

Eros and Revolution

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Abstract: In his later work, Marcuse concerned himself with the nexus between social movements and unconscious dimensions of human nature. He understood Nature (including instincts) as an “ally” in the revolutionary process. In this paper, I seek to explore his insight through the concept of the “eros effect,” which I first uncovered while analyzing the global revolt of 1968. Forms of direct democracy and collective action developed by the New Left continue to define movement aspirations and structures. Although contemporary rational choice theorists (who emphasize individual gain as the key motivation for people’s actions) cannot comprehend instinctual motivations, a different understanding is central to my conception.

In his last three books—*Counterrevolution and Revolt*, *An Essay on Liberation*, and *The Aesthetic Dimension*—Herbert Marcuse concerned himself as never before with questions raised by contemporaneous social movements. His work on Nature in these three books was central to his notion that there may be a “biological foundation for socialism,” that Nature—not only external Nature but our own inner human nature—is an “ally” in the revolutionary process. As Marcuse so clearly formulated it, humans have an instinctual need for freedom—something that we grasp intuitively.¹ Unlike Habermas, who considered the unconscious “inner foreign territory” as part of his overly rationalistic model of humans, Marcuse’s understanding embraced the erotic and unconscious dimensions of human nature as central to the project of liberation.

Following Marcuse’s formulation of political eros, I developed the concept of the eros effect in my book on the global imagination of 1968 to explain the rapid spread of revolutionary aspirations and actions.² The eros ef-

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1. See Herbert Marcuse, “A Biological Foundation for Socialism?,” in *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 6–22.
 2. See George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of*

fect is crystallized in the sudden and synchronous international emergence of hundreds of thousands of people who occupy public space and call for a completely different political reality. Other dimensions of this phenomenon include the simultaneous appearance of revolts in many places; the intuitive identification of hundreds of thousands of people with each other across national and ethnic dividing lines; their common belief in new values; and the suspension of normal daily routines like competitive business practices, criminal behavior, and acquisitiveness. In my view, it is the instinctual need for freedom that is sublimated into a collective phenomenon during moments of the eros effect.³ After 1968, other such moments are evident in the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street protests that spread to more than one thousand cities globally as well as in the less well-known wave of Asian uprisings in the 1980s and 1990s.

The eros effect first appeared to me as I completed a decade of research on social movements in 1968. As I sat overlooking the Pacific in Ocean Beach, California, I had a eureka moment as I uncovered the specific synchronic relations to each other of spontaneous uprisings, strikes, and massive occupations of public space. During this world-historical period, millions of ordinary people suddenly entered into history in solidarity with each other. Their activation was based more upon feeling connected with others and love for freedom than upon specific national economic or political conditions. No central organization called for these actions. People intuitively believed that they could change the direction of the world from war to peace, from racism to solidarity, from external domination to self-determination, and from patriotism to humanism. Universal interests became generalized at the same time as dominant values of society (national chauvinism, hierarchy, and domination) were negated.

When the eros effect is activated, humans' love for and solidarity with each other suddenly replace previously dominant values and norms. Competition gives way to cooperation, hierarchy to equality, power to truth. During the Vietnam War, for example, many Americans' patriotism was superseded by solidarity with the people of Vietnam, and in place of racism, many white Americans insisted a Vietnamese life was worth the same as an American life (defying the continual media barrage to the contrary). According to many opinion polls at that time, Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh

1968 (Boston: South End Press, 1987); and George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006) for development of the eros effect. For another early theoretical formulation, see my paper "The Eros Effect," prepared for presentation in 1989, available at <http://www.eroseffect.com/articles/eroseffectpaper.PDF>. The concept is expanded in my book *Asia's Unknown Uprisings*, 2 vols. (Oakland: PM Press, 2012).

3. For Marcuse's formulation, see *Essay on Liberation*.



was more popular on American college campuses than US President Nixon. Moments of the eros effect reveal movements' aspirations and visions as embodied in actions of millions of people, a far more significant dimension than statements of leaders, organizations, or parties.

European philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sought to understand the structure of individual thought and to classify it according to its various dimensions and historical unfolding. Using a similar analytical method, we can today comprehend social movements as the logical progress in history that unfolds within the praxis of thousands—and sometimes millions—of people as they rise up to change their lives. The inner logic in seemingly spontaneous actions during moments of crisis—particularly in events like general strikes, uprisings, insurrections, and revolutions—constitutes the concrete realization of liberty in history. People's collective actions define the specific character of freedom at any given moment. By reconstructing the actions of hundreds of thousands of people in insurgencies and uncovering concrete dynamics of the unconscious, we can contribute to a philosophical history not simply from my own mind but from the actions of thousands of people. As Susan Buck-Morss put it, what is needed is to “construct not a philosophy *of* history, but a philosophy *out of* history, or (this amounts to the same thing) to reconstruct historical material as philosophy.”⁴

One after another, insurgencies at the end of the twentieth century illustrate that ordinary people's collective wisdom is far greater than that of entrenched elites, whether democratically elected or self-appointed. Whether we look at France in May 1968, the Prague Spring, or Occupy Wall Street, people's common sense is greater than the “rational” knowledge of elites. Throughout the world, throngs of ordinary citizens who go into the streets and face violence and arrest, endangering their own lives and their families' futures, have visions of freedom writ large. Empirical analysis of the actions of hundreds of thousands of ordinary people—millions if we sum the total number of participants—reveals that ordinary people want peace, greater democratic rights, equality, and simple forms of progress, while elites are more concerned with cutting taxes on the rich, extending national sovereignty, and protecting corporate profits. In the transformed reality constructed by people power, mobilized throngs have newfound capacities to enact change. Inspired by previous movements of common people to overturn elites at the apex of power, popular movements continue to enlarge the scope of human liberty. Without highly paid trainers, insurgent activists adapt new technologies (such as the fax machine in China in 1989,

4. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 77, 55.

the cell phone video in Burma, and social media in Egypt) and bring them into use far faster than the corporate or political elite.

Forms of direct democracy and collective action developed by the New Left continue to define movement aspirations and structures. This is precisely why the New Left was a world-historical movement. In Gwangju, South Korea in 1980, people refused to accept a new military dictator and stayed in the streets for democracy. When the army brutally attacked the city, outraged citizens beat back a vicious military assault and held their liberated city for a week, using general assemblies and direct democracy to run their commune. Abetted by the United States, the South Korean military crushed the commune with tanks and helicopters, killing hundreds of people (at the time, Human Rights Watch estimated the carnage in the thousands). Within the Zapatistas, in the protests in Seattle in 1999, and in the more recent wave from Tahrir Square to Wall Street, general assemblies and direct democracy remain movements' *modus operandi*.

Alongside participatory currents, the history of social movements is also the history of popular insurgencies being placated, accommodated, and sold out by reform-minded parties and organizations of all kinds—whether French or Italian Communists, Czech or Bangladeshi democrats, or Korean or US trade unions. Ritualized protests organized by top-down groups with “progressive” leaders no longer suffice to bring the “masses” into the streets. Apparently, after 1968, centrally controlled elites, like Leninist-style parties, are no longer needed to transcend the reformism of spontaneously formed movements, since these movements are themselves capable of developing a universal critique and autonomous capacities for self-government. Since World War II, humanity's increasing awareness of our own power and strategic capacities has continually manifested itself in sudden and simultaneous contestations of power by hundreds of thousands of people.

A significant new tactic in the arsenal of popular movements, the *eros* effect is not simply an act of mind, nor can it simply be willed by a “conscious element” (or revolutionary party). Rather it involves popular movements emerging as forces on their own as ordinary people take history into their own hands. The concept of the *eros* effect is a means of rescuing the revolutionary value of spontaneity, a way to stimulate a reevaluation of the unconscious and strengthen the will of popular movements to remain steadfast in their revulsion with war, inequality, and domination. Rather than portraying emotions as linked to reaction, the notion of the *eros* effect seeks to bring them into the realm of positive revolutionary resources whose mobilization can result in significant social transformation.

Limits of the Eros Effect

Uprisings may be powerful vehicles for overthrowing entrenched dictatorships, but they are also useful to global elites whose interests transcend nations. Massive occupation of public space was clearly effective in overthrowing existing regimes (such as Marcos in 1986, Korea's military dictatorship in 1987, and Mubarak in 2011), but the system has become adept at riding the wave of uprisings to stabilize its operations. The wave of Asian people-power uprisings from 1980 to 1992 helped to incorporate more of the world into the orbit of Japanese and US banks.⁵ The South Korean working class's heroic struggles for union rights became useful to neoliberal economic penetration of the country.⁶ In democratic South Korea and Taiwan, as in the Philippines after Marcos (and elsewhere), newly elected administrations accelerated neoliberal programs that permitted foreign investors to penetrate previously closed markets and to discipline workforces of millions of people in order to extract greater profits.

Although Egypt's future has yet to be written, the military's control after Mubarak's imprisonment is another example of how dictatorships in danger of being toppled—and possibly taken out of the orbit of the United States—can be salvaged by deposing a few men at the top while retaining the core of the system. Egypt's military leaders enforce Mubarakism without Mubarak, a more stable system ruled by an elite friendly to the United States. As we saw in the Philippines without Marcos, Korea without the military dictatorship, and Taiwan without the White Terror, unstable countries were turned into fertile grounds for US and Japanese banks and corporations. An end to “crony” capitalism meant the expansion of transnational corporate markets and profits.

Humanity's unending need for freedom constitutes the planet's most powerful natural resource. In the struggle to create free human beings, political movements play paramount roles. Uprisings accelerate social transformation, change governments, and revolutionize individual consciousness and social relationships. Most popular insurgencies result in expanded liberties for millions of people; when they are brutally repressed, the regime's days are numbered. Uprisings' enormous energies transform people's everyday existence and continue to energize long past their decline. Uprisings activate civil society and mobilize subaltern groups, such as the working class, students, minorities, and women. After uprisings, autonomous media

5. See my *Asia's Unknown Uprisings*, vol. 2, *People Power in the Philippines, Burma, Tibet, China, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Thailand and Indonesia 1947–2009*.

6. See Loren Goldner, “The Korean Working Class: From Mass Strike to Casualization and Retreat, 1987–2007” (lecture, International Studies Conference, University of Padua, Padua, January 12, 2008), <http://libcom.org/history/korean-working-class-mass-strike-casualization-retreat-1987-2007>.

and grassroots organizations mushroom, feminism strengthens, and workers strike. Even among nonparticipants, bonds are created through powerful erotic energies unleashed in these exhilarating moments. These instances of what Marcuse called “political eros” are profoundly important in rekindling imaginations and nurturing hope.

Revisiting the Eros Effect

Although contemporary rational choice theorists (who emphasize individual gain as the key motivation for people’s actions) cannot comprehend instinctual motivations, even George Kennan, who famously started the Cold War with an essay written under the pseudonym Mr. X, found the antinuclear wave of protests in the early 1980s to be “expression of a deep instinctual insistence, if you don’t mind, on sheer survival. . . . This movement is too powerful, too elementary, too deeply embedded in the natural human instinct for self-preservation, to be brushed aside.”⁷

A similar basis for action was also gleaned by social scientist Choi Jungwoon in reference to the Gwangju Uprising. As an established scholar unfamiliar with what had transpired in 1980, Choi was subsequently approached by his professional academic association to investigate the uprising. After extensive research, he concluded that Gwangju citizens had crystallized an “absolute community” in which all were equal and united by love.⁸

So impressed was Choi with the solidarity he uncovered in Gwangju, he believed, “The most basic human values travel beyond history and culture; they began with the birth of humankind and will continue into the unknown future. . . . The term to refer to this primeval instinct has not been found in South Korea’s narrow arena for political discourse and ideology.” The empirical history of crowd behavior in the late twentieth century—most clearly in Gwangju—demands a reevaluation of the frozen categories of crowds, through which they are viewed as emotionally degraded, when Gwangju’s people were passionately intelligent and loving.⁹

For Choi:

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7. George Kennan, “On Nuclear War,” *The New York Review of Books*, January 21, 1982, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1982/jan/21/on-nuclear-war/>.
 8. Choi Jungwoon, *The Gwangju Uprising: The Pivotal Democratic Movement that Changed the History of Modern Korea*, trans. Yu Young-Nan (Paramus, NJ: Homa and Sekey Books, 2006), 85, 131. For background on the uprising, see George Katsiaficas, “Remembering the Kwangju Uprising,” *Socialism and Democracy* 14, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 2000), <http://eroseffect.com/articles/rememberingkwangju.pdf>.
 9. See my chapter “Remembering the Gwangju Uprising,” in *South Korean Democracy: Legacy of the Gwangju Uprising*, ed. George Katsiaficas and Na Kahn-Chae (London: Routledge, 2006).



It was not “mobs” of cowardly people hoping to rely on the power of numbers. The absolute community provided encounters among dignified warriors. The absolute community was formed only from love. . . . In Western Philosophy, reason is derived from solitary individuals. However the Gwangju uprising demonstrates that human beings who were conscious of being members of a community achieved reason. Reason was the capability of the community, not that of individuals.¹⁰

The connective threads running through grassroots movements around the world are often intuitively woven together in innumerable strands of what might seem like very different struggles. In the 1970s, Italy’s Metropolitan Indians, the most spectacular of dozens of autonomous groups that constituted Italian *Autonomia*, adopted very similar notions to the US Yippies and Black Panthers, Dutch Provos, and Christiania’s communards.¹¹ No organizational means of communication tied together these communities of struggle; rather, intuition and common sense made the same conclusions flow naturally from people’s hearts.¹²

Diffusion—what Samuel Huntington called “snowballing”—can help us to trace how one movement causes another.¹³ Snowballing is a postmodern version of “Domino Theory,” which guided American anticommunism in the 1950s. Based upon the assumption that there is a single point of origin for insurgencies, this concept expresses the paranoid fears of a center for social control that perceives itself to be surrounded by enemies, not the wondrous joy at the simultaneous emergence of freedom struggles. Tied as Huntington was to Washington policymakers, his ideological presuppositions blinded him to the emergence of polycentric grassroots movements. The distance between his theory and law enforcement officials’ is not great. As the US civil rights movement accelerated in the 1960s, sheriffs and police continually blamed Martin Luther King or Malcolm X for their own cities’ problems, and campus administrators often insisted that “outside agitators” caused university protests.

What Huntington called snowballing has been described by others—even by progressive academics in what Barbara Epstein dubbed the “social movement industry”—through terms like demonstration effect, diffusion, emulation, domino effect, and contagion. The sheer number of labels is one indication of this phenomenon’s recent emergence as a significant variable.

10. Jungwoon, *The Gwangju Uprising*, 134.

11. See Mary Anne Staniszewski, Dara Greenwald, and Josh MacPhee, eds., *Signs of Change: Social Movement Cultures; 1960s to Now* (Oakland: AK Press, 2010).

12. Compare with Habermas’s negative assessment in Jürgen Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 35–36.

13. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 46.

The concept of diffusion and the Marxist notion of the circulation of struggle are valuable because they show that struggles impact each other. Leaving aside the difference in values embedded in disease-laden labels like “contagion” and less pejorative terms like “diffusion” and “demonstration effect,” they all assume a single, external point of origin. None of these concepts comprehends the *simultaneous* appearance of insurgencies among different peoples, even across cultures. It’s not simply a chain reaction, not just that A causes B which causes C. Events erupt simultaneously at multiple points and mutually amplify each other. They produce feedback loops with multiple iterations. To put it in terms of a mathematical analysis, we could say that diffusion and the circulation of struggles describe the process of movement development geometrically, while the eros effect describes these same developments in terms of calculus.

While the influence of one event upon another is no doubt substantial, to comprehend movements as externally induced—much as a collision of bowling balls—is to miss something essential about their inner logic and meaning. Simultaneous emergence and mutual amplification of insurgencies are alternative understandings, ones embedded in the notion of the “eros effect.” Rather than a simple monocausal process of protest, the eros effect provides a way to comprehend the polycentric—indeed decentered—source of movements’ energies. For Huntington, simultaneity was “impossible,” and he excluded it in advance.¹⁴

Out of a series of struggles in France, activists developed a very similar notion to the eros effect: “Revolutionary movements do not spread by contamination but by *resonance*. . . . An insurrection is not like a plague or a forest fire—a linear process which spreads from place to place after an initial spark. It rather takes the shape of music, whose focal points, though dispersed in time and space, succeed in imposing the rhythms of their own vibrations, always taking on more density.”¹⁵ In many places, grassroots activism made possible “discoveries” of this same phenomenon with a simultaneity and autonomy that defied “scientific” understanding.

Long before social media, simultaneous tactical innovations occurred in different places. To name just one example, in May of 1970, after the United States invaded Cambodia and killed college students on its own campuses, activists from all across the country simultaneously blocked highways. There was no central organization directing people to do so. People didn’t obstruct highways simply because they heard that people elsewhere in the country were doing it but because people thought they should do something

14. Huntington, *Third Wave*, 33.

15. The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2009), 12, <http://www.bloom0101.org/thecomingsinsurrection.pdf>, 6.



effective to stop a society destroying hundreds of lives every day in Vietnam. Without direct lines of communication, activists on the West Coast clogged Route 5 while, at the same time, activists in other parts of the country stopped traffic on nearby roads. Tactics may move in a line from point A to point B through a process of diffusion, but we can't ignore how tactical innovations can also happen simultaneously.

Carl Jung and Synchronicity

How can we understand simultaneous emergence of freedom struggles in many places? One avenue was explored by Carl Jung, for whom synchronicity was so abstract and “irrepresentable” that he insisted we abandon completely the notion that the psyche is connected to the brain.¹⁶ Instead, through archetypes, he understood that unconscious impulses could influence consciousness. Such instinctual impulses originate in the deep layers of the unconscious, in what Jung called the “phylogenetic substratum.”¹⁷ They function to return our unknown lives from a distant past to consciousness—from the world of communalism at the dawn of human existence. For Jung, “In addition to memories from a long-distant conscious past, completely new thoughts and creative ideas can also present themselves from the unconscious—thoughts and ideas that have never been conscious before. They grow up from the dark depths of the mind like a lotus and form a most important part of the subliminal psyche.”¹⁸

The unconscious may not be rational, but it can certainly be more reasonable than “rational” thought. Consider the intuitive revulsion everyone feels for the wanton destruction of Nature caused by “rational” industrialization.¹⁹ When the unconscious is aroused, it flows toward consciousness—a psychic process very similar to what I understand as the eros effect.²⁰ Jung refers us to something that “indwells in the soul” and has the power to transform things, especially in moments of “great excess of love or hate.”²¹ We should note that by love, he meant eros in all its forms, not sim-

16. Carl G. Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, First Princeton/Bollingen Paperback ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 89.

17. Carl G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, vol. 9, part 1 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 286.

18. Carl G. Jung, “Approaching the Unconscious,” in *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl G. Jung (New York: Dell, 1968), 25.

19. Teodros Kiros considers a “rationality of the heart” an antidote to contemporary civilization’s misuse of reason. See Kiros, *Zara Yacob: Rationality of the Human Heart* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2005).

20. Jung, *Synchronicity*, 30.

21. *Ibid.*, 32. As Jung notes, the concept is originally Avicenna’s. Three hundred



ply sex. According to Jung, Freud attempted to understand the inner erotic necessities emanating from our instincts according to that one dimension. Freud sought to “lay hold of unconfined Eros within the crude terminology of sex.”²² In our age, when reversal of commodification of the life-world is paramount, can we reclaim eros from the throes of its reification as sex?

For Marcuse, political eros was “Beauty in its most sublimated form.”²³ The eros effect emanates from the instinctual reservoir, the collective unconscious, and is a form of sublimation of instinctual drives into erotic channels of human solidarity and love of freedom. Despite his conservative political orientation, Carl Jung also recognized ways that instinct makes rebellious actions necessary on our part: “The growth of culture consists, as we know, in a progressive subjugation of the animal in humans.²⁴ It is a process of domestication which cannot be accomplished without rebellion on the part of the animal nature that thirsts for freedom. From time to time there passes as it were a wave of frenzy through the ranks of humans too long constrained within the limitations of their culture.”²⁵ For Jung, these internally necessary drives for change manifested themselves in the European Renaissance and other forms of cultural expression. Under certain conditions they could produce social eruptions: “Separation from their instinctual nature inevitably plunges civilized humans into the conflict between the conscious and unconscious, spirit and nature, knowledge and faith, a split that becomes pathological the moment their consciousness is no longer able to neglect or suppress their instinctual side. The accumulation of individuals who have got into this critical state starts off a mass movement.”²⁶

The eros effect rests on intuition, an unquantifiable quality that may make its simultaneity impenetrable to the social control center (the police)—as well as impossible to verify “scientifically.” For Jung, synchronistic phenomena are akin to magic, and are not statistically verifiable.²⁷ “Mean-

years later, Ibn Khaldun similarly discussed forms of cognition outside the realm of rational thought. See my essay “Ibn Khaldun: A Dialectical Philosopher for the New Millennium,” in *African Philosophy: Critical Interventions*, ed. Teodros Kiros (New York: Routledge, 2000).

22. Carl G. Jung, “The Eros Theory,” in *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 28.

23. Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: A Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 64.

24. The text uses “man,” and I have substituted “humans” in three places and correspondingly substituted “their” for “his” in three places.

25. Jung, “Eros Theory,” 19.

26. Carl G. Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Signet, 2006), 79.

27. See Jung, *Synchronicity*, 95, 103, 106–07.



ingful coincidences” cannot be explained by rational cognition, but to recall them is to prepare the ground for their future recurrences. Just as keeping a dream journal enhances remembering dreams, so recalling instances of the eros effect prepares the ground for further episodes. Revolutionary spirit for Jung would arise outside the realm of sense perception: “The hallmarks of spirit are, firstly, the principle of spontaneous movement and activity; secondly, the spontaneous capacity to produce images independently of sense perception; and thirdly, the autonomous and sovereign manipulation of these images.”²⁸

When time and space are drastically altered in moments of the eros effect, explanations that assume linear conceptions cannot comprehend what is happening. Thus, the cause of the eros effect may not be capable of being understood within the framework of academic social science. As Jung describes such moments: “There I am utterly one with the world, so much a part of it that I will forget all too easily who I really am. ‘Lost in oneself’ is a good way of describing this state. But this self is the world, if only a consciousness could see it.”²⁹ In a similar vein of thought, Marcuse understood primary narcissism as “more than autoeroticism; it engulfs the ‘environment,’ integrating the narcissistic ego with the objective world.”³⁰ He derived his understanding of this “oceanic feeling” from Freud’s realization in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that “narcissism survives not only as a constitutive element in the construction of the reality.” For Freud, the content of the ego-feeling was “limitless extension and oneness with the universe.” In our feeling of merger with all of humanity, time does not exist, which may help us understand why outbursts of insurgencies so often appropriate past movement identities as their own.

Being “one with the world” implies bonding with those around us, a process similar to what Gaetano Mosca conceived as a human “instinct” for “herding together” that underlies “moral and, sometimes, physical conflicts.”³¹ Such smart group behavior—containing no centralized control yet eliciting appropriate responses to local situations—is present already among caribou, birds, bees, and ants. Swarm theory seems an appropriate means to comprehend protests like those in Seattle in 1999, when cell phones, texting, Internet, and people’s common sense created a “smart mob” that came together, dispersed, and reconstituted “like a school of fish.”³²

28. Jung, *Archetypes*, 212.

29. *Ibid.*, 22.

30. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 168.

31. Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, trans. Hannah D. Kahn (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1939), 163.

32. For more on swarm theory, see Peter Miller, “Swarm Theory: Ants, Bees and

Eros's Aesthetic Dimension

Seldom do self-appointed theorists of the working class mention women or minorities, and only in rare cases (as Herbert Marcuse did in his final book) do they even consider the possibility of freedom meaning to live without the compulsion to work.³³ At a time when it is possible for human beings to work twenty hours per week for twenty years and to retire with enough money to live decently, the state-capitalist system demands we work longer hours and for more years in order for governments and corporations to continue to function. The Soviet Union's variety of state socialism was little better. Indeed, that variety of Marxism was rightly perceived as wanting to make the entire world into a factory.

Much like medieval theologians debated how many angels could dance on the head of a pin, idealistic categorical imperatives define many leftists' means of analyzing the strategic value of sectors of the population and long-term goals. For mainstream democratization theorists, a bias exists in favor of the middle class as the vehicle of democratization, while academic Marxists insist rigidly that the working class is key, even to the point of excluding from conferences and journals those they regard as outside lines they draw in the sand.³⁴ In our world where humanity is the identity of movements emerging across the world and where Nature's destruction approaches a tipping point, species is key. For many Marxists, however, the "working class" functions as a collective father figure, a thing-in-itself fixed once and for all time in a frozen metaphysic, universally "valid."

The history of recent uprisings provides a rich, empirical resource from which to evaluate the political positions of sectors of the population, to gauge the concrete historical meaning of "class-for-itself." Revolutionary subjects reveal themselves in concrete praxis, not in the obscure calculations and charts of "analytical Marxians." As Marcuse explains, "The search for specific historical agents of revolutionary change in the advanced capitalist countries is indeed meaningless. Revolutionary forces emerge in the process of change itself."³⁵ Proletarian dogmatism of the left leaves it playing in the academic sandbox or searching the refuse bin of history for a non-existent "master class."

If Marxists reify categories of production and seek to make the whole world into a factory, reducing humanity to the proletariat, feminism is a

Birds Teach Us How to Cope With a Complex World," *National Geographic*, July 2007, 146.

33. Marcuse, *Aesthetic Dimension*, 28–29.

34. A recent example is American Sociological Association President Erik Olin Wright's refusal in 2011 to approve a panel on autonomous social movements because he considered them not to be "working class."

35. Marcuse, *Essay on Liberation*, 79.



vital counterforce that organically constitutes human life in domains other than work. As Marcuse so eloquently reminds us, “In a free society . . . existence would no longer be determined by life-long alienated labor.”³⁶ If Soviet Marxism turned art into an instrument of the state, Marcuse offered a different interpretation. At a time when consumerism envelops the continent of Desire and weapons of mass destruction destroy the foundations of the Beautiful, art’s own autonomous logic might be its salvation. The resolution of this apparent contradiction is the understanding that within art’s formal aesthetics, a truth is contained that transforms society. For Marcuse:

Art can express its radical potential only *as art*, in its own language and image. . . . The liberating “message” of art . . . is likely to persist until the millennium which will never be, art must remain *alienation*. . . . Art cannot represent the revolution, it can only invoke it in another medium, in an aesthetic form in which the political content becomes *metapolitical*, governed by the internal necessity of art.³⁷

The call for art to obey the dictates of the political struggle would mean “the imagination has become wholly functional: servant to instrumentalist Reason.”³⁸ Especially in an era when the system delivers the goods so that people live to work in order to buy into consumerism, art’s role may even be that of “An Enemy of the People” as it seeks to change the world.³⁹

Activating the Eros Effect

People’s intuition and self-organization—not the dictates of any party—are increasingly keys to the emergence of global protests. While political leadership based upon authoritarian models of organization has withered among freedom-loving movements, the power of example and the synchronicity of uprisings are increasingly potent—especially when their promulgators are among the poorest inhabitants of a world capable of providing plenty for all. Actualized in the actions of millions of people in 1968, the eros effect continues to define an essential core of movements, and as such it is a weapon of enormous future potential. Both the disarmament movement of the 1980s and the alter-globalization movement of the 1990s experienced periods of rapid international proliferation. With the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street protests currently spreading, transnational eruptions of protests have become widely visible.

Instances of the spread of movements across borders, involving a process of mutual amplification and synergy, are significant precursors for

36. Marcuse, *Aesthetic Dimension*, 28–29.

37. Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 103–04.

38. *Ibid.*, 107.

39. Marcuse, *Aesthetic Dimension*, 35.



future mobilizations. In the period after 1968, as the global movement's capacity for decentralized international coordination developed, five other episodes of the international eros effect can be discerned:

1. The disarmament movement of the early 1980s
2. The wave of East Asian uprisings in the 1980s and 1990s
3. The revolts against Soviet regimes in East Europe from 1989 to 1991
4. The alter-globalization wave and antiwar protests on February 15, 2003
5. The Arab Spring and Occupy Movements of 2011

Continuing global upsurges pick up from the international synchronicity and expanding popular involvement of movements since World War II. The next generations of protests—drawn from the trajectory of Chiapas; Caracas; Gwangju; Berlin; Seattle; February 15, 2003; and the Arab Spring—will surpass these other waves in a cascading global resonance. As the global tendencies of the world system intensify in their impact on millions of people's everyday lives, internationally coordinated opposition is more and more a necessity.

For the eros effect to be activated, thousands and then millions of people who comprise civil society need to act—to negate their existing daily routines and break free of ingrained patterns. This process is not simply enacted by the willpower of a small group—although small groups may help spark it. Without help from anyone, the global movement is building toward a protracted people's uprising that breaks through regional cultures and confronts the planetary constraints on people's freedom. As the target is fixed, its bull's-eye will be reached: the hundred billionaires who greedily hoard humanity's collective wealth, an even smaller number of gigantic global banks and corporations, and militarized nation-states armed with weapons of mass destruction. People used to think that it took a vanguard party to provide this kind of coordination, but these recent episodes of the eros effect prove otherwise. The multitude has its own intelligence—an intelligence of the life-force, of the heart. The eros effect is not an intelligence of Cartesian duality, yet is a moment of extraordinary reasonability.

The twentieth century will be remembered for its horrific wars, environmental devastation, and mass starvation amid great prosperity. It will also be known as a time when human beings began a struggle to transform the entire world system. Uprisings at the century's end reveal people's attempts to enact global justice. From the grassroots, millions of people around the world in the past three decades have constituted a protracted people's uprising against capitalism and war. Without anyone telling people to do so, millions of us in the alter-globalization movement have confronted elite meetings of the institutions of the world economic system—practical targets whose universal meaning is profoundly indicative of people's yearnings for a new world economic system. No central organization dictated this



focus. Rather, millions of people autonomously developed it through their own thoughts and actions. Similarly, without central organization, as many as thirty million people around the world took to the streets on February 15, 2003 to protest the second US war on Iraq. As the global movement becomes increasingly aware of its own power, its strategy and impact are certain to become more focused. By creatively synthesizing direct democratic forms of decision making and militant popular resistance, people's movements will continue to develop along the historical lines revealed in 1968 and subsequent Asian uprisings: within a grammar of autonomy, "conscious spontaneity," and the eros effect.

As we move into the twenty-first century, the Arab Spring and Occupy protests provide empirical evidence of the growing consciousness of ordinary people who go into the streets to change history. In 1968, "the whole world was watching." Today, it is increasingly the case that the whole world is awakening. Our ultimate goal should be to forge permanent popular assemblies as forms of governance, to enlarge and solidify the kinds of small general assemblies proliferating from the grassroots. Previous historical examples of such forms of governance can be found in the 1871 Paris Commune and the 1980 absolute community in Gwangju.⁴⁰

No one could have guessed that the suicide of a vegetable vendor in a small Tunisian town would set off the Arab Spring. Not even Mohamed Bouazizi himself had any idea that his solitary act of despair and anger would resonate among so many people. It appears that leaderless conjunctures most often produce the eros effect. Like falling in love, enacting the eros effect is a complex process. Can we make ourselves fall in love? Can we simply will ourselves to remain in love? If the eros effect were continually activated, we would have passed from the realm of prehistory to a world in which human beings for the first time are able to determine for themselves the type of society in which they wish to live. — • —

40. See my article "Comparing the Paris Commune and the Gwangju Uprising," *New Political Science* 25, no. 2 (June 2003), <http://eroseffect.com/articles/parisgwangjuprint.pdf>.