KEYWORDS FOR RADICALS

The Contested Vocabulary of Late-Capitalist Struggle

edited by
Kelly Pyrooz
Clare O'Connor
and A.K. Thompson

Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late-Capitalist Struggle

ISBN: 978-1-84935-242-0 | E-ISBN: 978-1-84935-243-7
Library of Congress Control Number: 2015959321

AK Press
370 Ryan Ave. #100
Chico, CA 95973
USA
www.akpress.org
akpress@akpress.org

AK Press
PO Box 12766
Edinburgh EH8 9YE
Scotland
www.akuk.com
ak@akedin.demon.co.uk

The above addresses would be delighted to provide you with the latest AK Press distribution catalog, which features books, pamphlets, zines, and stylish apparel published and/or distributed by AK Press. Alternatively, visit our websites for the complete catalog, latest news, and secure ordering.

Cover art by Seth Tobocman | sethtobocman.com
Interior design by Margaret Killjoy | birdsbeforethestorm.net
The Editors donate all royalties from the sale of *Keywords for Radicals* to AK Press in the interest of furthering the forms of movement-based education advocated by *Keywords for Radicals*

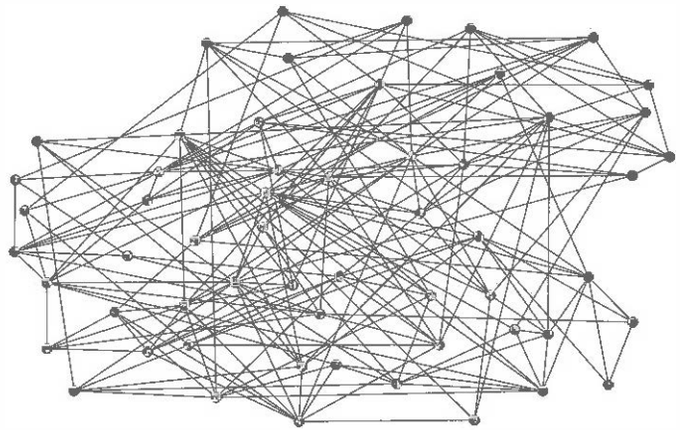
Printed in the USA on acid-free, recycled paper

CONTENTS

Editors	**Introduction**	1
Kelly Fritsch	**Accessible**	23
Clare O'Connor	**Accountability**	29
AK Thompson	**Agency**	39
Mab Segrest	**Allies**	47
Maia Ramnath	**Authority**	55
Anna Agathangelou	**Bodies**	63
Christine Kelly	**Care**	71
Johanna Brenner	**Class**	79
Lorenzo Veracini	**Colonialism**	87
George Caffentzis	**Commons**	95
Sarah Lamble	**Community**	103
Mandy Hiscocks	**Conspiracy**	111
Robert McRuer	**Crip**	119
Nina Power	**Demand**	127
Donatella della Porta	**Democracy**	135
Ruth Kinna	**Domination**	143
Kate Kaul	**Experience**	151
Simon Wallace	**Friend**	159
Rasheedah Phillips	**Future**	167
Tammy Kovich	**Gender**	175
Richard Day	**Hegemony**	183
Bryan D. Palmer	**History**	191
Ana Cecilia Dinerstein	**Hope**	199
Himani Bannerji	**Ideology**	207

Sumayya Kassamali	**Intellectual**	215
Sam Gindin	**Labor**	223
Joy James	**Leadership**	231
Robin Marie Averbeck	**Liberal**	237
Heather Davis	**Love**	245
Rosemary Hennessy	**Materialism**	253
Eliza Steinbock	**Misogyny**	263
Sunera Thobani	**Nation**	271
John Bellamy Foster	**Nature**	279
Sara Matthews	**Occupation**	287
Justin Podur	**Oppression**	295
Deborah Gould	**Politics**	303
Stefan Kipfer	**Populism**	311
Christian Scholl	**Prefiguration**	319
Douglas Williams	**Privilege**	327
Natalie Kouri-Towe	**Queer**	335
Conor Tomás Reed	**Race**	343
Jaleh Mansoor	**Representation**	351
Silvia Federici	**Reproduction**	359
Miranda Joseph	**Responsibility**	367
Thomas Nail	**Revolution**	375
Rebecca Schein	**Rights**	383
Markus Kip	**Solidarity**	391
Stacy Douglas	**Sovereignty**	399
Kanishka Goonewardena	**Space**	407
Patrick Bond	**Sustainable**	415
Dan Irving	**Trans*/-**	423
David McNally	**Utopia**	431
Alan Shandro	**Vanguard**	439
Heather Hax	**Victory**	447
Peter Gelderloos	**Violence**	455
Neil Balan	**War**	463
Ilan Pappé	**Zionism**	469

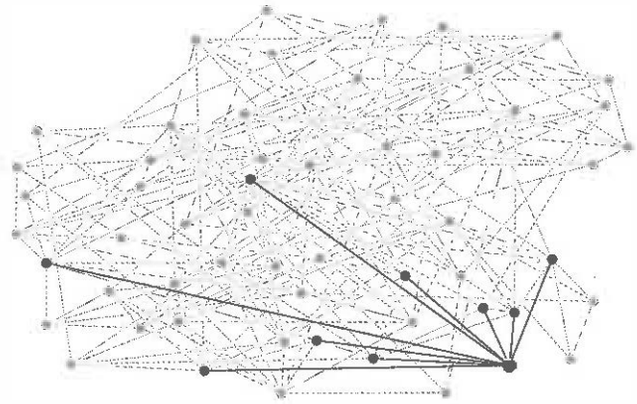
Appendix 477
References 481
About the Contributors 551



INTRODUCTION

Kelly Fritsch, Clare O'Connor, and AK Thompson

In 1837, Hans Christian Andersen recounted the story of "The Emperor's New Clothes." Working in the fantastical register of fairy tales, he spun a tale in which two swindlers descend upon the town of an emperor enthralled by sartorial decadence. Sensing an opportunity, the swindlers pose as weavers and propose to make the emperor a suit so fine that it will be imperceptible to people who were stupid or undeserving of their post. Seeing the benefit of owning such an outfit, the emperor agrees to their offer. As the swindlers begin their fictive weaving, a novel problem arises. Fearful that their credibility was about to be undermined, the emperor's men repeat the received lie and extol the beauty of the mystery



REVOLUTION

Thomas Nail

Today we are witnessing the return of revolution. This return, however, seems to be taking none of the traditional forms: the capture of the state, the political representation of the party, the centrality of the proletariat, or the leadership of the vanguard. The Zapatistas distinguish between two types of revolution: an uppercase Revolution and a lowercase revolution (Marcos 2004, 164). This distinction is emblematic of an indexical tension for radicals. On the one hand, the two words are phonetically identical and carry with them a unified history of social struggle. On the other hand, the words are semantically distinct and refer to two significantly different historical and political trajectories. For this reason, the idea of "R/revolution"

is less like an absolute signifier and more like a semantic Möbius strip that appears to be a continuous single-sided path and a discontinuous double-sided one at the same time (see Figure I).

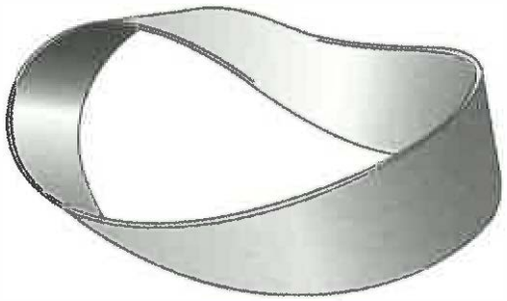


Figure I

Radicals today thus find themselves both unified and divided by two intertwined trajectories of revolution: the uppercase and the lowercase. Lowercase revolution can be defined by at least four revolutionary strategies that have become increasingly prevalent over the last twenty years. The first of these concerns an intersectional analysis of power, in which revolution is not defined by a single axis of struggle (e.g., political, economic, cultural, or environmental). Accordingly, there should be no single privileged "subject of the revolution" (e.g., whites, the working class, heterosexuals, men). The second strategy concerns prefiguration. Here revolution is not aimed exclusively at creating counter-institutions to oppose state policies, modes of production, cultural norms, or environmental destruction. Instead, and in addition to these institutions, contemporary revolutionary strategy emphasizes the need to create alternatives that build (even if only locally) the kind of new social relations that revolutionaries would like to see "after" the revolution. Third, we find an emphasis on participatory politics, in which revolutionary strategy demands the direct participation of people in the decision-making processes that affect them. This strategy can be witnessed in the

popular assemblies, consensus decision-making, and spokescouncils used around the world from the Zapatistas to the Occupy Movement. Finally, the strategic commitment to horizontalism has enabled revolutionary networks to link local popular assemblies without any central authority, program, or hierarchy. Examples of this strategy can be seen in the World Social Forum and the use of social media for decentralized local and global organizing.

Recent use of these tactics in the Alter-Globalization Movement, the World Social Forum, the *Indignados*, the Occupy Movement, and elsewhere can be traced back to the influence and inspiration of what many radicals now call "the first post-modern revolutionaries," the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico (Burbach 1994, 113–24). Perhaps one explanation for the new prevalence of these tactics concerns global capitalism's increasingly financial and neoliberal "development" model. In many ways, Mexico was one of the first laboratories for neoliberalism. It is thus of no surprise that it was also one of the first laboratories for new revolutionary strategy. Of course, the Zapatistas were not the first to use the four strategies described above; indeed, anarchists, feminists, and some indigenous groups have used them in some form or another since the nineteenth century. The important difference—as David Graeber argues in "The New Anarchists"—is that, until the mid to late nineties, these strategies were not nearly as pervasive (Graeber 2002, 61–73). However, even as the synthesis and spread of these four revolutionary strategies increased during the rise and influence of Zapatismo, they have in no way eliminated the tension between upper- and lowercase "revolution" (Nail 2013, 20–35). If anything, and precisely because of the increased prevalence of lowercase strategies, radicals today confront this tension more than ever.

Furthermore, one can discern at least two kinds of lowercase revolutionary strategies: social strategies (like those listed above) and more individualist strategies (popularized by the Crimethinc. Ex-Workers' Collective and anti-civilization anarchists and historically preceded by anarchist theorists like Max Stirner, Ernest Coeurderoy, and Joseph Déjacque) (Landstreicher et al. 2014). Individualist revolutionary strategies are much less focused on building alternative

institutions than on living revolutionary lives. If there is going to be any kind of revolution, they argue, it must be built from the ground up from our daily lives. As the CrimethInc. Ex-Workers' Collective writes in "Why We're Right and You're Wrong: Towards a Non-D(en)ominational Revolution": "Revolution . . . is not a single moment, but a way of living." Or, as Raoul Vaneigem put it: "People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints—such people have a corpse in their mouth" (2001, 26).

Despite their prominence in contemporary radical milieus, it is important to recall that such anarchistic "lowercase" strategies have not always defined "revolution." Historically, the etymology and idea of revolution has quite literally "revolved" around the state. Although Aristotle does not use the word "revolution" (contrary to common mistranslations of the word μεταβολή, "change," as "revolution"), his basic theory of political change remained the dominant one for thousands of years. For Aristotle, there were only two types of political change: change between types of state constitution (democracy, aristocracy, oligarchy, and monarchy) and change within a state constitution. Political theory from Machiavelli to Mao follows the kinetics of this basic statist definition of revolution: "a return to the state." According to Aristotle, the constitution (καθίστημι) is the "setting down" of a point of relative stasis (στάσις)—from the same root (*stā-) as the word "state." The stasis between conflicting forces produces a *polis* or city-state (πόλις)—from the same root (*pelə-, meaning "citadel" or "fortified high place") as the word "politics." Thus, for Aristotle, politics is the setting down of a walled city-state, and revolutions are constitutional changes of this centrally bounded point. People turn against and turn around its central axis. The political motion of revolution has thus been theoretically and practically one of rotation around the central point of the state. As Mao writes, "The seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of the issue by war, is the central task and the highest form of revolution" (1992, 548).

From the first usage of the English word "revolution" to describe political transformation in the sixteenth century to the twentieth-century socialist revolutions or near-revolutions in Russia, Germany, France, and China, Aristotle's cyclical kinetics remained dominant. As Hannah Arendt writes, "The fact that the word 'revolution' meant originally restoration, hence something which to us is its very opposite, is not a mere oddity of semantics. The revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which to us appear to show all evidence of a new spirit, the spirit of the modern age, were intended to be restorations" (1963, 43).

This is not to say that there were no non-state theories and practices at the time, just that they were not the most prevalent ones. So far, however, twenty-first-century revolutionary struggles have tended to have more in common with the historically "lowercase" non-state or anti-statist tradition associated with indigenous struggles, slave revolts, peasant heretics, pirates, and anarchists than they have with the Aristotelian model.

Ironically, this recent shift can be attributed in part to the very "success" of the classical "uppercase" statist model. The more the revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth century "returned to the state," the more they exposed the political limitations of both the state form and "the party," the dominant form for the revolutionary occupation of the state. Theoretically, the party was intended not solely to "abolish itself as the proletariat . . . and abolish also the state as state," as Engels wrote (Marx and Engels 1978, 713), but also to secure the "conditions under which the state can be abolished," as Lenin later added (1932, 94). Historically, however, the use of the state to abolish either itself or its conditions of possibility has failed. Consequently, the party has become perhaps the most widely discredited aspect of Marxism. It is accused of reducing revolutionary politics to state authoritarianism and bureaucracy, of recasting revolutionary theory as dogma, and of subordinating political imagination to disciplined order. In the name of the revolutionary party-state, all manner of the statist atrocities have been committed (political executions, labor camps, nationalist wars, propaganda campaigns, and so on). If radical activists

today no longer talk about the class party, military-style discipline, the vanguard, or the capture of the state (or if they reject them explicitly as the Zapatistas do), it is precisely because these strategies have been so discredited by the revolutionary experiments of the twentieth century (Day 2005, 45).

The differences between the cyclical, uppercase definition of revolution and the lowercase one illuminate two important strategic and kinetic interpretations of the word "revolution" that are still in tension today. On the one hand, the uppercase definition is based on motion around a static center and the cyclical transformation of its state constitution. It is essentially a rotational and centrifugal theory of political motion. What returns in uppercase revolution is the *identity* of the state form—even if the constitution has changed. Revolution thus marks a difference internal to the identity of the state form. On the other hand, the lowercase definition of "revolution" is based on the motion of decentralized vectors assembled together in waves. Given their non-statist tendencies, these revolutionary movements behave more like trajectories or directions without static end points. They pursue their aims without a central command, vanguard, or program. Instead, their local movements are inspired or influenced by each other as by the common force of a wave that moves *through* them. In this case, what returns in revolution is not the identity of the circle but the differential *process of the returning itself*. Here revolution is not a difference internal to the identity of the state form but a differential process *external* to the state and thus capable of many other social forms. In this case, "revolution" returns not to its starting point (the state) but to somewhere else further along a decentralized trajectory. The definition of lowercase "revolution" proposed by many on today's radical left reveals a strategic decision to break with the political motion of the cycle and affirm the historically minor political motion of decentralized differentiation.

By engaging this etymological and historical difference, today's radicals might be in a better position to reinterpret other classical political institutions like the party, the constitution, and the state without falling prey to their cyclical dangers. After all, non-state

or anti-state definitions of revolution must still grapple with existing party and state power at some point—as their Möbius doppelgänger. It is unlikely that the state will simply dissolve because alternative institutions have prefigured a future in which it does not exist. Under such conditions, it remains unclear how to reinterpret not only the concept of revolution but other political forms as well. Many theorists and activists have begun experimenting with such redefinitions, including Alain Badiou's anti-party, Daniel Bensaïd's New Anti-Capitalist Party, Hugo Chavez's revolutionary Bolivarianism, and the Zapatista's Other Campaign. Through this process, we are likely to uncover historical resources to facilitate the theoretical and practical return to forms of "revolution" that do not succumb to the traditional state form and its horrors. As these projects advance, the battle between lower- and uppercase definitions is likely to reach a zone of productive conflict.

SEE ALSO: Conspiracy; Demand; Ideology; Politics; Utopia; Vanguard; Victory; Violence; War