MILLENNIUM
Journal of International Studies

Conference Keynote

Communicative Capitalism and Revolutionary Form

Millennium: Journal of International Studies
1–15

DOI: 10.1177/0305829819840624
journals.sagepub.com/home/mil
SAGE

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Abstract
This essay considers the political form that is presupposed in questions of resistance and revolution. It situates resistance and revolution in communicative capitalism, a setting characterised by intense winner-take-all inequality, the decline of symbolic efficiency, and the shift from the use to the circulation value of communicative utterances. It draws out the way that this setting inflects the body the question of resistance and revolution presupposes. Is it the world, the individual, the network, or the party? I argue that the party is the form we need to assume when we ask about revolution because it is the party that has the capacity to strategise, to plan and to arrange itself with an eye to revolution.

Keywords
resistance, revolution, party, network

Capitalismo comunicativo y forma revolucionaria

Resumen
En este artículo se considera la forma política que se presupone en las cuestiones sobre resistencia y revolución. Se sitúan estas últimas dentro del capitalismo comunicativo, marco caracterizado por la intensa desigualdad de "el ganador se lo lleva todo", el declive de la eficiencia simbólica y la transición desde el valor de uso al valor de circulación de las expresiones comunicativas. Se muestra cómo este marco modula el núcleo de lo que presupone la cuestión de la resistencia y revolución. ¿Es el mundo, el individuo, la red o el partido? Sostengo que el partido es la forma que debemos asumir al explorar la cuestión de la revolución ya que el mismo dispone de capacidad de estrategia, planificación y autoorganización de cara a la revolución.

Palabras clave
resistencia, revolución, partido, red

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Capitalisme communicatif et forme révolutionnaire

Résumé

Cet essai aborde la forme politique présupposée dans les questions de résistance et de révolution. Il place ces dernières dans un contexte de capitalisme communicatif, un cadre qui se caractérise par une intense inégalité où le gagnant a tous les droits, par le déclin d'une efficacité symbolique et par un basculement entre la valeur d'usage et la valeur de circulation d'énoncés communicatifs. En découle la façon dont ce cadre altère l'organe que présuppose la question de résistance et de révolution. Est-ce le monde, l'individu, le réseau ou le parti ? Je soutiens que, lorsque nous posons la question de la révolution, la forme que nous devons envisager est celle du parti, car c'est lui qui est en mesure d'élaborer une stratégie, de planifier et de s'organiser en vue de la révolution.

Mots-clés

résistance, révolution, parti, réseau

What political form do we presuppose (or neglect) when we ask questions about resistance and revolution? Reflections on revolution – on whether we are in a revolutionary moment or age, on whether our time is revolutionary, on whether revolution is on the horizon and what this might mean – are not simple matters of academic description. They have political import. One cannot be neutral with respect to revolution, un-invested in the answer; the answer has impact on our actions – how do we prepare, in which direction do we push? I am interested in the form our action takes, the form that makes action possible, the form we presuppose when we ask ourselves questions about resistance and revolution.[1] My claim is that the form imperative for us today is the communist party – a party committed to the abolition of private property, to making production, circulation and reproduction serve the people rather than subordinating people to the imperative of capital accumulation.

Networked Revolution?

Are resistance and revolution necessarily progressive? Might revolution operate as counter-revolution (or is counter-revolution itself the erasure of revolution as the rupture necessary for progressive change)? Is resistance only a defence of the status quo (or perhaps the set of reactive responses to repression that incite repression's intensification)? Should the Left embrace revolution? Resistance? Or is there something conservative about them? Are these now terms in a language of defeat that must be jettisoned and overcome?[2]

1. Anna Kornbluh's work is indispensable to the new appreciation of form; see her book *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).
2. For an insightful overview of revolution in philosophy, see Artemy Magun, *Negative Revolution* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

In considering these questions, we might start by noting the difference between the modern idea of revolution as a radical break and the ancient conception of revolution as the circle of regimes, from monarchy to aristocracy to oligarchy, democracy, and then tyranny. In this ancient conception, revolution is not a radical break. It is unceasing return.

Technology is our contemporary correlate for the ancient conserving view of revolution. Every year, or six months, there is a revolutionary breakthrough in iPhones, self-driving cars, facial recognition, big data, surveillance technologies, etc. These technological 'revolutions' maintain the capitalist status quo, intensifying its practical and material grip on our lives. We go around in circles, with new gadgets and 'upgrades' that produce waste, erase jobs, and promote distraction.

The contemporary ideology of technological revolution supports the entrenchment of hierarchy. This is because of the power-law structure of complex networks. In *Linked: The New Science of Networks*, Albert-László Barabási sets out the formal characteristics of complex networks, networks characterised by free choice, growth and preferential attachment.[3] These are networks where people voluntarily make links or choices. The sites linked to or the number of links per site grow over time, and people like things because others like them – that is the preferential attachment part. An example: most of us have had the experience of looking for a restaurant on a street and seeing one that has hardly any people and one that has a lot. We tend to be hesitant about the one that does not have many people – why is no-one in there? The one that has a lot of people must be good (and so we might be willing to wait in line rather than eat at the place with a lot of available tables). Or, think about it with respect to theory texts – we have an incentive to read books and articles that others are talking about. If no one is talking about it, then we have to make a bigger effort to make it seem important. So that is preferential attachment – people like things others like. The power-law part tells us the shape of the distribution. It is generally the case that the most popular book or restaurant or internet site has roughly twice as many links/hits as the second most popular which has twice as many as the third most and so on down to the insignificant differences between those low in the food chain, those in the long tail of the distribution curve. It is the winner-takes-most or 80/20 rule characteristic of complex networks. The one at the top has significantly more than the ones at the bottom. The shape the distribution takes is not a bell curve; it is a long tail. The most popular people on Twitter have over 100 million followers; those ranked around ninth or tenth have around 50 million followers, and the average person has about 200 followers.

In a setting of complex networks, there is an advantage to being first – everyone else is influenced by the decisions of those who go first (again, that is the preferential attachment part). The network structure induces competition – for attention, resources, money, jobs – anything that is given a network form.[4] This leads, then, to two key points about complex networks: those who get there first have an advantage and free choice, growth

3. Albert-László Barabási, *Linked: The New Science of Networks* (Philadelphia: Perseus Publishing, 2002).
4. See my discussion in chapter four of *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso, 2012), 119–156.

and preferential attachment produce hierarchies – power-law distributions where those at the top have vastly more than those at the bottom. Another way to express the same point: hierarchies are immanent to networks. They are not transcendental impositions. Hierarchies arise out of free choices, growth and preferential attachment. Getting rid of them, combatting them, requires an imposition, a cut, a disruption of the system that produces them. Getting rid of immanent hierarchies requires politics. One might think of a workplace or organisation: 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work; in classrooms or seminars or activist groups, some people take up all the space; a small number tend to do most the talking. Making the space equal requires an intervention.

I have emphasised the structure of complex networks because this is a key feature of communicative capitalism, of the conditions in which we find ourselves. We see this pattern everywhere: for instance, the finance sector: 'UBS tops the rankings with $2,402.8 billion AUM [assets under management], over double that of its closest rival' (UBS is a Swiss multinational investment bank; in second place is Bank of America – Merrill Lynch).[5] We see the pattern in the revenue of shipping companies: the largest is Maersk with $40.3 billion, second largest Mediterranean Shipping group with $28.2 billion, and third largest CMA CGM Group with $15.7 billion.[6] And we see it in the endowment funds of British universities – first place Cambridge at £3.25 billion, second place Oxford at £3.08 billion, third place Edinburgh at £424 million, fourth place Manchester at £235 million.[7]

Whose Revolution?

In the United States, revolution is celebrated so long as it is Republican. I am thinking of the Reagan revolution, which detourned the communist signification of revolution operative throughout the 20th century. We could also throw in the Tea Party, which explicitly evoked and aligned itself with the American Revolution. These right-wing re-appropriations tell us that in the US the suppression of radical change has become the name for what had previously designated radical change. Counter-revolution expropriates the very name revolution.

5. Michael Selby-Green, 'The 15 Biggest Wealth Managers in the World', *Business Insider*, 11 June 2018. Available at: www.businessinsider.com/the-15-biggest-wealth-managers-in-the-world-2018-6. Last accessed April 5, 2019.
6. 'Top 10 International Container Shipping Companies', *MoverDB.com*, March 2016. Available at: https://moverdb.com/shipping-companies/. Last accessed April 5, 2019.
7. University of Cambridge, *Reports and Financial Statements 2018*. Available at: www.cam.ac.uk/system/files/uoc_annual_report_2018.pdf. Last accessed April 5, 2019. OU Endowment Management, *The Oxford Endowment Fund Report 2017: Investing in the Future*. Available at: www.ouem.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/OUem_Fund_Report_17.pdf. Last accessed April 5, 2019. The University of Edinburgh, *Annual Report and Accounts for the Year to 31 July 2018*. Available at: www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/university_of_edinburgh_annual_report_and_accounts_2017.18.pdf; Last accessed April 5, 2019. University of Manchester, *Financial Statements 2018*. Available at: http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=40683. Last accessed April 5, 2019.

Liberals tend to reject revolution of any sort. Social democrats, too, dismiss, denigrate and fear revolution. Geoff Mann's *In the Long Run We're All Dead* presents Keynesian liberalism as anchored in fear of revolution.[8] Revolution must be avoided at all costs. Revolution in any shape should be feared, rejected. Left or Right – it does not matter. In a repeat of liberal centrism's 'totalitarianism' thesis, the mobilising fear is of extremism. Maintaining order trumps a struggle for justice.

There are good reasons to ask about the currency of revolution for the Left. The term has been re-appropriated and denigrated. Some leftists are themselves sceptical about revolution as a progressive force. There are anarchists, for example, who reject the idea of taking power.[9] They advocate different kinds of transformation – in personal relations, forms of life, ways of relating to nature. Rather than an actual choice – *we could take power, we just don't want to* – this anarchist position reflects the contemporary Left's deep incapacity, its disconnection from organised and productive labour, that is, from a material ground for its politics. Even Slavoj Žižek (hardly an anarchist), says that in 'developed Western societies, calls for a radical revolution have no mobilising power. Only a modest "wrong" choice can create the subjective conditions for an actual communist perspective'.[10] It makes sense to emphasise the practical efficacy of 'wrong choices', say, popular demands with mobilising power raised in order to build momentum, train cadre, develop connections within and among the people and so on. But there has to be some kind of body capable of making demands in the first place. The very idea of a call or demand presupposes an active political collective. Furthermore, it is misleading to position popular demands or a minimal programme as an alternative to 'calling for' revolution. As Žižek knows, you cannot call for a revolution (a revolution is not reducible to an occupation or insurrection). Revolutions call us – revolutions produce their revolutionaries.[11] Calling for revolution is an empty gesture. Revolutions occur when the ruling class *cannot* continue to rule in the old way and the working class *refuses* to continue in the old way (in Lenin's classic formulation). Revolutions are real; they happen, whether we want them to or not. We can prepare for them, try to prevent them from being quashed by a repressive state, but no person, in fact, no party or group can make a revolution.

Resistance is Futile

What about resistance? Coming from the US where the resistance was declared after Trump's election, I have grown tired of the idea. Hillary Clinton claims to be part of the

8. Geoff Mann, *In the Long Run We're All Dead: Keynesianism, Political Economy, and Revolution* (London: Verso, 2017).
9. Exemplary here is John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (London: Pluto, 2002). See my critique in *Crowds and Party* (London: Verso, 2016).
10. Slavoj Žižek, *Lenin 2017: Remembering, Repeating and Working Through* (London: Verso, 2017), lxxvii.
11. Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*, trans. Nicholas Jacobs (London, Verso, 2009). See also my discussion in 'The Actuality of Revolution', *Socialist Register* 53 (2017): 59–79.

resistance. The entire Washington establishment attending the funeral of Republican Senator John McCain presented itself as the resistance. The picture of the resistance in the US, then, is a picture of a section of the capitalist class. The conflict we see in the mainstream media is an elite conflict. The resistance is one group of capitalists resisting the other – or, better, performing resistance to keep the illusion of democracy alive enough to ward off revolution.

Some might want to point to the Florida Parkland high school students who organised the massive anti-gun rally in Washington, DC, as an important part of the resistance. Their actions were laudable, inspiring; they did some real organising work. But the desperate media reception rang of 'and only a child shall lead them'. The actual proposals were fairly tepid gun control provisions.

In the US the struggles of oppressed communities are often described in terms of resistance. Survival itself is presented as resistance. This renders maintenance of the status quo as a political victory. Politics is reduced to the defensive position of holding on against an onslaught. The horizon of struggle is just where we are – continuing under imperialism, racism, patriarchy, capitalism.

Resistance is a term of defeat. It concedes the terrain of struggle, as if what we have is enough, as if that were adequate, as if maintaining the status quo were even possible under capitalism and climate change. Not only is the status quo anchored in exploitation, dispossession, racism, sexism and imperialism but it is moving and shifting. The system relies on crisis, war, disaster. Capitalists are open about it: 'disruption' is considered cool in business; 'creative destruction' is a capitalist goal. We might also add how contemporary nationalisms present themselves as a kind of resistance – resistance to migrants, globalisation, imagined threats to their imagined communities. Revolution is Real. Resistance is imaginary.

In sum, the question whether resistance and revolution are progressive presses us to think about appropriation/resignification and politics/political struggle. And these have to be thought together.

The Decline of Symbolic Efficiency

What we do not have to focus on (or make a big deal about) is defining our terms. The short reason is because definitions, naming, is part of the political struggle. The longer reason has to do with another feature of communicative capitalism – the change that occurs in language when communication merges with capitalism, that is, when communication is central to capital accumulation. In the 21st century, communication plays a fundamental role at the level of production, consumption and the circulation of goods and natural resources. Because of the rise of networked media, informatisation and global communications networks, communication supplies the resource for accumulation, functions as means of accumulation, and works as a tool for accumulation (for mining and processing communicative data).

Two inter-related impacts of the merger of capitalism and communication are the loss of the use value of communicative utterances and the decline of symbolic efficiency.[12] With regard to the loss of the use value of an utterance: my claim here is that circulation

12. See also my discussion in 'Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics', *Cultural Politics* 1, no. 1 (2005): 51–74.

has eclipsed meaning. That something is shared online does not depend on what it means. It depends on its affective capacity: does the shared item manifest outrage: is it funny and diverting? We attend less to the meaning of an utterance than to its affective dimension, which is most powerful when it contains different, conflicting meanings.[13] The idea of the decline of symbolic efficiency comes from Slavoj Žižek.[14] It designates the loss of shared symbols, of general ideas and norms, of a sense that we know what another means when they appeal to home, the common good, citizenship, the university, etc. Pointing to any one of these conventional sources of authorisation and authority could index something socially beneficial. It could also call out arrangements of oppression and exclusion. As a reference point, none is clear. This decline in symbolic efficiency is expressed in everyday language when people say, 'everyone has their own definition'. There is not a shared meaning that one can invoke in a conflict or discussion.

There are multiple symptoms of the shift from the use to the circulation value of the utterance and the decline of symbolic efficiency. I have already mentioned the primacy of affect in sharing in social media and the way people say that 'everybody has their own definition'. Further symptoms include the way Donald Trump's term 'fake news' became widely accepted as a descriptor for virtually all media content (especially content with which one disagrees). The term caught on in part because it extended what comedian Stephen Colbert had already called 'truthiness'. The intensity of language policing, especially on the Left, is also symptomatic. Because of the absence of a common understanding, a symbolic order, many of us lack confidence in each other's words. When you say 'feminism', how do I know that you do not just mean white feminism? When you say 'women', how do I know if you are including trans women? When you say 'prisoners', how do I know if you are taking into account prisoners with disabilities? Language policing circulates the intensities of networked outrage in the context of the decline of symbolic efficiency.

One last symptom of the instability of language that attests to the changes accompanying the merger of communication and capitalism: the loss of confidence in information. In the 1980s, hackers told us that 'information wants to be free'. These days it is clear that information is not enough. It does not stand on its own. It is immediately contested, disputed – where did it come from, why was it released, who benefits from it? Perhaps to fill-in for the absence of information as a viable political hook, another formulation has become prominent in the US: 'they don't care about …' After Hurricane Katrina, Kanye West said on live TV, 'George Bush doesn't care about black people'. That was dramatic – a statement of the obvious that the dominant ideology was based on denying. Now we see innumerable statements about the absence of care. The Senate doesn't care about rape. The rich don't care about the rest of us. The government doesn't care about climate change. The world doesn't care about Yemen. The hashtag Black Lives Matter responds to the fact that police can get away with the murder of black people. The police don't care, the system doesn't care, about black lives.

13. See also my discussion in *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (London: Polity, 2010).
14. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999).

Now ubiquitous, the sentiment 'they don't care about x' does not cut through the dominant ideology. It expresses it – of course the rich do not care about anyone else; of course, rich white men in the Senate do not care about a 35 year-old incident of high school sexual assault. In 2018, why would we expect anything better? Making the ethical claim about care does not politicise the situation. It laments it. The contemporary Right has amplified 'not caring' into a key part of its appeal. It is the logical extension of Thatcherism and austerity – forget social welfare, social provisioning, social responsibility. The only person who cares about you is you.

When we reflect on revolution and resistance, then, we cannot rely on the symbolic efficiency of the terms. We have to get clear about the politics of the question, which means clear about the body or form that is presupposed when the question is raised. Such an emphasis on the politics of questions regarding our moment is avowedly partisan. It positions one of the presupposed forms as the correct and necessary form, in fact, as the only way to make political sense of the question regarding revolution and resistance today. This form is the party. In shorthand: anyone who wants to talk about revolution, has to talk about the party.

What Do You Mean 'We'?

I will first set out the alternatives. A first option might be that the form we propose when we ask about revolution is global. We are thinking from the perspective of the world, all of us, a planetary whole. In other words, our presumption is an amorphous 'we' of everyone asking about revolution – as if the world were not divided, as if we could take a satellite or god's eye view. Or maybe the presumption is that we are all doomed and there is nothing to be done about it. A second option is the individual. We are asking about revolution and resistance from the perspective of an individual in the world, someone trying to figure out how to be a change-agent or an ethical subject. A third option is the network. Perhaps the body we presuppose when we ask about revolution takes the form of a network of knowledge workers such as the university or the sub-discipline of critical International Relations theory. It could also be that we have in mind some combination of infrastructure/means of communication and the network produced through our participation in it (basically, the people we communicate with in social media). The fourth option presupposes a part. When we inquire into the revolutionary (or not) character of our moment, our premise is division. We ask from the perspective of a body that takes a side in a struggle, whether in the name of the nation, a class, a demographic category, or a political party. Historically, the party most concerned with the question of revolution has been the communist party. (Although I do not develop the point here, readers of Lacan might notice that the four options of world, individual, network, and party correspond to Lacan's four discourses of master, hysteric, university, and analyst).

The criticisms of the first two forms are familiar. The world is divided. To assume the world is already to take a political perspective, to occupy a side. In a sense, the first and fourth options (or the positions of master and remainder) overlap. It is the remainder, the side or division, that produces the world (this is why Badiou's axiom, 'there is only one world' is a political statement). Asserting one world is not an objective, neutral claim; it is a partisan political claim. Likewise, the individual is a fiction, especially in politics.

Language comes from elsewhere, from outside. People are vectors of ideology, products and producers of collectivities. Politics is the field of the many. Communicative capitalism has overburdened the individual form to such an extent that individuality is commanded: be unique, be different, find yourself, care for yourself, be your own best self.[15] The injunctions to be this individual alert us to capitalism's interest in individuals: alone, we are disempowered, able only to consume. This is of course why communists have always insisted on solidarity. The many are strong only when we are together.

I am not saying that the individual cannot be a form for provocation, critique, or even resistance. On the contrary, we should look at the fetishisation of resistance as correlative to contemporary individualism and its preoccupation with individual ethical decisions, DIY, and small-scale aesthetic practices. Infatuation with individual resistance makes sense given the very real challenges of building and maintaining spaces and forms of enduring struggle. That there is individual adaptation to these challenges, however, should not be equated with politics, especially revolutionary politics. The presentation of individual ethical choices and aesthetic micropolitics as resistance is a manifestation of defeat, a way of presenting the maintenance of a miserable status quo as if it were a radical political achievement.

The more interesting question of the body of politics, of the form we presuppose when we ask about revolution, lies in the difference between the third and fourth forms – network and part. Network has a lot of ideological currency. It appears as the shape of our communicative interactions, the contemporary capitalist economy, our social relations. For some, it demonstrates the additive, inclusive feature of democracy and tells us that our goals are addition and inclusion without division, without an either/or. But what does it mean to raise the question of revolution and resistance from the perspective of the network? In what sense is the network a subjective form? In the sense of something like the 'wisdom of crowds' or crowd-sourcing? That does not work – these phenomena derive from inquiries. An investigator, person, or corporation asks a question and generates a data set from which an answer is derived.[16]

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri accept that the network is not a subjective form but insist that it is nonetheless revolutionary.[17] In an old school way we could say that their argument tries to demonstrate how revolution is objectively necessary, even more, an objective feature of our setting. In *Commonwealth* (the third book of the *Empire* trilogy), they say that 'the perspective of revolutionary action has to be conceived on the biopolitical horizon'.[18] They have in mind the way that production and the reproduction of life merge in communicative capitalism. For them, changes in networked communication technologies direct us to a model of revolution that involves the separation of the creative, cooperative, and communicative labour of the multitude from capitalist control.

15. See my discussion in *Crowds and Party* (London: Verso, 2016).
16. See my critique of the 'wisdom of crowds' idea in *Crowds and Party*.
17. My argument in this and subsequent paragraphs is a shortened version of my argument originally published as 'The Actuality of Revolution'.
18. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 239.

Three aspects of biopolitical revolution are relevant for my argument – its temporality, cooperation and democracy. First, Hardt and Negri tell us that revolution can no longer be imagined as an event separated from us in the future. Revolution lives in the present, an 'exceeding' present that already contains the future within it. Revolutionary movement resides within the same temporality as capitalist control. The revolutionary movement of being 'within and against' manifests as the way the multitude's productivity exceeds capitalist command. The reproduction of life is always more than capitalist production. In biopolitical production, necessary and surplus labour happen at the same time; producing for capital and producing social relations happens through the same processes. Hardt and Negri emphasise this simultaneity. And they imagine revolution as an analogous 'kind of simultaneity', the excess and limit to capitalist command over the biopolitical production it can never fully capture or control. Revolution and non-revolution occupy the same temporality.

The second aspect of biopolitical revolution is cooperation. For Hardt and Negri, biopolitical labour is generally autonomous from capitalist command, emerging out of networked cooperative practices. Capital seeks to capture, expropriate and discipline these practices, even as it itself depends on the creativity that their autonomy unleashes.

The third aspect of biopolitical revolution is democracy. The same networked, cooperative structures that produce the common generate new democratic capacities. In their more recent book, *Assembly*, Hardt and Negri theorise these capacities as 'entrepreneurship', continuing their effacement of politics in the economic.[19] Anyway, in *Commonwealth* they claim that networked technologies 'make possible in the political sphere the development of democratic organizations', a version of the familiar 'new media facilitates democracy' claim.[20] For this reason, they reject 'vanguard organizations'. Echoing Tronti, they tell us that the vanguard party corresponds to a different, earlier, structure of labour, the early 20th century's professional factory workers. The deskilled workers of the mid 20th century fit with that period's mass party. The political form currently appropriate to us, they argue, must correspond to biopolitical labour and hence be democratic. More specifically, it must be cooperative, autonomous, and horizontally networked. Hardt and Negri concede that 'these democratic capacities of labour do not immediately translate into the creation of democratic political organizations', nevertheless, they are a good basis on which to build them.[21] And, like I said, in *Assembly* they describe this building in entrepreneurial terms.

What's wrong with Hardt and Negri's network perspective toward revolution (other than that it leads them to adopt the neoliberal figure of the entrepreneur)? As they themselves admit, the processes of biopolitical production do not automatically create the kinds of political organisations we need. In fact, I have shown that they do the opposite. Complex networks produce hierarchies: a few at the top get a lot; the rest get a little. It is no wonder, then, that authoritarianism is on the rise. The few want to hold onto and defend what they have. Nevertheless, Hardt and Negri present the advantage of their

19. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Assembly* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
20. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 354.
21. Ibid., 353.

approach as its distance from the party form, more specifically, from the form of the Communist Party they associate with Lenin. The problem here thus turns on political form – the form of biopolitical revolution versus the party form.

Hardt and Negri treat Lenin's party as a 'counterpower' which mirrors 'in certain respects the identity of the central power it opposes'. Of course, biopolitical production's networked form also takes on the form of power it opposes – the networks of surveillance, international treaties, multinational corporations, militarised policing, communicative production. Therefore, the problem Hardt and Negri think they are solving cannot be that the party 'mirrors' the power it opposes. On the contrary, their periodisation makes it clear that the problem is that it does not. For Hardt and Negri, the vanguard party is inadequate, 'anachronistic', because it *does not* look like the networks of contemporary biopolitical production. It mirrors an old form of power, the hierarchical factory.

But that's precisely wrong – as we already learned from the discussion of complex networks. The ostensibly creative, cooperative and democratic character of networked communication does not eliminate hierarchy. It entrenches hierarchy by using our own choices against us. And, as Barabási's work makes clear, this hierarchy is not imposed from above. It is an immanent effect of free choice, growth and preferential attachment.

A political form mirroring biopolitical production would not be horizontal and democratic in the sense of a fictional and impossible everyone deciding everything all the time. This kind of 'democracy' produces power-law distributions, unequal nodes or outcomes, winners and losers, few and many. Moreover, the fact of emergent hierarchies suggests that an emergent vanguard may well be the political form necessary for struggles under biopolitical conditions. To reject the vanguard form in the name of an as yet non-existent democratic organisation is to encourage the conditions that produce the form – democratic engagements – at the same time that one condemns their product, vanguards. The rejection thus fails politically because it promotes the conditions that produce the vanguards it rejects. The structure of the complex networks of biopolitical production indicates that, contra Hardt and Negri, a vanguard party is not anachronistic at all. It is a form that corresponds to the dynamics of networked communication – and is necessary for the political struggle to seize, collectivise, and abolish the means through which such hierarchies and extreme inequalities are produced and monetised.

Network structure indicates an additional problem with Hardt and Negri's rejection of the vanguard party. They characterise Lenin's party as involving an organisational process that comes from 'above' the movements of the multitude. Historically, this insinuation is clearly false. The Bolsheviks were but one group among multiple parties, tendencies, and factions acting in the tumultuous context of the Russian Revolution. They were active within the movements of the oppressed workers and peasants. The movements themselves, through victories and defeats, short and long-term alliances, new forms of cooperation, and advances in political organisation gave rise to the Party even as the Party furthered the movements. Importantly, though, the Party was not identical to the movements. The party has an aim – the abolition of private property, classes, and capitalism and the arrangement of a new form of collective production and administration. When the party takes the perspective of revolution, it posits a specific future around which it plans, a future that determines its strategy. As Daniel Bensaïd points out,

when the movement becomes everything and the aim nothing, there is 'little room for the question of strategy'.[22]

The Revolutionary Part

This leads to the party form. Recall, I introduced the party under the heading of 'part', of those on the same side of a division. Other political divisions might be 'nation', 'class', or various demographic or identity categories. Over the last decade, it has become indisputable that identity categories alone are inadequate for either resistance or revolution. That someone is a woman tells you nothing about her politics – just ask Theresa May. That she is a black woman tells you nothing about her politics. That she is a black working-class woman tells you nothing about her politics. And so on. The politics has to be built, supported, sustained. The form for that political work remains the party.

I have already demonstrated the theoretical inadequacy of Hardt and Negri's claim that the party form is anachronistic. We see the political failure of their claim every day. All over the world the Right has triumphed through its parties. Obvious examples are Hungary, Poland, Turkey, the US and Brazil. The far Right uses electoral politics to hold onto and amplify the police power of the state. We also see the contemporary relevance of the party form in the hopeful eyes turned on Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party – hopeful because the access to power is real. The party provides the organisational form for strategising, planning, generating, and executing political power. So even as the Right today relies on nationalism to achieve its goals, its means, its instrument, is the party. When the Left fails to use the party form, it ensures in advance that it will lack the power to conceive, much less achieve, any political goals. Instead of organising the proletarianised, the Left relinquishes the field to already co-opted liberals and social democrats, unable to address the fundamental problem because they accept and promote global capitalism. The Right fills the vacuum, offering nationalism as the alternative to globalisation. Instead of capitalism being the cause of inequality and dispossession, immigrants, black, brown and Muslim others are positioned as the threat. Yet again the visibility and power of women and sexual minorities are made to appear as the downfall of civilisation.

Hardt and Negri say that the goal of revolution is 'the generation of new forms of social life'.[23] This is not wrong – but it is incomplete. The goal is the generation of free and equal forms of social, economic and political life, forms of life that are free of oppression, materially secure and empowered, open for collective steering by the collective in order to satisfy needs rather than secure private gain. Not all forms of life should be cultivated – there are some we must oppose. A party is necessary in a revolution because revolution's outcome is not inevitable, not determined. It is produced in and through the revolutionary struggle. For communists, this struggle – like the solidarity that enables it – is necessarily international.

22. Daniel Bensaïd, 'Strategy and Politics: From Marx to the Third International', *Historical Materialism* (2018), 1–38. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1163/1569206X-00001670. Last accessed April 5, 2019.
23. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 354.

I recently heard a podcast where a poet in California described revolution as local insurrections that join up. How do they join up, especially given the international reach of global capitalism? In a setting of the decline of symbolic efficiency, what enables them to connect with and speak to and understand each other? What provides them with the conceptual and political coordinates for coming together? When we recognise the challenges of communicating even within one locality, we cannot assume that it will be natural or easy across multiple, disparate ones. And, the party will not automatically solve these problems. What the party can do is prepare for a revolutionary situation by having people in multiple places who speak the same language, who share the same goals, and who have the same criteria for figuring out what is to be done.

Hardt and Negri conceive institutions as sites for the management of encounters, extension of social rupture, and transformation of those who compose them. The resemblance between these institutions and the party is striking, all the more so given Hardt and Negri's rejection of the party form. The party involves a common name, language and set of tactics. It has practices that establish ways of being together. Its purpose is occupying and extending the gap within society that class struggle denotes. Lenin's concept of party organisation prioritises flexibility and consistency; the party has and must have a capacity for self-transformation. In this vein, the Bolsheviks themselves adapted their party structure and practice, sometimes expanding and sometimes shrinking, sometimes operating above ground and sometimes below. What Hardt and Negri describe as the extension of insurrection in an institutional process is Lenin's party by another name.

Lenin's party has an advantage over Hardt and Negri's entrepreneurial institutions – an advantage that hinges on time. For Hardt and Negri, revolution is simultaneous with non-revolution. It is not a break with the present, not a rupture or a gap but a kind of creative excess (that, I would add, capitalism and/as imperialism always tries to enclose and monetise, especially in the affective networks of communicative capitalism). Drawing on Angelo Tasca, Daniel Bensaïd criticises '"timeless socialism" … without targets or deadlines, without interruptions or changes or rhythm'.[24] In contrast, Lenin recognised that revolution requires strategy and that strategic time is broken, 'punctuated by propitious instants and opportunities that must be seized'.[25] The party is the point of practical orientation, the body necessary for political strategy. Without a body to implement a strategy, all the suggestions in the world are little more than noise, contributions to the circuits of communicative capitalism easily drowned out by outrage and puppies.

As Georg Lukács insists in a classic study, Lenin made the actuality of revolution into the point from which all questions were evaluated, and all actions considered.[26] The Bolsheviks were not alone in anticipating the revolution. Various left parties and tendencies throughout Europe and Russia thought revolution was imminent. Lenin's contribution lay in understanding revolution's coordinating effects, the way that its anticipation established the tasks that needed to be done. The certain future of revolution enabled Lenin's party to choose, to decide, to adapt. At some points the revolution requires participation in bourgeois elections; at other points it demands the slogan 'all power to the

24. Bensaïd, 'Strategy and Politics', 4.
25. Ibid.
26. Lukács, *Lenin*.

Soviets!' For the Bolsheviks, the fact of revolution operated as a force of negation within the present that pushed forth the practices necessary for navigating the revolution.

Lenin's party – which is sometimes a mass party and sometimes a more exclusive cadre party, sometimes underground, sometimes parliamentary – provides the body necessary for taking a political perspective, a perspective determined by the future, not a future it says that it will bring into being, but a future for which it must strategise and plan. This approach to the future has been theorised as 'projected time' by Jean-Pierre Dupuy. Dupuy introduces 'projected time' as a name for 'coordination by means of the future', that is, as a term for a temporal metaphysics wherein 'the future counterfactually determines the past, which in turn causally determines it. The future is fixed, but its necessity exists only in retrospect'.[27] Projected time assumes a future inevitability, establishing this inevitability as the fixed point from which to decide upon present actions. Projected time might seem strange, but it is actually the temporality of making a plan. Projected time is not a prediction of what will happen, a fantasy about what one wants to happen, or a set of proposals regarding what should happen. Instead, a certain outcome generates the processes that lead to it. Again, in this temporal metaphysics, the future is not the inevitable effect of a chain of causes. The future is itself the cause. The future produces the past that will give rise to it.

The party does not make the revolution. It anticipates the revolution. It provides an organisational space and language for reflection, analysis, decision and planning, a space where political consciousness is developed and deployed. The significance of revolutionary anticipation is born out in Lukács's discussion of the way that Lenin's concept of organisation breaks with 'mechanical fatalism'. Proletarian class-consciousness does not follow 'with fatalistic inevitability' from the relations of production or a particular capitalist crisis. Some members of a class will always be passive, always be on the wrong side. The party is necessary because politics cannot be reduced to economics. Furthermore, revolution does not automatically mean the victory of the proletariat. Victory requires political struggle – decisions, planning, and flexibility in a chaotic, ever-changing setting. The role of the party is to anticipate this situation. As Lukács writes, '*The party must prepare the revolution*'.[28] The projected future guides the party's preparations. Thus, for Lukács the party's role as producer is itself a product of the projected future of proletarian revolution. The party is a product not only of events as they unfold and to which it responds but also of the future that calls it into being, the future that enables the party to guide its responses towards it.

Conclusion

I have positioned the questions of resistance and revolution within our setting in communicative capitalism, a setting characterised by intense winner-take-all inequality, the decline of symbolic efficiency, and the shift from the use to the circulation value of communicative utterances. I have emphasised the need to attend to the body the question of

27. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Economy and the Future: A Crisis of Faith*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 110.
28. Lukács, *Lenin*, 32; emphasis in original.

resistance and revolution presupposes – is it the world, the individual, the network, or the party? I have argued that it is the party, that the party is the form we need to assume when we ask about revolution because it is the party that has the capacity to strategise, to plan and arrange itself with an eye to revolution. Franco Berardi recently said: 'We must think of the future from the point of view of systemic psychosis, and this means the abandonment of political action and of political theory'.[29] He has things upside down and backwards: the abandonment of political action and political theory is a symptom of systemic psychosis. We start to treat this psychosis when we build collective political action out of common political orientation. The party provides this orientation. Our orientation towards the future depends on the party capable of coordinating its action by means of the future it projects. The communist party steers itself by means of the projected future of revolution. In light of this future it emphasises solidarity, develops practices of cooperation and encourages collective study.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

29. Franco Berardi, 'Global Civil War and the Rotting of the White Mind', *Verso Blog*, 16 March 2018. Available at: https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3689-bifo-global-civil-war-and-the-rotting-of-the-white-mind. Last accessed April 5, 2019.