

Universal Grammar of Insurgencies

By George Katsiaficas

We have all heard of the 2011 Arab Spring but who among us knows anything about the Asian Wave from 1986 to 1992, which overthrew eight dictatorships in nine places during six years? Despite its lack of recognition, this chain reaction of uprisings against local dictatorships transformed the region's political landscape in much more positive ways than the Arab Spring.

East Asia's regional string of uprisings had a huge political impact. Almost overnight (and for decades thereafter), "People Power" became activists' common global identity—cutting across religious, national, and economic divides as uprisings unfolded in the Philippines (1986), South Korea (1987), Burma (1988), Tibet (1989), China (1989), Taiwan (1990), Nepal (1990), Bangladesh (1990) and Thailand (1992). These grassroots uprisings overthrew eight entrenched local dictatorships: Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos was forced into exile; South Korea's Chun Doo-hwan was disgraced and compelled to grant direct presidential elections before being imprisoned; Taiwan's 40-year martial law regime was overturned; Burma's mobilized citizenry overthrew two dictators only to see their successors massacre thousands; Nepal's monarchy was made constitutional; military ruler Muhammed Ershad in Bangladesh was forced to step down and eventually sent to prison; and Army Chief Suchinda Krapayoon in Thailand was forced to vacate the office of prime minister.

Leading up to the 1980s, East Asian dictatorships had been in power for decades and seemed unshakable, yet the wave of revolts transmogrified the region. These insurgencies threw to the wind the common notion that Asians are happier with authoritarian governments than democracy, that "Asian despotism" continues to define regimes there. They ushered in greater liberties and new opportunities for citizen participation—as well as for international capital.

The Asian Wave was rendered invisible to popular understanding, but it is not the only global episode of insurgency that remains unrecognized. For decades after 1968, activists and analysts believed that their country's movement comprised the center of protests. Today, the *international* character and connections of movements in 1968 is evident. As planetary integration accelerates, human beings are rapidly becoming self-conscious as a species. World history opens new possibilities—but we must assimilate properly the recent past if we are to proceed effectively into the future. National histories today are unable to do justice to the global freedom movement, to comprehend the *simultaneous* emergence of freedom struggles in many places. When conceptualized solely within national boundaries, accurate representations of contemporary uprisings become implausible, and future strategy is blurred.

Since 1968, the global movement's mobilizations have changed from being spontaneous and unconscious to a form of "conscious spontaneity" in which

grassroots activists around the world synchronize protests with common aspirations. Asian uprisings again showed popular insurgencies' capacities to expand upon preceding examples and to borrow each other's vocabulary, actions, and aspirations. Popular movements assimilate lessons from previous protest episodes, and people improvise tactics and targets from their own assessments of past accomplishments and failures.

The 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe against Soviet regimes are well known, yet Eurocentric bias often diminishes the significance of their Asian precursors, rendering them invisible. The character of Asian uprisings is significantly more grassroots than contemporaneous turmoil in Eastern Europe (where Gorbachev's willingness to abandon Russia's buffer states triggered the movements), but they remain uncelebrated, even within the region where they transpired. Their inspiration on subsequent movements in Eastern Europe is ignored. Alongside Eurocentric biases (such as the oft-repeated notions that "civil society" and the "autonomous individual" do not exist in Asia), several other factors account for the failure to comprehend the Asian Wave: overt information suppression by governments, Asian modesty, the mass media's fragmentation of history, and the region's religious diversity. Unlike the Arab Spring—the risings of people predominantly of one religion in 14 countries in 14 months—the Asian Wave encompassed Buddhists, Hindus, Moslems, Christians and Confucians.

European philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries categorized the dynamic structures of individual thought and classified them according to various dimensions in history. Using a similar analytical method, we can today understand the logical categories of social movements in history as they unfold in 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.

The Eros Effect

Cycles of revolt develop in relation to each other. From the global eruption of 1968 to the string of Asian uprisings, from Eastern Europe in 1989 to the alterglobalization confrontations of elite summits, ordinary people glean the lessons of history. Today, not only is there global motion from the grassroots, but the grammar of insurgency is everywhere similar. Since World War 2, humanity's increasingly awareness of our own power and strategic capacities has become manifest in sudden and simultaneous contestation of power by hundreds of thousands of people, a significant new tactic in the arsenal of popular movements that I've named the eros effect.¹

¹ See "Eros and Revolution," *Radical Philosophy Review*, Volume 16, Issue 2 (2013) For an earlier theoretical formulation, see my 1989 paper at <http://eroseffect.com/articles/eroseffectpaper.pdf>. In *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1987) the concept of the eros effect is developed from its historical emergence.

During moments of the eros effect, universal interests become generalized at the same time as dominant values of society (national chauvinism, hierarchy, and domination) are negated. As Herbert Marcuse so clearly formulated it, humans have an instinctual need for freedom—something that we grasp intuitively, and it is this instinctual need that is sublimated into a collective phenomenon during moments of the eros effect.² Dimensions of the eros effect include: the sudden and synchronous emergence of hundreds of thousands of people occupying public space, the simultaneous appearance of revolts in many places, the intuitive identification of hundreds of thousands of people with each other, their common belief in new values, and suspension of normal daily routines like competitive business practices, criminal behavior, and acquisitiveness. People’s intuition and self-organization—not the dictates of any party—are key to the emergence of such moments. Actualized in the actions of millions of people in 1968, the eros effect continues to be a weapon of enormous future potential.

The eros effect is not simply a general strike, armed insurrection, or massive mobilization. Rather it can be all of these and more. It is not an act of mind, nor can it be willed by a “conscious element” (or revolutionary party). Rather it involves popular movements emerging in their own right as ordinary people take history into their 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. 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. As Herbert Marcuse understood, Nature is an ally in the revolutionary process, including internal, human nature.³

Uprisings are terrible, beautiful events. No one relishes the task of recounting the dead and wounded, of remembering the brutality of militaries and blood in the streets. Those who participate have difficulty overcoming the guilt they feel for injuries and deaths, while people who do not rise to the occasion cannot easily overcome the shame they feel for staying home (or fleeing). Nevertheless, far more than we realize, the world we live in has been created by revolutionary insurgencies—from the American Revolution to the Russian, from the 1980 Gwangju Uprising to the Arab Spring.

The oft-repeated phrase, “The people make history,” cannot be comprehended without focusing on popular uprisings, when the actions of hundreds of thousands of people speak for themselves and portray freedom’s meaning in history. Contemporary instances of the simultaneous appearance of movements without regard for national borders involve a process of mutual amplification and synergy. In the period after 1968, as the global movement’s capacity for decentralized

² For Marcuse’s formulation, see *Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969)

³ See “Nature and Revolution” in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972)

international coordination developed, five other waves of international insurgencies can be discerned:

1. The disarmament movement of the early 1980s
2. The wave of Asian uprisings from 1986-1992
3. The revolts against Soviet regimes in East Europe⁴
4. The alterglobalization wave from Seattle 1999 to anti-war mobilizations on February 15, 2003
5. The Arab Spring, the Greek rebellion and the Occupy movement in 2011

In my view, such globally synchronized waves of protest are significant precursors of future events.

Dialectic of Uprisings

Uprisings may be powerful vehicles for overthrowing entrenched dictatorships, but they are also useful to global elites whose interests transcend nations. The eros effect is clearly effective in overthrowing existing governments, but the system has become adept at riding the wave of uprisings to insert new regimes to stabilize its operations. The wave of People Power uprisings helped to incorporate more of the world into the orbit of Japanese and US banks. The South Korean working class's heroic struggles for union rights became useful to neoliberal economic penetration of the country.⁵ 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. The system's capacity to use the energy of insurgencies to reform archaic social relations and adapt to new technologies should never be underestimated—nor should the strength of the forces of Thanatos.

The 20th century will be remembered for horrific wars, mass starvation, and revolutions—as well as for humanity's technological progress and prosperity. It will be known as a time when human beings began a struggle to transform the entire capitalist world system. Uprisings at that century's end reveal that from the grassroots, millions of people around the world constituted a protracted people's struggle against capitalism and war. Without anyone telling people to do so, millions in the alterglobalization movement confronted elite meetings of those who govern the world economic system. No central organization dictated this focus. Rather, millions of people *autonomously* acted according to their own consciousness.

⁴ Those who disregard the popular character of the Eastern European wave around 1989 would do well to remember Rosa Luxemburg's admonition, "Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee."

⁵ See Loren Goldner, <http://libcom.org/history/korean-working-class-mass-strike-casualization-retreat-1987-2007>

In the 21st century, as society's velocity of change accelerates, so too do people's capacities to assimilate tactics of recent struggles and to adapt new technologies to changing circumstances. Without management consultants needed by the corporate elite, people adapted new technologies far faster and more robustly than did their rulers. During the Arab Spring, the increasing sophistication of protesters' use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, You Tube) and the cross-border speed with which the revolt spread offer a glimpse of People Power's potential. What some have called Uprising 2.0 refers to people's use of the Internet to quickly propagate news from one part of the world to another, to coordinate actions in real time, and to directly have a global voice.

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. Lifelong friendships are formed amid new values for everyday life. Even among non-participants, 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.⁶

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 peaks. Post-uprising surges in the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Thailand reveal phenomenal activation of civil society and outbreaks of working-class strikes.⁷ Autonomous media and grassroots organizations mushroomed, feminism strengthened, and subaltern groups and minorities mobilized to win greater rights and more dignity.

Not only do uprisings heighten ongoing struggles and build insurgent organizations, they also construct longitudinal integration of past episodes into future actions. In the 1960s, Latin American activists fought US imperialism while minorities in the US led a mobilization against racism. Many people, especially German and American activists, fought against the Vietnam War. In the 1970s, localized anti-IMF uprisings occurred in dozens of Third World countries. In the 1980s, Asians mobilized against local dictatorships. More recently, as the global movement has become increasingly aware of its own power, its strategy and impact have become focused on the transformation of the global capitalist system.

Growing Grassroots Intelligence

⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward A Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972) 64

⁷ See *Asia's Unknown Uprisings* (2 vols) (Oakland: PM Press, 2012)

The 1980 Gwangju People's Uprising is a significant indication of the capacity of people to govern themselves far more wisely than military dictatorships, corporate elites, or "democratically" sanctioned governments. People's global capacity for direct self-government (as well as the deadly absurdity of elite rule) is all too evident in the wake of Gwangju. In 1980, Human Rights Watch estimated 3,000 people had been killed; yet people's "community of love" brought hundreds of thousands of people closer together than ever. Solidarity sustained their struggle for 17 years until finally dictator Chun Doo-hwan was convicted and sent to prison. Gwangju is a shining example of people's contemporary capacity to live together with Eros at their side while death stands at their doorstep.

Empirical analysis of the concrete emergence of the Gwangju Uprising provides a glimpse of humanity's evolving collective wisdom. Like the 1871 Paris Commune, the people of Gwangju in 1980 spontaneously rose up against overwhelming forces arrayed against them. In both cities, an unarmed citizenry, in opposition to their own governments, effectively gained control of urban space. Hundreds of thousands of people created popular organs of political power that effectively and efficiently replaced traditional forms of government; crime rates plummeted during the period of liberation; and people embraced new forms of kinship with each other.

A significant difference, however, is that in Gwangju, no preexisting insurgent armed force like the Parisian National Guard led the assault on power. Gwangju was liberated without the government's defeat by a foreign power or planning by political parties. Rather a spontaneous process of resistance to the brutality of thousands of paratroopers threw forward men and women who rose to the occasion. At the decisive moment in the armed struggle, the city's transportation workers heroically assembled a column of buses and over 100 taxis that led a victorious assault by more than 100,000 people against flamethrowers and machine guns. Many key activists in this struggle had no previous political experience.

Not only did people rise up against horrendous violence and defeat thousands of elite paratroopers pulled off the front lines with North Korea with US approval, the citizenry then governed the liberated city through daily direct-democratic rallies. There was no internecine violence nor any looting or crime in what became known as the "absolute community."⁸

To illustrate people's superior capacity for self-government at the end of the 20th century, we can compare the republican democracy of the Paris Commune (its election of leaders) with Gwangju's direct democracy (where daily meetings of hundreds of thousands of people were its highest governing body). We can contemplate the enormous difference between the events of March 18, 1871 (when the uniformed, armed Parisian National Guard seized power amid drum rolls) with those of May 18, 1980 (when Gwangju's people began their heroic resistance to

⁸ See Choi Jungwoon, *The Gwangju Uprising: The Pivotal Democratic Movement that Changed the History of Modern Korea* (Paramus: Homa and Sekey Books, 2006) pp. 85, 131.

more than 50,000 South Korean paratroopers and elite soldiers). We can observe the internal discipline imposed from above on Parisians (posters called for “Death to Looters”) with Gwangju’s absolute community.

Eurocentric Views of Civil Society

For decades, social scientists have sought to locate specific variables and relationships that could predict the occurrence of social insurgencies, an elusive goal that continues to animate thousands of researchers in the social movement industry. Filling abstract hypotheses with empirical data, investigators produce administrative social research useful to the control center. Yet because their hypothetical-deductive methodology subsumes the unique character of social reality beneath the rubric of a standardized formula, they often obscure rather than enlighten. Caught within dominant ideological assumptions, the system’s analysts fail to anticipate emergent forces. Lukács maintained that bourgeois ideology blinds those immersed in it, obscuring emergent factors. “*But a radical change in outlook is not feasible on the soil of bourgeois society.*”⁹ Lukács’ insight might help explain why mainstream theorists failed to comprehend the existence of the Asia wave.

Neither their partisans nor their enemies can predict when uprisings will erupt. In January 1917, Lenin declared that, “We, the old ones, may never see the decisive battles of the coming revolution.” In 1984, Samuel Huntington surmised that, “The likelihood of democratic development in Eastern Europe is virtually nil...with a few exceptions, the limits of democratic development in the world may well have been reached.” Five years later, Huntington’s perspective was proven to be specious.

Further examples of theories’ inability to clarify uprisings can be found in mainstream understandings of social movements. No previously formulated sociological variable proves robust in explaining the emergence of the Asian Wave. Neither Lipset’s “democratic threshold” nor Davies’ J-curve provides us with an adequate understanding of the emergence of this wave. Quantitative measurements of repression and nationally specific political or economic variables offer little more help.¹⁰ There is no single explanatory dimension to which we can point—except the influence of one uprising on another.

The eros effect, arising as it does from the unconscious, cannot be verified “scientifically” since it involves an unconscious process of identification. Interviews of key activists in every of the countries involved, however, indicated that great inspiration and energy crossed borders and taught lessons. If the Asian movements had erupted within months of each other rather than years, as did the 2011 Arab Spring, no doubt more recognition would have been given to their “meaningful coincidence.”

⁹ “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” in *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973)

¹⁰ See Chapter 15 of Volume 2 of *Asia’s Unknown Uprisings*.

Another reason that the Asian Wave is unknown can be found in Westerners' mistaken belief that civil society did not exist there before Euro-American penetration. Idealizing European social history as their only model, Eurocentrists do not find replicas of the indigenous emergence of a bourgeoisie and the individual in Asia. They conclude that "civil society" is nonexistent, or at best insignificant, there. John Keane notes that "in early modern usages, 'civil society' was typically contrasted with the 'Asiatic' region, in which, or so it was said, civil societies had manifestly failed to appear."¹¹ Instead of locating Asia's heritage of values and relations as a resource, observers point to the dearth of American-style voluntary groups and conclude that there is no civil society.¹²

Autonomous secularism in Western Europe helped to create a space in which citizens could assert their rights and capitalism could develop. This outcome of Western Europe's historical development has been hypostasized as the model that all societies must take in order for "civil society" to exist. Jürgen Habermas in particular has posited a long list of requirements in order for "genuine" civil society to be said to exist: a free press and literacy, individual rights, civility, and sites for collective deliberation.¹³ For Habermas, as for many other theorists, Western European privacy and atomization stand in sharp contrast to Asia and the East, where they believe the bourgeois individual did not develop. The question of alternative forms of the "autonomous individual" is seldom asked.¹⁴ Privacy and individual rights in the West are considered fundamentally different than in Asia's densely packed cities. In Habermas's view, coffee houses in eighteenth-century Europe contributed greatly to the public sphere and civil society. Following in his footsteps, many people have asked whether or not Asia's teahouses might be considered similar domains. For those who hold European society in high regard,

¹¹ John Keane, *Global Civil Society?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 31. On the next page, Keane continues his commentary on Europeans' views: "Civil societies was impossible in Muslim society."

¹² The case of Korea is discussed at length in *Asia's Unknown Uprisings*, Volume 1. Gregory Henderson found "amorphousness and isolation in social relations." See Henderson, *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 4

¹³ See William A. Callahan, "Comparing the Discourse of Popular Politics in Korea and China: From Civil Society to Social Movements," *Korea Journal* 38:1 (Spring 1998): 281–82. Foucault considers China the "exotic East" [*History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 (New York Vintage, 1980), xv]; Afterward to Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (New York: Harvester Press, 1982), 213

¹⁴ See my discussion of individual and group in Islamic societies in "Individual and Group: Comparative Cultural Observations With a Focus on Ibn Khaldun," *Journal of Biosciences* (Indian Academy of Social Sciences) 39(1), March 2014, 1-6

the answer is “no.”¹⁵

Habermas’ bias severs the possibility of uncovering in history the telos of his own theories: “ideal speech situations.” During daily sessions of deliberation by tens of thousands of people in the Gwangju Uprising—to say nothing of other such insurgent moments, differences were not only tolerated, they were painstakingly discussed. Each individual was free to speak his or her mind, while collective will formation was an urgent necessity. Language analysis of discourse in emergent communes might find them to be moments of communicative competence, opening a possible link to Habermas’ utopian speculation.

A similar pro-European bias can be located in the work of conservative commentator Lucian Pye, who posited Protestantism as an ideal basis for civic culture and suggested Asia’s lack of it might mean it would be the last continent to democratize.¹⁶ Where only a few decades ago Confucian values were blamed for lack of business acumen and the ease with which Western businesspeople took advantage of polite Orientals, today Confucian culture is positively correlated with wealth.¹⁷ As Asia’s economies grew rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s, Singapore’s Lee Kwan Yew and Malaysia’s Mahathir Mohamad embraced “Asian values” as a reason for their success. They believed that unlike the West, Asians prize family above individual, social order above individual freedom, and hard work above leisure. Seeing its roots in Asian philosophers like Lao-tzu, Mencius and Confucius, Kim Dae Jung persuasively postulated Asia’s cultural traditions as possibly providing a base from which new “global democracy” could be constructed.¹⁸

For all the talk of “Asian” values, the continent is incredibly diverse, embracing lands from Palestine to Korea, Siberia to Sri Lanka. Even if we limit ourselves to East Asia, diversity is much greater than many people appreciate. Among the ten countries I discussed in my book, there were five religions: Islamic (Bangladesh and Indonesia),

¹⁵ See Susanne H. Rudolf and Lloyd I. Rudolf, “The Coffee House and the Ashram: Gandhi, Civil Society and Public Spheres,” in *Civil Society and Democracy*, ed. Carolyn M. Elliott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 377–404. Even in regard to Asian teahouses, the argument is made elsewhere that the nature of discussions does not reach the lofty height of individual autonomy attained in European cafes. From my experiences, many teahouses and even street corners in Asia might be more of a civil space than the interiors of Europe’s finest cafes—and I have spent a great deal of time in both venues. Neighbors in Asia often have more long-lasting and cooperative roles in each other’s lives than in the United States, where people often do not even know members of their community at all.

¹⁶ Lucian Pye, *Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1985)

¹⁷ See Larry Diamond, ed., *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993)

¹⁸ Kim Dae Jung, “Is Culture Destiny? The Myth of Asia’s Anti-democratic Values,” *Foreign Affairs* 6, 189–94

Hindu (Nepal), Confucian (China, Taiwan, and South Korea), Catholic (Philippines), and Buddhist (Thailand, Burma, and South Korea). South Korea also has many Protestants and Catholics, possibly more than one-third of its population.

To be sure, vibrant forms of civil society existed in Asia. No less than a hundred disparate women's newspapers were published in Beijing between 1905 and 1949, and Chinese chambers of commerce in market towns were said to number at least 2000 in 1912, with about 200,000 merchant members, and an additional 871 associations in larger cities.¹⁹ Eurocentrists have formulated democracy as a European (Greek) invention, yet research has revealed republican forms of government in ancient Sumerian cities.²⁰ In India, republics arose in the Ganges plain with elected leaders and assemblies, which gave rise to egalitarian breakaways from the Hindu caste system such as Jainism and Buddhism.²¹

Asia's traditional civil society, so different from the West's, has been a great source of strength for social movements. From the tree and the drum which Korean villagers could use to announce grievances and find consensual means of resolving them, to Chinese people's traditional right to petition for redress of grievances, and Nepalese understanding of the *dharma's* meaning that kings should rule justly, such longstanding cultural traditions—however dated and old-fashioned—became operative means of rallying opposition against ruling powers.

Civil institutions were of tremendous importance during the Gwangju Uprising, including the YMCA, YWCA, Namdong Catholic Cathedral, Women's Pure Pine Tree Society, Nok Du Bookstore, Wildfire Night School, Clown Theater Group, and the Artists' Council. Nonetheless, leading American Koreanists insist that civil society did not reawaken until the elections of 1985.²² In Gwangju, activists reminded me that even under the harsh terms of the military dictatorship, they spread word of movements by taking food to neighbors' homes—a longstanding tradition in Korea, especially when fresh *kimchi* is made—in order to whisper news and organize events.

Conservative American anticommunists obscured the existence of civil society in

¹⁹ Gordon White, Jude Howell, and Shang Xiaoyuan, "Market Reforms and the Emergent Constellation of Civil Society in China," in Elliott, 266–67

²⁰ See Thorkild Jacobsen, "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 2, no. 3 (1943), 159–72

²¹ Romila Thapar, *A History of India* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), 53; Jack Goody, "Civil Society in an Extra-European Perspective," in *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, eds., Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 156

²² Bruce Cumings, "Civil Society in West and East," in *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy and the State*, ed. Charles Armstrong (London: Routledge, 2002), 24

East Europe by insisting the “totalitarian” state had swallowed all autonomous elements of society. As the cunning of history invalidated Cold War propaganda on both sides, the political practice of *Solidarność* in Poland caused Polish dissidents to talk of “the rebellion of civil society against the state.”²³ Today, there seems to be general agreement today that uprisings there at the end of the twentieth century emanated from civil society.

Since many Western theorists believe civil society is a function of economic development, they expect the trajectory of the West and its kind of civil society to be the future of “less developed” countries. In actuality, changing dynamics at the end of the 20th century might reverse the political truism that “the country which is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.”²⁴ The 1997 IMF crisis in Asia was followed a decade later by the global economic meltdown that began in the United States. As infrastructure deteriorates and the central government seizes more powers, predictions that the United States is becoming a Third World country appear increasingly accurate. Rather than the West showing the East its future, the opposite may be occurring.

Civil society is the locus of significant strengths for movements, and it is also an important target for the long-term transformation of values needed for a genuine revolution—for “socialism worthy of the name.” Marcuse spoke clearly that the kind of changes needed were “...not merely a question of changing the institutions but rather, and this more important, of totally changing human beings in their attitudes, their instincts, their goals, and their values.”²⁵

Contemporary Emergence of Species-Being

Cultural, religious, ethnic and national differences, while appearing to constitute tremendous discrepancies between various social movements, obscure the essential similarities of movements all over the world today. The forging of a global culture of resistance to corporate capitalism since 1968 is nothing less than a world-historical force that is elevating humanity from nationalities, races and religions into a species-being that includes all humans. Whatever their specific identity today, people increasingly recognize that their ties to each other in insurgent movements are far more important than their ties to the rulers of their societies. More than at any other time in modern history, people reject the world capitalist system and seek to replace

²³ See John Ehrenberg, “Civil Society,” *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York: Scribner’s, 2004)

²⁴ Karl Marx, Preface to the first German edition of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York, International Publishers, 1967), 8–9

²⁵ “Marcuse Defines His New Left Line,” 1968 Interview, in *The New Left and the 1960s*, Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Vol. 3 edited by Douglas Kellner (New York: Routledge, 2005) 101

it with direct-democratic forms of self-government that respect all human life and protect the planet from predatory corporations and militarized nation-states.²⁶

Wherever we look today, from Taksim to Tahrir Squares, from *Indignatos* to Occupy, people seize public space where they can speak freely, they challenge their governments' policies, and they build forms of organization based upon direct democracy. 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 previous global waves: within a grammar of autonomy, "conscious spontaneity," and the eros effect. This global grammar of insurgency includes rejection of control by political parties in favor of autonomous modes of decision-making. These three qualities – autonomy, eros (international solidarity), and direct democracy – globally tie together movements that appear to be vastly different on the surface. This grammar of insurgency reaches beneath and above insurgencies' specific demands, aims and ideologies.

A global revolution with pluralist and decentralized forms is underway. Visible in global waves of uprisings, ordinary citizens' aspirations for people power and more democracy continue to emerge everywhere. While now seemingly marginalized, the international movement today involves more activists opposing global capitalism than at any other point in our species' history. While the airwaves broadcast a version of history that emphasizes the need for central authorities and social conformity, beneath the radar, people's understanding and self-guided actions constitute a powerful undercurrent. As we become increasingly aware of our own power and strategic capacities, our future impact can become more focused and synchronized. One tendency we can project into the future is the continual activation of a global eros effect of synchronous actions unifying people across the world.

Simultaneously today, men and women in all cultures yearn for love and freedom—and they actualize the struggle in their daily lives. Our erotic passions for freedom and justice are sublimated into political movements that unite us. These passions grow from the tender feeling for ourselves and the extension of that kindness to the partners of our unconscious in others. The life-forces within us bring us together and make us strong. To the extent we are fond of others—including other species—even when they appear more and more different from us, we grow freer.

The real axis of evil—the IMF, World Bank, and WTO, abetted by nation-states bristling with weapons of mass destruction in the service of 200 billionaires—will not willingly relinquish their grip on humanity's vast wealth. Globally synchronized struggles by hundreds of millions of people are needed to transform the global system. As Immanuel Wallerstein has long insisted, the system is undermining itself as it condemns a billion people at its periphery to semi-starvation and ravages our

²⁶ See Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014)

planet, while compelling all of us to work harder for more years with less money and diminished security.

Recent Asian insurgencies will help inform future uprisings—which, however reluctantly undertaken, will be necessitated by the systematic crisis tendencies of the existing world system. Sad and joyous, full of suffering while bringing forth tears of happiness, uprisings are moments of extreme desperation, during which human hearts act according to people's fondest dreams. By understanding these dreams and remaining true to them, we become more capable of a future of freedom.

George Katsiaficas was a member of Rosa Luxemburg SDS at MIT from 1969 and has been active in social movements ever since. A student of Herbert Marcuse, his most recent book is *Asia's Unknown Uprisings* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012 and 2013). His web site is <http://eroseffect.com>