and organize the resistance, there were those communists who from the beginning stood by the mass of workers, and there were those intellectuals, students, Protestant pastors, and antifascist veterans who had been woken up by the call for justice. How the members of the strike committee were chosen is perhaps not the most important element of the story. Central instead was their insistent call for freedom and democracy. No more production quotas! If labor is not free, then there can be no communism! This is the essence of Berlin 1953: they recognized representation to be a capitalist function of command over the working class and they said no. In response they affirmed the communist expression of desire through the multitude.*

## FROM DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION TO GLOBAL PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion has in many respects become the primary form of representation in contemporary societies. The Monday after a weekend of massive demonstrations against the U.S. war in Iraq in February 2003, with millions of people in the streets of major cities throughout the world, the *New York Times* proclaimed in a front-page story that there are now two superpowers in the world: the United States and global public opinion.<sup>43</sup> Public opinion, it seems, has finally arrived on the grandest of political stages. Public opinion, however, if it is to be considered a superpower, must be a political subject of a nature very different than a nation-state such as the United States. It is unclear, moreover, whom public opinion represents and how it represents them. It will be useful for us to take a step

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back at this point to consider the history of public opinion and the various theories that have sought to characterize its form of representation. We will find that public opinion is in fact neither representative nor democratic.

Although “the public” and “opinion” are notions that stretch back to the ancients, public opinion is essentially an eighteenth-century invention, born, not coincidentally, in the same period as the “new science” of democratic representation. Public opinion was conceived as the voice of the people, and thus it was thought to fill the role for modern democracy that the assembly filled for the ancient democracy: the site where the people express themselves in public affairs. Public opinion was thought to function through representative institutions such as electoral systems but go well beyond them; in it the popular will is imagined to be constantly present. Public opinion was thus from the beginning intimately related to notions of democratic representation, both as a vehicle that completes representation and as a supplement that compensates for its limitations.

This notion of public opinion quickly divides in modern political thought according to two opposing views: a utopian vision of the perfect representation of the will of the people in government and an apocalyptic vision of manipulated mob rule. Consider, for example, two texts published in 1895: James Bryce’s *American Commonwealth* and Gustave Le Bon’s *Psychologie des foules* (The Crowd). Bryce, a Scottish scholar and politician who, like Tocqueville before him, celebrates U.S. democracy, sees public opinion as an essential mechanism of democratic representation. The rule of public opinion could be achieved, Bryce writes, “if the will of the majority of citizens were to become ascertainable at all times, and without need of its passing through a body of representatives, possibly without the need of voting machinery at all. . . . this informal but direct control of the multitude would dwarf, if it did not supersede, the importance of formal but occasional deliverances made at the elections of representatives.”<sup>44</sup> Bryce imagines a political system in which the will of all individuals is completely and immediately represented in government, a system that he thought nineteenth-century U.S. politics made possible. Le Bon, in contrast, sees in the public expressions of the masses not many rational individual voices but one indifferent and irrational voice. In the

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crowd, according to Le Bon, “the heterogeneous is swamped by the homogeneous and the unconscious qualities obtain the upper hand.”<sup>45</sup> Crowds are fundamentally irrational and susceptible to external influence; they naturally and necessarily follow a leader whose control maintains their unity through contagion and repetition. In fact, panic might be thought of as the primary emotion of the crowd. The Greek god Pan, from whose name the term derives, leads the masses and drives them insane: innocent people are lynched by mobs, markets collapse, currencies crumble, wars begin.<sup>46</sup> Public opinion is so dangerous according to this second, apocalyptic vision, then, because it tends to be both unified and susceptible to manipulation.

Between these two extreme views, public opinion is also conceived in the history of modern political philosophy as a form of mediation that negotiates between the many individual or group expressions and the social unity. G. W. F. Hegel’s notion of civil society is fundamental to this conception of mediation.<sup>47</sup> Civil society is the realm of all social, economic, and political organizations and institutions that are not part of the state. Into civil society enter not only individuals but also and more importantly families, civic groups, trade unions, political parties, interest groups, along with all the various other forms of social association. The key to Hegel’s notion of civil society is the way it matches perfectly with the capitalist ideology of a society based on exchange relations. Through its political alchemy, civil society transforms the multiple exchanges of capitalist society into the unitary authority of sovereignty; it is both the plural expression of the wills of everyone and their enlightened synthesis in a unified general will. We should note that civil society fills for Hegel the same role that representation serves for modern political thought as a whole: through civil society all members of the society are both linked to and separated from the political realm of sovereignty and the state. Hegel’s notion of civil society provides a model for leading the plurality of individual expression in public opinion to a rational unity compatible with sovereignty.

Since at least the middle of the twentieth century, however, public opinion has been transformed by the enormous expansion of the media—newspapers, radio, television, Internet sources, and so forth. The speed of information, the exasperating overlap of symbols, the ceaseless circulation



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of images, and the evanescence of meanings seem to undermine the notions of public opinion both as multiple individual expressions and as a unified rational voice. Among contemporary theorists of public opinion, Jürgen Habermas most clearly renews Hegel's notion of mediation (drawing primarily on Hegel's early conception of interrelation rather than the later concept of civil society) and links it to the utopian vision of rational individual expression.<sup>48</sup> From Habermas's perspective, public opinion can be conceived in terms of communicative action aimed at reaching understanding and forming a world of values. This public sphere is democratic insofar as it allows for free expression and plural communicative exchanges. For Habermas this lifeworld actively stands as an alternative, outside the system of instrumental reason and the capitalist control of communication. There is, of course, a rationalist and moralistic echo that runs throughout this effort to divide the world of free and ethical communication from the system of instrumentality and domination a sense of indignation against the capitalist colonization of the lifeworld. This is where Habermas's conception of ethical communication in a democratic public sphere appears completely utopian and unrealizable, however, because it is impossible to isolate ourselves, our relationships, and our communication outside the instrumentality of capital and the mass media. We are all already inside, contaminated. If there is going to be any ethical redemption it will have to be constructed inside the system.

In contrast to Habermas, Niklas Luhmann rejects any such moral transcendentalism or utopianism and proposes instead conceiving the public sphere with a functionalist method that makes the networks of social interaction into a motor of social equilibrium.<sup>49</sup> This view renovates the functionalism characteristic of traditional U.S. sociology and couples it with various newer methodological approaches in sociology. Luhmann considers the public sphere an extraordinarily complex but nonetheless self-sustaining system in which all of the various social actors—despite their differences of opinion and belief, and even by expressing these differences—end up contributing to the equilibrium of the system as a whole. To the extent that this conception of public opinion involves democratic representation, this representation rests on a notion of the free interaction of the vast plurality of social differences within the social system; the very

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complexity of the system is taken as a sign of its representative nature. But this is a very weak notion of representation. Functionalist perspectives such as Luhmann's pose a model of mediation between the plurality of social voices and the synthesis of the social totality, but the accent is firmly placed on the solid, stable unity and equilibrium of the system.

None of these theories of mediation, however, grasp the new role of the media and polling, which are the essential factors in the construction and expression of contemporary public opinion. In the field of media studies, which indeed does confront these new factors, we find once again the old bifurcated view of public opinion as either rational individual expression or mass social manipulation. The utopian view is promoted chiefly by the mainstream media itself: the media present objective information that allows citizens to form their own opinions, which in turn are reflected back to them faithfully by the media's opinion polls. George Gallup, for example, the primary founder of the U.S. model of opinion polls, who was, incidentally, deeply influenced by the work of James Bryce, claims that polls serve to make government more responsive to the will of the people.<sup>50</sup> The scholarly field of media studies tends instead toward the apocalyptic view. Although information and images are omnipresent and superabundant in contemporary society, the sources of information have in certain respects been dramatically reduced. The alternative newspapers and other media that expressed the views of various subordinated political groups in much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have all but disappeared.<sup>51</sup> As media corporations merge into huge conglomerates, the information they distribute becomes increasingly homogeneous. Media scholars complain, for example, that during the 2003 war against Iraq the major U.S. newspapers and television networks uniformly reported only the U.S. government version of events with little or no deviation.<sup>52</sup> The corporate media can at times act just as reliably as a mouthpiece for government positions as any state-run system. Scholars also highlight the manipulative effect of opinion polls. There is, of course, something strangely circular in the notion that opinion polls tell us what we think. At the very least, opinion polls have a centripetal psychological effect, encouraging all to conform to the view of the majority.<sup>53</sup> Many on both the left and the right charge that the media and their opinion polls

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are biased and serve to manipulate and even fabricate public opinion.<sup>54</sup> Once again, public opinion seems to be trapped between the naive utopianism of objective information and rational individual expression and the cynical apocalypticism of mass social control.

In the context of this extreme and untenable alternative, the field of cultural studies, especially the stream that emerged from the work of Stuart Hall and the Birmingham School, provides an important perspective.<sup>55</sup> One fundamental insight of cultural studies is that communication (and thus also public opinion) is two-sided. Although we are all constantly bombarded by the messages and meanings of culture and the media, we are not merely passive receivers or consumers. We constantly make new meanings out of our cultural world, resist the dominant messages, and discover new modes of social expression. We do not isolate ourselves from the social world of the dominant culture but neither do we simply acquiesce to its powers. Rather, from inside the dominant culture we create not only alternative subcultures but, more important, new collective networks of expression. Communication is *productive*, not only of economic values but also of subjectivity, and thus communication is central to biopolitical production. *Public opinion* is not the adequate term for these alternative networks of expression born in resistance because, as we have seen, in the traditional conceptions public opinion tends to present either a neutral space of individual expression or a unified social whole—or a mediated combination of these two poles. We can only understand these forms of social expression as networks of the multitude that resists the dominant power and manage from within it to produce alternative expressions.

Public opinion, finally, is not a unified voice or an average point of social equilibrium. When polls and surveys lead us to think of the public as an abstract subject—the public thinks or wants *x* or *y*—that is pure fiction and mystification. Public opinion is not a form of representation or even a modern, technical, statistical substitute for representation. Rather than a democratic subject, public opinion is a *field of conflict* defined by relations of power in which we can and must intervene politically, through communication, cultural production, and all the other forms of biopolitical production. This field of public opinion is not an even playing field but rather radically asymmetrical, since the media are primarily controlled by

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large corporations. In fact there are no real constitutional guarantees or system of checks and balances that guarantee or regulate access to this field. There have been many attempts in Europe to exert public control over the mechanisms of public opinion, but they have never managed to touch the essential core of the corporate-owned media. In any case, recognizing that public opinion is not a space of democratic representation but a field of conflict does not really provide answers but only clarifies the problem. The conflict on the field of public opinion is a threshold through which the multitude must pass in its process of formation.

Now we can come back to our point of departure: the second superpower that the *New York Times* recognized in the globally coordinated antiwar demonstrations in February 2003. Calling this new superpower global public opinion does grasp that it extends well beyond the political institutions of representation and that its emergence is a symptom, in fact, of *the general crisis of democratic representation in global society*: the multitudes managed to express what their representatives could not. *Global public opinion*, however, is a term completely inadequate to understand the nature and power of such expressions of the networks of the multitude, and referring to them as a superpower is not only premature but also misleading, since their form of power is so dramatically asymmetrical to the one that dominates the global order today. To understand this power of the multitude better we need first to investigate in the next section some of its contemporary expressions—its grievances against the current global system and its proposals for reform—and then in the final section of the book explore how these networks of the multitude can form a real counterpower and make possible a truly democratic global society.