THE POLITICS OF WITHDRAWAL

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LAY ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to argue against a common assumption of political thought and action, that is, that politics necessarily involves *engagement*, either with or against established political institutions. It may involve running for office, casting a ballot, taking part in government or protesting in the streets. What this common feature of politics seemingly affirms is that politics cannot involve instances of *withdrawal*. In other words, actions like abstaining from a vote, walking away from government, or refusing to engage with the established political institutions in any way are nonpolitical in nature. This dissertation aims to argue against this assumption. Acts of withdrawal, I argue, can be just as political in nature as those involving direct engagement, even in the absence of or direct refusal of any orientation towards established political institutions.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation begins with examining prominent conceptualizations of politics in order to underline a common assumption implicit across all of them: that politics necessarily involves engagement in one form or another, with or against the established political institutions of the state. This assumption has largely occluded acceptance of withdrawal as an alternate way to think and act politically. Recent literature has begun to show how acts of withdrawal may be understood to be politically relevant. There are two issues that plague this literature, however. It does not always make it sufficiently clear what makes withdrawal political in its own right, and a good portion of the literature that attempts this does so by putting it in direct relation to the state, in effect constraining a fuller appreciation of withdrawal as a novel and distinctive way of acting politically.

This dissertation aims to contribute to the growing literature on political withdrawal by making it clear what makes instances of withdrawal political in the first place, even when there is either no discernible relation to the state or is conducted in express refusal of the state and its institutions. It does this by utilizing the prominent approaches to politics outlined at the outset of the dissertation. In arguing for the political nature of withdrawal, this dissertation hopes to expand our common understanding of politics, and thus widen the scope of both political action and thought.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wife: Kelsea. I know I've said it a million times, but here it is once more, with all the feeling and honesty of each of those other times and more: without you, I'd be lost.

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DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

I, Dan Marijanovic, declare this thesis to be my own work. I am the sole author of this document. No part of this work has been published or submitted for publication or for a higher degree at another institution.

To the best of my knowledge, the content of this document does not infringe on anyone's copyright.

My supervisor, Dr. Diane Enns, and the members of my supervisory committee, Dr. James Ingram and Dr. Stefan Sciaraffa, have provided guidance and support at all stages of this project. I completed all of the research work.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation aims to contribute to a continually growing literature on "withdrawal," a notion that has only recently emerged as a distinctly *political* concept. In its introductory chapter, a recent anthology on the matter asks if "withdrawal" can be conducted as a form of politics, and if so, to what extent there can be something like a "politics of withdrawal." As its authors note, a "*politics* of withdrawal" would appear to be an oxymoron, as withdrawal entails "non-action, inoperativity, dis-engagement," whereas politics, if understood within the context of contemporary understandings of the political, entails "engagement," "intervention," "representation" and "struggle."[1] To withdraw, in other words, would be an *a*political, if not anti-political gesture.

Yet, despite its detractors, and assumptions to the contrary, withdrawal has and does occur in distinctly political contexts. For example, prior to the official legal abolition of slavery throughout the United States, thousands of African Americans had sought refuge from their condition by attempting to flee from their former masters. Many of these, like Frederick Douglass, became outspoken and politically active members of the abolitionist movement—an ability afforded to him only after he found freedom in self-imposed internal exile.[2] Since at least the seventeenth century, America has been the refuge of individuals fleeing intolerance and oppression from all over the world. Some of

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[1] De Blooise, Joost and Pepita Hesselberth, editors. "Introduction: Towards a Politics of Withdrawal?" *Politics of Withdrawal: Media, Arts, Theory.* Rowman and Littlefield, 2020, 1.
[2] See: Douglass, Frederick. "Narratives of the Life of Frederick Douglass." *The Classic Slave Narratives*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates, New American Library, 1987.

these, like many of the Black abolitionists in the early nineteenth century, are political

exiles who continue to fight from afar for change in the polities they left behind. Other

examples, which I will look at in more detail throughout this dissertation, include acts

like voter abstentions and boycotts, labour strikes, and the Occupy encampments. As this

cursory, yet diverse list of examples I just noted shows, withdrawal appears to occur in

political contexts. What makes withdrawal *political* in the first place is something I will

make clear and defend in this dissertation. Suffice it to say in this introductory note that

the main difference between withdrawal and the kind of politics its detractors have

compared it to is not that between "inaction" and "action"—the examples listed above,

for example, exemplify action and activity—but rather what I venture to call their

directional movement. That is, in withdrawing one is actively *withdrawing from*, in

whatever shape that takes, rather than directly *engaging with* established political

institutions, or other manifestations of power. The fact remains, however, that in

withdrawing one might nevertheless remain politically active; the withdrawal itself might

be seen as a political act. Thus, as the editors of *Politics of Withdrawal: Media, Arts,*

Theory argue: "withdrawal means anything but depoliticization: to withdraw is not to

retreat into passivity."[3]

   This brief introduction into the notion of withdrawal surely raises the question of

how the term will be understood in the present project. It would be helpful, before I go

any further, to briefly state how I will be using it. Like any political activities that are

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[3] De Blooise and Hessleberth, "Introduction: Towards a Politics of Withdrawal," 2.

otherwise engaged with their object of concern, political withdrawals can look very different in practice. They are often conceived in terms of physicality—the leaving of one physical, political or legal place for another. And this in turn can be understood, or undertaken, internally, as in moving from one jurisdiction within a state to another, or externally, as with political exiles fleeing their homelands and fighting for change from abroad. But not all withdrawals are strictly physical in this sense. They can involve not necessarily leaving one legal, social or physical space for another, but disengaging from particular activities, like withdrawing support from one political party to support another, boycotting a vote, rescinding one's involvement or support for certain political groups or organizations, or refusing a particular set of circumstances, activity or way of life. Furthermore, the very way in which any of these kinds of withdrawals are conducted can look very different in practice. They can be, as Jennet Kirkpatrick has demonstrated,[4] noisy or quiet, singular or collective, expressive or muted, communicative or resistant. Moreover, several synonymous terms for withdrawal have been used in political theory, such as *exodus*, *flight*, *retreat*, *refusal*, *desertion*, *destitution*, and *exit*, to discuss what are all otherwise political *withdrawals*. For the sake of convenience, I primarily employ the term "withdrawal" in this dissertation largely as a blanket term to describe a general mode of political activity that can be used to designate any number or kinds of political actions or activities that, however different in practice, are united in the fact that their

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[4] Kirkpatrick, Jennet. *The Virtues of Exit: On Resistance and Quitting Politics*. University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

primary mode of action is a *withdrawing from* rather than a direct *engagement with* manifestations of power.

Although political withdrawals have and do occur, it might seem surprising that withdrawal has not, until very recently, been appreciated and more deeply investigated as a distinctly political concept in its own right in the tradition of political thought. The reason for this has already been intimated above: politics has largely been understood in terms of engagement (or cognate notions like "voice," "direct action," and "intervention"). There are a few exceptions. Albert O. Hirschman is arguably the first theorist to have discussed withdrawal, or "exit" as he prefers, in clearly political contexts. For Hirschman, to withdraw means to exit from an organization, relationship, institution, or process with which one has some grievance, or in which one has lost faith, and to take one's support elsewhere.[5] In political contexts, this largely means voters or party members exiting from one political party or organization for another or leaving a government post. This was groundbreaking because up until the time Hirschman wrote about withdrawal in *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* in the 1970s, "voice," as he observes, had been the dominant way in which to understand political actions or events. Voice, according to Hirschman, means stating one's opinion, or dissatisfaction, by way of visible, vocal, and public forms of expression that directly and openly convey one's opinion on a matter of concern. To employ voice is to call to the other, or in other words, to *directly engage*, as I would say, with the relevant actors and institutions with which

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[5] Hirschman, Albert O. *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States.* Harvard University Press, 1970, 4.

one wishes to express solidarity with, or, conversely, express concerns or grievances to.[6]

A number of studies in both political science and political thought, written in the wake of

Hirschman, have since applied his dual notion of voice and exit to examine (or *re-*

examine) and understand a variety of different sociopolitical phenomena, some of which I

will address in this dissertation. In "Voting With Your Feet: Exit-based Empowerment in

Democratic Theory,"[7] Mark Warren, for example, extends Hirschman's analysis of

political withdrawals in the context of democratic decision making. Noting that the latter

has long been dominated by a "voice-monopoly model," understood to simply mean that

democracy ideally revolves around the voice, engagement, or direct action of citizens,

Warren argues that a more productive way to understand, and thus strengthen, democratic

practices is to view the ability of citizens to choose from among different political parties

and individuals vying for a seat in decision making assemblies as the ability to withhold

their votes, that is, to withdraw from one party for another. With a less sanguine view of

democratic institutions in general, Ilya Somin has argued that the ability to choose the

government policies one wishes to live under by being able to move from one jurisdiction

(local, sub-national, or even national) to another, dubbed "foot voting," is a hallmark of

political freedom that should be protected, enhanced, and promoted as much as

engagement with political institutions is. Arguing that individual voters almost never

have more than a miniscule chance of making a difference to the outcome of an election,

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[6] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*, 4.
[7] Warren, Mark E. "Voting With Your Feet: Exit-based Empowerment in Democratic Theory." *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 105, no. 4, Nov 11, pp. 683-701.

foot voting empowers them and "offers individuals a chance to make decisions that actually matter" and will have a noticeably positive impact as far as the government policies that govern aspects of their lives are concerned.[8]

Jennet Kirkpatrick is the latest to have written extensively and explicitly about political withdrawal, situating her book *The Virtues of Exit: On Resistance and Quitting Politics* as both a direct extension of Hirschman's work on exit, but also as a response to some of its limitations, as she understands them. Kirkpatrick notes how the large part of the existing scholarship, from Hirschman onward, tends to view withdrawal as a "uniform, uncomplicated action," focused almost wholly on the effect it has on established decision making mechanisms and institutions,[9] and says little about the explicitly political nature of withdrawals themselves, besides or beyond their effect on conventional political institutions. She attempts to give a more expansive and nuanced picture of withdrawal, drawing on an eclectic variety of examples, such as fugitive slaves in pre-emancipation America, political exiles, and Henry Thoreau's two-year sojourn at Walden Pond. Additionally, she attempts to explicitly highlight what makes withdrawal political in the first place, which many accounts fail to do adequately. On Kirkpatrick's reading, a withdrawal is political insofar as those withdrawing are "attached," that is "remain connected via politics to the organization or place that was left." She adds that the connection must be fixed "on changing the political leadership, addressing a policy

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[8] Somin, Ilya. "How Foot Voting Enhances Political Freedom." *San Diego Law Review*, vol. 56, no. 1089, 2019, pp. 1089-1120, 1089.
[9] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 4.

issue, altering political ideas" of the state or state institutions that have been withdrawn from.[10]

This growing and multi-faceted interest in the notion of withdrawal is a pertinent development given that, as some commentators have noted, traditional forms of political engagement are perceived to have failed to address the multitude of social, political, economic, and even psychological issues that have increasingly turned many individuals *away* from established political institutions and conventional methods of political engagement, especially in representative democracies.[11] Since the middle of the past century, a growing number of political movements have sought to bypass traditional institutional arrangements altogether in order to have their concerns and accompanying demands addressed. Thus, as some commentators have noted, we seem to be living in an era where "dissent and defiance, revolt and resistance, tumults and uprisings... seem increasingly to be emerging as the normal modes in which many populations today relate to their lawfully constituted governments."[12] Such a phenomenon, particularly salient over the last two decades, appears to have heralded the "return of the political," the purported loss of which was increasingly mourned in the last decade of the twentieth century.[13] Many, if not most extra-institutional political movements engage in forms of

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[10] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 19.

[11] For more on this perspective, see, for example: Rancière, Jacques. *Hatred of Democracy*. Translated by Steve Corcoran, Verso, 2014; Swyngedouw, Erik. "Where is the Political? Insurgent Mobilizations and the Incipient 'Return of the Political.'" *Space and Polity*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2014, pp. 122-136.

[12] Laudani, Raffaele. *Disobedience in Western Political Thought: A Genealogy.* Translated by Jason Francis McGimsey, Cambridge University Press, 2013, viii*.*

[13] See, for example: Badiou, Alain. *Metapolitics*. Translated by Jason Barker, Verso, 2006; Mouffe, Chantal. *The Return of the Political*. Verso, 2005; Rancière, Jacques. *On the Shores of Politics*. Translated by Liz Heron, Verso, 2007.

protests which seek to be visible, public, and vocal. Indeed, the notion of extra-institutional movements is apt to evoke images of demonstrations in the street, speeches, petitions, or other forms of public manifestation of discontent. Moreover, they typically seek to directly engage with reigning political institutions (if from the outside).

It is not uncommon, however, that even under such pressure governments do not give way to reform, and often retain the structural inequities such protests and movements seek to address, even if in another form. Thus, when direct engagement, either in its institutional or extra-institutional form, has made little change, this can and has led to feelings that nothing more can be done, and that political engagement in all its forms is futile.[14] However, as I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, politics does not end with engagement, and withdrawal need not simply be seen as a withdrawal from politics. In some cases, withdrawal may be the only political recourse left when power has become stifling and intractable. Withdrawal is potentially appealing to those who have lost faith in political engagement because it signals a break with the status quo, especially with conventional methods and institutions by which individuals are presumably afforded the ability to address and make social, political, and economic change. Moreover, withdrawal promises, if not a new, then a radically different way for individuals to act politically, to directly and meaningfully raise those concerns not

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[14] See: Dubreuil, Laurent. *The Refusal of Politics*. Translated by Cory Browning. Edinburgh University Press, 2016; Heller, Nathan. "Is There Any Point to Protesting?" *The New Yorker,* 14 August 2017. www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/08/21/is-there-any-point-to-protesting.

adequately addressed through conventional political methods, without feeling like they are pulling away or disengaging from political action itself.

The growing literature on withdrawal constitutes an emerging awareness of the latter as both a distinctively political concept and activity that may, in fact, help to address the concerns briefly noted above. Moreover, as I will demonstrate, a discussion of withdrawal can elicit the same kind of attention and debates that other political concepts do, like power or conflict. It is with this in mind that I intend to argue in this dissertation that withdrawal can be understood as political, a claim I will defend against the predominant assumption that it is not. In addition, I intend to show that political withdrawal has different manifestations in practice depending on how we understand the nature of politics itself: whether as limited to the state and its governing institutions, or, especially, as emerging out of conflict and acting together with others in non-state contexts of power. Withdrawal gains sense and theoretical depth in relation to the way the main concepts of politics are shown to intersect in relation to it, and how it contributes to an alternative way of articulating them.

I believe this latter point is an important part of my contribution to the emerging literature on the politics of withdrawal because many of the theorists who discuss withdrawal in politically affirmative terms, including those mentioned above, largely fail to adequately address an important assertion made by Jennet Kirkpatrick in *The Virtues of Exit*, which had, according to her, persisted long after Hirschman introduced exit as a politically relevant notion: that is that a study of withdrawal can give us insight into the

notion of politics itself.[15] As she notes, political concepts like justice, freedom, conflict or

power, have the capacity to explain the "social world."[16] But they must also, surely, be

able to say something about the notion of politics itself. Concepts like "conflict,"

"power," and "acting together," for example, have, especially over the past century, been

utilized to examine the nature of the political and its re-imagining beyond the confines of

the state and its institutions. Conflict, for example, once seen as anathema to a well-

ordered society and good governance—the hallmarks of political thought since Plato and

Aristotle, right down to Hobbes and in many quarters of political thought today— was

later taken to be a characteristic of state-based politics starting with Machiavelli and later

systematized as such by Max Weber at the turn of the twentieth century, before being

understood, starting with Carl Schmitt in the 1920s, as the underlying essence of politics

itself, and not simply a feature of the institutional politics of the state. Neither Hirschman,

nor many of those who have written about withdrawal in his wake, have sufficiently

interrogated politics via the notion of withdrawal, at least not in any systematic way. In

most cases they have simply assumed what politics is and discussed their understanding,

or advocacy, of withdrawal strictly in relation to the sole definition or assumption of

politics they are employing, which, more often than not, is an understanding that sees it

as an activity related to the state, its government or institutions. The focus on one

particular way of understanding the political nature of withdrawal, namely, as an activity

that contests power within the confines of state institutions and practices—such as with

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[15] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit*, 2-3.
[16] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit*, 2-3.

the thinkers I briefly introduced above, beginning with Hirschman— may occlude the

acceptance of those instances of withdrawal which do not appear to occur on a strictly

institutional level. Yet, a look at a number of exemplary cases of what I refer to as

noninstitutional forms of political withdrawal, supported by a discussion of

noninstitutional conceptions of politics, shows that withdrawals do not have to occur

within institutionalized contexts to be countenanced as political. In fact, they may be the

only form of political activity possible when it is perceived that engagement with, or any

form of "attachment" to state institutions has either been denied or is no longer capable of

addressing the issues prompting the withdrawals in the first place. One of the reasons for

this is that these different approaches to, and interpretations of, withdrawal have been

borne out of a variety of very different concerns that are not always adequately addressed

by conventional political wisdom: for example, concerns with the perceived failures of

established political institutions themselves; the repressive and inequitable nature of the

state and the reigning economic and political institutions of power more generally; a

history of racism, sexism, colonialism, or other forms of oppression; and a general

dissatisfaction with the prevailing ways in which life itself is lived and organized.

In this dissertation, I look at a number of different cases and approaches to

withdrawal to defend this point. I primarily focus on three particular cases: "Indigenous

Resurgence," "Workerism," and "Autonomism." Indigenous resurgence refers to a

conceptual designation of a set of practices and, more generally, an ethos in Indigenous

political thought that is differentiated from practices which either seek direct engagement

with, and operate within, the political institutions of the Canadian state in order to gain

rights and recognition for Indigenous peoples through gradual reform, or through more combative extra-institutional forms of resistance. Indigenous resurgence seeks to address the negative legacies of colonialism, no less than these other forms of sociopolitical and cultural engagement, but through withdrawal. I refer primarily to the work of Glen Coulthard,[17] who makes a case for Indigenous resurgence as a response to the increasing frustration and inability on the part of Indigenous peoples to make more radical redress to the legacy of colonialism than forms of direct engagement.

Workerism (*operaismo* in Italian) refers to a Marxist-oriented political current with origins in the Italian working-class movement. True to its Marxist orientation, workerism was a movement resolutely focused on working class *struggle* against, and emancipation from, capital. The main theoretical underpinning of workerism, significantly contributed to by Mario Tronti and conveyed in his defining work *Workers and Capital,* is that workers themselves and their grassroots organizations may have greater power to effect social change than institutional levers, such as traditional workers' parties and the administrative institutions of the state itself. Anti-capitalist struggle, according to Tronti, begins on the shop floor, and, importantly, in the form of a "refusal of work," amounting to the mass withdrawal of labour power—the life-blood of factories and workplaces—from production, thus directly and negatively affecting the acquisition of surplus value on the part of the owners of those workplaces.

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[17] Coulthard, Glen. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Autonomism is a direct outgrowth of workerism. Influential autonomist thinkers like Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, Franco "Bifo" Berardi, Paolo Virno, and John Holloway have all noted that the current social and economic climate is particularly favourable to the strategy of withdrawal as a general form of resistance against increasingly pervasive capital and representative institutions which, in their eyes, do not truly act as effective relays conveying the voices of the citizenry. Dubbed *exodus* by autonomist proponents of withdrawal, Paolo Virno, a key theorist of Italian autonomism, refers to it, perhaps counter-intuitively, as the "*institution* of a non-state public sphere."[18] The withdrawal advocated by autonomists on this register seek a form of political action that is not violent or overtly confrontational, but in addition is one that is at the same time generative and productive of the very type of society those withdrawing wish to supersede the one they are withdrawing from. It is in this sense that the exodus model of the autonomists is also referred to as a "founding leave-taking, which both refuses [the reigning] social order and *constructs an alternative.*"[19]

By bringing together, as I intend to do, different discussions of withdrawal and different examples of it in practice, critically examining them, and paying particular attention to the distinct understandings of, and approaches to, the politics which underly them, we can gain not only a deeper appreciation of withdrawal as a political concept and practice, but can also, in turn, gain some broader insights into politic*s* itself. By mapping

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[18] Virno, Paolo. "Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus." *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics.* Edited by Hardt, Michael and Paolo Virno, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 189-209, 195.
[19] Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 260 (my emphasis).

the emergence of withdrawal within a particular understanding of the political—as centered on the state—and tracking it across a number of alternate visions of politics, my analysis will show how and why withdrawal was first postulated as a political concept, how it functions across different understandings of the political, and what kind of political work it can do. Namely, withdrawal demonstrates how politics does not require overt forms of active engagement, it is not solely reducible to any "attachment" to the state, and it can even involve activities not traditionally associated with the public realm of political action.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter 1: What is Politics? Institutional Politics

I begin the dissertation by raising the question of what politics is, or at least, how it has generally been understood in the history of political thought. It is necessary to take a broad look at the notion of politics in general, especially as it has been treated and understood throughout the tradition of political thought, because this will enable me on the one hand to show why withdrawal might be misunderstood and not accepted as political, whilst at the same time giving me a broad perspective with which to examine withdrawal itself as a political concept. Though I will focus on several rather broad and diverse approaches to politics, I do so to underscore several features that appear to me to be common to all of them. In chapter one I focus on what I refer to as the institutional approach to politics, highlighting the fact that most definitions of politics that fall under this approach usually have the state, the government and/or its various institutions in

mind as *the* domain(s) or arena(s) in and through which activities are properly understood as political.

Most conceptions of politics can be understood to have in common some kind of basic relation to the state, which has, since the beginning of political thought, consistently acted as the primary ground and horizon of political theorizing. Traversing the thought of Aristotle, Machiavelli and Max Weber, I show that the most common and historically entrenched approach is the institutional one, which sees the state as the central locus of political activity. This is a broad approach, which admittedly encapsulates a variety of ways in which political activity might be conducted and to what end. Politics may be restricted to the government and its actions. It might also include parties vying for government and jostling with each other for state power, and citizens engaging in a variety of civic duties, not least of which is running for political office or voting for those running to represent them in government. Furthermore, this approach to politics may be understood to be solely about the common good of the polity or community, it may be geared to the aggrandizement of the state and its power, or it may be about whatever end the government and political leaders see fit. Suffice it to say, whatever the specifics of the particular theory advancing this approach to politics, what unites them all is the belief that something is political only insofar as it is oriented to, or conducted through, the state, its government and its institutions.

Chapter 2: What is Politics? Noninstitutional Politics

However, as I will show, there are also approaches to politics that do not see it as being limited by a ruling apparatus, namely, the state and its institutions. The history of the inquiry into the nature of politics in political thought over the past century can be understood as a series of attempts to think politics beyond or other than the state, and additional approaches can be conceived which reflect this fact. In chapter two, I introduce a second broad approach to politics which I refer to as the "noninstitutional" approach to politics, referring to the fact that, understood in these terms, politics is not restricted to any particular place or set of institutions—politics may happen or be conducted anywhere. More specifically, I will focus on three primary dimensions of the noninstitutional approach: the first sees friend/enemy relations and the potential for real conflict between these as constituting the political, the second conceives of the political in terms of power relations, and the third locates it wherever individuals act together and deliberate over common matters. As such, the two broad approaches I focus on in this dissertation are distinguished from each other by the different attitudes the various theories of politics that can be categorized under them have towards the state. I conclude chapter two by noting that, whatever their differences, and in particular their respective approaches to the state, both institutional and noninstitutional approaches appear to require active engagement, and their common referent is power, however construed, regardless of whether the nature of the political engagement is more combative or conciliatory in nature.

As I will make clear throughout this dissertation, withdrawal itself has been used and interpreted as variously as the notion of politics, and I will show that the different ways in which withdrawal has been discussed or utilized in the political theory literature appears to adhere to one or another of the broad approaches to politics I will examine in this chapter. It is possible, and necessary, to show that withdrawal is as enigmatic a political concept as any other that has been associated with politics yet claimed to undergird its essence or activity. Indeed, part of the dissertation will demonstrate how a deeper understanding of withdrawal as a political concept may reinforce, but also push past some of the deeply ingrained assumptions of politics that will be presented in the first two chapters.

Chapter 3: Institutional Political Withdrawal

The common underlying assumption that politics requires engagement over power, which I bring out in the first two chapters, can make it appear as if withdrawal is not or cannot be political. After all, withdrawal means the opposite of engagement, and thus to withdraw would mean to cease political engagement. In contrast to this view, in chapter three I will begin to argue that withdrawal could be considered political via a discussion of the works of Albert Hirschman, and subsequent thinkers, specifically Mark Warren, Ilya Somin, and Jennet Kirkpatrick. I end this chapter by highlighting how this literature on withdrawal in political theory has associated the notion with an institutional approach to politics, as if any other kind of withdrawal, especially any concerted effort to withdraw from the state itself and its various institutions was a nonpolitical endeavour.

Chapter 4: Noninstitutional Political Withdrawal: Indigenous Resurgence

An institutional perspective, however, is not the only way that withdrawal can be discussed and appreciated as a political act or concept. Withdrawal may be considered political if we keep in mind political theories that have a noninstitutional orientation, a point I will begin to explore more thoroughly in chapter four. I demonstrate this by first drawing attention to the example of electoral boycotts; as examples of withdrawals that are both within and beyond the institutional approach to politics, they throw into question the strict adherence to the institutional approach to withdrawal by the thinkers I look at in the previous chapter. This will help begin to orient our thinking of withdrawal beyond the state. The rest of the chapter engages in a sustained discussion of a more fully fledged example of a noninstitutional approach to withdrawal: Indigenous resurgence. Arguing with Glen Coulthard that this form of Indigenous activism aims to confront a history and ongoing legacy of colonialism via a withdrawal from the various formations of colonial power that permeate Canadian society, I aim to show that withdrawal can be considered political even when not strictly oriented towards instances of institutional and state repression. I do this by drawing on Foucault's work on power.

I end this chapter by asking the question of whether to be a fully fledged political action, withdrawal, in the end, needs to re-engage with the formations of power from which it withdraws. I point to the fact that some of the examples of actions Coulthard associates with Indigenous resurgence would appear to suggest this, namely the various quite vocal, expressive protest actions of the Idle No More movement which aimed to

draw the attention of not only the wider Canadian public, but also the Canadian

government to the ongoing issues which Indigenous peoples continue to grapple with.

Chapter 5: Noninstitutional Political Withdrawal: Workerism and "Refusing Work"

I further flesh out this important critique at the beginning of chapter five by

drawing on Chantal Mouffe and Bonnie Honig, both of whom can be said to essentially

argue that withdrawal cannot be considered political insofar as it does not directly engage

with the system or formation of power being withdrawn from, especially in an

antagonistic manner. I utilize Hannah Arendt's approach to understanding politics,

specifically the notion of acting together over public matters, as well as her theories of

power and consent in conjunction with the specific form of withdrawal advocated by

workerism, in order to defend withdrawal against Mouffe and Honig's critiques.

Like Indigenous Resurgence, workerism's call to "refuse work" is a response to

an overbearing formation of power. In the case of workerism, the target is not

colonialism, however, but capitalist relations of production. Unlike Indigenous

Resurgence, or at least some actions associated with it, the "refusal to work" of

workerism is conceived in far more antagonistic and combative terms. It thus highlights

the friend/enemy dimension of noninstitutional politics looked at in chapter two, and

which both Mouffe and Honig claim is integral to any form of political action, without,

however, aiming at engagement or re-engagement with elements of the state or capitalist

institutions. I treat the workerist example as preamble to a discussion of autonomism, an

outgrowth of Italian workerism, whose approach to withdrawal I take to be a more pointed response to the question posed at the end of chapter four.

Chapter 6: Noninstitutional Political Withdrawal: Autonomism, Occupy and "Founding-Leave Taking"

In the last chapter, I demonstrate how, despite Mouffe's and Honig's critiques, withdrawal need not even be conducted or viewed in an antagonistic manner to be considered political, despite having showed, via a discussion of the "refusal of work" of workerism, that withdrawal may very well display this feature. I do this by examining the Occupy Movement, understood by several prominent autonomist thinkers, such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, as a pre-eminent example of the kind of withdrawal advocated by autonomism.[20] Occupy, as Hardt and Negri argue, signals both the crisis of democratic representation and the latest expression of an emerging "exodus" of the multitude from the reigning economic and political structures of power. Its political nature, I argue, lies in the fact that those involved in Occupy were "acting together," as Arendt would say; deliberating and debating directly with one another in a practice of grassroots direct democracy over the nature of the movement itself, its structure, and wider goals, outside of the established political institutions, and in direct contraposition to them. In response to the critiques of Mouffe and Honig outlined in chapter five, the depiction of Occupy I give in chapter six shows that a withdrawal can be understood as political, and in a positive, generative sense, without necessarily engaging with

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[20] See: Negri, Antonio and Michael Hardt. *Declaration*. Argo Navis Author Services, 2012.

established political institutions. As I will argue, the Occupation zones exemplify the "founding leave-taking" of a "noninstitutional public sphere" advocated by autonomists.

I close this chapter with an exploration of what I take to be a particularly novel element that the example of Occupy, as an instance of withdrawal, demonstrates. That is, in contravention to a mainstay of political thought that harkens back to Aristotle, the kinds of activities traditionally related to the private realm may be considered political insofar as they are a crucial aspect of the kind of withdrawal from power, namely, the state and capital, advocated by autonomists.

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS POLITICS? INSTITUTIONAL POLITICS

Introduction

In this chapter I begin to examine the meaning of politics, which is to inquire into its nature into what makes politics distinct from other spheres or domains of human activity. Essentially, it is to ask what we are doing when we are doing politics, and what are the constituent features of political activity. I begin this dissertation by bringing attention to the meaning of politics because this is, fundamentally, a project that challenges traditional conceptualizations of the nature of politics. Inquiring into this tradition will enable me to show why acts of withdrawal have been misunderstood and generally occluded from the tradition, whilst at the same time provide a broad perspective from which to argue that withdrawal is, in fact, a legitimate political concept and activity.

In this chapter, and the next, I take a broad look at the notion of politics, especially as it has been variously treated and understood throughout the tradition of political thought. In this chapter I focus on what I will refer to as the institutional approach, highlighting the fact that for this approach it is a particular place or specific set of institutions that determine the contours of the political. Most definitions of politics that fall under this approach usually have a territorially defined unit bounded by defined

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[21] Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 188.

borders and a common set of laws and institutions as its locus, typically covered by notions such as "polity," "polis," "public realm," and the "state." Because of its ubiquity today as the most common political unit, having largely superseded previous sociopolitical forms like the *polis* and having dominated the global political landscape for at least the past 500 years, I will primarily have the state in mind whenever I refer to the institutional approach to politics. Those that subscribe to an institutional approach to politics typically have the state, its government bodies, and/or its various institutions in mind as *the* domain or arena in and through which activities might be properly understood as political.[22] This understanding of politics is ubiquitous in political thought and has been the entrenched way to understand politics and its subject matter until more recently. It is fitting, therefore, to begin an inquiry into the nature of politics by examining this most common understanding of it.

Politics and The State

In one of the most influential works of German (and European) legal theory of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *Allgemeine Staatslehre* ("General Theory of the State"), Georg Jellinek states: "In the concept of the political, the concept of state is already implied,"[23] implying that politics is simply the name given for that field of activity which is centered on the state and its government. The state, in other words, is

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[22] Also variously referred to as the "domain," "site" and "arena" approaches. See, for example: Leftwich, Adrian (ed.). "Thinking Politically: On the politics of Politics." *What is Politics?* Polity Press, 2004, 1-22; van der Eijk, Cees. *The Essence of Politics*. Amsterdam University Press, 2018.

[23] Jellinek, Georg. *Allgemeine Staatslehre (*General Theory of the State*).* Springer, 1922, 180.

"the insurmountable horizon of [politics]."[24] This association between politics and the state has existed almost since its inception as a term delineating a particular sphere of human activity over two thousand years, and its ubiquity is reflected in the notable works of political philosophy throughout its long history. As such it is easy to take for granted that the state is the proper and legitimate domain of political activity, and that activities in any other sphere of human life, or which do not directly revolve around the state, its government or its institutions, should be called by some other name.

It should be noted, however, that though the origin of the institutional approach to politics is implied in the very word politics, its etymology also speaks to the fact that the notion of the state as it is generally understood today did not, of course, always exist. The closest cognate was the *polis*, or city-state, which constitutes the root of the word politics. It comes from the ancient Greek words *politika*, famously utilized by Aristotle in his work of the same name,[25] and *politea*, which is also the original Greek title of Plato's most famous work of political thought, *The Republic*,[26] terms which may generally be translated as "affairs of the city" or "things concerning the *polis*." The "state" is a highly contested notion in itself (as most important concepts in political thought are),[27] and as with the concept of "politics," the concept of the state has evolved throughout history. Quentin Skinner, for example, notes that the concept of the state evolved from earlier usages in which the "state" was directly applied to, or used interchangeably with, the

[24] Mezzadra, Sandro. "Beyond the State, Beyond the Desert." *The South Atlantic Quarterly,* vol. 110, no. 4, 2011, pp.989-997, 992.
[25] Aristotle. *The Politics*. Translated and edited by C.D.C Reeve, Hackett Publishing, 2017.
[26] Plato. *The Republic*. Translated and edited by Allan Bloom, Basic Books, 1991.
[27] Cerutti, Furio. *Conceptualizing Politics: An Introduction to Political Philosophy.* Routledge, 2017, 59.

rulers of territories and realms, a view perfectly expressed in Louis XIV's alleged

statement that the figure of a ruler "embodies in himself the whole of the state."[28] The

polity that today most humans live in and recognize, the modern state, is generally argued

to have emerged around the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with many placing its

emergence, first on the European, and later international stage, with the signing of the

treaty of Westphalia in 1648.[29] Serious debates, however, continue to exist as to the

specific nature of the state. The emergence of global institutions like the UN,

supranational entities like the EU, and an increasingly integrated global economy

dominated by transnational corporations with wealth and power that eclipse that of small

and even medium sized states, have begun to dissolve the once solid sovereign

boundaries between nations, putting to question whether it even makes sense to speak of

the sovereign state anymore. My use of the term "institutional" in referencing this

approach to politics is thus an admission of the state's historical specificity and

continually contested understanding. I hope to thus capture with the term what is both

specific to a strictly state-oriented understanding of politics, but also what, more

generally, theorists have in mind when utilizing the term, even if the state is not or has

not quite been part of their conceptual framework.

But because I am here interested in politics and political activity in a broad sense,

it would suffice, I think, to focus on the state whenever referencing "institutional" politics

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[28] Skinner, Quentin. "The State." *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*. Edited by Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit, John Wiley and Sons, 2019, pp. 55-76, 67.
[29] Skinner, "The State," 67

as it is the most widely accepted political unit understood to be the locus of politics today

and has been for at least the past several hundred years, especially since the theorization

of politics began to be more seriously systematized beginning around the time states

themselves began to emerge around the fifteenth century. It should also suffice to give a

generalized picture of the state in this chapter that would serve to illustrate what a basic

institutional understanding of politics is typically understood to involve, and,

incidentally, what features of it have motivated some contemporary thinkers to advance

alternate, noninstitutional conceptions of politics, which will be the focus of the next

chapter. Jürgen Habermas has given what I believe is the most succinct definition of the

state, referring to it as a legally defined entity "that possesses both internal and external

sovereignty, at the spatial level over a clearly delimited terrain (the state territory) and at

the social level over the totality of members (the body of citizens or the people),"[30] within

which a certain system of "institutions are recognized as having the authority to make

decisions applicable to the whole community."[31] Institutional politics thus involves

engaging through state institutions over matters touching on the entirety of the society

and territory covered by the state, or any activity which involves or directly affects the

power dynamics and authority structure of the state and its governing and administrative

institutions. More specifically, this might involve two very distinct things which are both

usually identified with an institutional understanding of politics: governance, and

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[30] Habermas, Jürgen. *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*. Translated by Ciaran Cronin, Polity Press, 2005, 107.

[31] Wolin, Sheldon. *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought.* Princeton University Press, 2004, 8.

attempts to gain and maintain power or to influence those in positions of political power through the appropriate institutions and mechanisms of the state.

As I will make clear in the rest of this chapter, the most common understanding of politics understands it as something related to and engaging with the state or, more specifically, its institutions, especially in the two ways outlined above. In the next chapter I will make it clearer that, together with more idiosyncratic notions of the political which do not see it as something directly related to the state's institutions, there is nevertheless a common underlying assumption in political theory that at its heart, politics is an activity that requires *engagement*. I will clarify this point with respect to the institutional notion of politics in what follows.

Governance and Administration

Since at least the Ancient Greeks, perhaps the most obvious form of activity usually associated with the institutional approach to politics has been rule, governance, or administration.[32] Understood in this sense, the actions of political leaders, professional politicians, and political parties entrusted with the daily task of running the state can be said to be political insofar as they are engaged in the appropriate government and administrative institutions in making decisions related to the organization, well being, and safety of society and the state. Their specific actions may include, among other things, drafting and presenting bills to parliament, debating and interpreting laws, enforcing

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[32] Mulgan, Richard. "Aristotle and the Value of Political Participation." *Political Theory,* vol. 18, no. 2, 1990, pp. 195-215, 196.

them, financing and running public services, distributing public resources, and engaging in diplomacy with foreign states. In all of these ways, it is clear that individuals are engaging with or within state institutions.

To call these activities political, however, is not immediately obvious, at least at the conceptual level. Even Aristotle recognized that one could also speak of the rule or governance of other kinds of associations, such as the household.[33] The very act of ruling, governing, managing, or administering in general is not, therefore, necessarily political. According to Aristotle, what distinguishes the kind of rule or governance found in a properly political entity from the kinds of rule that also exist in other domains or spheres of life, such as the household, and thus giving it the sole designation of specifically *political* rule is found in the very definition of the state I give above. For one, the rule over a polity, such as the state, or, as Aristotle would have in mind, the *polis,* as opposed to the governance or rule of any other association or domain *within* the state is, as Aristotle says, the most "authoritative,"[34] or as it was first argued by Jean Bodin in the early modern period in the now familiar terms of sovereignty: "that absolute and perpetual power vested in a commonwealth." [35] Furthermore, the state, and more specifically, those who govern it, are entrusted with the exclusive authority to deal with public interests, that is, matters that are common to, and affect everyone within, the

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[33] Aristotle, *Politics,* I 3 1253b.
[34] Aristotle, *Politics*, I 1 1252a1-5.
[35] Bodin, Jean. *The Six Books of the Commonwealth* (Les Six livres de la République). Abridged and translated by M.J. Tooley, Basil Blackwell, 1955, 24.

territory of the state and its citizens as a whole, unlike the head of a household who rules over a restricted domain and whose command does not extend to other households.[36]

Aristotle starts off the *Politics* by making a distinction between different levels of community and the kinds of activities and concerns proper to them. At the most basic level of human organization there is a relationship between two partners, a man and a woman, from which arises a household. A collection of households makes up a village, and a collection of these, finally, constitutes a city (*polis*). The city is, for Aristotle, the highest form of human community. But while each of these kinds of communities are established on the basis of the last, and though he is clear from the outset that each kind of community is at its core concerned with "some kind of good,"[37] they are, nevertheless, each concerned with a *different kind* of good. Thus, managing a household or engaging in household activities would be different, in essence, from managing a city or engaging in the affairs of the city. One of the fundamental distinctions Aristotle upholds between the household (*oikos*) and the city (*polis*) is the fact that, whereas the former is ultimately seen as a *private* domain in which individuals are mostly concerned with personal concerns, chief among them satisfying the everyday needs of life, the city is a *public* realm because it encompasses the whole community wherein citizens are concerned with the common good. This particular distinction between the private and the public has informed many later political theorists, most notably Arendt, for whom politics is a distinctively and exclusively public affair which she distinguishes from the private realm

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[36] Aristotle, *Politics,* I 3 1253b.
[37] Aristotle, *Politics,* I 2 1252b.

which is the proper place for the activity of labour.[38] As far as Aristotle is concerned, in

one's own private domain, one is concerned with one's own personal issues. In the public

realm, one is dealing with common affairs, matters that are common to the city and its

citizens as a whole.[39] For Aristotle, as for later theorists like Arendt, there are clear

boundaries between political activity and other kinds of human activity, and it is the

polis, according to Aristotle, which in large part determines these boundaries: whatever

concerns it is political; anything else is a strictly "private," "social," or "economic" affair.

It is no wonder, then, that Aristotle uses the notion of the "public" realm interchangeably

with the "polis" and "political community" (*koinona politike*).[40] This anticipated the

Romans, who employed the term "res publica," that is, "public matter" or "common

thing" in reference to the Roman Republic. The term "republic" was first used by the

Romans in reference to a particular kind of constitution in which the whole body of

citizens is in charge of public affairs, and not to just any kind of state regardless of its

type of government or constitution. This origin is reflected in Cicero's definition of a

republic in his work of the same name, written during the twilight of the Roman Republic

and onset of the Empire: "A republic is a constitution of the entire people. The people,

however, is not every association of men, however congregated, but the association of the

entire number, bound together by the compact of justice, and the communication of

utility."[41] This usage was later extended to describe the Roman Empire, thus generalizing

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[38] See: Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. 2nd ed., The University of Chicago Press, 1998.
[39] Aristotle, *Politics,* VII 2 1324a.
[40] Aristotle, *Politics*, I 1 1252a.
[41] Cicero. *De Re Publica* (On the Commonwealth)*.* Edited by James E.G. Zetzel, Cambridge University Press, 1998, I, 25, 39.

the notion of polities or states as "public things" regardless of the kind of government or

constitution in place. The translation of the title of Plato's most famous work of political

theory, *Politea*, as *The Republic* in English, despite Plato's ideal state in no way

resembling a republic in the way we typically understand the term today, is a reflection of

the Roman use of the word. Quentin Skinner has made the argument that it was the

republican tradition that most contributed to the formation of the modern concept of the

state. He says that

> it is within this tradition of thought that we encounter, for the first time, a
>
> vindication of the idea that there is a distinct form of "civil" or "political"
>
> authority which is wholly autonomous, which exists to regulate the public affairs
>
> of an independent community, and which brooks no rivals as a source of coercive
>
> power within its own civitas or respublica. It is here, in short, that we first
>
> encounter the familiar understanding of the state. [42]

The notion that governments of states, and therefore politics, deal with interests that are

common to everyone in the state has been a mainstay in political thought. Surveying the

major works of political thought since Plato and Aristotle, Sheldon Wolin, for example,

states that "one of the essential qualities of what is political, and one that has powerfully

shaped the view of political theorists about their subject-matter, is its relationship to what

is 'public'" precisely because, as he continues to elaborate, "of all the authoritative

institutions in society, the political arrangement (i.e. the state and its governing

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[42] Skinner, "The State," 62.

institutions) has been singled out as uniquely concerned with what is 'common' to the whole community."[43]

This begs the question, however, as to what counts, if anything, as a specifically public or common concern which the state and its governing institutions and leaders have or should have sole competence over. This has never been settled. Aristotle, for example, sometimes understands the governing institutions of the polis to have a legitimate hand in not only carrying out what we would today identify as being the traditional activities of government (such as the dispensation of justice, ensuring order and security, and (re)distribution of scarce resources), but also in making decisions directly governing all other areas of life insofar as they take place within the walls of the polis, such as, for example, social and economic matters.[44] More than this, for Aristotle, as well as much of Classical and Medieval political thought, political rule was also differentiated from other forms of rule in that it especially aimed at "the good." As Aristotle understood it, governance had a specifically normative imperative to improve the lives of all its citizens and ensure them a "good life,"[45] whatever that entailed. Modern, especially liberal, thinkers often take issue with such an omnicompetent view of government which has its hand in every sphere of private life. To many liberal thinkers, and contemporary libertarians especially, the notion that politics should have a positive role aimed at enhancing the "good life" of its citizens is particularly anathema. In *Anarchy, State, and*

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[43] Wolin, *Politics and Vision,* 4.
[44] Mulgan, *"Aristotle and the Value of Political Participation,"* 196.
[45] Aristotle, *Politics,* I 2 1252b30.

Utopia, Robert Nozick, for example, gives one of the most famous articulations of

libertarianism by arguing for a minimal conception of the state reduced to a limited core

set of roles which delimit a restricted public, political sphere of action as distinct from

other spheres, such as the economic and social. Foremost among these is that the state

simply exists to guarantee citizens' fundamental *negative* rights and to ensure safety and

order.[46] In his essay "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared With That of the Moderns,"

Benjamin Constant, an early classical liberal thinker, encapsulates a general attitude not

uncommon today in many modern liberal democratic states, which is that state matters or

government is a burden most individuals would rather be relieved of in order to focus

their energies on commerce and the pleasures of life.[47] I will return to the question over

the distinction typically made or debated in political thought, between a specifically

"political" sphere of action and concerns and ostensibly "nonpolitical" ones later in this

dissertation, where I will argue that movements of withdrawal, insofar as they are

understood politically, can also upend any hard distinctions between "political" and

"nonpolitical" activities.

     In any case, and like it or not, the state has, if to varying degrees, an increased

presence today in many spheres not strictly political in and of themselves. In fact, it is

sometimes hard to distinguish between what is an economic, social or private matter, and

what is a public issue requiring state intervention, because the state regularly intervenes

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[46] See: Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. Basic Books, 1974.
[47] Constant, Benjamin. "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns." Translated and edited by Jonathan Bennett, 2017. *Early Modern Texts,* www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/constant1819.pdf.

in issues often directly pertaining to interpersonal and private life (concerning, for example, religion, the environment, health, education, and the economy). It might be safest to say, as Max Weber does, that there is no one specific concern that the state or government as such aims at (or *should* aim at),[48] and rather, that any concern or interest arising in any sphere within the state on which governing institutions and representatives intervene and decide is a potentially public, and therefore political, issue. This is because whatever decisions the government does end up making about such issues affect everyone across the territory of the state and demands observance by all members of the state by virtue of the authority vested in it to make such decisions. To quote Sheldon Wolin, we might say that the state, in other words, is endowed with a certain system of institutions which are "recognized as having the *authority to make decisions applicable to the whole community."*[49] Politics understood as governance thus involves engagement with and within state institutions about issues and matters that the state immediately concerns itself with. This claim contains the elements necessary to understand another (and in a way, more contemporary) feature or dimension of institutional politics, that I will examine in more detail in the next section.

Power and Influence

In addition to the activities of governments and government officials, which is sometimes simply referred to as administration and policymaking rather than politics,[50]

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[48] Weber, Max. "The Profession and Vocation of Politics." *Political Writings*, edited by Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 309-369, 310.
[49] Wolin, *Politics and Vision,* 8 (my emphasis).
[50] See: Swyngedouw, "Where is the political?" 125

the latter involves struggles for power and influence in the public realm. In other words, politics involves competition over power. This is the aspect of institutional politics that D. D. Raphael has in mind when he summarizes it as an activity concerning not only government, but also, "the behaviour of groups and individuals in matters that are likely to affect the course of government, e.g. in voting, in forming and running political parties, or in exerting influence in other ways on those responsible for the conduct of government."[51] Wherever power and authority concentrate, especially within the institutions of the state, whose competencies, as I outlined above, potentially involve many different and significant aspects of peoples' lives, there will be those who wish to either challenge it and/or grab it. And power struggles have regularly occurred within states throughout history, including pre-state polities like the Ancient Greek *poleis*, with democracies like Athens particularly prone to them. This fact was not lost on Aristotle. He talks at length in *Politics* about "faction" and strife in the polis, or the attempts to either change the existing constitution or some part of it, or to take it over completely.[52] But he addresses this phenomenon in terms that are distinct from the everyday political activity of the rulers or governing structures of the polis. Accordingly, and insofar as he admits of their reality and ever-present possibility within the polis, factions, as described by Aristotle, should be understood in terms of "extra-political" activities rather than

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[51] Raphael, D.D. *Problems of Political Philosophy*. Macmillan, 1990, 30.
[52] See: Aristotle, *Politics,* V.

legitimate forms of political activity. He suggests they are, instead, signs that something is awry within the state that needs to be rectified or rooted out.[53]

This more modern aspect of institutional politics was inaugurated by Nicolo Machiavelli during the Renaissance,[54] and was given a more systematic treatment starting in the early twentieth century, especially by Max Weber. They are thus two important figures with respect to the development of the institutional understanding of politics, especially in its conflictual and power-oriented dimensions, and hence why I will focus on them here. Machiavelli was an important figure in the early development of an understanding of politics that was both centered on the state and its aggrandizement, and which focused on the dimensions of conflict and power. Prior to Machiavelli, and since at least Aristotle, politics was largely understood in terms of good governance, or governance in service of the common good.[55] As a diplomat and politician within the Florentine Republic during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Machiavelli was no stranger to political intrigue both in international relations, and within states. Having witnessed constant war and invasion on the Italian peninsula, it is no wonder that Machiavelli's thought is dominated by the idea that there is no stability or contentment in the field of international relations. As Machiavelli understands it, states are dominated by a relentless appetite for power and those which do not try to extend their power are bound in the long run to lose it. States can achieve predominance only at the expense of others,

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[53] Aristotle, *Politics*, V 3 1302b.
[54] Machiavelli, Niccoló. *The Prince*. Translated by Harvey C. Mansfield, 2nd edition, Chicago UP, 1998, XIV.
[55] Aristotle, *Politics,* III.

and those others are bound to be dissatisfied with their inferior status. National security, in other words, can only be achieved by national superiority, and the superiority of one nation implies the inferiority, and thus the insecurity, of another.[56]

Accordingly, Machiavelli appears to suggest that being politically active necessarily involves anything that is directly oriented towards the acquisition, maintenance, and enhancement of state power in a world of competing interests and constantly shifting relations of power. Probably no single passage in *The Prince,* Machiavelli's more (in)famous work on politics, is more evocative of this point than the following: "A prince should have no other object, nor any other thought, nor take anything else as his art but that of war and its orders and discipline; for that is the only art which is of concern to one who commands."[57] While Machiavelli here considers war and the art of war literally as one of the primary practical matters of concern for the politician in international affairs, what this passage expresses more generally, and this notion is played out throughout *The Prince*, is that politics should be treated as a constant struggle to achieve and maintain power both within the state, and especially between states, for, as he maintains, "a prince who has no army but has the art of war will prevail over one with an army but without the art."[58]

Machiavelli's focus on power and conflict in the political realm was not restricted to foreign relations. He was distinctly aware that states, especially republics, are

[56] Murray, A. R. M. *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, Routledge, 2010, 56.
[57] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 58.
[58] Machiavelli, *The Prince,* 58.

composed of a number of clashing and sometimes incommensurate interests that

continually threaten their internal stability and very existence. The importance of conflict

to Machiavelli's understanding of politics is, as such, exemplified in intra-state politics

no less than in foreign relations. And this is perhaps what marks Machiavelli as being a

particularly modern political thinker. For whereas conflict, since Aristotle, was seen to be

anathema to a well-ordered state, Machiavelli appears to valorize it. This comes across

more so in his *Discourses on Livy* than in *The Prince*. Here, unlike in *The Prince*,

Machiavelli seems to be advocating for a more republican and less authoritarian form of

government. In order to reinforce this point, and in seeming contradistinction to the spirit

of *The Prince*, he says in the *Discourses*:

> concerning prudence and stability, let me say that the people are more prudent,
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> more reliable, and have better judgement than a prince does. And it is not without
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> reason that the voice of the people is likened to that of God: for it is evident that
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> popular opinion has marvelous power in predicting, so much so that it would
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> appear to foresee its own good and evil fortune through some occult ability.[59]

Thus, contrary to the impression one gets solely from reading *The Prince*,

Machiavelli does not exclusively advocate absolute monarchy. On the contrary, he

appears to believe that only in those states in which government is ultimately based upon

a democratic foundation is it safe to assume that the power of government will not be

abused. However, given Machiavelli's view of human nature that humans are

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[59] Machiavelli, Niccoló. "Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius." *The Portable Machiavelli,* edited and translated by Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa, Penguin Books, 1979, pp. 167-418, 284.

"ungrateful, fickle, simulators and deceivers, avoiders of danger, greedy for gain,"[60] it might be odd that he advocates for republican government in the *Discourses*. Having in mind the same view of human nature and similar experiences of war and conflict as Machiavelli, Hobbes would forcefully argue a hundred years later that a centralized body politic and a strong sovereign power which is owed "absolute and universal obedience" by each and every subject[61] is necessary precisely in order to *avoid* internal discord and civil war, keep individual passions and self interests in check and thus ensure peace. Though internal discord that threatens the very stability of the state is a very real concern for Machiavelli, especially in republics,[62] he nevertheless believes that it underpins both the rationale and long-term stability of just such a form of government. Machiavelli claims that "in every republic there are two different inclinations: that of the people and that of the upper class, and that all the laws which are made in favor of liberty are born of the conflict between the two."[63] Referencing the institution of the tribunes of the plebs, that is, the public body which represented the interests of the commoners in the Roman Republic, against that of the Senate, which largely represented the political interests of the upper classes, Machiavelli demonstrates how the institutionalization of conflict between conflicting interests in society constitutes a healthy outlet for passions that may otherwise turn into resentment, and, ultimately, debilitating factionalism and revolution.[64] This exemplifies, moreover, how important conflict over offices and influence in the state

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[60] Machiavelli, *The Prince,* 66.
[61] Hobbes, Thomas. *De Cive*. Edited by Howard Warrender, Oxford University Press, 1983, 89-90.
[62] See: Machiavelli, *The Discourses,* I, vi.
[63] Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, 183.
[64] Machiavelli, *The Discourses,* 183.

is to Machiavelli's understanding of politics. His views would not, however, fully take root in political thought until the early twentieth century, especially with the thought of Max Weber.

A legal historian, Weber's outsized influence on political thought comes from his understanding of the state, on which he bases his approach to politics. According to Weber, the state is an instrument of domination. As he says in his most famous essay on the matter, "Politics as a Vocation": "The State is a relationship of rule by human beings over human beings... For the State to remain in existence, those who are ruled must submit to the authority claimed by whoever rules at any given time."[65] State authority is backed up by coercion in order for it to maintain its position as preeminent locus of power in society. Thus, for Weber, the state "is that human community which (successfully) lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a certain territory."[66] This notion of the state as the primary and preeminent locus of power over a society is not new. Hobbes, writing 400 years earlier in *De Cive,* argued that "absolute and universal obedience" is owed by each and every subject "to the city, that is to say, to the sovereign power,"[67] or, as he also describes it in the work of the same name, "that great *Leviathan* called a common-wealth, or *state*."[68] Machiavelli, of course, believed the state is superior to all associations in society. The state is sovereign and autonomous, and enjoys absolute power over all individuals and institutions within it.

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[65] Weber, "Vocation of Politics," 311.
[66] Weber, "Vocation of Politics," 310-311.
[67] Hobbes, *De Cive,* 89-90.
[68] Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Edited by Christopher Brooke, Penguin Classics, 2017, 81.

What is novel in Weber's understanding of the modern state lies in his awareness

of the development of constitutional government. In an expanded version of his definition

of the state in *Economy and Society*, Weber elaborates on certain important caveats which

set limits to the power of the state. Although the state is considered to be the only

legitimate wielder of violence, and though the right to use physical force by other

institutions and individuals is solely granted by state, its own right to use violence is not

absolute, according to Weber. Its use is based on, and delimited by, a system of rules,

thereby legitimizing it. As Weber states in *Economy and Society*: "The fully matured

political community [i.e. the modern state] has developed a system of casuistic rules to

which that particular 'legitimacy' is imputed. This system of rules constitutes the 'legal

order,' and the political community is regarded as its sole creator."[69] It is this system of

rules that ultimately constitutes "the right of those elevated to authority under such rules

to issue commands (legal authority)."[70]

Moreover, the power of the modern state is embodied less in individuals,

hereditary rulers, their courtiers and advisors, and more on a large and impersonal

bureaucracy. According to Weber, modern large-scale organizations, like states, require

specialization, and thus develop a hierarchically organized and systemized set of

positions and responsibilities. This bureaucratic leadership conforms to what Weber

called "legal-rational authority,"[71] which is impersonal and based on a formalized set of

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[69] Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, University of California Press, 1978, 904.
[70] Weber, *Economy and Society,* 215.
[71] See: Weber, *Economy and Society,* I iii.

rules, such as a constitution. Yet, even though the state has become more organized, centralized and run by an impersonal mass of nonpartisan specialists, democratic pressures nevertheless force political leaders to compete with one another in order to win and/or retain power over their political office.

Like Machiavelli before him, Weber recognizes that even though the state is to be understood as the preeminent authority over society, authority relations are rarely static and are ever shifting between states and within the state itself, and this has partly to do with the fact that the state encompasses a multitude of competing and sometimes incommensurate interests and concerns vying for the government's attention and its offices. This comes across in his political writings[72] more poignantly than in his strictly sociological work, in which he briefly lays out his otherwise influential definition of the state and politics. In these writings one gets a sense of modern democratic states as highly competitive political environments, with individual politicians and parties incessantly vying for power. For example, arguing for the extension of suffrage in then Imperial Germany, Weber describes competition among political parties as a struggle among competing interests "for power in... every possible kind of social formation" in the state,[73] noting that this is a desirable feature of a robust modern state, as opposed to unelected and compulsory state bodies and organizations which are better "suited to the expression of expert opinion on matters of fact or to purely 'routine' peaceful administration."[74]

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[72] Weber, Max. *Political Writings*. Edited by Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
[73] Weber, *Political Writings,* 94.
[74] Weber, *Political Writings,* 98.

Administrative bodies of the state are "utterly incapable of encapsulating political life,"[75] when compared to political parties, according to Weber, because the latter are formed by freely associated individuals fighting and compromising over state power and influence, whereas the former constitute an ethos desirous of a stable and peaceable status quo.

What can be gleaned from these writings is that, for Weber, political activity involves striving to get power, share power or influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups and individuals within a state,[76] or any activity or action which is "likely to uphold, to change or overthrow, to hinder or promote, the authority relations" within the state,[77] and ultimately the ability to enforce rules, laws, and policies influencing and directly affecting society at large. Accordingly, something is "political," for Weber, insofar as it has something to do with the authority relations within the state; [78] more specifically, an action is "politically oriented insofar as it aims at exerting influence on the government of a political organization [i.e. the state]."[79] Ultimately, as far as Weber is concerned, the activities of political leaders, and the political organizations and parties which they lead, or are supported by, are political by virtue of the fact that their actions are oriented towards gaining control of political offices and ultimately the government in order to wield state power. This understanding of politics, says Weber,

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[75] Weber, *Political Writings,* 98.
[76] Weber, "Vocation of Politics," 311.
[77] Weber, *Economy and Society,* 55.
[78] Weber, *Economy and Society,* 55.
[79] Weber, *Economy and Society,* 54

corresponds essentially to ordinary usage. When a question is said to be a 'political' question, when a cabinet minister or an official is said to be a "political" official, or when a decision is said to be "politically" determined, what is always meant is that interests in the distribution, maintenance, or transfer of power are decisive for answering the questions and determining the decision or the official's sphere of activity.[80]

The dynamics of the state and its bureaucracy, and the kinds of policies which determine its course are then ultimately the result of the machinations and struggles of professional politicians and mass organizations, such as political parties. In this formulation, Weber gives what is by far one of the most influential understandings of politics, especially of the twentieth century. That is, that politics fundamentally involves engagement with and within state institutions, and that this engagement is oriented towards gaining power and influence over state institutions and, ultimately, the state itself.

Conclusion

To summarize this chapter, we could say that, according to the institutional view, what makes an activity, issue, or concern political is an orientation towards, and direct engagement with, the state or state institutions with respect to public matters. And this is the case whether one views politics in terms of government and administration, or as power struggles for influence and authority in the state, or both. What matters is that both of these aspects of the institutional view can be considered to be aspects of a politics that

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[80] Weber, "Vocation of Politics," 311.

is solely oriented to, or centered on, the state. In the next chapter I will introduce what I

refer to as the noninstitutional approach to politics, which differs from the institutional

approach in understanding politics as something that does not have the state or its

institutions as its sole or primary reference. The various theories that have advanced just

such an account do so as a direct response to the institutional approach. While these two

approaches are quite different, namely in terms of their relationship to the state, I will

highlight what I nevertheless take to be some distinct commonalities between them which

appear to be taken for granted by both institutional and noninstitutional centered

approaches: namely, that politics is about and involves engagement with power, however

understood. This ubiquitous, almost unanimously agreed-upon featured assumed in most

understandings of politics is precisely what is being questioned in this dissertation. It is

the reason why acts of withdrawal, more often than not, have not and would not be

considered political in themselves, a point I will clarify in chapter three, before arguing to

the contrary.

…politics. What term is more familiar? Yet at every turn in history, we have to redefine it radically. [81]

-Giacomo Marramao

CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS POLITICS? NONINSTITUTIONAL POLITICS

Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the second broad approach to politics: the "noninstitutional" approach. I do so to further highlight what I understand is the predominant underlying assumption in political theory, regardless of how politics itself is understood and treated: that political activity requires engagement with that which the activity is primarily concerned with—be it the state, or, as I will show in this chapter, other noninstitutional formations of power or concerns. In addition to this, this chapter will also highlight how the state and its institutions need not be understood as the central concern or domain of politics as far as politics is concerned, a notion that I will further throughout this dissertation and especially in my discussion of various acts of political withdrawal.

While the institutional approach to politics continues to subsist in both theory and the common imaginary, the consensus that the state, and its institutions, are the sole horizon of politics has to some extent relaxed over the course of the past century, at least in the political theory literature. The state no longer constitutes the sole and unchallenged understanding of politics. As Wolin puts it, it is no longer the only "vision" of politics. The "noninstitutional" approach to politics, on the other hand, treats it as something that

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[81] Marramao, Giacomo. *Against Power: For an Overhaul of Critical Theory*. Translated by Patrick Camiller, John Cabot University Press, 2016, 11.

is not restricted to any particular place; politics may happen or be conducted anywhere, outside the institutions and processes related to the state, and even in opposition to it. What makes any engagement or situation political is the type of conduct or element in question.[82] The last several decades have seen an uptick in diverse and idiosyncratic accounts of politics which may be subsumed under the noninstitutional approach. To wade through and comment on all of them would require more space than this dissertation, with its narrower focus on the politics of withdrawal, allows. I will present and comment on only three influential dimensions of politics which are at the centre of the noninstitutional approach, namely: *conflict, power,* and *acting together.*

      I have chosen to focus on these three dimensions of politics because they happen to correspond to the prominent features of the institutional understanding of politics as I have laid it out in the previous chapter. Thus, they enable some sense of continuity with the preceding discussion and show the natural progression and development of political thought on the foundations laid by previous thinkers and events. For example, in the previous chapter I show that conflict and power are both prominent features in institutional politics, and aspects of governing can be viewed in terms of acting together, insofar as ruling political leaders or competing parties debate and discuss policies that affect the public realm. Nevertheless, noninstitutional politics divorces these dimensions of the political from any direct relation to the state and its institutions. According to noninstitutional approaches, politics is not what it is because it is conducted in direct

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relation to the state and its institutions. What matters is what underlies the activity itself, and this does not have to take place in direct relation with the state and its institutions. Thus, for example, the struggles of trade unions with employers may be considered political. So might the deliberations among community members about how do address a local public issue, though it may not involve petitioning an elected political official, local or otherwise.

I take my cue from Hans Sluga in focusing primarily on Carl Schmitt, Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt as the preeminent political thinkers of the twentieth century who each in their own way advanced noninstitutional conceptions of politics, respectively focusing on conflict, power and acting together. Sluga notes how these three thinkers' discussions of the nature of politics are among the most clear-eyed, and a reflection on them most helpful during a time in which, as he argues, we are "increasingly confused about the nature and meaning of politics" and that "we are not so sure anymore that the essence of politics can be captured in terms of government and state."[83] Each of these thinkers, and those who took their cue from them, crafted their understanding of politics in light of the sociopolitical events around them. Their respective approaches to politics are largely, as Sluga notes, a direct response to what they saw as the inadequacies of the institutional approach to politics.

I end this chapter by highlighting that, despite their differences, there is a more fundamental thread that runs through both institutional and noninstitutional conceptions

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[83] Sluga, Hans. *Politics and the Search for the Common Good*. Cambridge University Press, 2014, 1, 6.

of politics: despite how politics is understood—and there are many distinct ways that have cropped up throughout the history of political thought, as this and the previous chapter demonstrate—they all in some way relate to power and require direct engagement of some kind. This will enable me, on the one hand, to explain some criticisms of withdrawal in subsequent chapters, which focus on the *engaged* aspect of politics, and on the other, to explore various notions of withdrawal and how they might be considered political despite not emulating the features of an institutional understanding of politics. These chapters therefore provide not only the elements necessary to understand why withdrawals have not or may not be considered political in themselves, but, crucially, how we might in fact understand them to be thoroughly political activities.

Friend/Enemy Relations and Conflict

The conceptual decoupling of politics and state in political thought began early in the twentieth century with the publication of Carl Schmitt's book *The Concept of the Political* in 1932.[84] Schmitt begins this work with the phrase "the concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political,"[85] which is a direct (and intentional) inversion of Jellinek's view, cited in the previous chapter, that "in the concept of the political, the concept of state is already implied." Whether intentionally or not,[86] Schmitt here puts into question the notion that politics can simply be defined as whatever is brought in relation

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[84] Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*. Translated by George Schwab, The University of Chicago Press, 2007.
[85] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, 19.
[86] Some commentators believe Schmitt's attempt at defining the concept of the political on its own terms was not in order to dismiss the state as the central bearer of politics, but in fact to show what is so unique and important about the state itself. See George Schwab's introduction to *The Concept of the Political*.

to the state. In stating that the concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political, he is inaugurating a radically different way of thinking about politics. For Schmitt, politics is not simply "something pertaining to the state."[87] It subsists on its own; it is its own category independent of any concrete entity or set of institutions or their various historical permutations. For Schmitt, the state is a distinctly political entity by virtue of the fact that it embodies the political.

The typical understanding of the political as relating to the state and its institutions is cogent, according to Schmitt, only insofar as the state itself is assumed to be something "self-evident and concrete"[88] and that clearly stands above society as a stable, distinct and preeminent power. But he claims that, even if this was ever the case, it does not appear to be so anymore. Schmitt argues that the political can no longer be characterized simply by juxtaposing it with the state for a variety of reasons. For one, the popularity of liberal thought, which, according to him, focuses on the individual and, insofar as it admits of the necessity of the state, confines it to merely "securing the conditions for liberty and eliminating infringements on freedom,"[89] has led to a greatly diminished and reduced role of the state in both theory and practice. Though not as pronounced in its effects at the time of *The Concept*'s initial publication, Schmitt nevertheless also recognized that an increasingly globalized and interconnected world blurs sovereign borders and competencies, further eroding the status of states as self-

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[87] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 20.
[88] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 22.
[89] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 71.

contained and sovereign entities.[90] And finally, as he remarks in the opening pages of *The Concept*, in a state in which "everything is at least *potentially* political,"[91] when society and state penetrate each other and the concerns and conflicts original to each impinge on each other (an increasingly regular reality especially in modern nations where "heretofore ostensibly neutral domains—religion, culture, education, the economy" have become central matters of state concern), Schmitt argues that "it is no longer possible to assert for it [the state] a specifically political characteristic."[92] As a result politics can no longer be defined in relation to the state. The political, according to Schmitt, "must therefore rest on its own ultimate distinctions, to which all action with a specifically political meaning can be traced."[93]

According to Schmitt the political is better understood in relational terms, and is conditioned by the ever present possibility, if not actualization, of conflict between clearly defined groupings of friends on the one hand and enemies on the other.[94] He thereby hones in on one aspect of institutional politics, without at the same time necessarily insisting that this organization into opposing camps, and any potential conflict between them, needs to take place within or vis-à-vis state institutions to be considered political. In order to stress the distinction of the political from other categories, however, and to ensure that it is not mistaken that politics, based on this definition, is simply

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[90] See: Schmitt, Carl. *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of Jus Publicum Europaeum.* Translated by G. L. Ulmen, Telos Press, 2006.
[91] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 26 (my emphasis).
[92] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 22.
[93] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 26.
[94] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 26, 27.

understood to exist everywhere and at all times, Schmitt is emphatic that the specifically *political* enemy "is not merely any competitor or just any partner of a conflict in general. He is also not the private adversary whom one hates. An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity."[95] On the other hand he does not believe that the political resides in the conflict itself, "but in the mode of behaviour which is determined by this possibility, by clearly evaluating the concrete situation and thereby being able to distinguish correctly the real friend and the real enemy."[96]

While clearly defining the political, Schmitt says very little about the concrete manifestations of political activity.[97] This is because his concern is solely to characterize the concept of the political as such, or the "essence" of what makes anything, including any concrete activity or place, political in the first place. Open conflict, including war, may be accepted by him to be the penultimate expression of political activity, but does not in itself constitute the political. Political action may also, presumably, involve any number of things, as far as Schmitt is concerned, so long as it takes place in the context of a friend/enemy relation and is in some way oriented towards the ever-present possibility of outright conflict between them. In any case, the scant attention given to the actualities of political activity in fact serves to reinforce Schmitt's conceptual de-coupling of politics and the state. The subtle distinction found in *The Concept of the Political*, made explicit

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[95] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 28.
[96] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 37.
[97] Kari Palonen has criticized Schmitt for disregarding the "daily activities of politicians" in his search for an "'ontology' behind politics." Palonen, Kari. "Politics or the political? An historical perspective on a contemporary non-debate." *European Consortium for Political Research, vol.* 6, 2007, pp. 69-78, 75.

by later thinkers,[98] between *politics* (in German, *der Politik*), which refers to concrete

activities and set of practices, and "*the political*" (*das Politische*) as the substance of that

activity, regardless of its concrete forms of expression or location, leaves open the way to

identify politics in many situations, domains and activities.

Schmitt says at the end of *The Concept of the Political*, for example, that

"economic antagonisms can become political, and the fact that an economic power

position could arise proves that the point of the political may be reached from the

economic as well as from any other domain."[99] This is a point he further elaborates when

he suggests that class conflict may become more than just an economic conflict and turn

into a *political* relation when Marxists treat their class adversary as a "real enemy," "and

fights him either in the form of a war of state against state or in a civil war within a

state."[100] Schmitt's comments in *The Theory of the Partisan* on the rise of anti-colonial

guerilla and revolutionary partisan struggles, in the aftermath of World War Two in

particular, appear to all but confirm this more expansive view of politics. Here he says of

partisans that they are intensely political in nature, setting them apart from mere brigands

and criminals who are motivated by petty, private concerns:

> the partisan, by contrast, fights on a political front, and it is precisely the political
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> character of his action that brings to the fore again the original sense of the word
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> *partisan.* The word is derived from *Partei* [party] and refers to the relation to

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[98] For a good overview of some of these thinkers, see: Marchart, Oliver. *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau.* Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
[99] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 78.
[100] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 37.

some kind of fighting, warring, or politically active party or group. Such

connections to a party are particularly strong in revolutionary times,[101]

during which the distinction between friends and enemies, decisive for politics, is

particularly pronounced.[102] In revolutionary times, Schmitt goes on to say, it is a

revolutionary movement more so than the state, established political institutions or

institutional political organizations, single-mindedly guided by the ideological principles

which motivate those involved in it to lay down their lives if necessary for their cause,

which most effectively brings people together in common cause against their enemies,

thereby making them distinctly political.[103] Thus communists fighting in factories, the

streets, or from the mountains with the aim of the destruction of the capitalist system are

no less engaged in politics than those individuals seeking to enter parliament on a left-

wing agenda.

In fact, it is especially in light of the rise of guerilla warfare and partisan struggles

that Schmitt notes, if lamentably, that we are in fact in the twilight of the age of

statehood: "the state as model of political unity, the state as bearer of the most

astonishing of all monopolies, the monopoly over political decisions, this trophy of

European form and western rationalism is dethroned."[104] Agreeing with Hobbes'

"pessimistic" view of human nature,[105] Schmitt believes that it is an inevitable fact of

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[101] Schmitt, Carl. *The Theory of the Partisan*: *A Commentary/Remark on the Concept of the Political*. Translated by A. C. Goodson, Michigan State University Press, 2004, 10.
[102] Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan,* 35.
[103] Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan,* 10.
[104] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 2.
[105] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 65.

human social life that we will find ourselves confronting others who are "existentially something different and alien" and who therefore negate our way of life and "must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve our own form of existence."[106] This facet of the human condition therefore calls for strong, stable, clearly defined sovereign states in order to stave off the chaos that would inevitably arise between individuals and groups of individuals living in proximity with each other in a theoretical "state of nature," or in the absence of any such central authorities.[107] Nevertheless, and despite his championing of the state, this does not commit Schmitt to arguing that politics can *only* occur between states, and only at the level of the state. As I have noted, despite his apparent belief that states are *the* preeminent political entities, Schmitt's conceptualization of the political allows us to see how a specifically *political* conflict can theoretically arise in any domain, and between any group or association *within* or besides the state even if he would prefer that this real possibility be kept under control and sanitized by the state. It should be noted that despite his conceptual decoupling of politics and the state, and despite his ambiguity over what constitutes a properly political activity, his focus on examples of actual conflict between ideologically opposed groups appear to belie an assumption that political activity is very much an *engaged* one. And if it does not necessarily, or exclusively, involve directly engaging with the state, or within state institutions, as in parliamentary struggles between different, legally constituted political parties, it

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[106] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 27.
[107] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 65.

nevertheless seemingly requires the direct engagement between opposed groups, in one form or another, if not in outright violent conflict.

The understanding of politics in terms of conflict and the "friend/enemy" distinction has been taken up by thinkers who are as equally concerned as Schmitt with the increasing confusion about, and loss of, the political dimension of life, without taking it to the potentially worrying extremes to which Schmitt's formulation can lead. He was no friend of parliamentary democracy, having written an extensive critique of it in light of his experiences with the chaos of the Weimar Republic.[108] As I have already mentioned, Schmitt would prefer that states are the sole executors of politics, and that political conflict within states is reduced to a minimum. This, however, would mean restricting the agonal tussle typical of democratic politics. On the other hand, the formulation of politics in terms of conflict between friends and enemies has the risk of being interpreted as what Slavoj Žižek has called "ultra-politics," or the direct militarization of political conflict between existential enemies. An example would be the brutal ethnic civil and inter-state wars waged throughout the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.[109]

Among the most steadfast Schmittians in contemporary political thought, Chantal Mouffe proposes to "think with Schmitt against Schmitt"[110] in order to revitalize what she argues are increasingly depoliticized and placid democratic practices in contemporary

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[108] See: Schmitt, Carl. *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy.* Translated by Ellen Kennedy, MIT Press, 1988.
[109] Žižek, Slavoj. *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. Verso, 2009, 225.
[110] Mouffe, Chantal. *The Return of the Political*. Verso, 2005, 2.

liberal democratic states. She argues that there is an increasing lack of real distinctions between political competitors in contemporary democracies, and that liberal democratic institutions focus too much on reaching rational consensus.[111] As an example of this, Mouffe references the gradual adoption of neoliberal policies by social democratic parties from the 1980s onwards, emulating the same orientation towards the market economy as centre-right parties. This has effectively contributed to the erasure of any significant differences between them, so she argues, and thus a lack of choice among voters for an alternative to the status quo. Contemporary democratic practices, in other words, have lost touch with, or otherwise have attempted to sanitize politics understood in the true sense of the word. This has led to a "post-political situation" that has contributed to a "process of disaffection with democratic institutions, manifested in an increasing level of abstention."[112]

Real, robust democracy, she believes, requires a fiercely agonal public sphere. It requires, in other words, a "return of the political" in the Schmittian sense. Following Schmitt, Mouffe argues this is to be done by the formation of collective political identities on the basis of determining a "we" in opposition to a "they,"[113] each necessarily locked in adversarial struggle over the question of how to organize their shared social realm. In other words, the fundamentally partisan nature of politics must be reaffirmed. The difference with Schmitt, she asserts, is that such political relations are not carried out

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[111] See: Mouffe, Chantal. *The Democratic Paradox.* Verso, 2009, 4.
[112] Mouffe, Chantal. *For a Left Populism.* Verso, 2018, 10.
[113] Mouffe, Chantal. *On the Political*. Routledge, 2005, 20.

between "existential enemies," but "between 'adversaries' being defined in a paradoxical way as 'friendly enemies,' that is, persons who are friends because they share a common symbolic space but also enemies because they want to organize this common symbolic space in a different way." [114]

Beyond her concern with democratic reform, and in line with her own leftist political commitments, Mouffe also believes that significant, progressive change in areas as diverse as gender relations, the environment, and economy, cannot come about through calm, deliberative and seemingly rational dialogue and cooperation, at least not where large-scale and important change is concerned. She believes that only by taking a stand, marking one's enemy and engaging in an agonistic struggle with them are we able to effectively challenge problematic aspects of our societies. Importantly, political formations on the friend/enemy line do not have to be restricted to institutional politics, that is, to the democratic tussle between political parties and elected officials. For Mouffe, politics is not restricted to the state, but also encapsulates extra-institutional venues and movements. In fact, a robust democratic and progressive public sphere demands this broader understanding of the political field. This position comes across especially in her latest book, *For a Left Populism*, in which she makes a forceful case for both leftist political parties, but especially extra-institutional movements, to embrace combative populism. This populism is to be constructed around a discourse clearly marking off "the people," representing a heterogenous collection of traditional left-of-

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[114] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox,* 13.

centre and progressive demands, such as "the defence of the environment, struggles against sexism, racism and other forms of domination," from a clearly defined other representing entrenched interests and inequity.[115] By constructing "the people" in direct opposition to the "establishment," as she refers to the forces of inequity, those representing leftist ideals can have a more clearly defined axis around which to build a coalition capable of effectively combating "the policies promoted by right-wing populism" and other established political formations traditionally opposed to progressive principles.[116] As with Schmitt, for Mouffe it would appear that the antagonistic relationship that belies the political context within which individuals and groups are engaging requires actual direct engagement with each other. This point will be made even clearer when I examine a pointed critique of withdrawal advanced by Mouffe in chapter five. However, and as I will argue there, the noninstitutional approaches to politics examined here, including those centered on conflict and antagonism, already open a space to consider forms of withdrawal that either attempt to detach from institutional politics or are conducted with respect to formations of power other than the state, which are nevertheless deeply political. This, too, will be made clearer in later chapters.

Power

As influential and important as it is in the context of noninstitutional political conceptions, the formulation of the political in terms of friend/enemy relations and

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[115] Mouffe, *For a Left Populism,* 11.
[116] Mouffe, *For a Left Populism,* 11.

conflict glides a little too quickly over a fundamental aspect of politics: power. To be

sure, discussions of political conflict often also involve recognition of power. For

example, though he does not overtly focus on power, and though he is clear that a

political situation does not require that actual fighting take place, Schmitt makes it

evident that a truly political entity requires the ability to engage in conflict. This ability,

however, is not simply given over to just any collectivity that has clearly defined

enemies. It requires the wherewithal to marshal the requisite resources and public opinion

for the conflict, and, in the last instance, the ability to coax or coerce individuals into

battle, even at the risk of their own lives. It is no wonder, then, that Schmitt believes the

state to be the "decisive political entity;" it is thus precisely because, as he says, it

"possesses an enormous power: the possibility of waging war and thereby publicly

disposing of the lives of men."[117] In arguing this, Schmitt must have been aware that

while it may dissipate, grow, concentrate or change hands, power does not suddenly arise

and accumulate in groups only after battle lines have been drawn between them. A

political entity must already have a certain degree of power prior to engaging in political

activity, and a relationship of power must also already exist between competing political

entities.

Mouffe, for her part, recognizes and acknowledges this fact. She claims that the

friend/enemy distinction, or the classification of groups into friends and enemies, comes

about precisely because, simply put, "power is constitutive of the social."[118] For Mouffe

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[117] Schmitt, *Concept of the Political,* 46.
[118] Mouffe, *On the Political,* 18.

the fact that (often, unequal) relations of power inhere in and shape social arrangements, naturally gives rise to the fact that "the political is 'constitutive of human societies,'"[119] or, in other words, that groups of people will tend to divide and distinguish themselves in terms of friends and enemies or "us vs. them." On Mouffe's account, it is often on the basis of a real, or perceived, unequal relationship of power that groups form, with the stated goals of either rectifying those inequities or attempting to become the predominant force in society. So, for example, that working peoples have, at different times and in different permutations, formed revolutionary organizations and movements openly opposed to capitalism and its representatives, and thereby set up a distinctly political relationship with them, is precisely because of workers' attempts to overcome the significant economic, cultural and political power of capitalists over them.[120]

Power, and related notions such as authority, force and influence, have played a significant role in the conceptualization of politics since at least the Renaissance, and right up until the twentieth century when Weber unequivocally noted that politics "has something to do with the authority relations." But for him, as I have shown, politics could only be in relation to the most decisive and authoritative locus of power, i.e. the state, rather than in or between any organization. Power begins to be treated as *the* concept which underlies politics and political activity, irrespective of whether that activity takes place in and through state institutions or is oriented towards the state in some way or not,

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[119] Mouffe, *On the Political,* 9.
[120] See: Mouffe, Chantal and Ernesto Laclau. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics.* Verso, 1985.

starting around the 1950s. In his influential work on politics, *Power and Society*, Harold Lasswell, a leading political scientist of the past century, defines a "political act [as] one performed in power perspectives."[121] What is important to note about Lasswell's definition, according to Robert Dahl, is that politics is not confined to any particular system, such as the state, location (i.e. a parliament), or relationship (i.e. between political parties or between citizens and their government). Following Lasswell, Dahl defines a political system as "*any* persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, control, influence, power, or authority."[122] He effectively argues that politics is ubiquitous; it exists wherever there are relations of power, in associations as diverse as "private clubs, business firms, labour unions, religious organizations, civic groups" and even families,[123] and not just in relation to the state and its institutions.

Much of Michel Foucault's intellectual focus was set on this insight, even if he was not always explicit about it. His important contributions to the notion of power itself, as well as its relationship to politics, has had an outsized influence on contemporary political thought, a point that will be demonstrated in this section, and in later chapters. I will demonstrate how his understanding of power definitively helped to shift the understanding of politics itself away from its strictly institutional orientation, and while many who have taken up a Foucauldian understanding of power and politics nevertheless use it to showcase the political nature of instances of directly *engaged* activities, I will

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[121] Lasswell, Harold D. and Abraham Kaplan. *Power and Society.* Yale University Press, 1950, 240.
[122] Dahl, Robert. *Modern Political Analysis*. 5th ed., Prentice Hall, 1990, 4 (my emphasis).
[123] Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, 4.

later use it to begin to show how instances of withdrawal might themselves be considered political in nature.

        Politics, for Foucault, is fundamentally about relations of power, which, according to him, are *everywhere*: "a society without power relations," he believes, "can only be an abstraction;"[124] and "*all* human relationships are to a certain degree relationships of power."[125] According to Foucault, power cannot simply be understood in terms of the repressive or coercive apparatuses of certain institutions, especially that of the state. Power does not "only cover the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, which [are] destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people."[126] Power inheres in certain discourses, for example, concerning sexuality and madness. The more these discourses become norms diffused throughout society, they shape how individuals think and act in relation to the subject of that discourse, and in turn, how they comport themselves more generally in society. As Foucault says: "power relations are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationship (economic processes, knowledge relation ships, sexual relations), but are immanent in them... they have, where they come into play, a directly productive role."[127] Moreover, power arises between and can be exercised by groups or individuals, often in complicity with certain discourses.

[124] Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, The University of Chicago Press, 1983, pp. 208-226, 222-223.
[125] Foucault, Michel. "The Risks of Security." *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, edited by James D. Faubion, translated by Robert Hurley, The New Press, 2001, 372.
[126] Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 221.
[127] Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume I, An Introduction.* Translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, 1978, 94.

Foucault explains: "between every point of a social body, between a man and a woman, between the members of a family, between a master and his pupil, between everyone who knows and everyone who does not, there exist relations of power which are not purely and simply a projection of the sovereign's great power over the individual."[128]

Foucault's understanding of power as something embodied in everyday social relationships fundamentally throws into question the notion of politics as referring to whatever concerns *the most* decisive authority, wielding the greatest power vis-à-vis every other association within it, i.e. the state. Aristotle, as I have already shown, set the standard for this when he differentiated political from other kinds of, ostensibly, "nonpolitical" rule. But this very attempt to carve out a specifically political domain that is clearly delimited from other spheres of life leads to some potentially problematic consequences. On the one hand, as I have shown, it is never clear what counts as a specifically political concern which the state has legitimate and sole authority over. This question has sparked conflicts and controversies. On the other hand, where political rule and engagement in the public realm has been firmly delimited from other domains and spheres of life, the latter have often been shielded from the public and closed off from scrutiny, debate and government intervention. Historically this has led to the entrenchment of all kinds of questionable social dynamics within society. The rule, for example, of a man over his household—his children, his wife and, in certain societies,

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[128] Foucault, Michel. "The History of Sexuality." *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977,* edited by Colin Gordon, translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper, Pantheon Books, 1980, 187.

such as that of Ancient Greece or pre-Civil War America, his slaves—would not necessarily be subject to public scrutiny or intervention by the governing authorities. The treatment of those under his command was uncontestable, their unequal status hidden and protected behind the veil of his "private" domain. In light of Foucault's understanding of power relations, politics for him cannot be simply something related to the state. Even though in his later writings he seemed to believe that power has become "progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions,"[129] it is evident that, as far as Foucault is concerned, politics is more than just an exercise of power that is concerned with "government."[130] Because he believes power is everywhere, politics occurs in economic settings like the workplace, or "private" settings, like the household.

Despite resting his understanding of politics on power, Foucault qualified this belief by arguing that relations of power are only ever *potentially* politicizable. In other words, while he believes that relations of power exist everywhere, and that different social dynamics "have been produced and controlled by strategic power relations at an earlier time and they may once again become so later on," this does not mean that such relations will at every moment be *actually* subjected to political intervention.[131] Like family relations, they can ossify, become normalized, and "come to be thought of as immune to political intervention."[132] But they can just as well become *re*politicized.

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[129] Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 224.
[130] Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 221.
[131] Sluga, *Search for the Common Good,* 191.
[132] Sluga, *Search for the Common Good,* 192.

When Foucault says that "*all* human relationships are to a certain degree relationships of power,"[133] and that all social relations belonged to "a political field," he qualifies what he means by politics as a: "*strategy* for coordinating and directing those relations [of power]."[134] By strategy Foucault means: "the totality of the means put into operation to implement power effectively or to maintain it," or "the modes of action upon possible action, the action of others."[135] It is an action meant to gain advantage over another.

This means while relations of power are everywhere, they are not immediately political in the sense that the individuals and discourses caught up in them are active political agents engaging in politics; their actions cannot at every turn be described as "political" in nature. A woman obeying the state's law on abortion, even if personally affronted by such a law, is not necessarily acting politically by carrying her unborn child to term (though the state's passing such a law would be political), it is at best a conscious (or unconscious) decision based on a previously established political decision; a woman, likewise, is not acting politically when she is carrying out household chores while her domestic partner is at work (though her partner's attempts to ensure that she does may well qualify as such). There must be *strategic interventions* in these fields, specifically targeting the discourses and attitudes that make a woman simply accept that she is required to carry a child, wanted or unwanted, to term, or that set the expectations for her

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[133] Foucault, "The Risks of Security," 372.
[134] Foucault, "History of Sexuality," 189 (my emphasis).
[135] Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 225.

to unquestioningly bear the burden of household chores, despite how burdensome they may be and how little she may be compensated for it.

And it is precisely in attempting to bring to light the problematic and unequal relations of power in different domains within society which have been traditionally overlooked or purposely shunted by political theorists and politicians throughout history to "nonpolitical" spheres or domains that has been the motivating factor for those who contend that relations of power constitute the domain of politics, and that the latter includes all those activities which actively contest those relations. By treating the power relations that, following Foucault, *do* in fact exist within the household or within the workplace as something "political," and, moreover, strategically intervening in those spheres, many thinkers and activists have thereby attempted to open these, and other, spaces to public scrutiny and contestation. That is, they have openly *politicized* them, with the aim of exposing and attempting to rectify unequal power dynamics.

It is no wonder that this approach to politics became particularly pronounced in the post-World War Two era, during a time in which movements and citizen groups concerned with numerous different causes (climate change, anti-racism, feminism, labour and student issues, peace and anti-colonialism, etc.), were cropping up all over the place and demanding radical changes to the status quo in all segments of society hitherto untouched by formal political institutions. Feminist thought and activism are particularly instructive for this turn in the understanding of politics, reflected in the defacto slogan of second-wave feminism: "the personal is political." This slogan was popularized following

the publication of Carol Hanisch's essay of the same name in 1970.[136] In that essay, Hanisch shows that matters arising in the private realm, within the family for example, are political because they are founded on *power* relations. Hanisch assumes an understanding of politics as having "to do with power relationships, not the narrow sense of electoral politics."[137]

In *Sexual Politics*, another key text of second-wave feminism, Kate Millett gives a more clear and detailed description of the sense in which politics is about power, and how gender relations are implicated in it. The term politics, she says, cannot exclusively be thought in terms of the "relatively narrow and exclusive world of meetings, chairmen, and parties." [138] It certainly cannot take the form of consensus-based good governance, that is, "the arrangement of human life on agreeable and rational principles from whence the entire notion of power *over* others should be banished,"[139] but rather in terms of "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another," especially between that of particular social groups, "races, castes, classes, and sexes." [140] Such a definition, argues Millet, allows one to see how sex "is a status category with political implications,"[141] given that the relationship between the sexes in a male-dominated society is fundamentally one of "dominance and

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[136] Hanisch, Carol. "The Personal is Political." 2006.
https://webhome.cs.uvic.ca/~mserra/AttachedFiles/PersonalPolitical.pdf.
[137] Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," 1.
[138] Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. University of Illinois Press, 2000, 23.
[139] Millett, *Sexual Politics,* 24.
[140] Millett, *Sexual Politics,* 23.
[141] Millett, *Sexual Politics,* 24.

subordination."[142] This way of understanding the political is common in second-wave

feminist thought, which is focused on a broader set of issues affecting women beyond the

extension of equal legal and political rights (in its institutional understanding) that first-

wave feminism was largely focused on, including sexuality, the family and reproductive

rights. Utilizing this understanding of politics, feminists have engaged in a number of

different political actions that do not always conform to an institutional understanding,

such as petitioning elected officials or running for office themselves. It opened the way to

understanding how the various struggles by oppressed groups against the power of their

oppressors outside of the domain of institutional politics rightly constitutes political

activity especially considering how subordinated groups often tend to have "inadequate

redress through existing political institutions, and [are] deterred thereby from organizing

into conventional political struggle and opposition."[143]

Hanisch, for example, argues that consciousness-raising groups, wherein women

come together to discuss their personal experiences of patriarchal domination, are

distinctly political activities. They are an attempt to collectively bring to light the

oppressive nature of women's' experiences, however different and nuanced with respect

to each other. "I went, and I continue to go to these meetings," Hanisch says, "because I

have gotten a political understanding which all my reading, all my 'political discussions,'

all my 'political action'... never gave me. I've been forced to take off the rose-colored

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[142] Millett, *Sexual Politics,* 25.
[143] Millett, *Sexual Politics,* 25.

glasses and face the awful truth about how grim my life really is as a woman."[144] As

Hanisch's short essay intimates, in discussing their experiences together, women might

begin to both understand the diversity of their particular experiences, but also ultimately

use that knowledge to more skilfully confront and act against the unequal relationships of

power that contribute to their continued oppression in a male-dominated society.

Consciousness-raising groups give women a sense of collective agency and power when

they might otherwise feel powerless and unaware of the various ways in which they are

kept oppressed.

Anthony Skillen argues that the "statist conception of politics" in which the state

is seen as the "sole locus of politics"[145] has been made moot by the fact that "people are

acting, consciously politically, outside the officially marked zones. Young people and

women especially are making schools and families centres of direct political struggle,

workers are getting rid of their phobias about seeing their strikes and occupations as

political acts."[146] By conceiving the political strictly in terms of whatever concerns the

state and its institutions, we pre-empt, according to Skillin, the "exploration of the actual

political relations within and among social institutions."[147] Skillen argues that a richer

conception of politics, one that goes beyond the state and "involves political practices

appropriate to issues which the state… could hardly deal with",[148] would, among other

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[144] Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," 4.
[145] Skillen, Tony. "Politics Re-Entered: The State in its Place." *Radical Philosophy, vol.* 41, 1985, pp. 23-27, 23.
[146] Skillen, Tony. "The Statist Conception of Politics." *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 2, 1972, pp. 2-6, 2.
[147] Skillen, "The Statist Conception of Politics*,"* 3.
[148] Skillen, "The Statist Conception of Politics*,"* 2.

things, enable us to better appreciate emerging political movements and the issues and relations their practices are aimed at.

      Much like Foucault and the feminist thinkers and activists of his time, Skillen presents a view of politics that has power as its main locus, which revolves around conflicts and contestations arising from relations of power in different kinds of structures, associations and situations,[149] a view which, as a socialist, he appropriates from the classical Marxist analysis of capitalist society. Despite the fact that Marx himself viewed such relations in purely economic terms, Skillen contends that the belief that productive relations within capitalist societies are "relations of domination by the capitalists over the worker"[150] can only mean that they are political, and not strictly economic relations. It is, in other words, "a situation of domination and of more or less open struggle,"[151] for, as he goes on to state:

> even a simple exchange situation presupposes that one party has control over some good, 'over and against' others. From a political standpoint then the 'economic' need of the worker to produce his means of existence gives the controllers of the means of production *power* over him…. Thus wealth is itself a political power, an instrument of domination.[152]

By recognizing this, and any other social structure as "political," Skillen, among others, argues that one thereby opens them up to further scrutiny and contestation.

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[149] Skillen, "The State in its Place," 23.
[150] Skillen, "The State in its Place," 5.
[151] Skillen, "The State in its Place," 5.
[152] Skillen, "The State in its Place," 6.

Acting Together

The third and final dimension of noninstitutional politics that I will be surveying in this chapter takes its starting point from a phenomenon arguably more fundamental and primordial than either that of conflict or power, and in the absence of which the former would be meaningless: that of individuals coming together and inter*acting* with each other. It is hard to argue with the fact that neither friend/enemy relations could be established, nor relationships of power arise between individuals and groups if individuals with distinct perspectives, opinions and interests did not interact with each other in the first place.

This has been implicitly reflected in the discussions of the previous two dimensions of politics. Schmitt, for example, refers to political actors as "fighting *collectivities*" engaged in conflict with other groups designated as their enemies. Mouffe, following Schmitt's antagonistic reading of politics, says that the political is "constitutive of human *societies*."[153] Foucault understands power to inhere in all social relationships and interactions. He writes: "between every point of a social body, between a man and a woman, between the members of a family, between a master and his pupil, between everyone who knows and everyone who does not, there exist relations of power" which shape those very social relations. [154] This allows Hanisch, as I said, to understand consciousness-raising groups as fundamentally political not only because they involve discussion of the unequal and oppressive power dynamics in womens' personal lives, but

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[153] Mouffe, *On the Political,* 9.
[154] Foucault, "History of Sexuality," 187.

also because they collectively empower women to confront those very dynamics by associating with each other.

Unlike these previous thinkers, however, Hannah Arendt's political thought is explicitly and fundamentally premised on the notion that "politics is based on the fact of human plurality,"[155] and "deals with the coexistence and association of different men";[156] it "cannot even be imagined outside the society of men."[157] Politics, in other words, is to be understood first and foremost as an activity that occurs between diverse individuals interacting with each other. It is a distinctive mode of engaging with others in the public realm over matters of public or common concern: "action and speech go on between men, as they are directed toward them" and is "concerned with the matters of the world... which physically lies between them and out of which arise their specific, objective, worldly interests. These interests constitute, in the word's most literal significance, something which *inter-est*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together."[158] This concern with what is common among distinct individuals with different opinions and viewpoints is what makes her conclude that political action is the only kind of activity that *requires*, not only the presence of others, but active engagement with them; action, she says, as distinguished from other kinds of human activities, "is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act. Action and speech need the surrounding presence of others… action and speech are surrounded

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[155] Arendt, Hannah. *The Promise of Politics*. Edited by Jerome Kohn, Schocken, 2007, 93.
[156] Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 93.
[157] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 22.
[158] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 182.

by and in constant contact with the web of the acts and words of other men."[159] Arendt's

focus on the collective nature of politics, involving, indeed, *requiring*, the acting together

of distinct individuals, sets her apart not only from institutional approaches to politics, as

I will make clearer in what follows, but also from the other dominant noninstitutional

approaches to politics that were being theorized around the same time as she was

developing her own ideas. While Arendt, as I will show, would appear to be emphatic

that politics requires engagement, her political ideas and concepts are equally important

to show the political nature of withdrawal, as I will argue especially in the final chapter of

this dissertation.

To say that politics is essentially a collective endeavour, however, does not mean

that it exists wherever and whenever humans in the plural interact with each other. Arendt

is emphatic that action should not be understood as an activity based on a needs-ends

relationship. This is what makes politics so unique compared to the other forms of

activity individuals carry out in the other spheres of their lives, and also why Arendt is

particularly at pains to distinguish politics and the political realm from labour, work and

other kinds of activities specific to the private and social realms, even if and when they

involve the collaboration of multiple people (such as on a farm, in a factory, or studio).

Whereas one labours to procure the necessities of life, and one works to fabricate objects

with which to furnish the world, politics, first and foremost, simply involves the

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[159] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 188.

experience of engaging in deeds and deliberations with others over common public matters.

Arendt describes the public sphere as a place wherein "innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions" are interacting, and because of which "action almost never achieves its purpose."[160] Debate and contestation can therefore be read as fundamental, though not exclusive, aspects of politics for Arendt, a point she makes in "Truth and Politics," where she states that: "debate constitutes the very essence of political life."[161] When a diverse group of individuals starts acting together, their distinctive points of view and experiences will not only begin to take shape, and change shape, when they come into contact with that of others, as Arendt contends,[162] they will also likely at times harden in contraposition to each other and come into direct conflict with each other. This is part of the risk of politics, and part of what makes it so "unstable" and "unpredictable," as she mentions repeatedly throughout *The Human Condition*. But of course, this could only occur in the first place if individuals are actively engaging with each other.

It should be noted that though the activity of politics is not understood by Arendt to have a proper end beyond the activity itself, that it cannot, according to her, involve activities or ends proper to other spheres of life, especially the private realm or the

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[160] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 184.

[161] Arendt, Hannah. "Truth and Politics." *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, The Viking Press, 1969, 241.

[162] Arendt, Hannah. "Socrates." *The Promise of Politics,* edited by Jerome Kohn, Schocken Books, 2005, 5-40.

household, a view for which she has been criticized,[163] does not in my view mean that

Arendt believes that politics automatically precludes any discussion of concerns related to

these other realms. There is some textual evidence to support this. For example, Arendt

mentions that the "content" of politics, if not the activity of politics itself, is almost

always, she says,

> "objective," concerned with the matters of the world of things in which men
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> move, which physically lies between them and out of which arise their specific,
>
> objective, worldly interests…. *Most action and speech is concerned with this in-*
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> *between*, which varies with each group of people, so that most words and deeds
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> are *about* some worldly objective reality.[164]

What this quote shows is that Arendt is fully aware that people will naturally argue and

debate with one another about the realities and banalities of life, especially when it comes

to their common use. Even the French Revolution, whose devolution into violence, war

and tyranny Arendt locates in its having had at its core a singular concern for the social

and economic ills of society (rather than the freedom to act as was the case, on her

reading, with the American Revolution)[165] was, at least initially, carried out through

distinctively political means, for example in the salons, clubs, societies and associations

in which individuals freely and spontaneously came together to "occupy themselves in

common with [public] matters" and in the interest of preserving the new found freedom

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[163] See, for example: Pitkin, Hanna. "Justice: On Relating Private and Public." *Political Theory*, vol.9, no.3, 1981, pp. 327-352; Wolin, Sheldon. "Hannah Arendt: Democracy and The Political." *Salmagundi*, no.60, 1983, pp. 3-19.
[164] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 182 (my emphasis).
[165] See: Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. Penguin Books, 2006.

of French society from the shackles and hierarchies of the *Ancien Regime*.[166] I will return

to this point shortly, and further extend my discussion of it in chapter six. There I will

show how Arendt's understanding of politics invites, rather than closes off, a political

reading of activities traditionally associated with the private sphere.

Arendt is nevertheless wary of politics being too focused on private or domestic

matters. She argues that if a group of individuals are solely and routinely concerned with

a particular end, such as the preservation of life, security and the crafting of a stable

social order according to specific pre-established principles and conducted in such a way

most conducive to achieving it, they would not need the diversity of opinion, free debate

and negotiation that is so characteristic of politics and would ultimately be better off

without it. Their ends would better be accomplished by the adherence of all involved to

strict plans and orders according to which each has their own place and role. This is

precisely why the revolutionary French government devolved into despotism several

years after the initial years of the revolution, according to Arendt. The salons and clubs

wherein the French people, from all walks of life, openly and freely debated the nature

and goals of their new society gave way to a centralized government singularly focused

on institutionalizing and systematizing the core principles of the revolution, and

castigating and severely punishing anyone that did not adhere to them (as interpreted by

the government). Diversity of opinion and free interaction gave way to uniformity of

thought, obedience and administration. When politics begins to emulate the kinds of

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[166] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 231-232.

activities related solely to the procurement and distribution of the necessities of life, commerce, or private matters, when politics becomes nothing "but a function of society," as has increasingly been the case in the modern world according to Arendt,[167] action, with all its diversity of opinion and interaction, unpredictability, and agonism, suffers and gives way to the cold, rationalized, anonymous administration of society.[168] In the terminology of Jacques Rancière, *politics* (*la politique*) gives way to what he refers to as *policing* (*le politique*).[169]

This is also why, apart from attempting to establish clear conceptual boundaries between the functions and ends of action and other forms of human activity, Arendt is equally concerned with clearly distinguishing politics from the institutions of the modern state and, especially, the purely administrative activities related to them. While Arendt believes that the public realm is the proper space in which politics occurs, she disagrees with the tradition, initiated by Plato and Aristotle, that it is coterminous with, or necessarily anchored by, the state and its institutions. Unlike Aristotle, on whom she draws for her own distinctions between the public and private realms, the latter being the sphere in which activities related to labour takes place, the public realm cannot simply or exclusively be viewed in terms of the state or vice versa, nor the institutions and spaces ostensibly set aside for the purpose of carrying out political issues, such as parliaments, voting booths and government ministries. As Wolin indicates, in Arendt's view politics

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[167] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 33.

[168] Arendt, *Promise of Politics,* 97.

[169] See: Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Translated by Julie Rose, University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

should rather be understood as a "mode of experience rather than a comprehensive institution such as the state"[170] and related activities such as voting, legislating and administering social policies. In fact, Arendt argues that political activity precedes the emergence of states, laws, borders and institutions. The public realm, she says, "comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized."[171]

Arendt does accept that among properly political actions and concerns are the attempts at creating and organizing political communities.[172] She says, for example, that

the territorial boundaries which protect and make possible the physical identity of a people, and the laws which protect and make possible its political existence, are of such great importance to the stability of human affairs precisely because no such limiting and protecting principles rise out of the activities going on in the realm of human affairs itself.[173]

But this fact still should not, according to Arendt, blind us into thinking that a public realm could not exist outside of a territorially defined space organized by laws, governing apparatuses and administrative institutions, or even that politics requires a state form or specific institutions like parliaments. For Arendt, as Sluga relates, "public space must not

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[170] Wolin, Sheldon. "Fugitive Democracy." *Constellations*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1994, pp. 11-25, 11.
[171] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 199.
[172] Arendt lauds the American Revolutionaries for engaging in the "highest" form of political action when they set out to create a new political community based on their desire for freedom and free interaction with each other in the public realm. See: Arendt, *On Revolution,* 117.
[173] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 191.

have too much interior organization. If it is too encrusted with institutional structures,

free [political] interaction becomes difficult or even impossible."[174]

A conceptual separation between politics proper and the state should be

maintained, furthermore, especially in light of the fact that the modern state, according to

Arendt, has become more of an administrative apparatus dealing with the necessities of

life[175]—originally an exclusively private affair—than a public realm on the model of the

ancient Greek polis, in which citizens would regularly meet in public spaces to directly

engage with each other over public affairs. The public realm is mostly occluded in the

modern state. It appears only seldom. Indeed, as she says, most of us today, "the

jobholder or businessman in our world—do not live in it,"[176] especially insofar as we

continue to view the state as the sole horizon of activity over public affairs carried on by

a small group of self-styled representatives of the people.

In Arendt's view, the public realm emerges wherever and whenever individuals

come together to discuss and engage with each other over public matters. Thus politics

not only has "the most intimate relationship to the public part of the world common to us

all, *but is the one activity which constitutes it*."[177] And it is only at such times and in such

spaces that a common, public world emerges: "The *polis*" she argues, "is not the city-

state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting

and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this

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[174] Sluga, *Search for the Common Good,* 161.
[175] Threatened, according to her, by the emergence of a "social realm" that has "an irresistible tendency to grow, to devour the older realms of the political and private." Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 45.
[176] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 199.
[177] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 198 (my emphasis).

purpose, no matter where they happen to be."[178] It is no wonder that among Arendt's

favoured examples of political activities are those that are decidedly *extra*-institutional in

nature, as in the associations, councils and committees founded especially during

revolutionary periods, such as the town halls meetings which emerged prior to and during

the American Revolution, the Paris Commune of 1871, the *soviets* or peasants and

workers' councils that sprang up during the Russian Revolution, and the workers and

soldiers' councils that emerged during the German revolution of 1918-1919.[179] Arendt

understands these committees, associations and councils as grassroots, loosely organized

associations of individuals who have mutually and freely come together for the primary

purpose of directly participating in public affairs; to mutually debate and deliberate on

public matters concerning all its members together with one another[180] in a manner which

eschews and avoids formal organs of representation, static authority figures and

institutions, and proceeds along generally participatory democratic means. If the

opportunity to directly engage in public affairs had largely been denied to individuals, the

revolutionary councils became spaces wherein they could do just that. They thus

approximate exactly what is at the heart of political action, according to Arendt, that is, to

act together with one another over public affairs, a spirit which has largely been lost in

modern political institutions and government. I will speak more about Arendt's positive

appraisal of councils, and their importance in her political thought, in chapter six.

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[178] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 198*.*
[179] Arendt, *On Revolution,* 254.
[180] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 255.

While arguable, as Arendt viewed the domestic sphere as a private, and not political, matter—a position well established in the tradition of political thought—one might utilize her understanding of the political to understand how less conventional political activities, like the consciousness-raising groups of second-wave feminism could be seen as political, especially if we take seriously her discussion of the political nature of speech and the necessity of pluralism for politics. The women engaged in these groups were political not simply in the sense that they were gaining consciousness of themselves as oppressed vis-à-vis men and the ways in which to utilize their newfound understanding for the wider struggle of women's liberation, but because they were first and foremost coming together to openly speak with each other about concerns which affect them all, with all the nuances and distinctiveness of their individual experiences of oppression. Such experiences proved the intersection of private and public, even if Arendt remained blind to it. As Hanisch intimates, this empowered women, otherwise powerless when left to suffer the consequences of their mistreatment and unequal status on their own in their private lives and relationships. Coming together to discuss their respective situations, to collectively uncover the ways in which they are oppressed and ways in which they may begin to overcome their oppression, is a fundamentally empowering enterprise. I will further a similar line of thought later in this dissertation, utilizing Arendt's understanding of politics to show how withdrawal may be considered political, but also how it goes beyond Arendt's exclusion, not only of domestic matters, but also the activities traditionally associated with them, from politics.

Arendt on Power

The example of consciousness-raising groups displays another important aspect of Arendt's political thought: power is generated when individuals act together, and not when individuals or collectives exercise violence intended to coerce or compel others. Power arises from the coming together and acting in concert of distinct individuals as a result of common interests or concerns. It can never be associated with coercion, the state's "legitimate use of violence," as Weber understood it, with the use of force intended to coerce or compel others, or with the strategic intervention of unequal relations of power. This is how conventional political thought characterizes politics, according to Arendt.[181] Political engagement, as she understands it, engenders power, a collective "power-with" and "power-to" rather than a "power-over" or a "power-against." Power is generative and collaborative, not an instrument of domination. As she says: "the only indispensable material factor in the generation of power is the living together of people.... Power is always, as we would say, a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force or strength... power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse."[182] Her reading of power rests on a notion underpinning democratic thought since at least the early modern period that rulers, political representatives or governments get their power from the popular

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[181] Arendt, Hannah. *On Violence*. Harcourt, 1970, 44-46.
[182] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 200-201.

support of the population, whether or not this is represented through formal institutional levers, such as regular elections.[183]

This does not mean that the power that is engendered in acting in concert cannot or does not have, politically speaking, any effect on events or aspects of the world outside of the public realm wherein those acting in concert are engaged. Power in the sense that Arendt understands it may be employed "to achieve prescribed goals. But the power structure itself precedes and outlasts all aims."[184] Moreover, acting in concert does not require setting aside all the potential disagreements individuals likely have with respect to their common concern in order to generate power in the Arendtian sense. It does mean, as Sheldon Wolin says of politics, "that a free society composed of diversities can nonetheless enjoy moments of commonality when, through public deliberations, *collective power* is used to promote or protect the wellbeing of the collectivity,"[185] an understanding which is directly influenced by Arendt and which he sharply distinguishes from the "legitimized and public contestation, primarily by organized and unequal social powers, over access to the resources available to the public authorities of the collectivity."[186]

Public demonstrations and protests, born out of perceived failures of the state and institutionalized political practices to deliver on public demands, may display power and politics in Arendt's sense most poignantly. A protest is a public spectacle of disagreement

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[183] Arendt, *On Violence,* 48-49.
[184] Arendt, *On Violence,* 51.
[185] Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," 11 (my emphasis).
[186] Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," 11.

that may or may not represent a collectively agreed upon program or list of demands, way

of speaking or modes of action. What protest movements can nevertheless demonstrate is

that the acting together of individuals in response to a common cause, such as

disagreement with the ruling government or administration, or a set of unjust policies, no

matter the diversity of thoughts, deeds and opinions present within the movement, can

produce power to an equal if not greater degree than the power of the ruling apparatus

being protested. If protests are persistent, large, and ongoing, policy changes, or even

regime change, may flow from such an atmosphere of "spectacular" demand, especially if

such a display represents a wide enough lack of general support for the government,

administering body or policies being protested. As Arendt says, "popular revolt against

materially strong rulers... may engender an almost irresistible power even if it forgoes the

use of violence in the face of materially vastly superior forces."[187]

To conclude this section, it is worth pointing out two important contributions

Arendt makes with respect to the question of politics, especially when compared with

other approaches to politics I have elaborated in this chapter. For one, like the previous

two non-state conceptions, it makes yet another case for why and how politics cannot

simply be reduced to "whatever concerns the state." Indeed, she gives us additional

reasons to be wary of such a strict definition and application in practice. The institutions

of the modern state have largely become administrative apparatuses charged with taking

care of the needs of the population, with Arendt likening the modus operandi of the

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[187] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 200-201.

modern state to the administration of a private household. There is little room for

distinctly *political* action in such an edifice. Arendt affirms that politics occurs wherever

individuals act, that is, deliberate, debate and engage with one another over public affairs.

It can occur informally and occasionally, such as in consciousness-raising groups, or in

more large-scale and sustained phenomena such as in revolutionary activities and mass

protest movements. And this understanding of politics is a boon to those individuals and

groups who otherwise feel apathetic or disempowered by institutional politics.

More than any thinker before her (if no less apparent in their works), Arendt

makes it explicit that politics requires engagement with others. And insofar as there is a

point to that engagement, especially in the form of some common grievance vis-à-vis the

ruling structures of society or set of unjust policies and laws, that engagement is

necessary to generate a power that can effectively counter the power of those structures.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that there are different conceptions of politics in the

political theory literature beyond those centered on the state and its institutions. This

noninstitutional approach can be understood via several different dimensions. I have

looked at three in this chapter: friend/enemy relations, power, and acting-together. The

noninstitutional approach to understanding politics arose roughly towards the middle of

the last century chiefly because it was believed the state was no longer seen as an

adequate arena through which to settle rising grievances and concerns by individuals and

groups. For those thinkers who postulate a noninstitutional approach to politics, the state is no longer the indisputable horizon of politics.

Before I move on, however, it is necessary to briefly bring to attention what unites both the institutional and noninstitutional conceptions of politics, if loosely. I do this to highlight what is central to the understanding of politics in the broadest sense, and that explains why withdrawal might not be considered political in any sense. Drawing from what I have said in this and in the previous chapter, we can conclude, on the one hand, that politics appears to be an activity requiring some form of direct engagement or action, visibility, and voice in the public realm. This prejudice for voice or engagement was set by the Ancient Greeks, from whom, as I have already mentioned, the very term politics is itself derived. According to Aristotle's ontology of action, any form of activity can be classified and differentiated from each other according to the particular end or ends it is oriented towards. On Aristotle's understanding, political activity is distinguished from other kinds of activities by the fact that it is oriented towards the common good and engaged in the public sphere, or the affairs of the polis—the most "authoritative"[188] sphere of rule in society, as he understands it—more generally. To take part in politics, that is, to conduct oneself politically, is, for Aristotle, nothing less than to directly *engage with* and through the institutions of the polis over affairs specifically related to the polis; in other words, "to be *active* in managing the affairs of the city."[189]

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[188] Aristotle, *Politics,* I 1 1252a1-5.
[189] Mulgan, "Aristotle and the Value of Political Participation," 198.

The most obvious candidate with whom political activity is associated by Aristotle, as well as his predecessor Plato,[190] is the statesman (*politikos*)—the leader or professional politician whose official tasks include the design and implementation of enduring laws and institutions for the common good,[191] as well as taking part in the general leadership and daily governance of the polis. But political activity is also understood in a more expansive sense by Aristotle, to include any variety of activities wherein regular citizens, whether a few or many, depending on the kind of political order in place, partake in the everyday general affairs of the polis. These might involve attending assembly meetings, serving on juries or fulfilling other duties associated with official state offices.[192] It would thus be clear, according to Aristotle's ontology of action, that any activity predicated on withdrawal from the public realm or any nonengagement or disengagement from communal affairs and decision making, especially in order to engage in any other kind of activity, would mean cessation of political action on the part of those withdrawing, and that the act of withdrawal itself would be a nonpolitical gesture. Needless to say, a complete withdrawal from the polis itself would constitute a total exit from political life, with no way of influencing its public affairs, a point which Plato makes amply clear in the *Crito*.

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[190] Plato. *Statesman*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. *Project Gutenberg,* 7 November 2008. www.gutenberg.org/files/1738/1738-h/1738-h.htm.
[191] Aristotle, *Politics,* 1289a1 5-25.
[192] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1299a1 5-30.

In the *Apology* we learn that Socrates is charged with corrupting the youth of Athens, impiety,[193] and for being a "know-it-all busybody."[194] Despite his impassioned and well-reasoned defense against the charges, the latter are upheld, and Socrates is ultimately condemned to death. The *Crito* begins with the titular character, Crito, pleading with Socrates, his friend and tutor, to accept his proposal to save Socrates' life. Crito explains to Socrates how he and other friends and allies of his are fully prepared and capable of sneaking Socrates out of prison and whisking him away to Thessaly, where he might live out the rest of his life in exile.[195] Crito balks at the idea of Socrates having to face what he, and others, deem to be an unjust penalty for a life devoted to cultivating the virtue of Athenian society. Socrates sincerely, and very much stoically, refuses to flee Athens. Even a self-imposed exile would have been anathema to Socrates were it granted by the courts as an alternative punishment to death; it would be, as Jennet Kirkpatrick notes, "a more certain evil than death,"[196] as it would sever the most intimate connection Socrates holds with Athens: his citizenship. By withdrawing from the institutions of the polis, he will no longer be able to participate in its public life. He will lose his valuable role as social critic, and, moreover, lose his capacity "to agitate for change in Athens if he exits."[197] This is because in detaching oneself from the polity or political institutions, one will "no longer be part of the political organization and will not

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[193] Plato. "Apology." *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle*, edited by S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, C.D.C. Reeve, 3rd Edition, Hackett Publishing, 2005, 23*b.*
[194] Plato, "Apology," 19*c*.
[195] Plato. "Crito." *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle*, edited by S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, C.D.C. Reeve, 3rd Edition, Hackett Publishing, 2005, 45 a-e.
[196] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 31-32.
[197] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 40.

be able to participate in its collective life in an unmediated way."[198] And this extends not only to external withdrawals from the state itself, but to internal withdrawals from the institutions of the polity as well. The latter is exemplified in the Crito by Socrates' imprisonment, during which Socrates is stripped of all rights of citizenship and ability for formal public engagement. It is only by directly engaging with the citizens of the polis, its officials, its laws and institutions that one can have any influence over the polis itself, and politics is an activity that involves just this.

But of course, the ways in which political engagement manifests may vary. This is no less true of institutional politics than it is for noninstitutional politics. Institutional politics encapsulates more than just governance. Institutional political action, as I have outlined in chapter one, is also in part aimed at "exerting influence on the government of a political organization," as Weber puts it. But this would appear to no less require directly and openly engaging through the appropriate institutions and with the relevant state actors and institutions. During election periods political parties and prospective politicians engage in public campaigns to get elected, marshalling battalions of volunteers to canvass on their party's behalf; opposition parties regularly pummel the governing party with criticisms during parliamentary debates; and citizens attempt to exert influence on their elected officials either through the ballot box or grassroots movements and campaigns. Understood in the noninstitutional terms of friend/enemy relations, politics might involve shows of defiance and force between competing interest groups on the

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[198] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 40.

streets through rival protest marches, rallying movements of supporters through vocal campaigns denouncing rival groups or individuals. Politics understood as strategic interventions over unequal relations of power may require directly confronting and countering unjust laws, policies, or the systems and discourses which underlie them through acts of civil disobedience, mass labour actions, or consciousness-raising groups. Considering the characterization of politics as an "engaged" activity, withdrawal would appear to be the furthest thing from politics. If politics, for example, involves campaigning in an election to get voted to a legislative body, then withdrawing from that campaign, or refusing to campaign, would be tantamount to pulling away from politics. Refusing to distinguish an enemy and, moreover, refusing to actively engage in combatting them in one form or another, would be akin to refusing politics. More generally, withdrawing from the public arena wherein others are acting together would be an exit from political action altogether, as Arendt would understand it.

On the other hand, both institutional and noninstitutional approaches also have in common an orientation to power. In the institutional approach, of course, politics is oriented towards the state as the central locus of power, and governance is about wielding the power of the state for public ends, whereas conflict is engaged in with other state actors usually with an eye to increasing influence with respect to the state or increasing the power of the state. In noninstitutional approaches, power is understood in broader and different ways. It may be the prerequisite or cause of social conflict; it may manifest in dominant discourses or non-state systems and institutions, like patriarchy or capitalism; or arise among and between those acting in concert together over common public goals.

Despite the underlying assumption of *engagement* in political thought and practice, it is in fact with respect to this other ubiquitous aspect of politics, that it is also about power in one or another form, that we can begin to understand when and how a withdrawal could be considered political. For example, a disgruntled politician defecting from one party to start their own, or to join another party, can be seen as a tactic to weaken the influence of the party being left and lessen its chances of gaining or maintaining political power. By utilizing noninstitutional approaches to politics in particular, I will be able to show how withdrawals that do not simply take place within institutionalized, state-oriented contexts can nevertheless be considered political, and why such withdrawals might be the only or last effective recourse to political action when engagement is no longer seen to be effective. I will begin to argue both these points in the next and subsequent chapters.

nothing is less passive than the act of fleeing, of exiting[199]

– Paolo Virno

CHAPTER 3: INSTITUTIONAL POLITICAL WITHDRAWAL

Introduction

I ended the previous chapter by showing that although the question of what politics is has not been settled, there is implicit agreement that for an activity to be considered political there must be direct and active *engagement with* power. This is as true for the institutional approach to understanding politics as it is for the noninstitutional approach. And yet, it is not entirely clear whether everyone who is withdrawing from established political procedures or institutions is consciously attempting to disengage from politics. Some forms of withdrawal are very much precipitated by, and undertaken precisely because of, public issues or concerns, and with a view to affecting change in light of it: perhaps as a result of dissatisfaction with the way politics is typically conducted or a perceived inability to accomplish change through the established institutions.

This chapter will formally introduce the notion of withdrawal as a political concept via a critical discussion of some of the more prominent literature which has directly dealt with it in recent decades. I begin this discussion with the work of Albert O. Hirschman. Released in the early 1970s, his book, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to*

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[199] Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 198.

Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States formally inaugurated the notion of withdrawal as a political concept. In this ground-breaking work, Hirschman shows how withdrawals, or exits as he refers to them, regularly do take place in political contexts and can, furthermore, help to explain sociopolitical phenomena, contrary to received opinion which views politics exclusively in terms of active participation and engagement, or "voice" as he calls it. I move on to explore several more recent studies which have been directly influenced by Hirschman's analysis. Two of these critically adapt Hirschman's theory to specific political contexts, such as democratic decision making processes, as does Mark Warren in "Voting with Your Feet: Exit-based Empowerment in Democratic Theory," or the extension of political freedom, as does Ilya Somin in *Free to Move: Foot Voting, Migration and Political Freedom*.[200] The last work I examine, Jennet Kirkpatrick's *The Virtues of Exit: On Resistance and Quitting Politics*, though also an extension of Hirschman's work, is more critical and intended to give a broader and deeper understanding of withdrawal as a political concept.

This literature is certainly a step forward from conventional political wisdom which would see any withdrawal from political institutions, such as stepping down from a government position, leaving a political party or not voting, as tantamount to pulling away from politics altogether. Far from having no influence on the government or on political organizations and their policies, thinkers such as Hirschman, Warren, Somin and Kirkpatrick show how withdrawals, or "exits" as they prefer, could have as much, if not

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[200] Somin, Ilya. *Free to Move: Foot Voting, Migration and Political Freedom.* Oxford University Press, 2020.

more influence than engagement with them, depending on the context. I end this chapter, however, with the contention that this literature, beginning with and written in the wake of Hirschman, understands withdrawal largely in the context of an institutional understanding of politics. And while important in that it contributes to a novel perspective on politics, I argue that keeping withdrawal within the confines of a particular understanding of politics—simply assumed, and never itself interrogated or defended— limits a fuller appreciation of the notion of withdrawal, and specifically how it can contribute to and alter our fundamental understanding of politics itself.

The limits of such a discussion expresses itself in either the unwillingness or inability to see how certain kinds of withdrawal, or discussions of withdrawal, might be speaking to issues that go beyond the kinds of policy squabbles that have been considered appropriate and within the bounds of the state's authority and institutions to address. Discussing withdrawal within the confines of a particular understanding of politics contributes to the stifling nature that conventional political discussions and arrangements have on those who have lost faith in them, dismissing, or not taking as seriously, the issues which have contributed to the desire to withdraw in the first place. The irony here is that the very thinkers who have lauded withdrawal as a legitimate political concept and activity have done so with the recognition that people often employ strategies of withdrawal precisely because they feel they have not been heard by their governments or political organizations or their demands have not been responded to with the kind of urgency they would wish. Alternate, noninstitutional understandings of politics, as I have noted in chapter two, are often formulated precisely in response to this very issue.

Despite the longstanding assumption that politics *requires* active engagement, I contend that this is not the case, and that we can speak of withdrawal in politically affirmative terms. Even Weber implies that withdrawal may be a mode of political action in *Economy and Society*, despite his description of politics in terms that clearly evoke engagement with and within state institutions. There he describes politics as a form of social action, saying of the latter that "we shall speak of 'action' insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior—be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is 'social' insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course."[201] Important to note in his definition of a social action is the insistence that it includes "*both failure to act and passive acquiescence,*"[202] meaning that even inaction might be construed as doing something, such as not carrying out an order which results in different outcomes than if the order were carried out. It must follow that if inaction may be understood as nevertheless doing something, then one can be active without necessarily directly engaging with power. Hence one might be politically active whilst actively refusing to engage by withdrawing, so long as that withdrawal is in some way oriented towards political ends or conditioned by a context of power more generally.

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[201] Weber, *Economy and Society,* 4.
[202] Weber, *Economy and Society,* 22. (my emphasis).

Hirschman: "Voice" vs. "Exit"

The notion of withdrawal as an explicitly political concept that can be used to describe political activities is not entirely new or original, even if it is not widely accepted. It is, however, relatively new in the history of political thought. Hirschman is arguably the first to have designated withdrawal as political, a notion so novel at the time that *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* set the standard for ensuing discussions about withdrawal in political thought.[203] It is precisely for this reason that I begin my discussion of political withdrawal with him.

Hirschman notes that what he terms "voice," which essentially conveys what I mean by engagement, has traditionally been the favoured mode of action in politics; he says that voice "is nothing but a basic portion and function of any political system."[204] Hirschman understands voice to mean a form of stating one's opinion or dissatisfaction by way of visible, vocal, and public forms of expression that directly and openly convey one's opinion on a matter of concern to those in positions of power and influence. To employ voice is to call to the other, to directly engage with the relevant actors and

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[203] There are numerous works directly or indirectly influenced by Hirschman's analysis of "exit" published in the last several decades, including: Birch, AH. "Economic Models In Political Science: The Case of 'Exit, Voice and Loyalty.'" *British Journal of Political Science,* vol. 6, 1975, pp. 463-482; Sharp, Elaine E. "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty in the Context of Local Government Problems." *The Western Political Quarterly*, vol.37, no.1, 1984, pp. 67-83; Ma, Shu-Yun, "The Exit, Voice, and Struggle to Return of Chinese Political Exiles." *Pacific Affairs,* vol.66, no.3, 1993, pp. 368-385; Dowding, Keith, Peter John, Thanos Mergoupis, Mark van Vugt. "Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Analytic and Empirical Development." *European Journal of Political Research*, vol.37, no.4, 2000, pp. 469-495; Gehlbach, Scott. "A Formal Model of Exit and Voice." *Rationality and Society*, vol.18, no.4, 2006, pp. 395-418; Hoffman, Bert. "Bringing Hirschman Back In: 'Exit,' 'Voice,' and 'Loyalty' In the Politics of Transnational Migration." *The Latin Americanist*, vol.54, no.2, 2010, pp. 57-73.
[204] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 30.

institutions with which one wishes to express solidarity, or, conversely, express concerns or grievances.[205] Voice includes attempts to bring attention to, or actively change, an objectionable state of affairs, whether through "petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilize public opinion."[206] In other words, in the absence of engagement, or "voice," there is no politics. He goes on to say that political scientists have historically confined their attention only to those acts which approximate voice, viewing any response other than voice in the political realm as akin to "acquiescence or indifference."[207]

This prejudice for voice or engagement in politics was set by the Ancient Greeks, as I have already indicated. On Aristotle's understanding, political activity is distinguished from other kinds of activities by the fact that it is oriented towards the "affairs of the polis." To take part in politics, that is, to conduct oneself politically, is, for Aristotle, nothing less than to directly *engage with* and through the institutions of the polis over affairs specifically related to the polis; in other words, to be *active* in managing the affairs of the city. To withdraw from the institutions of the polis, or to withdraw from the polis altogether, would in effect end any further political activity. The ontological division between "political" and "nonpolitical" actions set long ago by Aristotle appears

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[205] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 4.
[206] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 30.
[207] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 31.

to be tacitly acknowledged by Hirschman by his attributing the preference for "voice," or engagement with, in political thought in part to the traditional disciplinary schism between politics and economics. He says that politicians and political scientists expect that disgruntled citizens or members of political organizations articulate their desires or grievances and petition the relevant political actors for change, such that withdrawal simply cannot play the same role in the political realm as it does in the economic realm.

"Exit," according to Hirschman, means simply to withdraw from an organization, relationship, institution, or process with which one has some grievance or in which one has lost faith, and to take one's business or support elsewhere.[208] Whereas voice, or engagement, has traditionally been associated with politics, Hirschman notes that exit, or withdrawal, has been the preferred way of "expressing one's unfavorable views of an organization"[209] in the economic realm. Citing Milton Friedman, Hirschman says that "the decision to voice one's views and efforts to make them prevail" are more likely to be regarded as "*cumbrous* political channels" rather than effective and efficient mechanisms by which one addresses their issues with a company or its products in the market.[210] The movement of withdrawal is likened to Adam Smith's "invisible hand," where consumers and workers freely move through the market in order to defend their welfare or to improve their position, or to set in motion market forces to "induce recovery on the part of the firm that has declined in comparative performance."[211] The very notion of the free

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[208] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 4.
[209] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 17.
[210] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty, 17.*
[211] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 15.

market is predicated on guaranteeing the ability and ease of consumers, labourers, business owners and capital to withdraw from one company or market to another. If customers find a product from one producer or seller too expensive or of worsening quality, the usual response will be to simply stop buying it and move to a competitor's product. Likewise, if employees of a company are dissatisfied with management of a company, they will leave the company and look for work elsewhere.[212] The expected result of this is generally that "revenues drop, membership declines, and management is impelled to search for ways and means to correct whatever faults have led to exit."[213]

Recognizing that "economists, with their emphasis on the virtues of competition (i.e., exit), had disregarded the possible contributions of voice just as political scientists, with their interest in political participation and protest, had neglected the possible role of exit in the analysis of political behavior,"[214] Hirschman's main goal in *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* is to transcend the schism of voice/politics and exit/economy. He shows that just as engagement can sometimes have a more direct and efficacious role in calling attention to issues in businesses than withdrawal in the economic realm, he seeks to also show how withdrawal can be employed to signal discontent in the political realm, or even spur social and political change. Contrary to the long-held view that politics requires direct action, engagement with or voice, Hirschman shows that this is not necessarily the case. At the very least, he demonstrates that withdrawal is an important phenomenon which

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[212] Curiously, Hirschman does not say much about the prominent role that unions, as the traditional instrument of collective voice for workers, have had historically in guaranteeing workers' rights.
[213] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty,* 4.
[214] Hirschman, Albert O. "Exit, Voice, Loyalty: Further Reflections and a Survey of Recent Contributions." *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly: Health and Society,* vol.58, no.3, 1980, pp. 430-453, 1.

politicos are well advised to take note of as they could play a crucial role in political

calculations. Thus, according to Hirschman, both "voice" *and* "exit," engagement with

and withdrawal from, can be understood as distinct and countervailing ways by which

individuals or groups might signal discontent with, or precipitate changes in, either

businesses or, more importantly, social and political arrangements which they perceive to

have decreased in quality or benefit to them. For example, by appreciating the threat of

withdrawal, and understanding the relationship between withdrawal and engagement,

political organizations may be more open to addressing both their members' and citizens'

concerns and issues. Failure to do so by stifling dissent and debate within the party, and

failure to address the voices of both members and prospective voters, can lead to

increased pressure for members of the organization and would be voters to use the only

other means available to express their discontent: withdrawal. This in turn may lead to

organizational decline and possible failure to make political gains on the part of the

political organization from which members are withdrawing.

Hirschman provides some examples and observations of withdrawal in the

political realm which I think are helpful to illustrate just how we might begin to

understand it in politically relevant ways. One involves the withdrawal of ministers or

elected officials from government or party members crossing the floor to competing

parties, especially in protest of government or party policies.[215] The other, the shifting or

exiting of members from one political party to create a new one.[216] Both phenomena

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[215] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 117-118.
[216] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 84-85.

sometimes generate significant attention and may contribute to productive soul searching within the affected political party or government administration to better reflect the interests or displeasures of those who have exited or threaten to do so.

There are ample examples of such occurrences, with the kind of effects Hirschman's analysis predicts. For example, Jenica Atwin's decision to leave the Green Party of Canada to join the Liberal Party in 2021[217] brought to a head a simmering debate within the Green Party with respect to its shifting policy direction following the election of Anamie Paul as leader of the Greens in 2020.[218] This not only damaged the public image of the Green Party following its most successful election yet with its highest ever vote count and most members elected to Parliament,[219] but the ensuing infighting led to significant internal division, arguably contributing to one of the party's worst electoral performances in twenty years during the 2021 federal election.[220] Paul ultimately lost a leadership review held shortly after the election,[221] after which the party began to engage in a significant review of its policies as part of the process of rebuilding itself.[222] Atwin's

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[217] Cochrane, David, and John Paul Tasker. "Green MP Jenica Atwin Crossing the Floor to Join the Liberals." *CBC*, 10 June 2021. www.cbc.ca/news/politics/jenica-atwin-joining-the-liberals-1.6060501.
[218] Connolly, Amanda. "Green Party Frontrunner Annamie Paul Wins Leadership on 8th Ballot." *Global News*, 7 July 2021. globalnews.ca/news/7376208/green-party-new-leader/.
[219] Breen, Kerry. "Green Party Wins Historic 3 Seats in Election Dominated by Climate Change." *Global News*, 22 Oct. 2019. globalnews.ca/news/6050521/green-party-election-climate-change/.
[220] Reynolds, Christopher. "Green Party in Tatters, with Glimmers of Hope, after Disappointing Election Finish." *CTVNews*, 22 Sept. 2021. www.ctvnews.ca/politics/federal-election-2021/green-party-in-tatters-with-glimmers-of-hope-after-disappointing-election-finish-1.5596122?cache=y.
[221] John Paul Tasker. "Annamie Paul Is Stepping down as Green Party Leader." *CBC*, 28 Sept. 2021. www.cbc.ca/news/politics/annamie-paul-stepping-down-green-leader-1.6190793.
[222] Woodside, John. "Annamie Paul Leaves a Struggle 'for the soul' of the Green Party." *Canada's National Observer*, 28 Sept. 2021. www.nationalobserver.com/2021/09/28/news/annamie-paul-leaves-struggle-soul-green-party.

departure did not necessarily lead to the divisions in the party which in turn hampered its electoral prospects, but it certainly played a significant role in sharpening them.

The defection of Maxime Bernier from the Conservative Party of Canada and his creation of the People's Party of Canada (PPC) in 2018 arguably had similar effects on the Conservatives (to say nothing of the federal political landscape). Bernier, an elected member of the Conservative Party since 2006, decided to run in the 2017 conservative leadership race following Stephen Harper's decision to step out of politics. Seen as the front runner as the race went on, he styled himself as a "true blue" conservative in comparison to his main competitor, Andrew Scheer. In the wake of his ultimately failed bid to win the leadership contest, he eventually broke ranks with the Conservatives and started the right-wing libertarian People's Party of Canada (PPC). His decision to do so was in large part due to being continually sidelined within the Conservative Party. For example, after being narrowly defeated by Andrew Scheer, the latter returned Bernier to the minor role he had in the previous Harper government, effectively giving him little significant influence within the party. The PPC is intended by Bernier to represent all the supposed conservative values from which the Conservative Party has deviated, in Bernier's mind, or has poorly promoted.[223] While the new party, and Bernier's media clout, were not solely responsible for the Conservatives' comparatively poor showing in both the 2018 and 2021 federal elections,[224] the trebling of the PPC's electoral support in

[223] Berthiaume, Lee. "Bernier Says O'Toole Not a Real Conservative, Unlike His People's Party." *CTVNews*, 24 Aug. 2020. www.ctvnews.ca/politics/bernier-says-o-toole-not-a-real-conservative-unlike-his-people-s-party-1.5077192?cache=kcfnyoei.
[224] Polls indicate that a majority of votes for the PPC in the latest election, where it had netted close to a million votes, have come from former Conservative voters. Had all or most of those votes gone to the

2021 compared to its inaugural election in 2018 had given some Conservatives pause for thought. It perhaps comes as no surprise that the current leader of the federal Conservatives, Pierre Poilievre, had adopted and emulated much of Bernier's rhetoric during the last Conservative Party leadership race, perhaps in a bid to reclaim a good portion of those lost votes.[225]

As the examples show, withdrawal does not translate into political irrelevance or the cessation of political activity. In fact, they demonstrate that withdrawal can speak as loud if not louder than words in the political realm. Despite the fact that Bernier campaigned effectively for his views for the direction of the Conservative Party during the Conservative leadership race in 2017 and came very close to becoming the leader of the Conservatives, he came short of winning the race to the more centrist Andrew Scheer. His active engagement with and within the Conservative Party, and the backing of at least half of the Conservative membership who voted, was not enough to effectively influence the policy direction of the party, either before or after Scheer's election. It was only after his withdrawal from the party that the voices echoing Bernier's rhetoric began to gain broader traction within it, but especially beyond the party itself. If politics, as Weber contends, involves striving to get power, share power or influence the distribution of power in the state, and to thereby exert "influence on the government of a political

Conservatives, which they most likely would have in the absence of the PPC, it likely would have contributed to a larger vote share for the Conservatives. Connolly, Amanda and David Akin. "Canada Election: Did the PPC Split the Conservative Vote? Maybe — but It's Not That Simple - National | Globalnews.ca." *Global News*, 22 Sept. 2021. globalnews.ca/news/8212872/canada-election-conservative-vote-splitting/.

[225] Graves, Frank and Stephen Maher. "Pierre *Poilievre: The Secret to the Conservative Leader's Success*." *The Walrus*, 14 Dec. 2022. thewalrus.ca/pierre-poilievre-the-secret-to-his-success/.

organization," as I have shown in chapter one, then the examples I have just given to illustrate the kinds of political withdrawals Hirschman had in mind surely fit this description.

Despite his nominal mentions of political withdrawals, however, Hirschman mostly focuses on the role of voice in economics, and how it may complement exit in that realm. He states that "in the large portion of my book which was an essay in persuasion on behalf of voice I argued that voice can and should complement and occasionally supersede exit as a recuperation mechanism when business firms, public services, and other organizations deteriorate," in order to "convince economists of the importance and usefulness, of the analysis of economic phenomena, of an essentially political concept such as voice."[226] Given his disciplinary background, this makes sense. Hirschman is a trained economist who first became interested in the potential interplay of withdrawal and engagement in his observation of responses, or lack thereof, to the inefficiency and deteriorating quality and service in monopolistic business enterprises.[227] Moreover, and as his few examples of how withdrawal may figure in politics show, his book is mostly focused on what Kirkpatrick notes is the strategic role of withdrawal, as "something to be deployed in order to gain immediate political advantage"[228] in the context of state institutions and processes, corresponding to the kind of political activity which Machiavelli and Weber had in mind. And this is an important point to keep in mind

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[226] Hirschman, "Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Further Reflections," 431.
[227] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 44.
[228] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 21.

because, as I will clarify in the rest of this chapter, Hirschman's appraisal of withdrawal within the context of an institutional approach to politics is taken up and replicated in the many works on withdrawal which have come after him.

Withdrawal and Democracy

The literature on withdrawal within political thought has expanded since *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* was published, taking on a more explicitly political understanding of the concept. Mark Warren, for example, has utilized Hirschman's exit-voice model to make a case for the empowering potential of withdrawal in the context of democratic decision making in "Voting with Your Feet: Exit-based Empowerment in Democratic Theory." Democratic theory, as I have shown is the case with political thought in general, has largely operated under the assumption of what Warren calls the "voice-monopoly model," understood to simply mean that democracy effectively, or ideally, revolves around the voice, engagement, or direct action of citizens in the context of established decision making institutions and processes. In recognition of the fact that states control key features of collective livelihood, such as security, and which, moreover, have a monopoly over the legitimate use of force, as Weber argued, democratic theory focuses on the fact that subjects of the state should have an equal say in, and opportunity to affect, which policies govern collective issues and how the coercive power of the state should be deployed. As such it focuses on the fact that ideally functioning democratic institutions include, enable, and amplify as many voices and opportunities for direct engagement in the political realm as possible. Positive political rights, such as voting, speech and

association, and "mechanisms such as electoral systems, judicial systems, public sphere discourse, and civil society activism through which citizens' voice is translated into influence over law and policy"[229] ensure that the state and governments are held accountable to their citizens, and whose policies reflect their interests. A democratic deficit viewed through this model would mean a dearth of active participation and engagement. Withdrawal under this model, of course, would be tantamount to silence, apathy and nonengagement.

Warren argues, however, that a more productive way to understand and thus strengthen democratic practices is to view the ability of citizens to choose from among different political parties and individuals vying for a seat in decision making assemblies as the ability to withhold their votes; that is, to withdraw from one party and move to another. At first glance, this is a rather strange way to understand electoral choice and voting patterns in multi-party democracies. We do not typically say we are "withdrawing" from one party and moving to another when in subsequent elections we might vote for a different individual or party than we did in a previous election. In what sense are we "withdrawing" if we are simply shifting our engagement from one party to another? There does not appear to be any withdrawal taking place. Like Hirschman, Warren gives an explanation taken from the market. When we stop buying one product and opt for a competitor's, we are effectively withdrawing from that company. That we

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[229] Warren, "Voting with Your Feet," 687.

shift to a different company's product does not take away from the fact that we have withdrawn from the first.

But does it make any difference whether we understand electoral politics in terms of withdrawal or engagement? Democratic thought, as was noted, tends to measure the strength of democracy to the degree to which citizen voices, and opportunities for engagement with political institutions, are amplified and multiplied, not on whether and how they might withdraw from those institutions or processes. Contrary to the dominant opinion in democratic thought, however, Warren argues that "votes function as empowerments just to the extent that voters can 'exit' from one candidate or party in favour of another."[230] To the extent that democracy is typically understood as empowering people to communicate the preferences, values, and ideas that figure into collective decisions which directly affect them whether they ultimately agree with them or not, withdrawal functions as an important communicative tool.

As the examples of Atwin and Bernier leaving their respective parties show, withdrawal can signal in ways engagement sometimes fails to do, the disagreement or discontent with the policies or procedures reflected in collective decision making on the part of those withdrawing. This could only add to, rather than detract from, the opportunities citizens and political actors have to effectively take part in the political sphere; it surely adds to the avenues by which one can take part in civic contestation which was noted as early as Weber, and even earlier, in the works of Machiavelli, as an

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[230] Warren, "Voting with Your Feet," 692.

important element of democratic politics. To reconceptualize democracy in terms of the play between withdrawal, as well as engagement, democratic thought might consider a wider array of institutional designs that address the fact that individuals in modern democratic states increasingly feel powerless and unable to have any significant influence on decision making bodies, despite their having the ability to vote.[231] This is especially the case in states with large populations wherein many decisions are carried out by an administrative apparatus with sometimes little meaningful oversight by elected bodies.[232] Withdrawal is meant to incentivize the "responsiveness of decision-makers to those they claim to serve or represent"[233] as Hirschman had identified. After all, whereas they might effectively ignore or water down oppositional voices within their ranks as long as their members and supporters remain loyal to them, governments and political parties are in a way forced to listen if not respond to the exodus of influential leaders, members and/or voters, or else risk threatening their influence in the political process. And if politics, as Weber intimates, involves the ability to "exert influence over the government of a political organization," then the retention, and growth, of voters and members for political parties are crucial for that struggle. Their exit from the party and its fight for power would drain the party of the resources and votes it needs to effectively influence

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[231] Voter turnout has over time decreased on average around the world: World Population Review. "Voter Turnout by Country 2020." *Worldpopulationreview.com*, 2021. worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/voter-turnout-by-country.

[232] These inevitable tendencies of large, populous democratic states are examined in classic works such as: Schumpeter, Joseph A. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy.* Routledge, 2003; *Michels, Robert. Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Society.* Translated by Eden and Cedar Paul, Batoche Books, 2001.

[233] Warren, "Voting with Your Feet," 692.

the government, if not gain enough seats to form the government. Thus, as Warren says, "exit and democracy are linked because the possibility of exit is a condition for using votes to signal and enforce representative relationships."[234]

"Foot Voting"

The meaning and force of withdrawal as an empowering feature in democracy is, moreover, strengthened when thought about beyond the context of voting. In *Free To Move: Foot Voting, Migration and Freedom to Move*, Ilya Somin focuses on an understanding of withdrawal that lies in the ability of individuals to leave one jurisdiction or polity for another with, as far as the one withdrawing is concerned, more favourable economic prospects and public policies in place, dubbed by him as "foot voting." Somin argues that the ability to choose the government policies one wishes to live under[235] by being able to freely move from one jurisdiction (local, sub-national, or even national) to another is a hallmark of personal and political freedom that should be protected, enhanced, and promoted as much as engagement with political institutions. This foot voting can be more politically empowering for individuals given the perception many have that their vote or voice has very little influence on the sociopolitical dynamics affecting them. Somin's argument in favour of withdrawal is largely couched in what he perceives to be major flaws in ballot box voting as a form of political engagement. For example, he points out that individuals have only the smallest chance of directly affecting

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[234] Warren, "Voting with Your Feet," 692.
[235] Somin, *Free to Move,* 3.

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the government policies they will be subjected to through the electoral process, especially in geographically large polities with a large and diverse electorate such as the United States.[236] The opportunity to directly affect outcomes is further undermined in representative systems where a relatively small group of elected officials are responsible for representing the interests of an even larger group of citizens.

Somin nevertheless asserts that withdrawal may be an important complement to ballot box voting and related institutional avenues of political engagement. The latter cannot and should not be done away with, he claims, given democracy is "superior" to alternative forms of government,[237] yet withdrawal goes beyond these, as does its political relevance. Somin correctly identifies a glaring issue with the communicative view of withdrawal: it can only be considered politically relevant insofar as it communicates grievances or opinions by those withdrawing to the relevant actors and institutions of political power, no less than forms of direct engagement such as ballot box voting. As Somin relates, this view, which both Warren and Hirschman assert is a defining feature of political withdrawals, suffers from the practical issue that withdrawals do not necessarily effectively communicate the reasons for which individuals are withdrawing in the first place, unless they openly and publicly communicate the reasons to the relevant actors themselves. More often than not, individuals do not openly communicate to their respective governing bodies or publicly state why they are moving; they are not "noisy" or "expressive" as Kirkpatrick designates the kinds of political

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[236] Somin, *Free to Move,* 16.
[237] Somin, *Free to Move,* 3.

withdrawals in which individuals openly and publicly state the reasons why they are leaving, and/or express their dissatisfaction or distaste for the organization, jurisdiction or polity from which they are withdrawing.[238] Thus when individuals do withdraw, whether in the form of politicians leaving their political parties or a government post, voters shifting their support and votes from one party to another, or especially, citizens leaving one municipality, province or nation for another, it is not always clear why they are doing so. It is then left to public bodies to proactively sift through data on exit trends within their respective polities and determine whether there are any significant trends warranting a significant political response.

Foot voting likely has a more immediate effect on an individual's life, for better or worse, than voting. For example, Somin argues that foot voting can be a powerful mechanism for improving the economic well being of individuals, especially for citizens living in jurisdictions with few economic opportunities or where redistributive policies are nonexistent, very basic or skewed to the benefit of only certain groups.[239] Waiting for job prospects to improve or government policy to change may be a failing strategy especially where opportunities to move to jurisdictions with potentially greater prospects may more quickly result in economic gain. While Somin agrees that agitating in favour of more robust and equitable redistributive policies is a distinct and laudable course of action, rather than simply waiting for change or moving, he notes that opportunities for political participation are in some cases skewed against certain groups, or outright

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[238] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 17.
[239] Somin, *Free to Move,* 25.

restrictive, even when there are formal rights enshrining equal opportunity to engage in the political process. Leaving the jurisdiction for another with more tolerant policies and greater opportunities for economic advancement and formal political engagement can have a more immediately positive impact on one's life. A particularly poignant historical example to highlight Somin's point is the "Great Migration" of African Americans in the United States throughout the early—to mid—1900s before the advent of the Civil Rights Movement. They migrated from Southern states where social, political and economic opportunities for African Americans were severely restricted and racism was particularly rampant, to urban centres in Northeastern, Mid-Western and Western states where they could enjoy generally greater sociopolitical and economic opportunities.[240] In the span of a few decades, millions of Black Americans decided to improve their lot by seeking and moving to states and communities with more promising life-prospects for themselves and their families. The results of this are, of course, imperfect, and structural racism continues to bedevil African Americans and their communities across the entirety of the United States, requiring continued political engagement through formal and informal channels. But the pull to leave was certainly motivated by greater prospects elsewhere and resulted in more opportunity overall.

Even in the absence of overt oppression, the majoritarian principle in most democratic processes can negatively affect one's ability to make any significant or lasting impacts in the political sphere. In most cases, says Somin, individual voters find

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[240] Somin, *Free to Move,* 47.

themselves under the complete domination of whichever political forces prevail in an election. And while a genuinely inclusive franchise can play a valuable role in the protection of various social groups, it does not dispense with the problem of nondomination.[241] "The individual voter," he says, "is still dominated by the views of the majority political coalition and still has almost no chance of influencing the policies adopted by the government."[242] Thus, in an electoral democracy where majority rules it may behoove individuals to seek out jurisdictions or communities where they might find the policies in place more favourable to them, or at least the opportunities to engage in the political process less dominated by a prevailing view.

Thus, according to Somin, even if the communicative function of withdrawal does not adequately signal discontent to political organizations or governments and prompt them to change public policies in response to the withdrawals, being able to withdraw to a different jurisdiction can ensure that individuals have some direct, immediate influence over their own lives vis-à-vis the policies enacted by public decision making bodies. The ability and ease by which citizens can move between jurisdictions is also an important factor in ensuring robust political freedom and nondomination, an important norm in democratic theory, besides the role played in allowing citizens the ability to influence collective decision making. The presence of options, whether amongst political parties, civil society organizations, or (most importantly as far as Somin is concerned) jurisdictions from which individuals can meaningfully choose, and the extent and ease to

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[241] Somin, *Free to Move,* 27.
[242] Somin, *Free to Move,* 28.

which they can withdraw, ensures that no one party, individual, organization, values or set of public policies can claim a monopoly over decision making institutions. At the very least they cannot claim uncontested dominance over an individual. It is in this vein that Kirkpatrick says that one of the defining political features of withdrawal is its opposition to vertical power relations, that is, state institutions and government rule.[243] As some theorists of withdrawal note, like Somin, the ability to freely move between jurisdictions and withdraw from the state itself is an important check on the authority of government over citizens.

What is clear from these thinkers is that withdrawal is an important and relevant action to consider in political contexts, especially if the latter is understood to involve attempts to influence or signal discontent with government policies, political institutions or to gain power over these, as is one of the main features of the institutional approach to politics outlined in chapter one. There are forms of withdrawal that can be engaged in that would appear to have a direct effect, in some cases, on political organizations and processes. This is notable because it shows how forms of engagement are not necessarily the only ways in which to act politically; withdrawal does not necessarily translate to political inaction or disinterest. However, while this literature is thus important in identifying withdrawal as potentially political, it inadequately captures what is so unique about withdrawal as a political notion and action in its own right, occluding, as it does, many other ways in which withdrawal might be political. It does this precisely because of

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[243] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 10.

the assumption underlying this literature that the prospects of withdrawal eliciting genuine political effects are wholly dependent on the political institutions within which the withdrawals occur and about which they are enacted in the first place. This is a point which Jennet Kirkpatrick has recently attempted to make clear and critique.

Kirkpatrick: Additional Virtues of Political Withdrawal

Kirkpatrick has written one of the latest book-length treatments of withdrawal as a political concept and practice, which is arguably the most sustained discussion of political withdrawal since Hirschman's *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*. Indeed, *The Virtues of Exit: On Resistance and Quitting Politics* is meant both as a direct extension of and critical response to Hirschman's treatment of exit and the literature that follows in his footsteps. Its recognition of the limitations and insufficiencies of the existing literature on the politics of withdrawal make it an important work to examine and discuss as far as any project about political withdrawal, such as this one, is concerned. Kirkpatrick takes issue with what she sees in this literature as the purely instrumental view of exit that treats it as a relatively simple and straightforward action: cutting ties with an organization or jurisdiction and leaving. She also questions the narrow understanding of politics with which the discussion of withdrawal is associated, namely, that of established political institutions and procedures like ballot box voting,[244] which even Somin, who presents the political boons of withdrawal in terms beyond the ballot box and formal political engagement with established institutions, can be said to fall under. Somin recognizes that

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[244] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 4.

it is not often an easy decision to just up and leave,[245] and that much is dependent on

regulatory and socioeconomic policies enacted by various levels of government. He thus

ultimately calls for institutional designs that focus as much on expanding and protecting

exit rights as it does on expanding voting rights and the opportunity to engage in

established political processes, making it both easier and attractive for individuals to

move between jurisdictions as they see fit at the subnational, national and international

levels.[246] Effective foot voting requires established political institutions to provide

options for foot voters to take advantage of. Foot voting on its own cannot ensure the

availability of those options.[247] As he says, "when foot voting takes place between

jurisdictions controlled by governments—such as in federal systems and through

international migration—it is to a large extent dependent on the existence of political

institutions."[248] Exit and voice; withdrawal and engagement, in other words, should

complement each other, but ultimately, withdrawal is more dependent on continued and

active engagement with political institutions than the latter is on the capacity and actual

presence of withdrawal.

      Kirkpatrick notably attempts to widen an understanding of political withdrawal

beyond electoral politics or formal political "exit-rights." For example, Kirkpatrick

spends ample time discussing the withdrawals of groups and individuals who are either

systematically denied any political voice or opportunity to engage in the political

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[245] See: Somin, *Free to Move,* Ch. 2.
[246] See: Somin, *Free to Move,* ch. 7.
[247] Somin, *Free to Move,* 43.
[248] Somin, *Free to Move,* 133.

procedures of the polities which they leave, or who express distaste with the injustices perpetuated by the governments of their respective polities. Her treatment of political exiles, refugees, fugitives, and, in the case of Henry Thoreau, quasi-hermits,[249] is not to then argue, as does Somin, simply for greater exit-based rights and the instrumental benefits that interjurisdictional withdrawals can provide for individuals. It is rather to focus on the explicitly political import of the act of leaving itself in situations where there is no other legal, safe or effective recourse for those withdrawing to otherwise engage in the politics of their polity or jurisdiction; that is, how the act of withdrawing itself can express resistance or defiance with political power irrespective of the effects withdrawing might have on it.

Kirkpatrick argues that one of the main politically relevant results of withdrawal is that it can give individuals and groups the ability to engage in attempts to influence or change aspects of the government or political institutions that they have left safely and effectively from a distance. She discusses two notable examples to showcase this point: fugitive Black slaves in pre-Emancipation America, and political exiles and dissidents who leave their country of origin altogether. In the first case, Kirkpatrick notes how the flight of Black slaves from Southern plantations to Northern states in the immediate pre-Civil War era afforded many of them more than just greater personal freedom and autonomy, a point that Somin stresses. Most who fled (or attempted to flee) from their

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[249] I say "quasi" because Thoreau did not completely remove himself from society to live a hermetic life. His sojourn at Walden Pond, for example, was punctuated by regular visits to his nearby town of Concord, Massachusetts. The land on which he built his cabin, moreover, was owned by his friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who bequeathed its use to Thoreau, and whose own home was near the edge of the forests around Walden.

masters and from slave-holding states certainly did so out of an urgent sense of self-preservation and personal freedom. Mary Prince, the first woman to write about her life as a slave, ends her account, for example, by saying: "all slaves want to be free—to be free is very sweet... I have been a slave myself—I know what slaves feel... The man that says slaves be quite happy in slavery—that they don't wanna be free—that man is either ignorant or a lying person."[250] Yet escape also enabled former slaves the freedom to "become politically active, to join a political movement (the abolitionists), and to focus on the suffering of the oppressed" in slave-holding states.[251] Notable abolitionists like Harriet Jacobs, William Wells Brown, and Frederick Douglass were all born into slavery before escaping to the North, where they became active in the abolitionist cause. Their escape from servitude, and their first-hand experiences as former slaves added to the poignancy of the abolitionist cause, giving a sense of urgency to end an unjust institution that continued to enslave millions of their fellow compatriots. In "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," Harriet Jacobs, for example, writes that "I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse."[252] The same is true for political exiles who, though they might not be indentured and oppressed in the same way as slaves, leave or are otherwise exiled from their homelands altogether. Kirkpatrick brings to attention the example of Vietnam War draft dodgers who fled the

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[250] Prince, Mary. "The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave." *Six Women's Slave Narratives*, edited by William L. Andrews. Oxford University Press, 1988, 23.

[251] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 77.

[252] Jacobs, Harriet. "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl." *The Classic Slave Narratives*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates. New American Library, 1987, 439-40.

United States for Canada and Europe, where they rallied and spoke out against the draft, and the war, from afar. While the continued engagement with the politics of the homeland, albeit from abroad, is a decisive element of politics traditionally understood, it is notably only enabled by withdrawing in the first place as Kirkpatrick points out.

But beyond enabling continued political engagement, if from afar, withdrawals can be expressive in themselves, communicative as Hirschman and Warren would say. However, they are so, as Kirkpatrick aims to show, in ways beyond what they might express directly to elected officials or political leaders. Her primary case study for this side of political withdrawal is Henry Thoreau. Thoreau's withdrawal took on two primary forms, as discussed in the literature which has recently focused on this aspect of his life:[253] his refusal to pay his poll tax, for which he was briefly imprisoned in 1846, and a physical retreat from society to live a life of solitude in a cabin he had built on the shores of Walden Pond, near his hometown of Concord, Massachusetts, between 1845-1847. In both cases, his sojourn at Walden in particular, Thoreau's withdrawal does not appear to be political in any sense. His refusal to pay the poll tax could not amount to much of an effective resistance to the state—the absence of six years' worth of back taxes from a single individual would hardly have had any negative impact on the state's coffers. Thoreau's retreat to Walden Pond seems even less political. After all, Thoreau spent much of the time focused on writing personal and naturalist works, rather than social and

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[253] See: Bennet, Jane. *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, Politics and the Wild*. Sage, 1994; Mariotti, Shannon L. *Thoreau's Democratic Withdrawal: Alienation, Participation, and Modernity*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2010; Walker, Brian. "Thoreau's Alternative Economics: Work, Liberty, and Democratic Cultivation." *American Political Science Review*, vol.92, no.4, 1998, pp. 845-56; Rosenblum, Nancy L. "Thoreau's Militant Conscience." *Political Theory*, vol.9, no.1, 1981, pp. 81-110.

political tracts, and to otherwise live simply and "deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life... to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life... to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion."[254] Arendt, notably, argues that Thoreau's actions fell short of being political because they did not engage in concert with others against the government whose laws, policies and institutions he deplored. Instead, they were motivated by a concern for personal integrity, rather than the political world.[255] Nor was his withdrawal political by the prevailing standards of withdrawal theorists themselves, as his withdrawal was neither strategically efficacious, nor effectively communicative with respect to the laws, policies, institutions, or representatives of the state. Yet Thoreau himself appears to connect both cases of withdrawal not only to personal moral conviction or some other sense of spiritual or aesthetic sensibility, but also, crucially, to the political affairs of his time. Like later proponents of civil disobedience, Thoreau was an outspoken critic of a number of injustices either constitutionally allowed or perpetuated by the state, namely, slavery, America's expansionist war against Mexico (1846-1848), and the mistreatment and dispossession of Indigenous peoples.[256]

    Thoreau's practice and advocacy of withdrawal is similar in vein to later nonviolent practitioners of civil disobedience, such as Martin Luther King Jr., who speaks

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[254] Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden; Or, Life in the Woods*. Dover Publications, 1995, 59.
[255] Arendt, Hannah. "Civil Disobedience." *Crises of the Republic*, Harcourt Brace and Company, 1972, pp. 49-102, 60-68.
[256] Thoreau, Henry David. "Civil Disobedience." *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays*, Digireads.com Publishing, 2017, pp. 5-22.

of the necessity of direct action outside the bounds of the ballot box, imploring those

fighting for racial justice to break laws "that conscience tells him is unjust, and willingly

accept[s] the penalty by staying in jail to arouse the conscience of the community over its

injustice."[257] Thoreau likewise asks, rhetorically:

> Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to
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> amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them
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> at once? Men generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to
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> wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them. They think that, if they
>
> should resist, the remedy would be worse than the evil. But it is the fault of the
>
> government itself that the remedy is worse than the evil. It makes it worse.[258]

However, whereas King advocates engaging in direct action so as to "create such

a crisis,"[259] in order to bring attention to unjust laws and bring attention to racial injustice,

Thoreau insists on withdrawing and standing aloof from the state.[260] He did exactly this,

both in his refusal to pay his taxes and in his physical retreat to Walden. The latter,

admittedly, was a less clear-cut case of protest against the government, saying in *Walden*

that he "went down to the woods for other purposes."[261] But he nevertheless connects his

physical retreat to his nonpayment of taxes in the very next line, where he says, in

reference to his arrest for nonpayment, that

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[257] King Jr., Martin Luther. "Letter From Birmingham Jail." Stanford University: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, 16 April 1963. https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/letter-birmingham-jail.
[258] Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," 11.
[259] King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail."
[260] Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," 18.
[261] Thoreau, *Walden,* 111.

wherever a man goes, men will pursue and paw him with their dirty institutions,

and, if they can, constrain him to belong to their desperate odd-fellow society. It is

true, I might have resisted forcibly with more or less effect, might have run

'amok' against society; but I preferred that society should run "amok" against me,

it being the desperate party.[262]

Just as King's advocacy of civil disobedience is very clearly centered on the state

and others in power, Thoreau's advocacy of withdrawal is no less political precisely

because it, too, is oriented towards the state. He claims that in withdrawing, "I quietly

declare war with the State, after my fashion."[263] His withdrawal is, like King's advocacy

of nonviolent direct action, predicated on an opposition to unjust laws and policies.

Moreover, and as Kirkpatrick notes, Thoreau's withdrawal can be seen not only as a sign

of personal resistance to a state that has failed morally, but also as an expression of

solidarity with those who have suffered and continue to suffer by the unjust laws and

practices of the state, putting into question Arendt's criticism. As Kirkpatrick points out:

"Thoreau's resistant exit maintains a connection with the political community through his

writing and his agitation, actions that suggest he wants to change the dominant power

arrangements."[264] In Thoreau's highly influential essay "Civil Disobedience," in which

he directly speaks out against the state's unjust actions, he advocates for those similarly

inclined to "dissolve" and "disregard" their relationship to the government. To those

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[262] Thoreau, *Walden,* 111.
[263] Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," 18.
[264] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 62.

"who call themselves abolitionists," for example, he says they "should at once effectually withdraw their support, both in person and property"[265] just as he had done; likewise, political officials, insofar as they disagree with the course of their government should, as Hirschman argues, "resign [their] office."[266] As James Ingram puts it, Thoreau's withdrawal "if even minimally generalized, can also be seen as a political strategy, consonant both with his immediate goals (abolition, pacifism) and his more distant hope of reducing the state's claims on its citizens."[267]

Thoreau's withdrawal can be called into question as an effective strategy to radically alter the laws or structures of the state–let alone contribute to its ultimate demise–at least not when conducted by a single individual, despite his bombastic claim that:

> if one thousand, if one hundred, if ten men whom I could name—if ten honest men only—ay, if one HONEST man, in this State of Massachusetts, ceasing to hold slaves, were actually to withdraw from this co-partnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefore, it would be the abolition of slavery in America.... When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished.[268]

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[265] Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," 12.
[266] Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," 13.
[267] Ingram, James D. "Anarchism: Provincializing Civil Disobedience." *The Cambridge Companion to Civil Disobedience*, edited by William E. Scheuerman, Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. 178-200, 186.
[268] Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," 12.

But his withdrawal is nevertheless a form of political declaration, a rallying cry in defense of those suffering the injustices of the powers that be, a desire to not be associated with such powers, and a hope, however slim, for political change.

Conclusion: Political Withdrawal Beyond the State?

The literature on withdrawal, beginning with Hirschman, and largely following in his wake, shows how withdrawals can indeed be understood as political despite the longstanding assumption in political thought that politics requires engagement with a state and its institutions. They can be communicative or expressive of dissent or displeasure to relevant members of political organizations, institutions, governments, or beyond these, to citizens and those suffering under unjust laws in the interest of evoking positive change in the state. Alternatively, withdrawal can enhance political freedom and the promise of greater political influence vis-à-vis established political power structures. However, as I have already said, it stays firmly within the orbit of a particular understanding of politics. And this includes Kirkpatrick's treatment of political withdrawal, which itself remains largely couched in an institutional view of politics, despite her concern that the political theory literature on withdrawal has largely focused on the ballot box and institutional politics, and despite her more far-reaching and idiosyncratic examples of political withdrawals, especially Thoreau's. In spite of some differences among those who have explicitly written on withdrawal, the literature examined in this chapter largely shares a common thread: the view that, as Darin Barney

argues,[269] that which makes withdrawal a specifically political word is when it stands in some kind of direct relation to the state and "the institutions of liberal democratic politics;"[270] or that withdrawal is political insofar as, in Kirkpatrick's words, those exiting remain "attached" to the polity or state within which, or from which, the withdrawal takes place.

This deference to the state and its political institutions, even among discussions of withdrawal that have attempted to showcase its clearly political import, shows to what extent the state, and its institutions, have been entrenched as the sole or predominant horizon of politics. As I have shown in chapter one, this makes sense, as it has been around since politics was first taken up as a matter of theoretical study by the Ancient Greeks, principally Aristotle, right through more modern and contemporary treatments, such as those by Machiavelli and Weber. Perhaps because of how entrenched the institutional view of politics is, any kind of withdrawal that is not "attached" is not often seen as sufficiently political, if at all, even within the withdrawal literature. In an "attached exit," Kirkpatrick says, "political actors remain connected via politics to the organization or place that was left… the attachment is political, and thus the focus of the connection is on changing the political leadership, addressing a policy issue, altering political ideas."[271] Her examples of fugitive slaves, exiles, or conscientious objectors like Thoreau who refuse civil government and its impositions in light of the injustices it

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[269] Barney, Darin. "Withdrawal Symptoms: Refusal, Sabotage, Suspension." *Politics of Withdrawal: Media, Arts, Theory*, edited by Pepita Hesselberth and Joost de Bloois, Rowman and Littlefield, 2020, pp. 115-131.
[270] Barney, "Withdrawal Symptoms," 116.
[271] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 19.

engages in and perpetuates, are all nevertheless "attached," in her estimate, to the extent

that they are attempting to communicate displeasure with or actively change elements of

the existing arrangement of institutional political power in the course of their withdrawal,

without significantly subverting the political power arrangements in place. She notably

distinguishes, for example, between African American slaves who fled their servitude out

of a simple desire for self-preservation and those who used their newfound freedom to

rail against slavery, rally others to the cause of emancipation and precipitate change in the

laws of the land to which they nevertheless remained committed in their freedom. While

the former exemplifies what she would call a "garden-variety" exit[272]—recognizing,

nevertheless, that such withdrawals are in many cases highly laudable, necessary, and full

of meaning for those that go through with them—it is only the latter that could be

described in distinctly political terms because they remain attached to their polity and,

largely speaking, the existing laws and political institutions. Their withdrawal from, and

re-engagement with, established political institutions is meant to reform or strike down

their more oppressive and anti-human laws and policies. Even Thoreau's withdrawal, on

Kirkpatrick's reading, was politically relevant only insofar as "Thoreau's resistant exit

maintains a connection with the political community through his writing and his

agitation."[273]

      This largely conflates with Hirschman's comparison of what he dubs "true" exits

with political exits. In the case of the former, he says that "exit terminates the relationship

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[272] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 95.
[273] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 62.

between the customer-member and the product-organization he is leaving"[274] and any

effect it might have on the organization being left behind is "an *unintended* side

effect."[275] On the other hand, in the case of a *political* withdrawal, "the customer-member

will *himself* be interested in making his exit contribute to improvement of the product-

organization he is leaving."[276] Thus the "cop-out" movement of groups like the hippies in

Hirschman's time is more akin to a "true" rather than political exit, because the

individuals who "find American society, its values, and the actions of its government not

to their tastes" are, by choosing to "opt-out," attempting to "secure for themselves a

better set of values and policies [elsewhere] *without having first changed the existing*

set."[277] Warren, who argues in favour of greater awareness of withdrawals in the context

of decision making processes in electoral democracies, and Somin, who advocates for

institutional design enabling greater "exit-based rights," similarly operate within an

institutional understanding of politics.

Kirkpatrick indicates that a discussion of withdrawal should give us insight into

political theory itself. Political concepts, like justice or freedom, conflict or power, have

the capacity to explain "diverging political and socio-cultural phenomena," or the "social

world" as she puts it. But they must also, surely, be able to say something about the

political itself.[278] Kirkpatrick's approach in this direction is to show that there are a

number of different ways to think about withdrawal and its relationship to politics than

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[274] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 104.
[275] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 108 (my emphasis).
[276] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 104.
[277] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 105.
[278] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 2.

the current scholarship appreciates, [279] which tends to view withdrawal as a "uniform, uncomplicated action" that can only be performed one way: to cut ties with a political organization and walk away.[280] She certainly gives a more nuanced picture of withdrawal than exists in the literature I have thus far reviewed. However, given her clear indication of what makes a withdrawal "political," and that "garden-variety exits" outside of the context of institutional political practices are nonpolitical, Kirkpatrick's attempt to show the wider implications of a discussion of withdrawal on the notion of politics is rather restricted. The focus on "attached exits" as the only form of truly political withdrawals unfortunately contributes to the lack of a fuller discussion and appreciation of withdrawal in the literature. It also mirrors and contributes to the divide in the wider political theory literature between institutional politics and noninstitutional understandings. In so doing it contributes to the stifling nature that institutional political discussions and arrangements have on those who have lost faith in them, dismissing, or not taking as seriously, the issues which have contributed to the desire to withdraw in the first place. The irony here is that the very thinkers who have lauded withdrawal as a legitimate political concept and activity have done so with the recognition that people often employ strategies of withdrawal precisely because they feel they have not been heard by their governments or political organizations; their desires have not been acted upon with the kind of urgency they would wish.

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[279] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 3.
[280] Kirkpatrick, *The Virtues of Exit,* 2.

Alternate, noninstitutional understandings of politics, as I have noted in chapter two, are often formulated precisely in response to this very issue present in the institutional approach to politics. The notion of politics has evolved since its inception, shifting according to the specific concerns identified by its various proponents. In the chapters that follow I will show that, as with the notion of politics, withdrawal itself has evolved according to the political convictions of those who have engaged in such withdrawals or who have written about them, and these largely map on to the different approaches to politics discussed in the previous two chapters. Despite their differences, the forms of withdrawal I will explore going forward have in common an attempt to pull away from institutional forms of political engagement, reflecting one or another of the noninstitutional conceptions of politics discussed in chapter two.

Withdrawals that are not directly engaged with a state or political community may not necessarily be attempts to leave politics, as theorists who discuss withdrawal within an institutional understanding of politics argue. They may be expressions of a desire to be free from the grasp of the coercive authority of the state or other dominant institutions altogether, or at the very least, to bypass the state in attempts to address the core issues motivating the withdrawal. Their political nature may be attested to by the fact that they express in different ways the noninstitutional conceptions of politics examined in chapter two. By showing how alternate understandings of politics change the political context of withdrawals and vice versa, we might have a fuller, cross-discipline dialogue on the notion of withdrawal and the political, the hallmark of any serious political concept, as Kirkpatrick rightfully notes.

to flee is not to renounce action: nothing is more active than a flight[281]

– Deleuze

CHAPTER 4: NONINSTITUTIONAL POLITICAL WITHDRAWAL: INDIGENOUS RESURGENCE

Introduction

I ended the previous chapter by arguing that withdrawals that are not in some way attached to the state, even if in an attempt to make changes to its government, institutions, policies or laws, may not necessarily be attempts to leave politics, as theorists who discuss withdrawal within an institutional understanding of politics argue. In fact, they may be understood to be political even when they are attempting to withdraw from state institutions and processes altogether. Beginning with this chapter, I will show that much like with the notion of politics, withdrawal itself has evolved and shifted according to the political convictions of those who have engaged in such withdrawals or who have written about them. Despite their differences, the forms of withdrawal I will be focusing on in this chapter, and subsequent chapters, share the fact of pulling away from state forms of political engagement, reflecting one or another of the noninstitutional conception of politics discussed in chapter two, namely, those revolving around power, conflict and acting together.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of electoral boycotts. Their importance at this point in the discussion, as I will argue, is that they gesture towards a different way of

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[281] Deleuze, Gilles and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues II*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Columbia University Press, 2007, 36.

understanding political withdrawals, one that eschew any attachment to the state. Focusing on the specific example of the Serb electoral boycott of 2020, I argue that electoral boycotts, as a form of withdrawal, are political in that they bring into sharp relief the relations of power between citizens and the state. They do so, however, without fully withdrawing from the orbit of established political institutions and processes. I will show with the example of the Serb electoral boycott that those who engage in such boycotts do so with the capture or protection of state institutions in mind, especially when formal avenues of political engagement have effectively barred them from doing so. I briefly examine the example of an electoral boycott because it is, in a sense, a bridge between examples of withdrawal that remain attached to an institutional understanding of politics, and those that refuse any such attachment. The latter, as I will show, can be understood to be political by one or another of the noninstitutional understandings of politics examined in chapter two.

I then turn my focus to Indigenous resurgence, arguing with Glen Coulthard that this form of Indigenous activism aims to confront a history and ongoing legacy of colonialism via a withdrawal from the various formations of colonial power that permeate Canadian society, and in so doing show that withdrawal can be considered political even when not strictly oriented towards institutional change or capture, and are attempting to withdraw from state institutions and processes altogether. I do this by drawing on Foucault's work on power, showing that Indigenous refusal of settler colonial political institutions and practices seeks to fundamentally question and recalibrate the power dynamics between Indigenous peoples and the settler colonial state.

I end this chapter by asking the question whether to be a fully fledged political action, withdrawal, in the end, needs to be followed by a re-engagement with the formations of power from which it withdraws. Electoral boycotts appear to confirm this, despite bringing under scrutiny the underlying power dynamics of citizens and state institutions and thus pushing past some of the more resolutely institutional withdrawals examined in the previous chapter. And while I argue that Indigenous resurgence is a clearer example of a noninstitutional political withdrawal, some of Coulthard's own examples of actions he associates with Indigenous resurgence would appear to suggest this. In this way he would appear to view withdrawal in much the same way as I characterize electoral boycotts—as gesturing away from, without fully leaving the orbit of institutional politics. I return to this question in the next, and final chapter, where I attempt to address it with two further examples of noninstitutional withdrawals.

Electoral Boycotts

Electoral boycotts in effect fundamentally challenge the attachment citizens have to their governments, polities and political institutions, especially if they are intended to express the public's lack of consent to be governed by them, or even to topple the government and radically transform state institutions. But they do so even in the case where those boycotting may wish to preserve what remains of their political institutions, such as was the case with the electoral boycott called for by Serbia's main opposition parties during the 2020 legislative elections in that country. It is in this sense that Hirschman, for example, declares that boycotts are "on the border line between voice and

exit," and that while they are "undertaken for the specific and explicit purpose of achieving a change of policy on the part of the boycotted organization," they are temporary and those engaged in the boycott "will return to the fold in case certain conditions which have led to the boycott are remedied."[282]

Serbia's current political institutions, embattled though they are by the current ruling party, are the result of hard-won democratization efforts following the ouster of strongman Slobodan Milošević in 2000. It is no wonder that pro-democracy opposition parties and citizens have become increasingly vocal about the methodical undermining of these very institutions in recent years by the Serbian Progress Party (SNS),[283] which has been ruling Serbia unimpeded since 2012. Several failed attempts at unseating the SNS-led coalition at the ballot box, however, had led the opposition to announce and campaign for a boycott of the 2020 parliamentary elections to send a direct signal of discontent against the now decade-long rule of the SNS and its quasi-authoritarian leader, Aleksandar Vučić.[284] This was a stark contrast in form to previous mass protests against Vučić's rule, and especially with those which toppled Serbia's previous authoritarian president, Slobodan Milošević, in the Fall of 2000. Milošević and his ruling party, the Socialist Party of Serbia, were ousted from power after weeks of mass protests and civil disobedience, following a strong showing for pro-democratic opposition forces in a

[282] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty,* 86.

[283] Janković, Daniel and N. Dumanović. "New Dog, Old Tricks: Serbia's Continual Repression of the Media and Civil Society." *Foreign Policy Journal,* 27 Nov. 2015. www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2015/11/27/new-dog-old-tricks-serbias-continual-repression/.

[284] Filipović, Gordana and Misha Savić. "Serbian Opposition Groups Boycott Parliament as Protests Spread." *Bloomberg*, 11 February 2019. www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-11/serbian-opposition-groups-boycott-parliament-as-protests-spread.

parliamentary and presidential election that saw a record turnout in any election held in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia or Serbia either before or after.[285]

The opposition to Vučić could not recreate the same result with its periodic, though regular, protests since the SNS came to power in 2012, nor generate the same motivation among citizens to go to the polling booths in large enough numbers to vote out the current regime. In short, its attempts at meaningfully changing the direction of Serbian politics by directly engaging with the established political institutions and practices have been largely fruitless. The democratic opposition thus radically changed tactics and resorted to the opposite reaction to its enemy: instead of fight, or voice to utilize Hirschman's language, it opted for flight, or exit. To refuse, in other words, what they deemed to be sham, rubber-stamp elections. And with an expected dismal voter turnout, to deny the ruling coalition—the expected, and eventual, overwhelming winners of the election—any popular legitimacy.

The debate over whether or not to boycott an election is a storied one. Often, the reaction is negative, and revolves around two central reasons: one normative, the other practical. On the one hand, electoral boycotts are often seen as shirking one's civic duty. As Warren notes, democracy is typically understood to require active engagement by the citizenry and especially, if nothing else, its mobilization and direct activity during election periods. Democracy's very survival is predicated on active engagement by its citizens. Not voting is tantamount to *not* taking part in the political process; and in a

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[285] Steele, Johnathan. "Yugoslavia's hated regime crumbles." *The Guardian*, 6 October 2014. www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/06/yugoslavia-milosevic-revolution-2000.

democratic society, this means, ostensibly, forfeiture of the very principle of the notion

that political power rests in the hands of the people. On the other hand, detractors of

electoral boycotts have pointed to the utter pointlessness of them from a tactical point of

view, especially when it leaves the ballot wide open to be scooped up by remaining

parties on the list.[286] This would inevitably give the ruling party a strengthened and

entrenched presence in parliament, and thus a freer hand to conduct the business of

government with less scrutiny from opposition parties. And this is in fact what happened

in the aftermath of the 2020 Serb parliamentary elections.[287] Thus, unless causing the

collapse of existing political institutions, or ignoring them completely, is the expected

result of a boycott, the latter is acutely counterproductive.

There are a few reasons to reject such criticisms. In the case of Serbian politics,

the boycott was in a way a greater demonstration of democracy than voting. It should be

noted that opposition leaders called for a boycott of the 2020 elections after several failed

attempts at unseating the ruling coalition in previous elections which the opposition has

claimed were fraught with voting irregularities and political gerrymandering orchestrated

by the ruling party to ensure its victory at the ballot box.[288] And while, as was expected,

the ruling party came out of the 2020 election victorious, the opposition won somewhat

[286] Teachout, Zephyr. "Boycotts Can't Be a Test of Moral Purity." *The Atlantic*, 3 August 2020.
www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/08/boycotts-cant-be-a-test-of-moral-purity/614821/.
[287] Dragojlo, Saša. "Landslide in Election Boycotted by Opposition." *Balkan Insight*, 21 June 2020.
https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/21/serbia-presidents-party-scores-landslide-in-election-boycotted-by-opposition/.
[288] "Serbia Opposition Announces Parliament Boycott, Calls for Snap Elections." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 11 February 2019. www.rferl.org/a/serbia-opposition-announces-parliament-boycott-calls-for-snap-elections/29762088.html.

of a greater symbolic victory with its boycott than its demonstrations in previous years because it made an issue of the increasingly nonrepresentative nature of the country's institutional democratic procedures itself. With both domestic and international pressure increasing around this very issue after an election in which less than half of the electorate voted and virtually no official opposition party contested as a direct result of the boycott, the Serbian president, Aleksandar Vučić, formally called on opposition leaders to meet and discuss electoral reform.[289] However perfunctory and half-hearted such an effort might have been on the part of the president, it showed that the boycott had some success in calling the ruling regime's attention to a matter of immediate concern to the electorate.

Boycotts in a way emulate the features of exits which Hirschman, and Warren especially, contend make them political in the first place. They intend to communicate the displeasure of those engaging in the boycott with the party, organization, or government they are boycotting, with the hope that the latter take notice and make relevant changes to rectify the issues that are the source of that displeasure. It is an alternative action to that of "voice" or engagement, with similar hoped-for outcomes. But they also gesture at something more than this. They signal a potential breach with respect to any attachment on the part of those boycotting with the institutions and political processes they are boycotting. The case for withdrawal from the established political institutions is often called for by those who experience increasing and longstanding frustration with

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[289] Ivković, Aleksandar. "[EWB Interview] Kmezić: Outcome of the protests showed that Vučić's rule is not unlimited." *European Western Balkans*, 20 December 2021. https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2021/12/20/ewb-interview-kmezic-outcome-of-the-protests-showed-that-vucics-rule-is-not-unlimited/.

established political institutions and processes. This is exactly what frustrated and disgruntled Serbs, who have already had experiences in their recent past with unresponsive political leaders who viewed elections as rubber stamps for their rule. This frustration is echoed by Jacques Rancière who views formal representative institutions and procedures, such as elections, as nothing more than a periodic competition among a select few individuals ("elites") for votes from the electorate. He argues that this effectively removes power from the people and goes so far as to call this form of democratic rule in the *a*-political terms of "policing" to signify its purely procedural, administrative and, in his view, far from democratic nature.[290] In Rancière's view, democracy needs to be seen in terms other than simply voting or taking part in institutional procedures; politics, moreover, needs to be understood as something more than just engaging with the institutions of the state.[291]

And this is exactly what boycotts gesture at. Boycotts by no means result in a cessation of political activity. Those withdrawing from formal political procedures and institutions do so in order to demonstrate their displeasure at being denied real political influence through the very procedures and institutions they are boycotting. They actualize the kind of democracy Rancière advocates for, which challenges "governments' claims to embody the sole principle of public life,"[292] extending the meaning of political action itself beyond the formal processes by which governments are instituted and influenced. In

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[290] Rancière, *Disagreement,* 28-29.
[291] Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy,* 55.
[292] Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy,* 62.

any case, the charge of being a contravention of one's "civic duty" or of being tactically ineffectual is of little concern to the present argument, which simply wishes to demonstrate the overtly political nature of withdrawal. As Hirschman notes, simply walking away from the government, political party, or public good is a political act insofar as it is oriented in some way to the political institutions being walked away from; "it will operate either by making the government reform or by bringing it down, but in any event, the jolt provoked by clamorous exit of a respected member is in many situations an indispensable complement to voice."[293]

But the example of boycotts shows, more than other forms of withdrawal discussed in the previous chapter, that a discussion of withdrawal can also cut across institutional political activities in ways not appreciated by the literature examined in that chapter, and in such a way that it points to alternate ways of understanding and conducting politics. As the boycott example shows, withdrawals might put in sharper relief the power dynamics between individuals and the state than do forms of political action that directly engage with the established political institutions, gesturing to one of the noninstitutional understandings of politics I outlined in chapter two. The Serbian opposition which called for a boycott of the 2020 elections did not, of course, reject electoral democracy in principle, nor, for that matter, the state—they remained more or less attached to them. In boycotting the election, they wanted to bring to attention the fact that it was hijacked and used as a tool by the ruling party to legitimize its otherwise

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[293] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*, 117.

increasingly autocratic tendencies. The boycott attempted to express the fact that power

over a community resides, ultimately, in the people, regardless of the existence of

political institutions whereby that power is ostensibly represented and translated into

actionable policies. In so doing it displaced the conventional *place* of politics from the

institutions of the state to a more basic political context, that being relations of power. I

will explore this dimension of withdrawal further in this chapter, utilizing an example of

a kind of withdrawal that, unlike the Serbian electoral boycott, attempts to go beyond any

engagement with or attachment to the state.

Indigenous Resurgence

Whether it be a long history of slavery and segregation, colonial repression and

genocide, patriarchal social relations, or economic inequality, the modern liberal

democratic state is everywhere being held to account for past and present systemic

injustices and inequities. This has brought into relief a dilemma that has been at the

centre of Indigenous theory and activism: whether to engage with the state through

established political processes or various extra-institutional forms, or to refuse any such

engagement and attempt to withdraw from dominant relations of power in order to

address ongoing structural injustices and oppression.

On the one hand, some liberal-democratic states, like Canada, have made

substantial efforts at accommodating Indigenous assertions of nationhood with settler

state sovereignty. These efforts have resulted in greater recognition of Indigenous cultural

rights within the legal and political framework of the state, recognition of existing treaty

rights, and a degree of political autonomy.[294] And while ultimately granted by the state, such initiatives have arguably been gained thanks to decades of direct action on the part of Indigenous peoples themselves.[295] On the other hand, some Indigenous activists and political theorists have claimed that any further attempts to gain recognition by, or reconciliation with, the settler colonial state is deeply problematic. Such is the argument made by Glen Coulthard in *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, wherein he contends that "instead of ushering in an era of peaceful coexistence grounded on the ideal of *reciprocity* or *mutual* recognition, the politics of recognition in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples' demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend."[296] He argues that even though colonial power has long shifted from a structure that was once explicitly oriented around outright genocide and assimilation,[297] that same power dynamic, characterized by a particular form of domination which continues to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land and their self-determining authority, and alienates them from their culture and identity,[298] is now reproduced through a less overtly oppressive set of discourses which emphasize the recognition and accommodation of Indigenous peoples.[299] While Coulthard's critique of contemporary forms of colonialism, and questioning any further

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[294] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 3.
[295] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 2.
[296] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 3.
[297] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 6.
[298] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 6.
[299] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 6.

political engagement with the settler colonial state on the part of Indigenous peoples is not new, his work provides a good conceptual framework that will enable me, in conjunction with Foucault's political thought in particular, to show how the call to Indigenous resurgence, which Coulthard, among others, advocate is deeply political. It is for this reason that I focus on Coulthard's work, without intending, in doing so, to diminish the important contributions of other scholars in this area.[300] I will, where appropriate, make references to these other thinkers in the ensuing discussion.

According to Coulthard, colonial power relations should be understood as an interrelated collection of discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, racial, cultural, psychological, and state power.[301] Without acknowledging it, Coulthard's understanding of colonial power relations reflects, in part, a Foucauldian understanding of power. As I discussed in chapter two, power, in Foucault's understanding, transcends the approach to it found in institutional notions of politics. Though Foucault never denies the reality of state, or "sovereign" power as he refers to it, arguing that power has become "progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions,"[302] he denies that the *only* real power is sovereign power. Power does not "only cover the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated,

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[300] Alfred, Taiaiake. *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Actions and Freedom*. Broadview Press, 2005; Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*: *Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence*. Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011; Simpson, Audra. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*. Duke University Press, 2014.
[301] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 6.
[302] Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 224.

which [are] destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. [Power] in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others."[303] Moreover, according to Foucault, power is everywhere.[304] This is why, according to him, institutional politics, which includes, as I have already elaborated, institutional power struggles, do not always lead to change in the social order. Not much will change in society, he says, if the mechanisms of power that function beyond and outside of the state apparatus, on a minute and everyday level, are not also changed.[305]

Coulthard appropriately refers to colonial power relations as a "*field* of power," reflecting another Foucauldian description of power,[306] and not simply in terms of the brute power wielded and exerted by the settler colonial *state*. Colonial power relations are not just reflected in and forcibly maintained by the laws, policies and institutions of the state. They are maintained and reproduced along multiple different registers diffuse throughout society which serve to limit the accommodation of Indigenous peoples and their way of life within settler colonial societies, manifesting in racist attitudes, capitalist dynamics, and a discursive legal and political regime founded on settler colonial practices and knowledge. The diffuse nature of dominant power relations has prompted Taiaiake Alfred to state that under such conditions "oppression has become increasingly invisible;

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[303] Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 221.
[304] Foucault, "The Risks of Security," 372.
[305] Foucault, Michel. *Remarks on Marx*. Translated by R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito, Semiotext(e), 1991, 60.
[306] Power, says Foucault, must be understood "in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization.... as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system..." Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* 92-93.

[it is] no longer constituted in conventional terms of military occupation, onerous taxation burdens, blatant land thefts, etc.," but rather through a "fluid confluence of politics, economics, psychology and culture."[307]

For example, since the beginning of the colonization of the Americas, Europeans have projected an image of Indigenous peoples as inferior and "uncivilized." Such an image led to the designation of the Americas as "*terra nullis*" or a "no man's land" that was up for grabs by more "civilized," European powers leading to the outright conquest and theft of lands historically populated and cultivated by Indigenous peoples. Such attitudes continue to play an important role in contributing to the denial of equal and full self-determining status to Indigenous peoples in Canada to this day. The racist notion that Aboriginal societies were too primitive to have political rights when they were first encountered by European powers is still evident in legal practice, according to Coulthard; Canada's assumed sovereign authority over Indigenous peoples and their territories has never been seriously challenged or questioned by government bodies.[308] Moreover, the belief in the inferiority and uncivilized nature of Indigenous peoples led to the institution of all kinds of supposed "civilizing" practices, such as forced conversions to Christianity, the residential school system, and forced adoptions, which in effect amount to forced assimilation and cultural (if not outright) genocide, a legacy which continues to have a direct, albeit deleterious effect on Indigenous self-identity. These more overt forms of racialized oppression are just one emanation of white settler racism. Drawing directly

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[307] Alfred, *Wasáse,* 58; 38.
[308] Coulthard, *Red Skins*, *White Masks,* 41.

from the work of Frantz Fanon, Coulthard argues that colonized peoples tend to internalize the negative views of themselves imposed on them by colonizers over time, and as a result come to be accepted as more or less natural by the colonized.[309] These internalized racist attitudes have inevitably contributed to mental health issues such as low self-esteem and depression, and negative and self-destructive habits such as alcohol and drug abuse, and violent behaviours.[310] Simply confronting the power of the state, and having policies changed to reverse course on more overt state-sanctioned racist practices, such as those geared towards forced assimilation, for example, cannot so easily rid colonial subjects "of the 'arsenal of complexes' driven into the core of their being through the colonial process,"[311] according to Coulthard.

The consistent practice on the part of the settler colonial state to override Indigenous land rights and claims in the interest of purely economic and financial gain shows to what extent unequal relations of power continue to have deleterious effects for Indigenous peoples in the economic sphere. In addition to the formidable legal and political challenges presented by landmark cases such as *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*[312] to the economic and political aspirations of Indigenous communities to autonomous self-government on lands they historically lay claim to, challenging the state

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[309] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 41-42.

[310] See: Duran, Eduardo and Bonnie Duran. *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*. State University of New York Press, 1995.

[311] Coulthard, *Red Skins, White Masks,* 38.

[312] In the case *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, the supreme court of Canada effectively ruled that virtually any exploitative economic venture is reason enough for federal and provincial governments to be able to infringe upon Indigenous land rights. Dufraimont, Lisa "From Regulation to Recolonization: Justifiable Infringement of Aboriginal Rights at the Supreme Court of Canada." *University of Toronto Faculty of Law Review*, vol.58, no.1, 2000, pp. 1–30.

through conventional legal and political channels does not fundamentally address the underlying extractive and exploitative values of capitalism itself. The latter is problematic as the fundamental values underlying capitalism clash with the land-connected practices which, according to Coulthard, inform and structure the ethical engagements and relationships Indigenous peoples have with the world, humans and nonhumans alike.[313] A statement made by Philip Blake, a Dene from Fort McPherson, poignantly highlights this fact: "For thousands of years we have lived with the land, we have taken care of the land, and the land has taken care of us. We did not believe that our society has to grow and expand and conquer new areas in order to fulfill our destiny as Indian people. We have lived with the land, not tried to conquer of control it or rob it of its riches."[314] The very capitalist dynamics which have become so ingrained in Canadian and other settler colonial states have worked their way into the reasoning of Indigenous communities themselves. As Coulthard notes, attempts that have sought greater autonomy for Indigenous communities via capitalist economic development have created an Indigenous bourgeoisie whose desire for profit has found it more concerned with economic trends than their identity and culture.[315]

Moreover, as Alfred discusses, the state's institutional and discursive fields are not neutral. They are built on European, that is, settler colonial legal and political discourses and knowledge, and given that these are ingrained and treated as the legal and

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[313] Coulthard, *Red Skins, White Masks,* 13.
[314] Philip Blake, "Statement to the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry." *Dene Nation*, Mel Watkins. University of Toronto Press, 1977, 7–8.
[315] Coulthard, *Red Skins, White Masks,* 42.

valid norm, tend to govern how Indigenous subjects think and act in relation to themselves, others, and the land.[316] It is thus inevitable, as Coulthard argues, that over time this has resulted in Indigenous peoples understanding their rights and identities in relation to the settler colonial state and its legal and political institutions rather than their own customs and traditions.[317]

In such a situation where the power of the dominant settler colonial society is so diffuse yet interrelated, Indigenous peoples can be granted a substantive share of autonomy and recognition by the state, without disrupting the underlying colonial power dynamics which continue to downplay and denigrate Indigenous ways of life. In all the ways briefly overviewed, Indigenous peoples are, over time, interpellated by the dominant socioeconomic and cultural discourses and processes of the settler colonial society in which they find themselves. Thus, fighting for and ultimately being granted greater recognition in conventional legal or political terms does not address the multiple other noninstitutional avenues by which the colonial power dynamic is maintained; the latter cannot be undermined simply via a "liberal politics of recognition." To receive recognition by a state and government without addressing the various other underlying power dynamics cannot make recognition "a source of freedom and dignity for the colonized" but just another facet of the *field of power* through which colonial relations

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[316] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks, 42.*
[317] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks, 42.*

are produced and maintained, especially, as Coulthard argues, "when the terms of recognition tend to remain in the possession of those in power."[318]

Engaging in either formal political processes, or even traditional forms of extra-institutional practices aimed at political, legal recognition does not, therefore, do much to undermine colonial power dynamics if these other avenues are not divested of their colonial nature. Moreover, the degree to which state power is entrenched, as well as the sheer pervasiveness of the other forms of power I have just overviewed, means that institutional forms of political activity are met with a formidable, if not insurmountable challenge, despite the gains made by Indigenous peoples with respect to recognition. As Coulthard laments while addressing the settlement agreements signed by members of the Dene nation of the Northwest Territories with the federal government of Canada in the early 1990s: "these settlements signified the official end of an at times tenuous and fragile (but nonetheless unified) Dene national self-determination movement."[319] In the years that followed formal recognition by the Canadian state, former Dene activists who once fought for a robust land claim proposal, including economic management rooted in distinctly non capitalist modes of production and economic exchange, and political self-rule based on consensual governance and direct democracy,[320] were later actively promoting largescale and capital intensive resource extraction projects on traditional lands and currying favour with the federal government. Though strong, united, and

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[318] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 39.
[319] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 76.
[320] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 66.

committed, Indigenous political activism has been faced with an often intransigent federal government and heavy-handed state institutions, tempered with occasional, yet perfunctory, offers of recognition and reconciliation. It has also faced the sheer weight of the various noninstitutional discourses and practices that make up the field of colonial power relations which continue the legacy of colonialism even as Indigenous peoples gain greater recognition by the state.

Coulthard, among others, seeks an alternative politics of decolonial Indigeneity, to bypass conventional forms of engagement with the settler colonial state and the field of colonial power dynamics itself, by promoting what has been referred to as "a resurgent politics of recognition" or, simply, Indigenous "resurgence." In *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, Alfred refers to the practices of Indigenous resurgence as a form of "self-conscious traditionalism," or, in other words, a program of self-affirmative and culturally grounded decolonization.[321] This involves Indigenous peoples refusing aspects of settler colonial society and empowering themselves on their own terms by drawing on Indigenous beliefs, history, and culture, practicing their own ways of life, and developing their own economic structures. These practices are envisioned as enabling Indigenous peoples to counter the various structural and subjective modalities of colonial power that have conditioned and methodically replaced Indigenous ways of life and self-understanding over centuries of colonial rule.

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[321] Alfred, Taiaiake. *Peace, Power and Righteousness.* Oxford University Press, 1999, xviii.

I contend that one way that the practices underlying Indigenous resurgence could be characterized is in terms of what Darin Barney calls a "refusal of and *withdrawal from* ongoing structures and discourses of domination and subordination."[322] The thinkers and activists of Indigenous resurgence appear to characterize it as such, variously referring to it as a "turning away" from the legacies of colonialism,[323] or a "refocusing" from a "colonial outside" to an "*Indigenous* inside... without the sanction, permission or engagement of the state, western theory or the opinions of Canadians."[324] Coulthard himself echoes this sentiment when he says that a "resurgent politics of recognition" is effectively a call to "'turn away' from engaging the discourses and structures of settler colonial power with the aim of transforming these sites from within."[325] The withdrawal implied in the call to Indigenous resurgence is laid squarely against the calls for "recognition, reconciliation and incorporation" offered by the state on terms seen as parallel with the existing settler colonial order.[326]

The ways in which this withdrawal can or does manifest itself is various, and not always part of a concerted, collective, or organized effort. For example, in seeking to extricate themselves from the dictates of capitalist modes of production and the exploitation of Indigenous lands and labour[327] Coulthard suggests that Indigenous peoples could reconnect with their lands and land-based practices in an effort to

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[322] Barney, "Withdrawal Symptoms," 118.
[323] Alfred, *Wasáse,* 19.
[324] Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 17.
[325] Coulthard, *Red Skins, White Masks,* 45.
[326] Barney, "Withdrawal Symptoms," 117.
[327] Coulthard, *Red Skins*, White Masks, 171.

refamiliarize themselves with the places that shape and give content to their histories, languages and cultures. They might also revitalize land-based and sustainable harvesting practices like fishing, hunting and gathering, and activities like hide-tanning and carving.[328] They might apply traditional models of governance, such as decentralized, regional political structures based on participatory, consensus decision making, to subsistence-based economic ventures,[329] rather than the hierarchical management and private-ownership models typical of capitalism. Audra Simpson discusses the refusal of settler colonial standards of citizenship, including the attempted use by members of the Iroquois Confederacy of self-issued "Haudenosaunee passports" for the purpose of international travel rather than Canadian passports. The former, of course, are not recognized as legal travel documents by most countries or legal entities, including the Canadian state itself. But their use is rooted in a desire to affirm a communal self-awareness and sovereign identity that is distinct from that of the majoritarian society.[330]

The Politics of Indigenous Resurgence

It might be pointed out that the attempted withdrawal from the sociocultural, political and economic elements of majoritarian Canadian society is seriously deficient not only in its effectiveness as a decolonizing movement, but as a political movement at all. This is certainly the argument that would be made by Chantal Mouffe who argues that *political* interventions "always *engage with* a certain aspect of the existing hegemony in

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[328] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 171

[329] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 171.

[330] See: Simpson. *Mohawk Interruptus*.

order to disarticulate/re-articulate its constitutive elements,"[331] which I will elaborate on in more detail in the next chapter. The call to refuse engagement with the state, to "turn away from" settler colonial practices, and to "turn inward," as it were, to Indigenous beliefs, values and practices, risks the criticism that it is an apolitical gesture, less about challenging the dominant order of things, and more akin to the preservation of culture, self-help or healing; or, in more critical terms, as a form of cultural "navel-gazing." Instead, to be *politically* relevant, Indigenous peoples will have "to *engage* [*with*] the state's legal and political discourses in more effective ways,"[332] as argued by Dale Turner in *This Is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy*.

Turner argues that "true" reconciliation between the Canadian state and its settler colonial society and Indigenous peoples, and specifically between the former's assertion of sovereignty over the entirety of the territory of Canada and Indigenous assumption of sovereignty and autonomy on their own territories, must occur in an equal and respectful dialogue between Indigenous peoples and Non-Indigenous Canadians.[333] As far as Turner is concerned, withdrawing, or attempting to withdraw, from the state and prevailing institutions, discourses and practices of settler colonial society in whatever form would ultimately be unproductive as far as Indigenous claims to land, autonomy and self-rule are concerned, and fail to address the countless other ways in which the culture, identity and self-worth of Indigenous peoples are degraded. This is because, as he argues,

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[331] Mouffe, Chantal. *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically.* Verso, 2013, 24.

[332] Turner, Dale. *This Is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy.* University of Toronto Press, 2006, 97.

[333] Turner, *This Is Not a Peace Pipe,* 3.

Indigenous peoples have been so thoroughly steeped in the customs, beliefs, attitudes, and practices of the dominant society. In order for their claims to matter in *politically relevant* ways between themselves and the state, Indigenous peoples need to *engage with* the Canadian state's legal and political discourses and processes, and in more effective ways than it has.[334] Those best placed to conduct this engagement are what Turner refers to as Indigenous "word warriors;" Indigenous intellectuals who utilize the forms of knowledge rooted in Indigenous communities in order to assert and protect Indigenous voices, nationhood, sovereignty and rights *within* Canadian legal and political practices.[335]

Turner argues the need to engage with the Canadian state's political discourses, institutions and processes is strategically expedient and necessary as a matter of survival for Indigenous peoples, given their position as a minority group with few other avenues available to them to effectively better their lot among a majority. However, his insistence on the need for "word warriors" also belies Turner's assumption that politics in general simply requires engagement. This can be gleaned in part from his understanding of traditional Indigenous political practices. As an example, Turner explains how the Haudenosaunee, being a loose alliance of several distinct tribes, were historically kept together through continuous political engagement of each tribe within the Confederacy. As the product of a peace treaty among formerly warring tribes, the political union of distinct Iroquois nations required continuous renewal through engagement in communal

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[334] Turner, *This Is Not a Peace Pipe,* 3.
[335] Turner, *This Is Not a Peace Pipe,* 6-7.

rituals and ceremonies, especially in order to maintain respect, reciprocity, peace and friendship among the members of the Confederacy; principles which, as Turner relates, underlie an Iroquois notion of justice.[336] These public rituals of engagement were politically important, especially in the Confederacy, as they renewed political alliances that risked unravelling in their absence. These very same principles of political engagement were employed by the Haudenosaunee in their early and continuing dealings with European settlers. In order to establish friendly relations with the newcomers on a foundation of mutual respect, the Iroquois directly engaged with them, rather than shied away from them. For the Iroquois, a just society does not merely happen on its own. It certainly cannot be achieved through nonengagement, the refusal to engage, or withdrawal from ceremonial practices or established political institutions. Similarly, in the context of the settler colonial state, Turner maintains that Indigenous political activity demands the engagement of Indigenous peoples (especially a specialist class of Indigenous individuals trained in the legal and political practices of the dominant group) with the institutions and discourses of the settler colonial state. This entails reciprocal, mutual exchange in order to both reaffirm but also possibly alter the existing political relationship to ensure it is more respectful and inclusive of Indigenous peoples' ways of thinking and claims to sovereignty. Engagement with the political structures that exist, whether in a traditional, strictly Indigenous context, or a contemporary colonial one, is therefore simply the stuff of politics.

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[336] Turner, *This Is Not a Peace Pipe,* 50.

It would be helpful here to refer again to Foucault's understanding of how power operates and how it relates to politics to fully appreciate the political nature of the kind of withdrawal involved in the practices of Indigenous resurgence. As I mentioned in chapter two, Foucault understands politics as a concerted intervention into a particular social relation, activating its underlying power dynamics. As Hans Sluga notes, the simplest picture of politics that emerges in Foucault is "that of a binary division of the field of social relations into a domain of non-political relations and another domain of 'strategic,' that is, political relations that coordinate and direct relations within the first domain."[337] The difference between politics and the domain of power relations to which they apply is more readily perceivable in cases of institutional actions, as in the debating, making and administration of the law. For example, when the state decides which special rights, if any, Indigenous peoples are entitled to, it is making a direct intervention into what extent the state is obligated to protect them, punish those that harm them, and determining what kinds of opportunities they have access to. Legislation is thus very clearly a political activity which issues in politically constituted laws governing social relations. But the same might also be said of interventions at the level of micro relations *within* society and not only those vis-a-vis state and society; that is, "relationship[s] in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other."[338] Thus, for example, when Christian missionaries began to convert Indigenous peoples to Christianity, and in the process,

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[337] Sluga, *Search for the Common Good,* 190.
[338] Foucault, Michel. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, vol. I of *Essential Works of Foucault* 1954-1984. Translated by Robert Hurley, et al., edited by Paul Rabinow, The New Press, 1997, 292.

among other things, changed their names and altered their worldview from a traditional

Indigenous to a Christian Eurocentric one, they were making directly political

interventions in their lives. The actions of missionaries in culturally assimilating

Indigenous peoples to the then nascent settler colonial society greatly contributed to the

ongoing colonial project. It may be the case that certain discourses, such as those

regarding the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, are already

widespread and diffuse throughout society at the time they are taken up by legislation.

When these become generally accepted and practiced as the norm in society they become

dominant, and thus "politically dormant."[339] But ultimately, just as they "may have been

produced and controlled by strategic power relations at an earlier time, they may once

again become so later on."[340]

If we extrapolate from this interpretation of politics in Foucault, it can be argued

that a similarly salient form of political intervention or politicization occurs when a

particular relation of power in society is experienced as, or at the very least comes to *be*

seen as oppressive or unduly restrictive in nature and, inevitably, meets with resistance.

And resistance will undoubtedly begin to form when relations of power congeal into

stable, longer lasting and, ultimately, potentially *oppressive*, formations.[341] It is when

these social power dynamics begin to be questioned, and ultimately contested, that they

become openly political issues according to Foucault. This is exactly how colonial

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[339] Sluga, *Search for the Common Good,* 191.
[340] Sluga, *Search for the Common Good,* 191.
[341] Foucault, Michel. *Power*, vol. III of *Essential Works of Foucault* 1954-1984. Translated by Robert Hurley, et al., Edited by James D. Faubion, The New Press, 2001, 347.

relations of power have been characterized by Coulthard and others, and indeed experienced by Indigenous individuals and communities. Politics at the level of the social, beyond (or underneath) that of the state can be said to occur when these oppressive formations of power inevitably begin to meet with resistance, especially by the oppressed.

There are various ways to resist, according to Foucault.[342] One way in which resistance to oppressive power formations occurs, by which the latter can be said to become an active political issue, for example, is when individuals begin to openly and visibly protest. As I mentioned in chapter two, the turn to understanding politics in terms of power relations beyond the state accelerated during the 1950s and 1960s, during the heyday of Western radical protest movements that sought to directly address a number of social issues long stifled or ignored by institutional approaches to politics. Issues such as women's equality, gay liberation, and race relations *became* issues in the public arena, and thus were explicitly *politicized* because of the numerous and successive actions that were more often than not extra-institutional in nature, and, more importantly, expressed *voice*, to use Hirschman's terminology, on the part of those most intimately affected by them. The experiences of Indigenous peoples are firmly embedded in this general history, right down to the present day. In many cases it took a long period of overtly vocal, visible, sometimes violent actions on the part of Indigenous peoples themselves to bring attention to these ongoing issues in the wider public arena.[343] In fact, it is usually the case

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[342] Kelly, Mark G.E. *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*. Routledge, 2009, 109.
[343] Coulthard, *Red Skins, White Masks,* 2.

that politicization of social issues like these occurs with vocal, visible, *engaged* protests. I will say more about this at the end of this chapter.

However, it might also be the case that relations of power become politicized when people start to *refuse* a particular relation or constellation of power and attempt to turn away or *withdraw* from it. Foucault said that the basic political challenge of our time was not the choice between political positions in "a pre-existing set of possibilities," it was rather, "to imagine and to bring into being new schemas of politicization."[344] He had in mind the notion that social issues not previously politicized should come to be viewed as such, questioned and contested. "The frontier of the political has shifted," he writes, "and so now subjects such as psychiatry, internment, or the medicalization of a given population have become political problems... politics has colonized areas that had been almost political yet not recognized as such."[345] His theory of power helped make this shift. But we might also attribute to this passage a view of different ways to conduct politics. As Sandro Mezzadra says of Foucault: "he was at least looking for new conceptual lenses in order to map a new political landscape—beyond the state."[346] Refusal to engage might seem trivial, hardly resistance, politically adjacent at best. But as Foucault says, "to say *no* is the minimum form of resistance."[347] In fact, refusal is already a *strategic*, political, response. It is "an irruption... which is not compliance, nor the

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[344] Foucault, *History of Sexuality,* 190.

[345] Foucault, Michel. "Prisons et asiles dans le mécanismes du pouvoir." *Dits et Scrits*. Quoted in Eribon, Didier. *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*. Translated by Michael Lucey, Duke University Press, 2004, 293.

[346] Mezzadra, "Beyond the State, Beyond the Desert," 996.

[347] Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth,* 168 (my emphasis).

regular reaction of a physical object to a quantum of force... it opposes power, not simply diametrically but transversally, opposing *by going off in a different direction to power's strategies.*"[348]

This brief foray into Foucault's understanding of politics shows that the kind of withdrawal advocated by Coulthard in his approach to Indigenous resurgence can be understood as fundamentally political, even if it would not appear to be so according to the understandings of politics outlined in chapter one, nor even by the theorists of withdrawal introduced in chapter three. By refusing and attempting to withdraw from a relation of power because it is experienced as being particularly unjust or oppressive, it is effectively singled out and made into an issue. And it is precisely then that we could understand withdrawal as political, even if the manifestation of power being withdrawn from is not necessarily, or not solely, the government or institutions of the state. The impetus to withdraw in this case is no different than what Hirschman argues is the main motivating rationale for exiting, or withholding support from a product, company, or political party or organization; we do so because we have lost confidence in it or have come to seriously disagree with some aspect of it when there is seemingly no other effective recourse to *voice*. The withdrawal, as Hirschman notes, is not passive in its effects, however. It can bring attention to a perceived problem or issue with the organization or state of affairs that is being withdrawn from, without the withdrawing members in question necessarily expecting or inducing significant changes in the

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[348] Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault,* 109 (my emphasis).

organization or state of affairs being withdrawn from. The only difference here is that for

Hirschman the withdrawal is explicitly political (rather than economic) when it takes

place *within* the field of politics—which, as I have argued, is assumed by him to be the

state, organizations or institutions related to the state or public governance. As I have

mentioned, as far as Hirschman is concerned, the hippies "copping-out" of society and

engaging in alternative practices, were, for example, *not* acting politically. Here I have

argued that the withdrawal in question is no less political, despite not exactly conforming

to Hirschman's parameters, and despite taking place outside of and refusing established

political institutions and practices.

Indigenous peoples are called on by Coulthard to turn away and inward in the

hopes of freeing themselves from the domination of colonial power relations,[349]

especially in light of the persistent difficulty of effectively changing them through

conventional political means. The refusal of Indigenous peoples to engage with the state

and the dominant elements of settler colonial society, (re)engaging with Indigenous forms

of life and (re)immersing themselves in their traditional lands and cultural practices, is a

direct recognition that the constituted power of the settler colonial state, even in its liberal

democratic guise cannot easily be counteracted through traditional means of political

engagement, especially when its more pernicious effects are propped up and shot through

with other modes of power. Indigenous refusal is not seeking to overturn the Canadian

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[349] In this sense, Indigenous resurgence finds echoes in Foucault's notion of "care of the self," "by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being." Foucault, Michel. "The Ethics of a Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom." *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 282.

state or position itself in an overtly antagonistic and confrontational position vis-à-vis the state. Its mode of action does not involve directly engaging with settler colonial institutions and practices. However, the deliberate withdrawal from them is political insofar as it signals an attempt to be free from dominant colonial relations of power, especially considering the numerous ways the latter has negatively impacted and continues to impact Indigenous communities and individuals. If nothing else, turning away from settler colonial society signals that something is wrong, in the eyes of those turning away, with the relations of power that shape it.

The example of Indigenous resurgence shows, more than most approaches to withdrawal discussed in the literature focused on a strictly institutional context, or even that of electoral boycotts, that a discussion of withdrawal can also cut across this kind of politics, and in such a way that it points to and reinforces alternate ways of understanding the political. An appreciation of withdrawal can certainly show an alternative way by which citizens, or members of political organizations can influence the government and other political and state institutions. But a discussion of withdrawal might point to alternative ways of understanding and conducting politics more generally. As the example of both electoral boycotts, but especially that of Indigenous resurgence shows, withdrawal might put in sharper relief the power dynamics between individuals and the state[350] than does any conventional political action that directly engages with the established political institutions, gesturing to one of the noninstitutional understandings

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[350] Clark, William Roberts, Matt Golder and Sona Nadenichek Golder. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Sage, 2018, 89.

of politics I outlined in chapter two. Indigenous resurgence, like Thoreau's call "to refuse

allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it,"[351] in effect fundamentally

challenges the attachment Indigenous peoples have to their governments, polities and

political institutions without this being an apolitical or even antipolitical gesture. It

simply means conducting politics differently.

Conclusion: Engagement Nevertheless?

Before I end this chapter, it is worth noting an aspect of Indigenous resurgence

that appears to throw into question its characterization as a form of political *withdrawal,*

and ultimately, my argument that withdrawal might be understood as political. In the

conclusion to *Red Skin, White Masks,* Coulthard ruminates on the Idle No More

movement which swept across Canada in late 2012 and early 2013. Idle No More is an

Indigenous grassroots political movement that began as a protest against the then

Canadian government's passage of *The Jobs and Growth Act*, *2012* (Bill C-45), which,

among other things, would erode environmental protections and oversight, and make it

easier to develop lands which in many cases are located on Indigenous territory.[352] As

Coulthard relates, the tactics employed by Idle No More participants included flash mobs

involving dancing and drumming in public spaces, protest gatherings in front of

legislatures, public education campaigns, blockades and traffic stoppages.[353] The

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[351] Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," 18.
[352] McGregor, Janyce. "22 Changes in the Budget Bill Fine Print | CBC News." *CBCnews*, 26 Oct. 2012. www.cbc.ca/news/politics/22-changes-in-the-budget-bill-fine-print-1.1233481; Hoang, Linda. "Hundreds of First Nations, Métis, Rally against Bill C-45." *CTVnews Edmonton*, 10 Dec. 2012. edmonton.ctvnews.ca/hundreds-of-first-nations-m%C3%A9tis-rally-against-bill-c-45-1.1073796.
[353] Coulthard, *Red Skins, White Masks,* 161.

immediate result of these actions was a meeting called by then Prime Minister Stephen

Harper with the Assembly of First Nations,[354] and a "Declaration of Commitment" by the

executive committee of the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Women's Association

of Canada, and two of Canada's federal opposition parties: the New Democrats and the

Liberals. The latter declaration involved thirteen points which called on the Canadian

government to, among other things, work on fully implementing the United Nations

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.[355]

Though he is ultimately skeptical of any form of direct negotiation with the

political institutions or representatives of the Canadian state, Coulthard nevertheless

suggests that open and vocal forms of direct action are not only politically expedient

ways of getting Indigenous issues and concerns on the federal government's political

agenda, but that engagement with state institutions is ultimately necessary to address the

political concerns of Indigenous peoples. In a concluding statement of the book, he

claims that "historically, I would venture to suggest that all negotiations over the scope

and content of Aboriginal peoples' rights in the last forty years have piggybacked off the

assertive direct actions... [and] the ongoing commitment of Indigenous activists willing to

put their bodies on the line in defense of their lands and communities."[356] This is a far cry

from the insistence on refusing engagement with the state and the discourses and

practices of other forms of colonial power, and (re)engaging in traditional economic or

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[354] "Harper Commits to "High-Level" Treaty Talks with First Nations." *CBC*, 12 Jan. 2013, www.cbc.ca/news/politics/harper-commits-to-high-level-treaty-talks-with-first-nations-1.1302432.
[355] "Chief Theresa Spence to End Hunger Strike Today." *CBC*, 24 Jan. 2013, www.cbc.ca/news/politics/chief-theresa-spence-to-end-hunger-strike-today-1.1341571.
[356] Coulthard, *Red Skins*, *White Masks,* 167.

cultural practices that Coulthard also associates with Indigenous resurgence. As with

electoral boycotts, Coulthard's concluding remarks in *Red Skins, White Masks* relating to

the Idle No More Movement suggest that withdrawal may ultimately only be understood

as properly political if there is (re)engagement or some level of attachment with the

institutions, practices and policies of the state, even if from the outside. In this way

Coulthard appears to lean towards, if not confirm a critique of withdrawal found in the

works of both Chantal Mouffe and Bonnie Honig, which I will flesh out, and address, in

the next chapter.

what qualifies this escape and defection is nothing less than an affirmative doing. It is a conflict that is
articulated by targeting what has been built[357]
- Gabriele Fadini

CHAPTER 5: NONINSTITUTIONAL POLITICAL WITHDRAWAL: WORKERISM AND "REFUSING WORK"

Introduction

I concluded the previous chapter by suggesting that despite Coulthard's positive

portrayal of withdrawal in the context of Indigenous resurgence, he seems unsure as to

whether it is sufficiently political on its own. Some of the actions he associates with

Indigenous resurgence would appear to suggest this, namely the various quite vocal,

expressive protest actions of the Idle No More movement which aimed to draw the

attention of not only the Canadian government, but also the wider Canadian public to the

ongoing issues which Indigenous peoples continue to deal with. In short, what is political,

if anything, about Indigenous resurgence is its antagonistic relationship with the settler

colonial state and colonial power relations more broadly. Though he does not explicitly

state it, Coulthard seems to assume that though politics may at heart revolve around

power, for an action to be considered sufficiently political what is required is an

antagonistic engagement with it. And this underlying political relationship cannot be fully

demonstrated without actions that directly engage with the institutions of the settler

colonial state, or nonstate instantiations of colonial relations of power in society.

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[357] Fadini, Gabriele. "Ontological Resistance: A Meditation on Exodus and Power." Translated by Creston Davis, *Angelaki*, vol.12, no.1, 2007, pp. 61-71, 64.

Coulthard's reservation correlates to critiques of withdrawal advanced by both

Chantal Mouffe and Bonnie Honig. They insist, more openly and forcefully than

Coulthard does at the end of *Red Skin, White Masks*, that politics, to be considered as

such, needs to actively contest dominant power formations, and this requires direct

engagement with the state or nonstate power relations at either the institutional or extra-

institutional level, or both. I begin this chapter by critically examining both Mouffe's and

Honig's respective critiques. I will argue that despite what Mouffe and Honig say,

instances of withdrawal from the state, or any power formation, may be considered

political despite a lack of any direct (re)engagement with it, antagonistic or otherwise.

I aim to address their critiques by examining Arendt's understanding of politics in

conjunction with workerism, in this chapter, as well as autonomist political thought in the

next chapter. I believe Arendt's political thought, when applied to the cases of workerism

and autonomism, provides useful concepts in response to the specific critiques of

withdrawal given by Mouffe and Honig. They highlight, respectively, a different aspect

of Arendt's understanding of politics: on the one hand, the potentially conflictual nature

of withdrawal, and on the other, acting in concert outside of established institutions. In

both of these cases, Arendt's political thought draws out the specifically political nature

of withdrawal which Mouffe and Honig argue is absent from withdrawal. In this chapter,

I focus on workerism. Workerism was a movement with origins in the Italian working-

class movement of the 1950s and 60s, and a Marxist orientation resolutely focused on

working class struggle against capital. The preeminent political tactic underpinning much

of workerist thought is the "refusal of work," amounting to the mass withdrawal of labour power from production, thus directly and negatively affecting the acquisition of surplus value on the part of the owners of those workplaces. I highlight the fact that this kind of withdrawal is openly antagonistic in nature, underlying one of the dimensions of noninstitutional politics I have looked at in chapter two, and which both Mouffe and Honig believe is not only critical to any understanding of politics, but, in addition, can only happen in instances of direct and open engagement with power. However, unlike their insistence on the need for engagement, the "refusal of work" is a poignant demonstration of how withdrawal might actively contest a dominant manifestation of power. In this way, it pushes against the argument that withdrawal needs some level of attachment or engagement with the institutions and processes being withdrawn from to be considered as properly political, even if the underlying assumption is that politics involves antagonistic relations.

In the next chapter, I will bring up the example of autonomism to show how the advocacy of withdrawal by some of its prominent proponents highlights a dimension of the political underappreciated by both Mouffe and Honig. That is, withdrawal may be generative and productive of the very type of society those withdrawing wish to supersede the one they are withdrawing from, and this may make withdrawal political even in the absence of any antagonistic dimension. And this, moreover, ultimately confirms what makes withdrawal so distinctive as a form of political activity.

Critique of Withdrawal: Antagonistic Engagement

  As I mentioned in chapter two, Mouffe places power at the centre of conflict and friend/enemy relations, which, following Schmitt, she takes to be the modus operandi of politics. In *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*, Mouffe, in fact, explicitly critiques what she calls the "strategy of withdrawal" from this very understanding of politics. Mouffe takes her understanding of withdrawal from autonomism, whose tenets I will explore in more detail in the next chapter. In brief, withdrawal, according to her, is envisaged as "desertion" and "evacuation" of the places of power, which is expressed in the acting together in concert of individuals attempting to construct and experiment with novel forms of social and political life on the "outside" of the dominant institutions of society, and which are distinct from them.[358]

  In her critique of the "strategy of withdrawal," Mouffe makes a point to argue that it lacks both efficacy and the characteristics of an explicitly political movement. Much like Foucault, who, as I have shown, argued that society is constituted by power relations, Mouffe's position is based on the understanding that every social order is an expression of a particular configuration of power relations.[359] And any such order may be challenged by those who are opposed to the existing relations of power which underly it,[360] just as Foucault argued that resistances to the dominant constellation of power relations are bound to irrupt and challenge it. With this basic underlying feature of

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[358] Mouffe, *Agonistics,* 69-71.
[359] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox,* 21.
[360] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox,* 114.

Foucault's understanding of politics, I attempted to show in the previous chapter how

withdrawal, such as in the Indigenous refusal of settler colonial power relations and the

institutions which support them, could be accepted as political in nature.

Mouffe, however, argues that any *political* challenge to the established social

order must be in the form of a direct antagonistic engagement with the dominant relations

of power which keep the order in place. In Mouffe's understanding of the political, there

is the existing set of dominant power relations and those that resist and challenge those

very same relations with the aim of changing them. Politically speaking there is no

"outside" to this either/or of power and politics.[361] Nor can there be. Power is a closed

system. No one can meaningfully extract themselves from power, but they can attempt to

directly modify it. They can, in Mouffe's words, attempt to rearticulate the hegemonic

relations of power to reflect a different, "more just," articulation of power.[362] And it is

precisely for this reason that she critiques the "strategy of withdrawal" as she calls it. Not

only must a properly political intervention revolve around the antagonistic interventions

between opposed collective identities, "friends" and "enemies," respectively, according

to Mouffe, it must also "always *engage with* a certain aspect of the existing hegemony in

order to disarticulate/re-articulate its constitutive elements."[363] It is no wonder that, on

Mouffe's register, withdrawal might be understood as the antithesis to politics. According

to Mouffe, theorists advocating for withdrawal as a form of bringing forth more just

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[361] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox,* 22.
[362] Mouffe, *Agonistics,* 74.
[363] Mouffe, *Agonistics,* 24.

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social, political and economic systems "deny" the very real role played by struggle in ushering forth political change.[364] They miss the point that power cannot be vacated, it can only be changed, but to be changed it needs to be actively engaged with in an antagonistic manner.

Bonnie Honig levels a similar critique against withdrawal in *A Feminist Theory of Refusal*, despite being more favourably inclined towards the notion of withdrawal than Mouffe. Utilizing the term "refusal" for what she nevertheless understands, as I do, as "withdrawal,"[365] Honig says, for example, that "even when refusal *seems* to reject the world, it betrays a deep attachment to it, if not to the world as it is, then surely to a more just world that is not yet."[366] Honig nevertheless claims that a simple "refusal" without any related commitment to directly make changes to the system or institutions being withdrawn from is foolhardy at best, and ultimately counterintuitive to any serious political aims. For Honig there is nothing politically active with a simple refusal to engage with the existing order unless it is part of what she conceptualizes as a wider *arc* of refusal that incorporates elements of direct engagement, in some form, with that which is initially refused.[367] While Honig's treatment of withdrawal is made specifically in the context of feminist theory, and the "project of enacting sex-gender equality... in the face of governing powers that insist on gender binarism, heteronormative sphere separatism,

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[364] Mouffe, *Agonistics,* 72.
[365] She utilizes the terms "leave-taking," "abandonment," "escape," and "fugitivity" interchangeably with refusal. In each case, it is clear that she has "withdrawal" in mind. See: Honig, Bonnie. *Feminist Theory of Refusal.* Harvard University Press, 2021, 15, 1, and 97.
[366] Honig, *Feminist Theory of Refusal,* 3.
[367] Honig, *Feminist Theory of Refusal, 3.*

patriarchal kinship, and the instrumentalities and inequalities they secure,"[368] her critique

can be applied to any political refusal. Indeed, she appears to echo Coulthard's sentiments

towards the end of *Red Skin, White Masks* with respect to Indigenous resurgence, as I

have already suggested. Moreover, although Honig understands politics in terms of

agonistic practices in the context of unequal relations of power, her critique finds echoes

in the distinction between political and nonpolitical withdrawals found in the works of the

withdrawal theorists I examined in chapter three. Recall that for Hirschman, for example,

the attempted exit by hippies from American society "*without having first changed the

existing set*"[369] amounted to a *non*political exit.

Honig does recognize that an important element of withdrawal may, and often

does, include attempts at forming new, or exploring alternative forms of social and

political life. For example, in refusing engagement with the institutions of the settler

colonial state, and in rejection of colonial power relations altogether, Indigenous

resurgence would see Indigenous peoples re/engaging with Indigenous ways of being,

which are seen to be positive alternatives to the colonial social norms and institutions

being withdrawn from. Honig might, for her part, accept this as being a preparatory part

of the overall movement of withdrawal. In the feminist context she describes withdrawal

as not only a "movement away" from the patriarchal institutions of the state and

traditional expectations of female labour, but also the establishment and withdrawal into a

sororal "heterotopia" in which old ways of being are unlearned and new, female-led ones

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[368] Honig, *Feminist Theory of Refusal,* 3.
[369] Honig, *Feminist Theory of Refusal,* 105.

explored.[370] In these alternative communities new forms of life and organization that are different and opposed to the ones that are being refused are experimented with and practiced. They are "fugitive spaces" wherein individuals who seek some respite from the dominant order might "practice how to be otherwise, and reimagine what the world might be."[371] But according to Honig, withdrawal into such counter-communities, or "heterotopias," does not ultimately express any kind of politics unless those who withdraw into them use their newfound experiences and practices to bring down the dominant order.

Honig argues that any withdrawal, to be politically relevant, must include a "return to the city" which aims to transform it, "not abandon it."[372] The city, according to Honig, stands for "political community. It may be an actual city, but it may also be a state, a town, a village, or a neighbourhood"[373] and the institutions and discourses associated with them. Withdrawal, in other words, is political only insofar as it is part of a general "arc" or movement that includes re-engagement with the institutions or places of power being withdrawn from in order to transform them.[374] To simply leave the spaces of the dominant social order, "to build elsewhere," without returning to change the spaces left behind "is to leave the [dominant order] empowered."[375] Honig insists that experimentations with novel forms of life and social organization can only have any

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[370] Honig, *Feminist Theory of Refusal,* 52.
[371] Honig, *Feminist Theory of Refusal,* 70.
[372] Honig, *Feminist Theory of Refusal,* 1.
[373] Honig, *Feminist Theory of Refusal, 1.*
[374] Honig, *Feminist Theory of Refusal, 1.*
[375] Honig, *Feminist Theory of Refusal,* 71.

lasting form if instituted and protected by stable institutions, such as those of the state, and that directly engaging with the latter is the only way to do this: "if refusal is to be a politics... then returning to the city to claim it is key."[376]

Honig relies on a reading of Arendt's understanding of the political to substantiate this critique of withdrawal. While acknowledging that, for Arendt, the *polis* is not a physical location; that it arises out of acting and speaking together and that this alone constitutes its true "space,"[377] Honig fixates on another notion of Arendt's in *The Human Condition* where she speaks of a lasting *polis* as one that is walled, i.e. has borders, and is guaranteed by laws and institutions,[378] in other words a permanent place of politics. But though Arendt raises this point to express the ephemerality of political action; that in the absence of any permanently established spaces within which individuals could gather and conduct politics the latter is always at risk of ending sooner rather than later, Arendt is not suggesting that institutionalization is the sole stuff of politics, or that politics requires stability in the form of a state or stable institutions designed to conduct politics. Politics, for Arendt, is an activity; it is simply the acting and speaking together of individuals engaged in public matters or concerns. The *polis* is not a physical space, or a certain set of institutions or well-defined rules of conduct, according to Arendt; it is wherever and whenever people act together over public ends. Honig, on the other hand, appears to take Arendt's offhand remarks about a permanent *polis* to mean that politics, in some

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[376] Honig, *Feminist Theory of Refusal,* 95.
[377] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 198.
[378] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 194; 198.

significant sense, involves the "need for" and the struggle for "a walled" space,[379] or, in other words, the institutions and codified spaces of a permanent political community. Unless individuals are engaged in an "action in concert that battles to make the [state] live up" to their demands, whatever they may be, or even to capture state power, they are "not political" according to Honig.[380]

To sum up: the notion of withdrawal's apolitical nature in the works of Mouffe and Honig rests on the assumption that where there is no serious attempt to directly engage with the state or other dominant nonstate institutions and relations of power, especially in an openly antagonistic manner, there would simply be no politics to speak of. Politics requires antagonistic engagement with dominant power relations and the institutions which are representative of them. Without this, withdrawal is at best a reactive gesture of protest, signaling at most, like Kirkpatrick's reading of Thoreau's sojourn at Walden, mere displeasure with some aspect of the reigning political order, but not much more. Politics begins only after initiating an open and direct confrontation with that which is being refused or withdrawn from.

With the help of Arendt's understanding of politics, I will show that collective withdrawal from reigning political, social and/or economic institutions may be understood as a political act, contrary to Mouffe's and Honig's respective assertions. In what follows I will illustrate this Arendtian reading of the political nature of withdrawal with reference to the notion of the "refusal of work" advocated by the Italian workerists,

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[379] Honig, *Feminist Theory of Refusal,* 170 n. 68.
[380] Honig, *Feminist Theory of Refusal,* 99.

and especially by one of its earliest and most prominent members, Mario Tronti. The "refusal of work" advocated by workerists is particularly illustrative of an antagonistic withdrawal, and is thus a good example that clearly troubles the nonpolitical reading of withdrawal contained in Mouffe's and Honig's critique of it because it showcases one of the very elements both thinkers argue is at the heart of political action.

Workerism and the Refusal of Work

Workerism (*operaismo* in Italian) was a Marxist-oriented political movement with origins in the wider Italian working-class movement that was particularly prominent during the 1960s and early 1970s. True to its Marxist orientation, workerism was resolutely focused on working class struggle against and emancipation from capital. Its main theoretical mouthpieces were the journals *Quaderni Rossi* ("Red Notebooks") and *Classe Operaia* ("Working Class"). The latter's chief editor and main contributor was Mario Tronti, whose early writings can be said to be among the most representative of workerism's outlook.

One of the main theoretical ideas underpinning workerism, which broke with a fundamental tenet present in the dominant strand of the workers movements at the time, is that capital derives its existence and power from the working class as much as the latter was taken to be an outgrowth of the formation and organization of capital. This fundamental workerist idea was first formulated by Raniero Panzieri, considered the

founder of workerism, in the early 1950s,[381] and further developed by Tronti, who argued

that not only is it the case that capitalists depend on the productive power of labour for

their existence, but that capitalist development is driven by the very struggles of the

working class against capital.[382] Such a formulation placed an important caveat on the

classical Marxist notion that it is capital which brings together workers and gives rise to

the conditions that effectively turn the latter into a particular class conscious of itself as

such, ie., the proletariat or working class.[383] Without denying this fact,[384] however, Tronti

nevertheless insists on the ability of workers to define their own interests and to struggle

for them on their own terms.[385] Danilo Montaldi, another influential workerist, noted that

"it is in production that the revolt against exploitation, the capacity to construct a superior

type of society, along with class solidarity with other workers and hatred for exploitation

and exploiters...are formed."[386] Workers may have been brought together (i.e.

"socialised") by capital on a scale and under conditions of exploitation never seen before,

but that in and of itself did not turn workers into a class. This was a process that took off

autonomously among workers themselves in the course of their exploitative socialisation.

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[381] Wright, Steve. *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*. Pluto Press, 2017, 15-19.

[382] Tronti, Mario. "The Strategy of Refusal." *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics* edited by Sylvere Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, Semiotext(e), 2007, pp. 28-35, 29.

[383] As Marx said, "the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all... its own grave-diggers" i.e. the proletariat. Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Translated by Samuel Moore, Penguin Books, 2002, 133.

[384] Tronti, Mario. *Workers and Capital*. Translated by David Broder. Verso, 2019, 190-191.

[385] Cleaver, Harry. "Autonomy, Work and Refusal." *Vis-à-vis,* vol.1, 1993*,* 2.

[386] Montaldi, Danilo. Quoted in Wright, *Storming Heaven,* 21.

A related underlying tenet of workerism, tied to the notion that workers have their own agency vis-à-vis capital, is that workers are ultimately "autonomous as well from their official organizations (e.g. the trade unions, the political parties)."[387] This was not a uniform sentiment among workerists. Despite Panzieri's "insistence that the final arbiter of the forms and goals of the struggle against capitalism must be the working class itself,"[388] for example, he nevertheless believed that the traditional Left parties may yet be reformed, and the working class struggle fought as effectively on the terrain of the state's political institutions as on the factory floor.[389] Tronti himself had an ambivalent approach to "official institutions." For example, he never severed ties with the Italian Communist Party, of which he was a member. However, he spared no words in lambasting the Party in his early writings. He was even less sanguine about trade union leadership directly loyal to the Party, because of the distance union leaders engendered between themselves and rank and file members with respect to questions of demands and strategy.[390] As far as workers parties were concerned, Tronti argues that they have likewise lost touch with the class they ostensibly represent, and "concrete forms of class struggle,"[391] preferring, instead, to win state power through the ballot box. This not only served to stifle working class power, but was also based on a fundamentally flawed understanding of the state. According to Tronti, the modern state serves as the guarantor

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[387] Cleaver, "Autonomy, Work and Refusal," 2.
[388] Wright, *Storming Heaven,* 16.
[389] Wright, *Storming Heaven,* 16.
[390] Tronti, *Workers and Capital,* 77.
[391] Tronti, *Workers and Capital,* 90.

of capitalist class domination, a point originally developed by Marx.[392] State institutions

and conventional politics cannot, therefore, be used as the sole means to overthrow

capitalism. Even in its ostensibly democratic, representative form, capitalists rely on the

state to domesticate the working class. Any form of collaboration and engagement with

the state by the working class in service of its political goals are doomed to fail,

according to Tronti, because of the state's fundamental class character. To try to take

over, co-opt, or influence by way of gradual democratic capture of government, to try and

work with and within the state system, is in effect to capitulate to the very logic of

capitalism, ensuring not its gradual demise, but the continuation and smooth functioning

of the capitalist system. Engaging in what Tronti calls "the tactic of collaboration" has

led, in fact, to the "stabilisation of capitalist development."[393] By working within the

capitalist system, workers have thus strengthened the very system that oppresses them.

Workerism thus developed in part as a direct response to, and intended to update

or correct, the perceived failings of the dominant currents of the organized labour

movement in Italy at the time. The most pertinent question for workerists was not

whether or not workers had the political agency and power to effect social change

irrespective of the exact socioeconomic developments under capitalism at the time—they

did, so they believed. Rather, it was how to do so without being co-opted and

contributing to capitalism's continued smooth functioning, eliciting a strong counter-

reaction by capital, or, in the case of a successful struggle as in the Soviet experience,

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[392] Tronti, *Workers and Capital,* 34.
[393] Tronti, *Workers and Capital,* 72.

how to avoid its worst excesses. For his part, Tronti proposed a different way of engaging

in class struggle. Not only was it not to directly engage with state power—even if in an

extra-institutional way such as had been advocated by Marx and Engels in their calls for

revolution, and attempted by many committed revolutionaries up until that point; and

certainly not through institutional means, as was the case with Social Democratic and

Communist Parties which Tronti, at least in his early years, and the workerist movement

in general criticized. This new strategy was summed up by Tronti in the simple terms of

"refusal of work," which became a defining motto of workerism in general.[394]

The Political Logic of Refusing Work

In Tronti's words, the "refusal of work" essentially amounts to the mass

withdrawal of labour power—the lifeblood of factories and workplaces—from

production, thus directly and negatively affecting the acquisition of surplus value on the

part of the owners of those workplaces, ie. the capitalists. He claims that "if labour's

activity should cease, then capital's life also ceases. A closed factory is already dead

labour, capital-at-rest that does not produce and does not reproduce itself."[395] The formal

form of this refusal has traditionally been, and continues to be, the labour strike,

according to Tronti.[396] Wildcat strikes in particular have a well-regarded place in the

workerist imaginary, as they are not formal, union-run events, but often spontaneous,

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[394] See: Wright, *Storming Heaven,* 117; Lotringer, Sylvere and Christian Marazzi. "The Return of Politics." *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics,* 9; Hardt, Michael. "Laboratory Italy." *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, edited by Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 2.
[395] Tronti, *Workers and Capital,* 220.
[396] Tronti, *Workers and Capital,* 244; 221.

"illegal" ones carried out within factories and during the production process by rank and

file workers on their own initiative. Thus, unlike union-led strikes, wildcat strikes

potentially pose a greater direct challenge to workplace authorities—both of the company

and of the union.[397] Romano Alquati, a contributor to both *Quaderni Rossi* and *Classe*

Operaia, was particularly interested in wildcat strikes as not only one form of refusing

work, but its most politically expedient form. Writing about the wildcat strikes at FIAT in

1963 in an early edition of *Classe Operaia*, he concluded that they were not indicative of

purely self-interested workers engaging in petty and disorganized acts of rage against

their employers and union bosses, "but of a new, compact, mass vanguard in motion. The

most important property of these wildcats lay in their refusal to play by the established

rules of industrial relations."[398] Other forms of refusing work variously advocated by

workerists include: absenteeism, workplace sabotage, and purposefully carrying out tasks

at a slower place than expected—expressed in the "go-slow" movement.[399]

Questions of efficacy aside, it might be said that "refusing work" is not

necessarily political in nature. At most it might demonstrate isolated instances of general

frustration, grievances with the specific workplaces in which it is carried out, or a

collection of tactics engaged in to leverage better pay or workplace conditions. As far as

Tronti is concerned, it could be argued that what differentiates political instances of work

stoppage or refusal from non-political ones is not so much their form, but, crucially, the

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[397] Rinehart, James Wi. *The Tyranny of Work: Alienation and the Labour Process*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987, 146.
[398] Wright, *Storming Heaven,* 70.
[399] Wright, *Storming Heaven,* 109.

general intention or purpose of the stoppage. Refusal of work as a political tactic does not mean a "refusal of creative or productive activity" in general, or because of fatigue, perceived lack of adequate compensation, or a workplace grievance,[400] but rather, a generalized *"refusal of capital's command, its role as organizer of production."*[401] According to Tronti, to be alienated from work, its form, function and subject, becomes the founding condition of revolutionary politics. No worker today is disposed to recognize the existence of labour outside capital. Labour equals exploitation; this is the logical prerequisite and historical result of capitalist civilization. To actualize their political power, workers must therefore confront their own labour as a hostile force, and the most effective and logical form of struggle the working class can therefore engage in to combat such an enemy that it itself otherwise actively takes part in is to "deny themselves as a productive force,"[402] that is, to withdraw from that very labour it sees as the enemy.

The call to refuse work is ultimately meant as a strategy of fomenting crisis within capitalist social and economic relations, especially the more widespread and self-organized the refusal is. It is positioned as a tactic *against* capital. As Alquati remarks, all forms of refusing work in which "the revolutionary consciousness and will of the workers expressed itself above all in the refusal to address positive demands to the boss"[403] demonstrates workers groping towards the organization of "political self-management

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[400] Tronti, *Workers and Capital,* 30.
[401] Tronti, *Workers and Capital,* 244.
[402] Tronti, *Workers and Capital,* 273.
[403] Alquati, Romano. Quoted in: Wright, Storming Heaven, 71.

outside of capitalist production against the 'general political power' of capital."[404] The

notion of refusing to work is directly tied to the notion, underpinning workerism, that it is

workers and their labour which prop up, enrich and empower capital in the first place.[405]

For the working class to withdraw their labour is to attempt to fundamentally undercut

capital's ability to function. As the general theory of refusal goes, drained of its capacity

to create value, indeed, to reproduce itself because its productive forces have stopped

being productive, the power of capital will simply collapse in on itself. Thus, as Tronti

argues: "when the development of capital's interests in the factory is blocked, then the

functioning of society seizes up. The way is then open for overthrowing and destroying

the very basis of capital's power."[406]

Arendt, Power and Withdrawal

Arendt's analysis of power is helpful in further illustrating this point about the

political nature of "refusing work" as advocated by the workerists. In speaking

specifically about political authority, Arendt makes claims about the effectiveness of

confronting oppressive governments, or governing authorities which have lost the

confidence of those they govern, in terms of withdrawing consent from them rather than

engaging with them directly, especially with violence or force. Power, according to

Arendt, is not something which individuals or states have by themselves. They do not

have nor can they wield power over others without having first been granted power; at

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[404] Alquati, Romano. Quoted in: Wright, Storming Heaven, 71.
[405] Wright, Storming Heaven, 245.
[406] Wright, Storming Heaven, 28.

most they might wield force, or violence, in other words, the means to coerce or compel others.[407] When an individual, a government, or set of institutions are said to be "in power" or to have power, according to Arendt, this simply means they are "empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name."[408] Power flows directly from the active approval and consent of the public body. Consent, however, is not simply a passive quality, as far as Arendt is concerned, but involves the "active support and continuing participation in all matters of public interest."[409] Citizens, in other words, empower governing institutions to act in their name to the extent that those institutions are actively engaged in by citizens. It is power in this sense that is the essence of all government, according to Arendt. "Government," she says, "is essentially organized and institutionalized power;"[410] that is, the power initially generated by the active support and participation of the citizenry in the public affairs of the state over which the government claims authority. Her view is summarized in the following passage: "the moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with... disappears," she says, the power of the authority figure or institutions that were once empowered by those people "also vanishes."[411]

While the specific reasons why people would rescind their consent from governing authorities may be varied, the point is that this is normally done, according to

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[407] Arendt, *On Violence,* 44.
[408] Arendt, *On Violence*, 44.
[409] Arendt, "Civil Disobedience," 85.
[410] Arendt, *On Violence,* 51.
[411] Arendt, *On Violence,* 44.

Arendt, in protest against those very authorities. [412] This inevitably sets up an antagonistic context between "ruler" and "ruled," especially in instances where governing authorities and institutions refuse to recognize the peoples' refusal to be governed. In stating that "power granted to the authorities is delegated power, which can be revoked"[413] Arendt likely had in mind direct action against the state, its institutions and government. She often refers to the various extra-institutional activities of students, anti-war demonstrators, workers and civil rights activists of the 1950s and 1960s, which, according to her, are predicated on waning consent for established institutions of authority, in terms that evoke direct confrontation with those very institutions, i.e. protests, revolts and rebellion.[414] These groups and the movements of which they are part, as Arendt understands them, are attempting to directly confront the status quo with the intent of openly expressing their displeasure with the current state of affairs and with the intention of actively changing them, often through recourse to "persuasion and dramatization of issues."[415]

But Arendt's understanding of power and politics may also allow for a positive appraisal of acts of withdrawal, rather than those premised on engagement, despite what she has said and might say to the contrary. This point is made clearer if we compare what Arendt says about giving and rescinding consent to Étienne de la Boétie's argument in favour of withdrawing from dominant institutions of power in such a way as to actively

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[412] See: Arendt, *On Violence*, 74.
[413] Arendt, "Civil Disobedience," 86.
[414] See: Arendt, *On Violence,* 18-19; 49.
[415] Arendt, "Civil Disobedience," 76.

contest them. Boétie was an early modern political theorist of the sixteenth century whose

insights on consent and political authority are reflected in much of the liberal and

democratic thought that came after him. In reflecting on the question "how it happens that

so many men, so many villages, so many cities, so many nations, sometimes suffer under

a single tyrant who has no other power than the power they give him,"[416] Boétie did not

simply wish to investigate the origins of political power, he sought a way to actively

oppose it, but without the necessity of open confrontation and, inevitably, bloodshed.

Boétie's approach is based on an understanding that the true source of the power that a

ruler or a state has over their subjects originates not in them, but their subjects. In other

words, he conceived of the basis of political power in the willing or tacit consent of a

state or sovereign's subjects.

Boétie's "solution" to the oppressive power of the sovereign is eloquent, if,

arguably, naïve in its simplicity. After arguing that all tyranny rests on popular consent,

he concludes that "obviously there is no need of fighting to overcome this single tyrant,

for he is automatically defeated if the country *refuses consent* to its own enslavement."[417]

According to Boétie, tyranny, or dominant political institutions more generally, need not

be directly confronted or engaged with force or pleas. Boétie concludes his exhortation

by assuring the masses that to overthrow the tyrant they need not act, nor shed their

blood: "I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over," he says,

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[416] Boétie, Étienne de la. *The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude.* Translated by Harry Kurz, The Mises Institute, 2002, 42.
[417] Boétie, *The Politics of Obedience*, 17.

"but simply that you support him no longer..."[418] For if tyranny really rests on mass consent, tacit or otherwise, then the obvious means for its overthrow is simply by mass withdrawal of that consent. The weight of tyranny would quickly and suddenly collapse under such a nonviolent revolution.[419] This was a markedly different approach from the revolts, revolutions, and insurrections past, present and future, all instances of political actions involving direct, antagonistic engagement with the reigning government or political system in order to bring them down and replace them. Boétie was in this way an early theorist who moved from the emphasis on the necessity of confronting and directly engaging with tyranny head on, and to the strategy of toppling tyranny by leading the public to withdraw their consent.[420] He was, in other words, an early political theorist of withdrawal, but of a militant strain which desires to utilize withdrawal to directly combat oppressive power. In actively withdrawing consent in the way Boétie proposes, to effectively undercut power and bring it to its knees, is to effectively position oneself in opposition to it; drawing a distinction, making a stand, and setting up a context of friend and enemy, as Mouffe or Schmitt would say.

Thus, just as the loss of consent is expected to result in the loss of power by the state or government, according to Arendt, and Boétie's, analysis, the loss of its labour power by capital is expected by Tronti to contribute to the collapse of capitalism. The potential power of such a refusal was, in fact, demonstrated in practice during the events

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[418] Boétie, *The Politics of Obedience*, 49.
[419] Boétie, *The Politics of Obedience*, 17.
[420] Boétie, *The Politics of Obedience*, 37.

of May 1968 in France. It is difficult to pin down any central motivating factor for May

1968; its causes and preconditions were many and varied, involving, but not limited to,

both the narrow interests of students, on the one hand, as well as the broader issue of

labour and class relations on the other.[421] Similarly, the various actions and events that

took place during May '68 were themselves varied in nature. The student dimension of

May '68 is an important and integral one. It was a succession of months-long student-led

protests at the University of Paris Nanterre, culminating, on May 6, in the mass protest of

around 20,000 students, teachers and supporters against the police invasion of the

Sorbonne on May 3, which is commonly understood to be the spark that touched off the

wider events that rocked France, and beyond, during that time. It was in this context that

France's largest trade unions, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) and

Confédération Générale du Travail - Force Ouvrière (CGT-FO), called for a one-day

general strike for May 13. On that day nearly one million people marched in solidarity

with protesting students in Paris alone, with workers advancing their own labour-related

grievances that had been accumulating during the post-war years and sharpened during

the sixties.[422] The union-led general strike led, in turn, to the largest and most widespread

general wildcat strike in history.[423] In the days and weeks following the general strike of

May 13, workers began striking across France and across all sectors of the French

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[421] See: Reader, Keith. *The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and interpretations*. MacMillan
Press, 1993; Singer, Daniel. *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968*. Haymarket Books, 2013; Viénet,
René. *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement, France, May '68*. Autonomedia, 1992.
[422] Howell, Chris. *Regulating Labor: The State and Industrial Relations Reform in Postwar France*. Princeton
University Press, 1992, 61-66.
[423] Keith, *The May 1968 Events in France,* 1.

economy, including both the public and private sectors. Up to one third of the country's

workers were on strike, nearly ten million, by May 22.[424]

Many, if not most of the workers who went on strike beyond May 13 did so on

their own terms and, for the most part, against the wishes of their unions, though many

workers who went on strike during this period were not even represented by a trade

union.[425] The main trade union federations in the country tried to contain the spontaneous

mass strike by channeling it into a struggle for higher wages and other economic

demands. Between May 25th and 26th union representatives entered talks with

representatives of the government and employers in order to quell the strike. The result

was the Grenelle Accords, which provided, among other things, for an increase of the

minimum wage by 35% and of average salaries by 10%.[426] The major leftist parties,

including the French Communist party, which was highly influential in French

parliamentary politics at the time, supported the efforts of the unions with the intent of

channeling worker sentiment into electoral support.[427] The Grenelle Accords were

ultimately rejected by many workers who continued their strikes for at least another

several weeks.[428] While their motivations to continue to strike may have been varied, the

events of May '68 had all the hallmarks of the very kind of withdrawal advocated by

workerists. Workers, taking it upon themselves and in contravention to the overtures of

unions and establishment political parties which ostensibly represented their interests as a

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[424] Keith, *The May 1968 Events in France,* 1.
[425] Singer, *Prelude to Revolution,* 156.
[426] Howell, *Regulating Labour,* 67.
[427] Singer, *Prelude to Revolution,* 10.
[428] Singer, *Prelude to Revolution,* 11.

class, were spontaneously refusing to work en masse. Besides the economic gains, the most significant political result of the strikes was an effectively paralyzed government before the National Assembly was dissolved by President de Gaulle on May 30 and new elections called for June 30. And while neither the French economy nor state ultimately collapsed, these were regarded at the time as very real threats.[429]

Regardless of whether or not it achieves its stated aims of toppling the state or capitalism, what makes the refusal of work, or consent, political, however, is that it is undergirded by a deeply antagonistic relationship with that which is refused; in the case of the workerists, a particular class, and system, which it is geared towards eradicating. As Schmitt, who understands politics in terms of friend/enemy relations, argues, for a situation to be political it is not necessary that conflicting parties are actively fighting each other. If Schmitt is right, the manner of engagement, if any, between antagonistic forces is of lesser consequence in determining their political relationship. What matters, as far as determining a political relationship is concerned, is not the manner of political action, but the presence, and extent, of antagonism inherent in the relationship. Direct confrontation and engagement may be the most obvious form in which the political relationship bears out, but it does not in itself constitute the political.

It is in this sense that Tronti can, without paradox, refer to the refusal to work, that is, "the working-class's mass rejection of the use of its labour-power" in terms of a "working-class *struggle against* work, the worker's *struggle* against her own condition as

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[429] Keith, *The May 1968 Events in France,* 2.

a wage-labourer."[430] It thus evokes another of the nonstate conception of politics I outlined in chapter two—an understanding with which Mouffe, and Honig, attempt to show withdrawal's nonpolitical nature. But, as Sarah Farris states: "the depiction of the struggle between workers and capital as essentially a battlefield of moves and counter-moves anticipates in certain important respects Tronti's characteristic representation of politics as a war between arch enemies,"[431] of which the "refusal of work" is anticipated by workerists as the working class's most effective tactical manoeuvre against capital, clearly evoking the Schmittian conception of politics as revolving around friend/enemy relations and conflict.

Moreover, the notion, underlying the refusal of work, that workers might effectively combat capital at the very site of capital's production, the workplace, rather than through the domain of the state, shifts the very terrain itself of the political—understood in terms of friend/enemy relations and conflict—quite literally from the institutions of the state to a noninstitutional context. Even Schmitt, as I mentioned in chapter two, argues that "economic antagonisms can become political, and the fact that an economic power position could arise proves that the point of the political may be reached from the economic as well as from any other domain."[432] This is a point he further elaborates when he suggests that class conflict may become more than just an economic conflict and turn into a political relation when workers treat their class adversaries as a

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[430] Tronti, *Workers and Capital,* 273 (my emphases).
[431] Farris, Sara R. "On Mario Tronti's Weberianism." *Historical Materialism*, vol. 19, no.3, 2011, pp. 29-62, 35.
[432] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political,* 78.

"real enemy." And this, as I have already suggested, cuts across some of the prevailing interpretations of Marxism and socialist and communist revolutionary practice, which was preoccupied with state power: both with fighting the state as presently constituted, and with seizing state power and constituting a proletarian state—in any case, understanding the state as the sole terrain of politics. As Tronti states, the destruction of the capitalist state, society, and production relations must be found "within the social relation of the factory. The bourgeois state machine must today be broken within the capitalist factory."[433] And the refusal of work by workers therefore becomes the most effective political means of anti-capitalist struggle. Like a tactical retreat during warfare, withdrawal need not mean that overall hostilities between friends and enemies are over or that the battle is lost. Employing withdrawal as a tactic can maintain the antagonism, working to overcome the opposing side, without necessarily directly engaging with it head on.

The belief of the workerists that capitalist development is driven by workers themselves, and by active and concerted struggles on their part against capital mirrors Arendt's insistence that those individuals and institutions said to "be in power" receive their power from the ongoing, even if in large part, tacit, consent of its subjects. Likewise, calling for a general refusal of work in order to undercut the power of, and ultimately overthrow capital mirrors Arendt's solution to governing institutions that have lost the confidence of the people, that is, to refuse consent to be governed by them.

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[433] Tronti, *Workers and Capital,* 34.

Importantly, what may be gleaned from Schmitt, Arendt, as well as the guiding principle of action advocated by Tronti is that withdrawal, whether in the form of a refusal of consent, refusal of work, or otherwise, can both operate in the context of a pre-existing friend/enemy relation, and sharpen the contours of conflict between opposing sides no less than the open confrontation on either the institutional or extra-institutional fronts that Mouffe and Honig suggest is a prerequisite for politics. And it can do this without the need to engage with the institutions of power being contested.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to address a critique of withdrawal by Chantal Mouffe and Bonnie Honig that to be a fully fledged political action, those withdrawing need to (re)engage with the formations of power from which they are withdrawing in an antagonistic manner in order to be accepted as political. Utilizing Arendt's insistence that a ruling authority may be directly undercut by individuals withholding their consent to be ruled by them, I focused this chapter on showcasing the "refusal of work" advocated by workerism as an example of a resolutely noninstitutional political withdrawal. I highlighted the fact that this kind of withdrawal is openly antagonistic in nature, underlying one of the dimensions of noninstitutional politics I have looked at in chapter two. The "refusal of work" advocated by workerists demonstrates how withdrawal might actively confront a dominant manifestation of power beyond simply refusing to engage with it. In this way, it pushes against the notion that withdrawal needs some level of

attachment or (re)engagement with the institutions and processes being withdrawn from, especially those of the state, to be countenanced as being properly political.

Politics does not, however, necessarily require actions predicated solely on antagonistic relations. In chapter two I showed how Arendt's understanding of politics is predicated on individuals acting together over public ends, and such activities, according to her, do not necessarily have to take place within the state. In fact, they need not engage with the state or its institutions at all. In the next chapter I will show how antagonism need not be the focal point of a withdrawal for it to nevertheless be considered political, while still doing something positive that runs counter to the formations of power being withdrawn from. Utilizing Arendt's understanding of politics I will show, via a discussion of autonomist political thought, that withdrawals may be understood to be political when those withdrawing are also acting together in experimenting with alternative forms of decision making and community. This reading is intended to undercut Honig's insistence that, while political if part of a wider "arc" of refusal that ultimately includes engagement with the state or dominant power relations, withdrawing to experiment with alternative forms of life is not sufficiently political on its own.

withdrawal means creation of spaces of autonomy where solidarity can be rebuilt, and where self-relying communities can start a process of proliferation, contagion, and eventually, of reversal of the trend[434]

-Franco "Bifo" Berardi

CHAPTER 6: NONINSTITUTIONAL POLITICAL WITHDRAWAL: AUTONOMISM, OCCUPY AND "FOUNDING-LEAVE TAKING"

Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined a critique of withdrawal advanced, respectively, by Mouffe and Honig that essentially views withdrawal as an apolitical gesture because it does not reflect an antagonistic element, which, as can be gleaned in their works, can only be actualized through direct engagement with formations of power that are seen as the enemy. I effectively argued against their critiques by showing that withdrawal may in fact be understood to be political precisely because, contrary to what they argue, it *can* be conducted in a deeply antagonistic manner. I utilized Arendt's political thought, especially her work on power as consent, to establish this. In this chapter, I continue to utilize Arendt's work to argue that withdrawal need not even display or maintain antagonism with that from which it is withdrawing in order for it to be accepted as political. I apply her work to autonomist political thought to argue my point.

Autonomist thinkers, like the workerists that preceded them, tend to evoke noninstitutional approaches to politics in order to confront the continued domination of

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[434] Berardi, Franco. "An Interview with Bifo." *After the Future*, AK Press, 2011, pp. 169-185, 177.

the state and capital. One of the main forms such an approach takes is, as I will show,

withdrawal. Unlike the focus on utilizing withdrawal as a weapon against state and

capital as in workerist thought, however, autonomists tend to explore what the positive

side of withdrawal looks like. Autonomism thus explores a side of political withdrawal

that extends beyond its antagonistic relationship to state and capital. It is in this sense that

the exodus model of the autonomists is also referred to as a "founding leave-taking,

which both refuses [the dominant] social order and constructs an alternative."[435] I draw

out this aspect of withdrawal by focusing on the Occupy Movement, understood by

several prominent autonomist thinkers, such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, as a

preeminent example of the kind of withdrawal advocated by them. The Occupation zones

exemplify the prefigurative "founding leave-taking" of a "noninstitutional public sphere"

advocated by some autonomists.

As I will argue in this final chapter, the understanding of withdrawal found in

autonomism shows how withdrawal can be wed not only to a negative and antagonistic

vision of politics, but also a positive and generative one, thereby pushing past the

restricted understanding of politics as antagonistic engagement underlying the critique of

withdrawal advanced by both Mouffe and Honig. Arendt's understanding of politics

involving the acting together of individuals over common, public matters is instrumental

in showing this. I close this chapter with a brief exploration of what I take to be a

particularly novel element that the example of Occupy, as an instance of the kind of

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[435] Virno and Hardt, *Radical Thought in Italy,* 260 (my emphasis).

"foundational leave-taking" advocated by autonomists, shows. That is, that in contravention to a mainstay of political thought that harkens back to Aristotle, and is staunchly maintained by Arendt herself, the kinds of activities traditionally related to the private realm may be considered political insofar as they are a crucial aspect of the kind of withdrawal from power, namely, the state and capital, advocated by autonomists.

Autonomism

Autonomism is the name given to a field of interrelated movements,[436] or more precisely, a political orientation, which, in Italy specifically, grew out of the workerist movement. While workerism was regarded by some of its proponents to have ended towards the end of the 1960s,[437] autonomism (*autonomia* in Italian) is regarded to have come into its own during this very period. Autonomism thus shares some of the same figures and theoretical concepts as workerism, but has developed some important distinctions. For example, the notion that workers can and must operate autonomously from, even in direct disobedience of, leftist political parties and unions, and engage in political struggle outside of state institutions, was an overarching tenet of workerism taken up by autonomism. Hence the name *Autonomia Operaia (*"Workers' Autonomy"), one of the first and earliest autonomist groups started by Antonio Negri in 1973, who was

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[436] Autonomism is not a singular political movement and has multiple origins and national and doctrinal flavours. George Katsiaficas gives a thorough historical treatment of these differences, particularly in their French, German, American, and, of course, Italian contexts in *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life*. AK Press, 2006.

[437] Roggero, Gigi. *Italian Operaismo: Genealogy, History, Method*. Translated by Clara Pope, MIT Press, 2023, 71.

himself heavily involved in workerism.[438] In starting *Autonomia Operaia*, Negri was

cutting ties with former workerists who began to openly side with Panzieri's earlier hopes

that workerism could help reform leftists parties to take a more grassroots revolutionary

ethos in their parliamentary struggles, thus bridging the gap exposed by the workerists

between the demands and autonomous actions of workers themselves and the parties and

unions which ostensibly served to represent them in state institutions, but failed in the

eyes of the workerists to do so. This was followed by a number of other autonomist

groups and journals.[439] Notable among these was *A/traverso,* started on the initiative of

Franco "Bifo" Berardi, another prominent member of *Autonomia Operaia*. Broadly

encapsulating the crux of autonomist thinking, the articles in *A/traverso* "criticized

ideologies and organizations, the oppressive role of the PCI, and really existing socialism,

with a strong emphasis on the refusal of work."[440]

 Despite their shared history, autonomism has two notable differences that

distinguish it from workerism, ideas initially developed in earnest by those engaged in

Autonomia Operaia. These differences, in turn, inflect the nature and scope of the kind of

withdrawal typically advocated for by autonomists which autonomism also happens to

share as a political tactic with workerism. As far as autonomists are concerned, factory

workers can no longer be considered the preeminent subject of emancipatory politics.

According to them, the industrial factory worker has become a rarer commodity in the

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[438] Wright, *Storming Heaven,* 140.
[439] Roggero, *Italian Operaismo,* 85-57.
[440] Roggero, *Italian Operaismo*, 87.

post-Fordist era,[441] which, according to Bifo, is marked by the widespread production and commodification of information, data and creative output, and the digitalization of machinery and computerization of productive processes. This phenomenon, which effectively reduces the "entire production process to the elaboration and exchange of information,"[442] establishes the latter as the most important commodity with regard to capital's valorization today. Accordingly, the rise of digital technologies and the shift to data in value-creation has significantly changed both the qualitative, but also quantitative nature of labour. Moreover, the decline of industrial labour, and the reorientation of the economy around data, information and the digital technologies that allow for their rapid production, dissemination and consumption, undermine the possibility of traditional forms of solidarity that, according to Bifo, is necessary for effective collective political action. Industrial workers once found pleasure and purpose "in subversive working communities, political organizations or unions where members organized against capital."[443] The transformation of the nature of industrial work, if not also its steady decline, has thus significantly undercut the ability of the traditional working class to engage in effective direct action as a collective political subject. The subject of social struggle is therefore argued by autonomists to necessarily include a wider subset of the population, comprising the larger part of society: individuals not directly employed in factory work and whose labour is not traditionally seen as socially productive, but who

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[441] Hardt, "Laboratory Italy," 4.

[442] Berardi, Franco. *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. Semiotext(e), 2009, 95.

[443] Berardi, *The Soul at Work*, 84.

nevertheless have their own grievances against the state and the capitalist economy, such as students, mothers, artists, intellectuals, among others.[444] This more expansive collective subject has been termed the "multitude" by some autonomists,[445] to distinguish it from the narrower "working class" as it encapsulates the transformations in the labour landscape, and as such the sense of a collective political subject whose individual elements reflect a broader social milieu than industrial factory workers.

This focus on a new and more diverse political subject is a reflection of autonomism's more general political goals, which quickly evolved beyond the narrower concerns with class-conflict and economic change characteristic of workerism. Autonomism's goals are not only set against capital, like the more traditionally Marxist-oriented workerists, but are also just as opposed to all hierarchical forms of organization more generally, like the state and representative party politics.[446] Autonomists seek independence from political parties, and institutionalized forms of politics, as George Katsiaficas explains.[447] In essence, autonomism, as its name would suggest, seeks autonomous living; autonomous, that is, above all from traditional, hierarchical social, political and economic structures of control and governance.[448] And, as I will make clear, autonomism premises political power on the autonomous acting together of individuals in

[444] Cuninghame, Patrick. "Autonomia in the 1970s: The Refusal of Work, the Party and Power." *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 11, no.2, 2005, pp. 77-94, 79.
[445] Foremost among these are Paolo Virno and Antonio Negri. See: Virno, Paolo. *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. Translated by Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito and Anrea Casson, Semiotext(e), 2004; Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. The Penguin Press, 2004.
[446] Lotringer and Marazzo, "The Return of Politics," 11.
[447] Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics,* 1.
[448] Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics,* 16.

creating alternate forms of community outside of the institutions of the state, a goal which underscores its focus on withdrawal from dominant relations and institutions of power.

The Inadequacy of Traditional Politics

Traditional forms of political engagement, especially in its institutional forms, such as running for political office or voting for political representatives, are not effective, according to most autonomists. Political representatives, or political leaders elected by citizens to represent their interests, stand apart from the people once elected, inevitably creating a schism between leaders and followers, rulers and ruled. Rather than enable individuals to make concrete decisions about the social order, they contribute to the inability of individuals, especially the impoverished and systemically downtrodden, to effectively change their lot. As Negri and Michael Hardt say, representation "is not, in fact, a vehicle of democracy but instead an obstacle to its realization."[449] Representation divorces the majority of citizens from effective political life, a phenomenon which Joseph Schumpeter favourably assessed as an inevitable outcome of a democratic system organized on representative principles.[450]

Moreover, some autonomists have also warned that radical or revolutionary actions committed to challenging and/or taking over state power are problematic where they directly engage with the institutions or formations of power they are seeking to topple. John Holloway notes that the institutional understanding of politics involves the

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[449] Hardt and Negri, *Declaration,* 26.
[450] Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*.

goal of the conquest of state power, which in turn involves an instrumentalization of engaged struggle. But this focus on struggle for the conquest of state power risks making even the most committed revolutionary, if not also a loyal elected representative of the state, increasingly removed from the actual reason and goal behind the struggle.[451] For those fighting for a society resting on more just power relations, like anti-capitalists, politics needs to be viewed differently. Otherwise, attempting to change society through the conquest of state power will end up achieving the opposite of the initial goal. Instead of being a step towards abolishing oppressive power relations, the attempt to conquer power will simply extend the reigning "field of power relations into the struggle against power."[452] In effect, Holloway argues that engaging with power will inevitably change the very nature of those engaged against it to reflect aspects of that very power.

In summing up the autonomist attitude towards the institutional understanding of politics, Hardt and Negri say that whereas many have conceived "the realm of the political as the terrain of the sovereign itself, focusing on the state... this is too narrow a view of the political."[453] In their arguments detailing the deficiencies of traditional institutional forms of political engagement, the autonomists echo many of the thinkers advocating noninstitutional approaches to politics. Each of these thinkers, as I have elaborated in chapter two, respond to what they see as deficiencies in the institutional understanding of politics, and the political practices which are anchored in just such an

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[451] Holloway, John. *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*. Pluto Press, 2002, 11.

[452] Holloway, *Change the World*, 12.

[453] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 332.

understanding, such as governance and struggling for state power and institutional influence. In response, they have formulated alternative conceptions of politics they feel better represent its nature. These alternative conceptions of the political in turn contribute to alternative visions of engaging in politics. Unlike the noninstitutional thinkers, however, autonomists put an emphasis on withdrawal rather than engagement.

Autonomism and Withdrawal

Negri and Hardt, for example, each claim that real political affirmation, in fact, begins with a refusal,[454] rather than dialogue or engagement of any kind with or against the institutions under question. Holloway, likewise, argues that a meaningful politics capable of real change "begins with refusal, with No."[455] In this they appear to follow Foucault, who, as I have noted already in chapter four, understood the most elementary act of resistance as a simple refusal. But this refusal does not necessarily appear as a form of head-on resistance against the reigning social, economic and political structures that are being refused. Instead, autonomists, like the workerists before them, advocate for actions that seek to effectively *withdraw from* rather than *engage with* the systems and structures of power they are refusing: "This act of refusing the relationship with the sovereign is a kind of exodus, fleeing the forces of oppression, servitude, and persecution in search of freedom."[456]

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[454] Hardt and Negri, *Declaration,* 32.
[455] Holloway, John. *Crack Capitalism*. Pluto Press, 2010, 17.
[456] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 333-334.

Paolo Virno, another prominent autonomist, contends that exit, rather than engagement, is a potential way to understand politics; a kind of politics, moreover, which may be capable of animating the multitude to change their lot when engagement fails to.[457] Exit, or exodus, according to Virno, is far from being passive or inactive, as the tradition of political thought has up till now largely assumed: "Nothing is less passive than the act of fleeing, of exiting. Defection modifies the conditions within which the struggle takes place, rather than presupposing those conditions to be an unalterable horizon."[458] However, the withdrawal advocated by autonomists can be distinguished by that advocated by workerists in that it is not simply, or necessarily, a gesture of opposition.

The withdrawal advocated by some autonomists is not simply a movement away from the dominant social order and political institutions, nor is it a purely negative reaction to the power of the state, or capitalist economic relations, but a movement away to collectively establish new forms of social life and organization. In this the withdrawal found in autonomist thought shows how it may be viewed as political even in the absence of either engagement or antagonism and conflict. As Holloway puts it: "the real force of the 'serve no more' comes when we do something else instead."[459] This is what one might take Virno to mean when he describes exodus as the "*institution* of a non-state public sphere"[460] Importantly, this does not necessarily mean the intentional destruction

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[457] Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude,* 71.
[458] Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude,* 70.
[459] Holloway, *Crack Capitalism,* 17.
[460] Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 195.

of the old order, whether through violent or largely nonviolent forms of direct

engagement with the reigning structures of power; it does not purposively engage with

the old society in order to bring about one or another change in it. Using the term

"*Exodus* here to define mass defection from the State,"[461] Virno argues that such a

withdrawal is not "in any case a negative gesture that exempts one from action and

responsibility. To the contrary, to desert means to modify the conditions within which the

conflict is played instead of submitting to them."[462] Like the workerist calls for the

"refusal of work," the withdrawal advocated by autonomists on this register seeks a form

of political action that is not directly confrontational, but in addition, and unlike the

simple refusal of work, is one that is at the same time generative and productive of the

very type of society those withdrawing wish to supersede the one they are withdrawing

from: "We negate... but out of our negation grows a creation, an other-doing, an activity

that is not... shaped by the rules of power."[463]

It is in this sense that the exodus model of the autonomists is also referred to as a

"refusal-and-other-creation,"[464] or a "founding leave-taking, which both refuses [the

reigning] social order *and constructs an alternative*,"[465] and as such can be viewed as a

response to the kind of critique of withdrawal offered by both Mouffe and Honig. They

argue withdrawal is a politically barren act, especially since it is not directly engaging

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[461] Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 196.
[462] Virno, Paolo. "The Ambivalence of Disenchantment." *Radical Thought in Italy*, *A Potential Politics.* Edited by Hardt, Michael and Paolo Virno, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 32.
[463] Holloway, *Crack Capitalism,* 3.
[464] Holloway, *Crack Capitalism,* 6.
[465] Virno and Hardt, *Radical Thought in Italy,* 260 (my emphasis).

with the status quo dominant arrangement of power as an enemy to be challenged. I have

shown, through a discussion of workerism, that withdrawal may be understood as

antagonistic in nature and thus might be considered political. But withdrawal may do

something more, which a purely antagonistic reading of politics does not sufficiently

appreciate. The notion of withdrawal that can be gleaned in the works of autonomists,

especially, as I will show, if viewed according to an Arendtian conception of politics,

shows how withdrawal may be considered sufficiently political even if not viewed in a

purely antagonistic manner. It is the autonomist vision of withdrawal, or *exodus*, which

represents, as I will show, a form of political withdrawal that is generative of different

ways of doing things without engaging with the dominant relations of power. I will

illustrate this using the Occupy movement as a prime example in practice of just such a

withdrawal.

Occupy

The Occupy Movement[466] (hereafter simply "Occupy") has made a lasting impact

on the imaginary of social activism. It has also resulted in extensive theoretical

intervention by political thinkers, both critics and those more favourably disposed to the

events of Occupy. What are perhaps among the more interesting interventions are those

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[466] The Occupy *phenomenon* is perhaps a more apt title to describe what happened at Zucotti Park and elsewhere in 2011. Like the various protest movements and mass engagement in social activism that erupted over the world in 1968, there was no singular issue, set of goals, manifestos or actors common to the global acts of social activism in 2011 that would tie them together in what could be called a singularly focused "movement." But those engaged at the time could be seen to have affinity to one another in that the form of activism many of them partook in around the world in that year could be described as: non-hierarchical, horizontalist, amorphous, and often resulted in the occupation of a prominent public space for some period of time.

made by thinkers who have situated Occupy in the discussion of withdrawal vs. engagement.[467] Daniel de Zeeuw is particularly explicit about this in "Engaged Withdrawal: Occupying Politics Beyond Politics" in which he discusses Occupy as a protest form from the lens of both "advocates of a new model for radical politics that proposes the cumulative exit from existing political and economic institutions, and advocates of a model that proposes new forms of radical-democratic engagement with existing institutions."[468]

As some autonomists have themselves argued, Occupy expresses in an immediate and publicly visible way exactly the kind of withdrawal that autonomists advocate. For example, in Hardt and Negri's estimation, "Occupy is the latest expression of an emerging 'exodus' of the multitude from the economic and political structures of power, especially the representative mechanisms of the state."[469] According to them, Occupy shows how individuals might be able to collectively extract themselves from the dominant order and assert their own form of democratic action without the mediation or leadership of a vanguard organization or representative political party directly engaging with the state. This signifies a transition from traditional models of politics, whether of parliamentary politics or extra-institutional resistance, to a politics of exodus. Possibly

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[467] Mouffe, for example, notably interprets the Occupy Movement as being "inspired by the exodus model" in *Agonistics*, 71; see also: Holloway, Travis. "Neoliberalism and the Future of Democracy," *Philosophy Today,* vol.62. no.2, 2018, pp.627-50; de Lorey, Isabell. "Presentist Democracy: The Now Time of Struggles" in *Subjectivation in Political Theory and Contemporary Practices*. Edited by Oberprantacher, A., Siclodi, A., Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 149-163.

[468] De Zeeuw, Daniël. "Engaged Withdrawal: Occupying Politics Beyond Politics." *Krisis* vol.1, 2014, pp. 68-78, 68.

[469] De Zeeuw, "Engaged Withdrawal"; See also: Hardt and Negri, *Declaration*.

few political events have resulted in such an intensive and overt discussion of this once theoretically muted (if very real) distinction in political practice. And so it is fitting that I end this dissertation by examining Occupy and the ways in which the kind of political withdrawal I will argue it displays adds to the discussion of political withdrawal, and of politics itself, initiated by this dissertation. I will primarily examine the occupation of Zucotti Park as an expression of withdrawal on the part of the occupiers from the social, political and economic institutions they were protesting, and into spaces within which they could effectively act together in ways radically different to the institutions they were withdrawing from.[470] In so doing, I will highlight the specifically noninstitutional political nature of just such a withdrawal, how it modifies the noninstitutional politics to which it is theoretically wedded and how it goes beyond it in an important way.

Occupy began on Sept 17, 2011 when members of *Adbusters*, a Canadian anti-consumerist magazine, proposed a peaceful occupation of Wall Street earlier that same year in order to protest social and economic inequality and a perceived lack of "real democracy" with respect to existing democratic institutions.[471] By October 2011, what began as an occupation of Zuccotti Park in the heart of New York's financial district, effectively became a global phenomenon with occupations occurring in hundreds of cities in over 80 countries around the world, all united, if loosely, by the same underlying reason that prompted Occupy Wall Street (OWS).

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[470] De Zeeuw, "Engaged Withdrawal," 72.
[471] Fleming, Andrew. "Adbusters Sparks Wall Street Protests." *The Vancouver Courier,* 2011. https://web.archive.org/web/20121011160015/http://www.vancourier.com/Adbusters+sparks+Wall+Street+protest/5466332/story.html.

Occupy in many ways demonstrated aspects of traditional extra-institutional movements, predicated on voice, visibility, publicity, and engagement. For example, on its inaugural day, around 1,000 protestors walked up and down Wall Street. On October 1, Occupy protesters attempted to march across the Brooklyn Bridge, resulting in more than 700 arrests. Other examples include direct collaboration between Occupy protestors and unions. In addition to receiving official support from several unions, thousands of union workers representing their respective unions marched alongside Occupy protestors in various protest marches.[472] Members of established political parties actively supported and attempted to court those directly involved in Occupy, while some of those involved in Occupy actively petitioned and lobbied for support from elected officials or would-be political representatives.[473] This begs two questions: can a movement like Occupy be considered a form of withdrawal, and is such a withdrawal political? These are questions I will attempt to address in order.

The Politics of Occupy

What was perhaps the most characteristic, and derided, aspect of Occupy was its lack of any generally accepted goals or demands, its organizationally fluid nature, and, despite featuring aspects of traditional activism, the overall lack of engagement with established political and economic institutions on the part of protestors. As a movement,

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[472] McVeigh, Karen and Matt Wells. "Occupy Wall Street: Thousands March in New York." *The Guardian*, 2011. www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/05/occupy-wall-street-new-york-march.
[473] Lichtblau, Eric. "Wall Street Protests Gain Support from Leading Democrats." *The New York Times,* 2011. www.nytimes.com/2011/10/11/us/politics/wall-street-protests-gain-support-from-leading-democrats.html.

Occupy was not uniformly directed at elected officials with a view to have demands legislated at the level of institutional politics. In effect, Occupiers were not directly engaging with the political actors and institutions of the state. Rather than simply march through the streets, petition those in power and expect results from legislators, many of those involved in Occupy began to occupy spaces and experiment with forms of democratic decision making that were different from the representative system that many occupiers were actively shunning. It is in this aspect of Occupy that we can tease out an alternative politics, a politics that poses itself in direct contraposition to the kind of conventional politics those taking part in the occupations were rejecting; a politics, in other words, that is based on the premise of withdrawal rather than engagement. This withdrawal, moreover, displayed positive content, which critics of withdrawal like Mouffe appear to downplay. Occupy was not just a withdrawal *from*, but a withdrawal *into* that sought a different form of society that was being withdrawn from. Indeed, this was part of the way in which Occupy reflected the "founding leave-taking" described by Virno as the nature of the kind of withdrawal which autonomists advocate. It was the instantiation of what a real, nonrepresentative, nonstatist democratic decision making might look like.

For example, in rejecting the representative politics of the state, the occupiers practiced forms of direct democracy that utilized horizontalist methods such as working groups and general assemblies which eschewed the role of leaders or hierarchical systems of representation. Individuals in the occupy encampments deliberated directly with each other and openly debated the nature and aims of the movement without the mediation of,

regard for, or sanction from state institutions or political representatives. Working groups

would meet before the general assembly to decide their common positions on the issues

at hand, sometimes on the bases of research carried out by their members. Important

decisions affecting the occupations as a whole were made at general assemblies, which

were in turn often informed by the findings of multiple different working groups. The

latter would present proposals to assembly participants, who were invited to comment

upon them using a process called a *stack*—a queue of speakers that anyone could join.

The flow of the meetings was facilitated by discussion facilitators, and final decisions

were made using a consensus model.[474] As part of a "generalised revolt against

representation," this horizontalist and participatory form of governance enacted by

Occupiers effectively acted as a mechanism to counter the political status quo, which is

epitomised by rigid institutions, political parties and elections.[475] The occupation zones

could be seen as "non-state public spheres," the emergence of which Virno advocates in

rejection of the social and political institutions of traditional institutional politics. In other

words, conducting and experimenting with such radically democratic forms of decision

making is an express rejection of and, with their proliferation, an active exodus from state

institutions and political representation. By enacting a different, noninstitutional form of

political activity, occupiers attempted to disentangle from institutional forms. And it was

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[474] Guilherme, Fians. "Prefigurative Politics." *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology,* edited by Felix Stein, 2022, pp. 1-18, 8. http://doi.org/10.29164/22prefigpolitics.

[475] Tormey, Simon. "Occupy Wall Street: From Representation to Post-Representation." *Journal of Critical Globalization Studies*, vol. 5, 2012, pp. 132-137, 136.

in acting in concert together over matters of public concern that they were, in fact, acting politically, as Arendt would say.

The occupations could be seen as a "restorative moment" of the political, to borrow a phrase from Sheldon Wolin.[476] Wolin's debt to Arendt is made clear in his notion of "fugitive democracy," which is a decidedly noninstitutional conception of politics and democracy. As I have already noted in chapter two, the *political*, for Wolin, is an "expression of the idea that a free society composed of diversities can nonetheless enjoy moments of commonality when, through public deliberations, collective power is used to promote or protect the wellbeing of the collectivity"[477] which he sharply distinguishes from the antagonistic and confrontational nature of institutionalized political engagement, largely in the form of representative democracy.[478]

In Wolin's view, democracy, and politics more generally, cannot be reduced to a fixed set of institutions, but an experience in which ordinary people are politically active by directly engaging with one another without the mediation of state institutions, and working together for their collective wellbeing. In this construction "fugitive" stands for the fact that democracy is an impromptu, people oriented and public event that occurs as suddenly as it can end. Democracy is just another name for the political, according to Wolin, and does not occur in parliaments, in the deliberations of government bills, or in the implementation of laws and policies by administrative apparatuses. It occurs, rather,

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[476] Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," 23.
[477] Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," 11.
[478] Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," 23.

when individuals come together and "take on responsibilities, deliberate about goals and choices, and share in decisions that have broad consequences and affect unknown and distant others."[479] Applying this theory of the political to Occupy, it could be said that occupiers were practicing a "fugitive" politics; fugitive because the occupations were an express refusal of, and purposely occurred at the edges of the dominant social, political and economic institutions. Furthermore, by coming together outside of the latter to practice the radically participatory form of democracy they did, occupiers proceeded to "make themselves political."[480]

This follows almost directly from Arendt's own understanding of politics. Recall that politics is, according to Arendt, a mode of acting together with others in the public realm over matters of public concern. In Arendt's view, "the political realm rises directly out of acting together, the 'sharing of words and deeds.'"[481] In other words, a public realm emerges, is constituted, wherever and whenever individuals come together to discuss and engage with each other over public matters, that is, when they act politically. It is during such times that a public, common world emerges. And this need not be in the halls of parliament, or other institutionalized venues designed for just such a thing. Extending her notion of politics to Occupy, it could be argued that it was, in part, withdrawal into occupied spaces that enabled this alternate form of political activity, which in turn shaped those occupied spaces and made them public, political spaces. In the

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[479] Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," 23.
[480] Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," 23.
[481] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 198.

framework of Arendt's view of politics, we may understand people to be actively

political even as they refuse their consent to be governed by, or to engage with, the

institutions of established authority; and, moreover, when they begin to act in concert

over public affairs outside of the established institutions. This is supported by her positive

appraisal of the instances of participatory democratic engagement of individuals in

revolutionary moments, when, having lost faith in the ruling authorities, those rebelling

refuse their consent to be governed any longer by the dominant institutions, and attempt

to leave them to build and participate in alternative, grassroots forms of decision making

in the course of their opposition, a form of political activity she refers to as the "council

system."[482]

As I have already stated in chapter two, in Arendt's understanding of

"councilism," small, grassroots, loosely organized associations of individuals come

together for the primary purpose of directly participating in public affairs together with

one another[483] in a manner which eschews and avoids formal organs of representation,

static authority figures and institutions, and proceeds along generally participatory

democratic means.[484] One of their most interesting aspects, apart from their radically

democratic core, according to Arendt, is the fact that councils typically occur

spontaneously, having formed from individuals eschewing dominant institutions of

political authority, and established political organizations and processes, precisely in

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[482] See: Arendt, "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution." *Crises of the Republic*. Harcourt Brace and Company, 1972, pp.199-233, 231-233.

[483] Arendt*, On Revolution,* 255.

[484] Arendt*, On Revolution,* 254-255.

order to act together politically.[485] As can be gleaned from what Arendt says of them,

councils are in a way a direct expression of peoples' dissatisfaction with the powers that

be, which has either directly denied them the opportunity to effectively engage in the

political system or governing structures of their state or which have not adequately

addressed their concerns as citizens. As she explains, "action and participation in public

affairs, a natural aspiration of the councils, obviously are not signs of health and vitality

but of decay and perversion in" established political institutions.[486] Speaking of the

political communities which both preceded and became particularly salient during the

American Revolution, and which in part modelled her conception of "councilism,"[487]

Arendt is clear that what sets them apart from other forms of politics, traditionally

understood, is that "these bodies, moreover, were not conceived as governments, strictly

speaking; they did not imply rule and the division of people into rulers and ruled."[488] The

turn to councilism is in effect a direct expression of opposition to the prevailing political

order. It is little wonder then that Arendt finds councils particularly ubiquitous during

revolutionary times,[489] for they signal not only the general breakdown of centralized

authority, but also, given the typical motivation of those turning to the formation of

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[485] Arendt, *On Revolution,* 254.

[486] See: Arendt, *On Revolution*, 263-264; See also: Arendt, *On Revolution*, 236-240 and 248-250 on the recurring conflicts between constituted authority and the state and councils when and where they emerged in revolutionary situations.

[487] It was in their struggle for freedom from Britain that led the American revolutionaries to discover among themselves new ways of being together in which they could decide "what to do and how to live together through mutual persuasion and common deliberation" in freely formed "meetings, committees and assemblies." Arndt, David. *Arendt On the Political.* Cambridge University Press, 2019, 256.

[488] Arendt, *On Revolution,* 159.

[489] See, for example: Arendt, *On Revolution*, 248-250, 254, 258-259.

councils, as partly the reason why central authority has broken down in the first place.

Speaking of the growing power of the early American colonists vis-à-vis the waning

power of British authority over them just prior to and during the American Revolution,

Arendt, for example, notes how it was the "power of confidence in one another [i.e. the

colonists], and in the common people, which enabled the United States to go through a

revolution. This confidence moreover, arose not from a common ideology but from

mutual promises and as such became the basis for 'associations'—the gathering-together

of people for a specified political purpose."[490] It is precisely in revolutionary moments

that individuals have not only found the need and opportunity to withdraw into spaces

wherein they might practice politics unfettered by established institutions and authority,

but in doing so have effectively revoked their consent to be governed by the established

systems of political rule. It would seem, then, that acts of withdrawal—especially in the

sense of withdrawing from established governing systems, and into spontaneous,

grassroots associations, like the occupation camps of the Occupy movement—can be

equally political in nature to those actions premised on engagement with state or

governing bodies, especially according to an Arendtian politics.

The example of Occupy thus provides an objection to Honig's critique of

withdrawal in particular. While she does, unlike Mouffe, applaud withdrawals into spaces

wherein individuals may experiment with new social and political ways of life, Honig

argues this is merely a part of a wider arc of political withdrawal, which can only be

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[490] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 173-174.

considered political if it ultimately leads to engagement with that which was initially

withdrawn from. Here, I have suggested the creation of alternative spaces of acting

together in opposition to the political spaces and institutions of the state is a decidedly

political act on its own with the help of Arendt's understanding of politics. This also

speaks directly to a comment about withdrawal Kirkpatrick makes in her concluding

remarks to *The Virtues of Exit*. It is here that Kirkpatrick comes closest to offering a

decidedly noninstitutional conception of withdrawal when discussing its potentially

positive aspects, thereby approximating what I have been arguing throughout this

dissertation, and in this chapter in particular. "Leaving," she argues, "creates the

conditions that facilitate the forging of collective bonds."[491] This, moreover, is made

possible through collective action. Leaving together, working together, and creating

together can "create possibilities for political growth and development that were not

apparent before."[492] Ultimately, as she notes, withdrawal "can be a way to cultivate new

democratic forms and revitalize democratic life."[493] In ending on this note, however,

Kirkpatrick does not fully explore, as I mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation,

what she promises to do. That is, not only to examine withdrawal itself as a properly

political act, but also to show what it might add to, or say about, the political itself. For

Kirkpatrick, if it is not somehow directly attached to or reengaging with the state and its

political institutions, withdrawal is political at best only in a secondary sense, in that for

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[491] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 117.
[492] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 117.
[493] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 111.

her, the withdrawal itself is not predicated on people coming together to enact politics anew, but merely "*creates the conditions*" of doing so.[494] I have argued here that it is in the very process of establishing alternative social and political spaces that withdrawal, understood in the autonomist terms of a "founding leave-taking," can be understood as political in itself.

Politics Without Boundaries

Withdrawal from the dominant political, economic and social institutions, can, however, demonstrate something more than simply opening up spaces to conduct politics anew, that is, in its nonstate form as acting in concert together with others over public matters. Politics understood simply in this sense can tend to leave consideration of practical matters related to the mundane aspects of life and society to the side, despite, more often than not, being the motivating factors of political activity in the first place. When there is talk of withdrawal into ostensibly autonomous zones, especially as I have shown, the temptation is to think of them in largely, if not solely, "political" terms as political is traditionally understood: spaces wherein individuals come together merely to discuss strategies, and build alliances and networks for the task of confronting and resisting dominant institutions and formations of power; in other words, to "act together" over public matters, as Arendt would say. One would thus be forgiven for overlooking the role of camp infrastructure, organization, daily housekeeping and mundane acts of interpersonal life when investigating the political novelty of movements like Occupy.

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[494] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 117 (my emphasis).

This is not surprising, as I have discussed in chapter one, given that since Aristotle, it has been common in political thought to distinguish between a political realm and a social, private and/or economic realm. As far as Aristotle is concerned, in one's own private domain, one is concerned largely with matters of "practical" concern: activities which are a means to the end of living—the securing of food, shelter, clothing, security of person and property, etc. In the public realm, one is dealing with public affairs: matters concerning the *polis* and its citizenry as a whole.[495] For Aristotle, as for later theorists, like Arendt, there are clear boundaries between political activity and other kinds of human activity. Arendt, for her part, argues that politics should not be understood as an activity based on a needs-ends relationship. This is what makes politics so unique compared to the other forms of activity individuals carry out in the other spheres of their lives, and also why Arendt is particularly at pains to distinguish politics and the political realm from labour, work and other kinds of activities specific to the private and social realms, even if and when they involve the collaboration of multiple people. Whereas one labours to procure the necessities of life, and one works to fabricate objects with which to furnish the world, politics, first and foremost, simply involves the experience of engaging in deeds and deliberations with others over matters of public concern.

The overt focus on politics understood in distinction to social and economic activities, however, runs the risk of envisioning a politics that is, at best, merely

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[495] Aristotle, *Politics,* VII 2 1324a.

performative, at worst worryingly dismissive of serious issues of everyday life, even if this is the stuff that is often the very concern and impetus of individuals who take an interest in politics in the first place.[496] This is what Hardt and Negri mean when they say that, "if we treat the potential effectiveness of democratic organizing to transform the world only in 'political' terms [and] if we treat the political as an autonomous realm detached from social needs and social production, then we will"[497] not appreciate the full richness of novel forms of political action like that of the "founding leaving-taking" of exodus. This is an important point to keep in mind especially with respect to movements like Occupy which are never simply acts of reactive resistance against established political institutions and practices. If the occupiers were opposed to these, it was in part because they had felt that existing political institutions were not doing enough—or anything—to address the growing economic and social concerns of the people. Occupy *was* about this. In establishing their encampments to which they physically withdrew from their daily lives and careers, and refused direct engagement with established political institutions and processes, occupiers were not simply withdrawing from traditional ways of governing and allocating power; they were at the same time withdrawing from the social and economic systems and ways of life that had become, in the eyes of many occupiers, no longer feasible or manageable—unbearable even.[498]

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[496] Lois McNay does an excellent job of laying out just such a critique of contemporary "radical" politics in: *The Misguided Search for the Political*: *Social Weightlessness in Radical Democratic Theory*. Polity Press, 2014.

[497] Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Assembly.* Oxford University Press, 2017, XV.

[498] See: Fleming, "Adbusters Sparks Wall Street Protests." *The Vancouver Courier,* 2011; Dube, Arindrajit and Ethan Kaplan. "Occupy Wall Street and the Political Economy of Inequality." *The Economists' Voice*, vol.9, no.3, 2012; Townsend, Mark and Lisa O'Carroll. "Occupy protests against capitalism spread around

Withdrawal can thus be both a reaction to, and an attempt to find new and better ways of

addressing, the social and economic needs of those withdrawing. While still clearly

evoking a noninstitutional conception of politics, I argue that the occupations of Occupy,

seen as a form of withdrawal, can thus begin to shift our understanding of what we take

to be as fundamentally political matters, and what, ultimately, constitutes political

activity in light of these very concerns which many occupiers had. The occupations were

not simply political because the form of decision making practiced within them reflected

a distinctly noninstitutional understanding of politics. The occupations can help us

appreciate the activities and concerns proper to other spheres of life as integral to an

alternative politics, especially a politics of withdrawal.

Arendt would criticize such a move, given that she makes a clear distinction

between political activity and social and economic activities. In fact, she says of councils

that their "fatal mistake... has always been that they themselves did not distinguish clearly

between participation in public affairs and administration or management of things in the

public interest,"[499] as if anticipating, with this comment, my assertion about Occupy here.

And yet it is especially with reference to Arendt's notion of power and politics that we

may see the potentially important role traditionally "nonpolitical" activities can play in a

politics of withdrawal. If, for Arendt, power, arises out of individuals acting in concert

the world." *The Guardian*, 2011. www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/16/occupy-protests-europe-london-assange; Francis, David R. "Thanks to Occupy, rich-poor gap is front and center." *The Christian Science Monitor,* 2012. www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2012/0124/Thanks-to-Occupy-rich-poor-gap-is-front-and-center.-See-Mitt-Romney-s-tax-return; Lowenstein, Roger. "Occupy Wall Street: It's Not a Hippie Thing." *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 2011. www.businessweek.com/magazine/occupy-wall-street-its-not-a-hippie-thing-10272011.html.
[499] Arendt, *On Revolution,* 265-266.

together, especially, but not exclusively, in rejection of the reigning political authority, as the occupiers did in 2011, then power, as such, is "to an astonishing degree independent of material factors."[500] Power is not a reflection of physical or material capacities; it does not "grow out of the barrel of a gun." It is not, in other words, some tangible capacity or force that can be wielded like a club, or a police force. For her, it is simply collective action. But that is also why, as Arendt herself noted, that power, like politics, especially if conducted outside of the walls of an institutionalized *polis*, is ephemeral in nature. For while power "comes into being only if and when men join themselves together for the purpose of action" it "will disappear when, for whatever reason, they disperse and desert one another."[501] What may be gleaned from this admission by Arendt is that individuals cannot simply sustain the power they generate while acting together through words and deeds alone, at least not for an extended period of time. The reasons why individuals, after having come together in common cause, would likely disperse sooner rather than later is very likely because of a lack of the necessities of life required to keep them physically and emotionally motivated to continue acting together. Thus, what might help individuals to not only continue acting together, but in fact what they might also act together about, is attention to the practical necessities of daily life. In short, they may need to consider all the things individuals and groups need for daily survival, sustenance, education, even entertainment, if they are to carry on for an extended period of time.

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[500] Arendt, *Human Condition,* 200.
[501] Arendt, *On Revolution,* 166.

In other words, the "autonomous zones" into which those engaged in the

"founding leave-taking" from the dominant institutions of state and capital might

withdraw, according to Bifo, should be understood as areas for all kinds of everyday

social and economic activities that allow individuals to (re)connect outside of the

dominant refrains of a hyper-competitive capitalist society; places that are, according to

him: "based on the sharing of common things and services and on the liberation of time

for culture, pleasure and affection."[502] Withdrawal may entail experimenting, not only

with alternative forms of decision making, but also with alternative forms and activities

of production and exchange outside of the dominant capitalist framework. Occupy

displayed this, and it is what, moreover, arguably contributed to its staying power beyond

its initial phases as a traditional protest movement. However, lest the mere attainment of

the necessary conditions of living within the Occupy encampments continue to be seen as

having no political value in itself, instead deriving such value, if any, from merely being

a necessary condition of political activity in its more traditional, Arendtian sense, it can

be argued that it is in the very experimentation with alternative forms of social and

economic life within the occupation camps that occupiers were not only maintaining, but

also generating a counterpower to the dominant social and economic institutions and

narratives.[503]

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[502] Berardi, *Soul at Work,* 219-220.

[503] Cognates of this understanding of withdrawal can be found in the New Association Movement (or NAM), founded by Japanese philosopher Kojin Karatani. On this, see: Cassegard, Carl. "From Withdrawal to Resistance. The Rhetoric of Exit in Yoshimoto Takaaki and Karatani Kojin." *The Asia-Pacific Journal,* vol. 6, no.3, 2008, pp. 1-22.

Part of the strength of Occupy as a political movement of withdrawal was the vibrant communities that were built in and around the various occupied spaces during the movement's heyday in 2011. These spaces welded a disparate crowd of individuals from all angles of life together,[504] generating the very "multitude" which autonomists have argued is the ideal political subject today, and kept the political movement alive and thriving for an extended period of time. Among the larger, better established Occupy encampments, such as the one at Zuccotti Park, there were cantinas that operated on sustainable principles and were staffed by volunteers who cooked and served largely donated food to Occupiers;[505] classes, workshops and lectures were offered, for free, on a wide range of topics; libraries were set up—the most famous of which was known as "The Peoples' Library"—and books lent and donated for the purpose of self-education or simply quietly passing the time;[506] medical tents staffed by volunteers provided free, rudimentary first aid and medical care. In some corners of the wider movement, foreclosed homes and abandoned buildings left sitting for years on unused property were occupied and given new life and meaning as community hubs, and, crucially, dwelling places for those who needed a roof over their head.[507] This was in addition to the working groups and general assemblies which brought everyone encamping or passing through the

[504] Da Silva, Chantal. "Has Occupy Wall Street Changed America?" *Newsweek*, 2018. www.newsweek.com/has-occupy-wall-street-changed-america-seven-years-birth-political-movement-1126364.
[505] Gordinier, Jeff. "Protesters at Occupy Wall Street East Well." NYTimes, 2011. www.nytimes.com/2011/10/12/dining/protesters-at-occupy-wall-street-eat-well.html.
[506] Pous, Terri. "Occupy Wall Street: Their Own Mini-Government, Complete with Library." *Time*, 2011. https://newsfeed.time.com/2011/10/10/occupy-wall-street-their-own-mini-government-complete-with-library/.
[507] Chomsky, Noam. *Occupy*. Zucotti Park Press, 2012, 12.

camps the opportunity to talk and discuss together and make mutual decisions on the day-to-day activities of the camps themselves as well as the movement more generally. The camps in effect acted like oases of autonomy into which individuals could withdraw, experiment with and experience a different kind of life—in the fullest sense of the term—than that which they were protesting. And it was especially in light of the so-called "nonpolitical" aspects of Occupy, those traditionally related to the social or economic realms, that Occupy can also be said to reflect the "founding leave-taking" nature of withdrawal found in autonomism. The Occupy camps were bustling spaces that provided all kinds of services, public goods, and basic necessities for those that made use of and lived in the encampments, and many of these actively reflected the social and economic values many protestors felt the existing order failed to meet. Thus if we can see in the Occupy camps a concrete manifestation of a desire to withdraw from not only the political, but also the economic and social order many involved in the movement criticized, then it was in the very activities related to building up the social and economic infrastructure of the Occupy camps themselves, and actively living out different forms of social and economic life within them, that initiated and sustained such a withdrawal in the first place. Moreover, the so-called "nonpolitical" aspects of Occupy were part of, and in fact ensured, the space within which individuals could sustain their withdrawal from the reigning institutions and conduct alternate decision making practices.

Occupy, of course, was a temporary phenomenon. The various occupation zones were dismantled as quickly as, if not quicker, than when they came into existence. Does this make Occupy and movements similar to it examples of a failure to translate the

alternate modes of acting and living enacted in the encampments to social life beyond them, to fundamentally subvert the status quo? More importantly, does this make withdrawal as a political strategy an ineffective one, if even political at all? Without delving too deeply into a discussion as to the practical efficacy of withdrawal, I will only say: not necessarily. Occupy showed that a different way of doing things is possible, and this "bears long-lasting significance: after having experienced human relations otherwise, participants return to wider society with a renewed perception of how things can work, which eventually encourages them to try and reproduce some aspects of this short-lived experience over their year-long everyday lives."[508]

More importantly, however, is to note that its efficacy, its ability to effectively bring down the prevailing social order or to successfully create a counter-society that would, if not replace, then exist independently of the prevailing order for longer than it did, is not what makes Occupy, or any example of withdrawal, political. Its political nature is reflected in the fact that individuals have come together and enacted new forms of life and social organization, outside of, if not always in express rejection of those forms represented in the dominant social order. This may not directly bring down or alter existing power relations, but it both reflects, and goes beyond, a form of politics represented especially by Arendt's understanding of it, itself an understanding that had been formulated in explicit rejection of the dominant institutional approach to politics which has been thoroughly critiqued throughout this dissertation. The power of collective

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[508] Guilherme, "Prefigurative Politics," 11.

action is on display perhaps most clearly when people come together in opposition to a

reigning power which has lost their consent. Occupy, understood as a form of withdrawal

expressing the "founding-leave taking" theorized by autonomists, showed this. But it also

shows, contrary to Arendt's own belief, how the political may be further nurtured by

experimenting with alternative forms of life, including concerns over the practical matters

of daily life, in rejection of the dominant forms of social and economic life.

Conclusion

In this chapter I furthered my response to Mouffe and Honig's respective critiques

that I introduced in the previous chapter by arguing that withdrawals do not need to

display antagonism to be considered political. To show this, I looked at the notion of

withdrawal present in the works of autonomism. The kind of withdrawal advocated by

autonomists is one that is generative and productive of alternative ways of life. It is in this

sense that the exodus model of the autonomists is also referred to as a "founding leave-

taking, which both refuses [the dominant] social order and constructs an alternative."[509] I

examined the Occupy Movement as a preeminent example of the kind of withdrawal

advocated by autonomists, arguing that the occupation zones exemplify the "founding

leave-taking" of "noninstitutional public spheres" advocated by them. This model of

politics thus shows how withdrawal can be wed not only to a negative and combative

vision of politics, but also a generative one. Moreover, I reflected on what I believe is a

novel element of politics demonstrated by an examination of the occupation camps of the

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[509] Virno and Hardt, *Radical Thought in Italy,* 260 (my emphasis).

Occupy movement, understood in terms of withdrawal: in contradistinction to the long-

standing assumption in political thought that the concerns and needs related to the

private, social and economic realms are distinct from politics, these may very well be

understood in a distinctly political way.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have argued, contrary to received opinion, that withdrawal can be political. Furthermore, I attempted to demonstrate that political withdrawal is not solely reducible to any "attachment" to the state, a feature which underlies the most common understanding of politics—the institutional approach, as I have called it—and that it can even involve activities not traditionally associated with the public realm of political action.

Contrary to this longstanding assumption, which spans not only the long history of political thought, but a variety of very different approaches to understanding politics, I have, I hope, successfully argued that politics does not necessarily require engagement; that it could, in fact, involve withdrawal. Withdrawal, as I have defined it, involves pulling away from, rather than directly engaging with, established political institutions. It may involve leaving one physical or political place for another, disengaging from particular activities, or refusing a particular set of circumstances, activity or way of life. But much like with any political activity, withdrawals may be precipitated by and undertaken precisely because of some public issue or concern, and with a view to doing something about it.

As I have already noted in this dissertation, this argument is not necessarily a new one. There are studies which have made similar arguments to show that withdrawal is potentially political. The more prominent and systematic literature on this topic takes its cue from Albert O. Hirschman's groundbreaking work on the matter: *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*. Hirschman's insight into "exit," as he refers to withdrawal, as a potentially

effective method of strategic action is itself not particularly novel. As he noted, it was and

is the favoured method of "expressing one's unfavorable views of an organization"[510] in

the economic sphere: the withdrawal of consumer spending on a product or company

could lead to a drop in revenue, thereby signaling that something is wrong and should be

rectified in order for a company to retain its customers so as to remain competitive and

profitable. The novelty of Hirschman's analysis is that withdrawal could be an equally

viable form of action in the political sphere; that it could just as effectively do politically

what it does economically, that is, to be a form of action that either communicates a

grievance or general dissatisfaction and/or elicits a change in that which has been

withdrawn from.

     The purpose of this dissertation, however, was to not simply gloss over arguments

already made in support of the contention that withdrawal can be political, but to also

demonstrate and reinforce how withdrawals may be understood to be political even in

circumstances that are not obviously political. The prominent literature on withdrawal,

some of which I reviewed in chapter three, appears to understand the political nature of

withdrawals in a derivative sense and only insofar as those withdrawing do so while

remaining "attached" to the state, its institutions or government. Thus, as Hirschman

noted, the hippies of his time that were attempting to "cop-out" of society were engaging

in nonpolitical withdrawals because they were not directly attempting to make an impact

on the policies and institutions of the state. That is, their withdrawal was in no way

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[510] Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty,* 17.

"attached" to the state and its institutions. Given that the "institutional" approach to politics, to which the thinkers examined in chapter three have wed their positive appraisals of withdrawal, is the most commonly accepted approach, it is easier, perhaps, to see the ways in which the kinds of withdrawals examined by them are or can be political. However, just as there are limitations to what may be considered political according to a strict adherence to the "institutional" approach to politics, which became clearer in my examination of the "noninstitutional" approaches to politics in chapter two, there would also evidently be limitations to what kinds of withdrawals may be understood to be political if they are strictly understood according to an institutional approach. This fails to capture and appreciate the full range of political withdrawals in which individuals might engage.

It is in light of this recognition that I began in chapter four to show the different ways in which withdrawals may be understood as fundamentally political activities, despite the lack of any relation to, and in fact even in direct refusal of, the state, its government and institutions. To do this I have shown how withdrawals might address and confront one or another dominant nonstate manifestation of power—primarily, colonialism and capitalism—thus reflecting the noninstitutional conceptions of politics discussed in chapter two. In doing this I showed that political withdrawal has different manifestations in practice depending on how we understand the nature of politics itself: whether as limited to the state and its governing institutions, or, especially, as emerging out of conflict and acting together with others in nonstate contexts of power.

Each example that I have shown of withdrawal in the latter three chapters of this dissertation—the refusal of settler colonial institutions and social conventions of Indigenous resurgence, the "refusal of work" of workerism, and the "founding leave-taking" of autonomism —challenges the long-held belief that politics requires engagement of some sort with the formations of power it attempts to influence, change or take hold of. Moreover, while some understandings and practices of withdrawal remain attached to, or leave open the possibility, even necessity, of further engagement or reengagement with the state, especially as advocated by Hirschman and those who have written with his notion of exit in mind, this is certainly not the only way that withdrawal might be understood as political. The examples of Indigenous resurgence, workerism and autonomism which I discussed in these chapters all appear to challenge this notion, presenting forms of political activity that appear to eschew engagement with the institutions of power, state or otherwise, being left behind. I ended this dissertation by additionally demonstrating that political withdrawal can come in forms which involve activities that have long been considered to be proper to spheres of human concern and activity *other than* politics. This came across in my examination of the occupations of the Occupy movement, which I argued exemplified in concrete form the "founding leave-taking" that underpinned the autonomist conception of withdrawal. That is, of withdrawing from a dominant set of power relations, especially that of the state and the capitalist economy, by way of creating alternative spaces of social, political and economic life. The very creation of such spaces entails consideration and engagement in activities which are not traditionally accepted as political in their own right, especially if

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those spaces are to remain viable, functioning and long lasting. In addition to developing

and practicing new forms of decision making, the creation of such spaces may involve

developing and maintaining new methods of economic exchange, grassroots social

services, and even methods of communication and interaction.

      In summation, this dissertation attempts to demonstrate how withdrawal can be

political, the various different ways in which it might be understood to be political, and

the ways in which it goes beyond or eschews some features of politics that have been

assumed for centuries. In order to do this, I have brought together a disparate literature on

political withdrawal, and examined a host of quite distinct instances of what I have

argued are political withdrawals, in a way that has not yet been done. There are barely a

handful of sustained discussions of withdrawal that attempt to draw out the latter's

political nature in any systematic way. The few works of this kind that do exist, namely,

Hirschman's *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* and Kirkpatrick's *The Virtues of Exit* are, as I have

argued, limited in their considerations of what makes withdrawal political in the first

place. Hirschman, and many that followed him, restrict their discussions on

"institutional" withdrawals, i.e. rescinding one's votes, walking away from political

parties, or moving from one political jurisdiction to another. And while Kirkpatrick

herself notes this glaring issue, attempting to rectify it with her far more detailed cross-

examination of what she takes to be deeply political actions that at their core involve

withdrawal, such as Thoreau's sojourn at Walden Pond and fugitive Black slaves in pre-

emancipation America, she nevertheless attempts to illustrate their political nature by

arguing they remain "attached" in some way to the state and institutions from which they

are withdrawing. By widening my examination of political withdrawals, with direct reference to recognition of, different ways in which politics itself has been understood within the political theory literature, I have been able to both reinforce arguments in defence of the claim that withdrawal can be political, but also show some of the inadequacies and limitations of the various approaches to political withdrawal which already exist.

Before I conclude, I think it worth bringing attention to a question that has not been far from my mind at every stage of working on this dissertation, and which might arise in consideration of its main claims: Does further widening the scope of politics, a process that had begun in earnest a century ago and which has, if anything, accelerated ever since, not risk further pushing politics into the awkward position of encapsulating "everything," and thus losing what is so specific to it as a form of conduct and area of theoretical study and intervention? Would it not be more novel, considering this general trajectory, to discuss whether we should, or can, withdraw from politics itself?

Laurent Dubreuil has in fact attempted just this, criticizing, in turn, the consistent failures of politics to bring about that which, according to his reading, was and ostensibly remains at its core the modus operandi of politics: a "good life."[511] Nor have "non-traditional" forms of politics, "other" politics,[512] themselves successfully (re)discovered

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[511] Dubreuil, *The Refusal of Politics*, 2.
[512] Dubreuil, *The Refusal of Politics*, 2.

the original promise of politics, despite, as Dubreuil recognizes, having increasingly

erupted to challenge "official" or "traditional," institutional politics:[513]

> the unbearable managerial discourse, the increased domination over the living, the
>
> permanent circus of elected representatives and managers, the gigantic enterprise
>
> of informative ideas, the destruction or systematic enslavement of certain animal
>
> groups—humans or others—should be met with revolt, uprisings, rebellions,
>
> revolutions. *But that is not enough.*[514]

All forms of politics, all theoretical articulations of politics, however novel and attune to

the ills of contemporary society and politics they are in nature, have either failed to

achieve or recover the "collectivity's ability to *live well*"[515] or have simply replicated, in

one form or another, the problematic aspects of politics which Dubreuil details.[516]

According to Dubreuil, the point of discussing withdrawal in conjunction with

politics should not, then, to be to attempt to show how withdrawal itself is or can be

political, for all the supposed good it might do in giving hope to those who have lost hope

in political action. Politics is simply irredeemable at this point in history. For Dubreuil

withdrawal thus becomes the last remaining form of action remaining to us to achieve

exactly what politics has always promised but has only ever consistently denied

humanity: "the idea thus emerges that beyond, beside or outside political demands... we

can also (or perhaps rather) make out a desire for greater defection, a break not only with

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[513] Dubreuil, *The Refusal of Politics*, 2.
[514] Dubreuil, *The Refusal of Politics*, 3.
[515] Dubreuil, *The Refusal of Politics*, 2.
[516] Dubreuil, *The Refusal of Politics*, 9-14.

the police and the grand farce of power, but more broadly with politics, the political and policies."[517] It is thus more than ever imperative to attempt to define and capture forms of withdrawal that escape the logic of politics altogether, in view of a more "livable life."

While Dubreuil might balk at my own approach to withdrawal, which affirms its explicitly political dimensions, his intervention is an interesting avenue that may be further explored with respect to the political, an aim that has already gained some traction.[518] And that such studies exist further shows, together with those works, including this one, which explore the explicitly political dimension of withdrawal, how the notion of withdrawal itself is as enigmatic a concept as politics itself, and that there are many further avenues to explore at their interstices—even if they are not always complimentary. These are worth further investigation as they contribute, with respect to withdrawal, what Kirkpatrick noted is the mark of a truly robust political concept: that it can say something about the political itself and open new avenues of its interpretation and reinterpretation, critique or (re)affirmation.

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[517] Dubreuil, *The Refusal of Politics*, 8.
[518] See, for example: Viriasova, Inna. *At the Limits of the Politics: Affect, Life, Things*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2018.

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