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# Without Content: Rhetoric, American Anarchism, And The End(s) Of Radical Politics

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**WITHOUT CONTENT: RHETORIC, AMERICAN ANARCHISM, AND THE END(S)  
OF RADICAL POLITICS**

by

**MICHAEL JOHN RISTICH**

**DISSERTATION**

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of Wayne State University,

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Approved By:

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Advisor

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my best friend, the late Michael Gaddes, who reminds me still today that wit, intelligence, and curiosity are nothing if not tools for increasing joy, fraternity, and optimism.

This work is also dedicated to the late Dr. Kathryne V. Lindberg, a radical (pedagogue) whose words have shaped and will continue to shape my work and teaching:

*“Be well. Do not hesitate to write to me about this right away, and we will hammer something more definitive out. Don't be shy; don't be put off by my direct criticism-- of which more later.*

*Yours, K”*

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wonderful human being with whom I am lucky to share my life, she is a top-notch editor. Lastly, since their arrival, our little anarchists Oliver and Damian continually reminded me of the importance of deadlines (whether or not those deadlines were met, however, is another story).

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Thomas Jefferson, Rhetoric, and the (anti-)Foundations of Anarchy	30
Chapter 2: Imagining Collectivity: Taste, Sympathy, and the “Ends” of Anarchic Rhetoric	57
Chapter 3: “Bring[ing] the Universal into Play in a Polemical Way”: Ethos, Aesthetics, and Anarchism in C.L.R. James’ “Fireside Chat”	89
Chapter 4: What’s Left of the Right and Right with the Left?: Finding the Future of Critical Theory in the End(s) of Radical Politics	114
References	151
Abstract	166
Autobiographical Statement	167

## INTRODUCTION

It is often remarked that Anarchism is an impractical theory imported into the United States by a lot of ignorant foreigners. Of course, those who make this statement are as much mistaken as though they made it while conscious of its falsity. The doctrine of personal freedom is an American doctrine, in so far as the attempt to put it into practice is concerned, as Paine, Franklin, Jefferson and others understood it quite well (Joseph Labadie, *Anarchism: What It Is and What It Is Not*).

Anarchy does not mean simply opposed to the archos, or political leader. It means opposed to archē. Now, archē, in the first instance, means beginning, origin. From this it comes to mean a first principle, an element; then first place, supreme power, sovereignty, dominion, command, authority; and finally a sovereignty, an empire, a realm, a magistracy, a governmental office (Benjamin Tucker, "Anarchism and the State" 34).

We have no illusions that there are any shortcuts to anarchy. We don't seek to lead "the" people, but to establish a nation of sovereigns; we don't seek to be a vanguard of theorists, but to empower a readership of authors; we don't seek to be the artists of a new avant garde, but to enable an audience of performers—we don't so much seek to destroy power as to make it freely available in abundance: we want to be masters without slaves. (CrimethInc, *Fighting for our Lives: An Anarchist Primer* 7).

A casual reader of humanities and social sciences scholarship could be forgiven for thinking that critical theory has been either dead or dying for nearly three decades. Concomitant with the budding "big theory" era in American universities, Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels questioned its very foundations in their infamous 1982 article, "Against Theory." In 1996, Alan Sokal's famous "hoax" on the venerable critical theory organ *Social Text* left many opponents of critical theory as a method (and certainly of its popularity in academic research and mass media coverage of the same) gleefully celebrating the "vindication" of their beliefs that the endeavor was intentionally obtuse and, in any case, one conducted with little or no stakes in the "real world" of contemporary political economy. The year 2004 marked the beginning of another pang in the supposed "death of theory," one seen everywhere from the publication of Terry Eagleton's *After Theory*, to the linking of Jacques Derrida's death to the death of critical theory



as a whole in his obituary in the *New York Times*, to what Jeffrey Nealon calls the “high profile wake” for the enterprise that inadvertently resulted from *Critical Inquiry*’s roundtable on its future.<sup>1</sup> Yet, unlike any of its previous “deaths,” the 2004 postmortem of critical theory did not present the enterprise as corrupt from the start, or one that had been recently outdated, but rather as a victim of its own success. Critical theory, long taken to be, in the works of Max Horkheimer, the “intellectual side of the historical process of proletarian emancipation,” the resistant counterpoint to the dominant forces of oppression, had proven itself to be so effective that its methods had been co-opted by the very institutions of social power that it was once leveraged against (Horkheimer 215).

The post-Marxist writers Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, perhaps the most vocal proponents of this conclusion, suggest that from the 1980s onward “the postmodernist and postcolonial theorists who advocate a politics of difference, fluidity, and hybridity in order to challenge the binaries and essentialism of modern sovereignty have been outflanked by the strategies of power” (138). As Negri writes elsewhere, critical theory’s critique of capital and power relations has in many important ways become the very logic of capitalism, thereby crippling critique as a political tool of dominant social and economic systems and concomitantly shifting “any possible critical space towards the outside, to its margins” (“The Italian Difference” 13). Similarly, Bruno Latour has drawn our attention to how critical theory’s focus on the power of discourse and social constructivist epistemology is now being used by those with retrograde political objectives, such as the “dangerous extremists” who oppose the science of climate change and who leverage theories of textual indeterminacy and accusations of ideological bias in order to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives” (227). Far from celebrating critical

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<sup>1</sup> See Jeffrey T. Nealon’s “Post-Deconstructive: Negri, Derrida, and the State of Theory,” *Symblokē* 14, no. 1 (2006): 68-80. Print.

theory's "success" on this score, politically inclined academics are instead tasked with thinking through the irony of the contemporary situation. In Horkheimer and Adorno's words, what once "require[d] us to take up the cause of the remnants of freedom, of tendencies toward real humanity," is now used by advertising executives, lobbyists/politicians, and CEOs to accumulate record profits (xi).

In addition to critical theory's precarious situation, contemporary American politics has seen a similar ironic inversion taking place around the same time and gathering significant steam since the election of Barack Obama in 2008. Specifically, the actions and ideas so long associated with the Left, particularly the populist tactics associated with the "New Left" of the 1960s, have also become unmoored, and find themselves often equally comfortable on the Right of the political spectrum. The newly christened Tea Party (an acronym that stands for "Taxed Enough Already") and other "patriot groups," many of which are funded by the billionaire Koch Brothers, have dominated the political landscape using an arsenal of strategies more commonly associated with leftist organizing. Writing in the *New York Times*, conservative commentator David Brooks offers a succinct summary:

The Tea Partiers have adopted the tactics of the New Left. They go in for street theater, mass rallies, marches and extreme statements that are designed to shock polite society out of its stupor. This mimicry is no accident. Dick Armey, one of the spokesmen for the Tea Party movement, recently praised the methods of Saul Alinsky, the leading tactician of the New Left. ("The Wal-Mart Hippies")

Consequently, the American Left, despite Democratic control of both the Presidency and Congress from 2008-10, as well as the emergence of the ubiquitous yet short-lived Occupy Wall Street movement in 2010, there has been less cheering than jeering. According to a recent

“manifesto” in the *Nation Magazine*, “American progressives and principled liberals need to face an essential truth: the Democratic Party, as now constituted, is no longer an agency for realizing their ideals (“How to Save the Democratic Party”). Unable to counter the Right’s assault on social programs and responsible regulation, as well as the continual capitulation to the Right’s demands, the reform-minded and radical Left has been left disappointed on seemingly all fronts.

The early twenty-first century has found critical theory’s critical gaze turned inward, and those concerned with social, political, and economic justice without a program. Thus, one might ask: what is or could be considered “radicalism” in the twenty-first century? In addition, what is the role of critical thought in/for such twenty-first century radicalism?

For some, critical theory’s “death” warrants a gleeful adieu. Stanley Fish, for instance, suggests “theory is a political non-starter,” and one should “stop asking it to do things it just can’t do” (“Ideas and Theory: The Political Difference”). Critical theory, in this regard, is not political; politics alone is political. In short, “theoretical formulations are not answers to political/empirical questions” (“Ideas and Theory: The Political Difference”). Yet for others, the goal has been to interrogate and contextualize critical theory’s own existence in order to take stock of its impact and move beyond the contemporary impasse. This entails, in Terry Eagleton’s words, “reflect[ing] on the truth and reality of its [critical theory’s] existence, at a time when postmodern thought has grave doubts about both truth and reality” (73). Indeed, the text *Philosophy in the Present*, a dialogue between Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek addressing the role of philosophy in the wake critical theory’s “death” suggests both an audience and an academy eager to move beyond the current impasse (this text was republished three times in 2010 alone). In their discussion, Žižek suggests it is time to renounce the “neo-Kantian” and “postmodern

neosophism” that has marked the academy for over a generation and reconstitute philosophy and its quest for timeless truths (65-66).

The most common answers to the questions outlined above—the same ones that guide this study—have included two “(re)turns.” Most prominent has been the return to the study of ontology by such thinkers as Jean-Luc Nancy, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, and Michael Hardt and his collaborator Antonio Negri. Furthermore, in the works of many theorists, particularly Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, and Terry Eagleton, Marxism remains the dominant political paradigm. Yet, the (re)turn to such essentialized categories threatens to roll-back the advances made in politics and critical thought as a result of poststructuralism’s questioning of these very categories. While the contemporary moment suggests the need to rethink critical theory and its connection to politics, the response to its latest “death” should not risk dismissing the practices and connections that once invigorated an entire generation of radicals, artists, and dissidents.

Indeed, Jean-Luc Nancy, for one, points out that the revolts of May 1968, were largely influenced by the works of France’s most influential theorists—the same “neo-Kantians” and “postmodern neosophists” Badiou and Žižek are apt to blame for the decline of philosophical thought: “In the midst of the profound upheavals caused by decolonization—accompanied, on the one hand, by the multiplication of socialist-revolutionary or socialist-republican models, and, on the other, by the tectonic mutations of thought and representations—we left the age of ‘History,’ as Levi-Strauss, Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida all diagnosed very early on” (9). On Nancy’s view, these theorists’ critique of Western metaphysics became a tool for radicals, dissidents, and students in their attempt to create an egalitarian society. For Rancière, who, one might argue, is the heir apparent of critical theory, if there is ever to be a similar rupture in the body politic, one must recognize that “the end of politics” bemoaned by Badiou, Žižek, Hardt

and Negri, etc, as well as the hope for a “return of politics” by Marxists like Eagleton, Jameson, and Harvey, belies the possibility that both views are “two complementary ways of cancelling out politics in the simple relationship between a state of the social and a state of the state apparatus” (“Ten Theses on Politics” 42). In other words, the returns to metaphysics and Marxism because of critical theory’s “failure,” enact the same problematic: they limit our ability to (re)imagine the very concepts of politics and ethics.

For this study, I attempt to join rhetorical theory and anarchist politics as a counterpoint to the current trends toward metaphysics and Marxism. To be specific, this dissertation argues that instead of turning away from much of critical theory and returning to originary systems of totalizing thought—Marxism and metaphysics—we develop more fully many of critique’s most influential tenets by taking up two constellations of ideas that, while implied in much of critical theory’s postmodern and poststructuralist expression, have either been overlooked or disregarded. To phrase it another way, instead of discounting critical theory out of disappointment and disgust and returning to the originary models of human thought (philosophy) and radical politics (Marxism), we optimistically take up an alternative set of ideas that stand directly opposed to such original categories: rhetoric and anarchism. In the chapters following this one, I develop what I call “anarchic rhetoric,” which, I hope, echoes Wendy Brown’s observation that “[c]ritical theory is not what makes progressive political projects fail; at worst it might give them bad conscience, at best it renews their imaginative reach and vigor” (16).

### **The End of Politics?**

Before continuing with the argument, however, it is necessary to reiterate and elaborate on some of the concepts and ideas that have marked critical theory since the mid-twentieth century and characterize what has broadly been called the “linguistic turn” within critical theory.

Doing so will allow me to better articulate the various responses to critical theory's "death," as well as frame my project's relationship to these responses. The following, then, is a brief description of the ideas of Jacques Derrida, whose work I take to be emblematic of the sort of poststructuralist and critical thought that has been both venerated and valorized since the mid-twentieth century and, as such, informs much of my own approach in the following chapters. To be clear, while I recognize that Derrida's ideas are well-worn territory, I begin here because the project of "deconstruction," with its emphasis on the contingency of language and its ability to undermine dialectical/philosophical thought, as well as its influence on later critical theorists, provides the proper contextualization for my turn to rhetoric and anarchism. To be specific, deconstruction, insofar as it is "political," represents both the best and worst of critical theory's uptake in French poststructuralist and postmodern thought.

Being well-worn territory, I will reserve a long explication of Derrida's thought and instead offer a brief summary in order to move into a discussion of Derrida's reception among Marxist-oriented critical theorists. Derrida's project takes up the whole of Western metaphysics through a reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*, as well as the way in which a certain desire for absolute "presence" characterizes the work of, among others, Rousseau and Levi-Strauss. Most famously, though, Derrida targets the relationship between speech (dialectical/philosophical examination) and writing (rhetoric) in the *Phaedrus*, and, through a philological investigation into the meaning of the word "pharmakon" undermines Plato's condemnation of writing/rhetoric and valorization of dialectical exchange.

As Derrida notes in his book *Dissemination*, when Plato criticizes writing (qua sophistic rhetoric), Plato uses the term "pharmakon," which means both remedy and poison. Thus, when Plato's Socrates makes the case against writing, which is a criticism directed "above all against

sophistics” that “mark[ed] out the battle lines between sophistics and philosophy” for over two millennia (“Plato’s Pharmacy” 1855-1856), Plato attempts to efface “the fact that the pharmakon properly consists in a certain inconsistency, a certain impropriety, this nonidentity-with-itself always allowing it to be turned against itself” (“Plato’s Pharmacy” 1865). To phrase it another way, Plato pits dialectic (philosophy) against rhetoric, which he labels a poison (“pharmakon”). However, as Derrida points out, because “pharmakon” also suggests remedy or healing, the distinction between rhetoric and philosophy lacks the substantive grounding Plato thought he was providing. By making this distinction, Derrida calls into question the Platonic hope for metaphysical knowledge via dialectical exchange, which, as he suggests, marks the history of Western philosophy and its claim to absolute correspondence between signifiers and signified. The result is that all “Truth” claims, in being cast against some opposing or competing concept, have a priori assumptions that “deconstruct” the binary. Such a situation reveals that the Platonic desire for an idealized communicative process that brings one into contact with the everlasting and divine is an impossibility. Echoing Horkheimer’s characterization of “traditional theory,” philosophy, on Derrida’s view, is characterized by the desire to efface contingency and undecidability by developing totalizing systems of thought and action.<sup>2</sup>

The result of Derrida’s view is that the desire for Platonic truth is undermined by language’s slipperiness. For Derrida, because language lacks a transcendental referent, meaning is constructed at certain times, among certain groups, and in particular places. Such a view, then, seems to suggest a rhetorical view of truth and meaning that evokes Plato’s archenemies, the Sophists and their interest in *kairos*—the recognition that persuasion is dependent on arguing the

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<sup>2</sup> Horkheimer writes, “The general goal of all theory is a universal systematic science, not limited to any particular subject, but embracing all possible objects” (“Traditional and Critical Theory” 188).

“right” thing at the “right” time in front of particular audience. The sophist Gorgias, for instance, writes, “[O]n most subjects most men take opinion as counselor to their soul, but since opinion is slippery and insecure it casts those employing it into slippery and insecure successes” (41). Thus, the works of both Derrida and Gorgias continually point to the idea that “truth” and “meaning” are contingent and open to construction and revision at anytime.

However, despite bearing such a strong resemblance to sophistic thought, Derrida is unwilling to assign rhetoric the same all-encompassing definition as Gorgias. Whereas Gorgias calls rhetoric “a powerful lord” (41), Derrida argues, “I am in favor of the most rigorous and most generous attention given to rhetoric. What I'm suspicious of under the name 'rhetoricism' is the authority of language” (“Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition” 16). In fact, when faced with the opposition between the Plato and the sophists, Derrida says he “would be on the side of philosophy” (“Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition” 16), and any privileging of “rhetoricism...is synonymous with logocentrism or phonocentrism” (“Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition” 19). To summarize, Derrida’s project might be characterized as a rhetorically inclined philosophy that, in being “interested in the way concepts or arguments depend intrinsically on metaphors, tropes, and are in themselves to some extent metaphors or tropes,” is somewhere in between philosophy and rhetoric. Alternatively, to use Derrida’s description, “To the extent that I am caught up within this couple, I'm a philosopher, but I try not to remain within this opposition” (“Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition” 16). The point I am trying to make here is that although his critique of Western philosophy shares much in common with philosophy’s Other—rhetoric—Derrida is unwilling to place himself in that tradition. He makes clear that one must “be fully cognizant that this reading of Plato is at no time spurred on by some slogan or password of a ‘back-to-the sophists-nature’” (“Plato’s Pharmacy”



1857). While his work has done much for (re)invigorating rhetorical studies, his project's own undecidability and his refusal to take hard stances leaves much to be desired, particularly, as I hope to show, when it comes to questions of politics and ethics.

Derrida would come to take up variety of controversial and politically oriented themes late in his career, which included penning perhaps his most (in)famous work, *Specters of Marx*. In this text, Derrida develops the concept of the “new international,” one who is “an untimely link, without status, without title, and without name, barely public even if it is not clandestine, without contract, ‘out of joint,’ without coordination, without party, without country, without national community” (*Specters of Marx* 107). The “new international” “refers to a profound transformation, projected over the long term, of international law, of its concepts, and its field of intervention” (*Specters of Marx* 105). Yet, this collective existence, this striving for a more egalitarian existence is a future-to-come. The “new international,” and Derrida's entire project, is “even more a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of a promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any *messianism*” (*Specters of Marx* 111). Such a goal—to be messianic without the messianism—means recognizing the “undeconstructibility of a certain form of justice” (*Specters of Marx* 112). Derrida suggests that such a project begins by acknowledging that “no degree of progress allows one to ignore that never before, in absolute figures, have so many men, women, and children been subjugated, starved, or exterminated on the earth” (*Specters of Marx* 106). Yet this knowledge is only a beginning. For as he puts forth in his essay “On Cosmopolitanism,” to create such a messianic project with the messianism is a task of “invention” (4).

Paradoxically, this future-to-come, which is to remedy these concrete political injustices, is dependent on the constant questioning of any possible future. That is, endless critique must orient any possible politics stemming from deconstruction:

A deconstructive thinking, the one that matters to me here, has always pointed out the irreducibility or affirmation and therefore of the promise, as well as the undeconstructability of a certain idea of justice (disassociated here from law). Such a thinking cannot operate without justifying the principle of a radical and interminable, infinite (both theoretical and practical, as one used to say) critique. (*Specters of Marx* 112)

The formation of a “new international,” a messianic project, must endlessly critique its own possible futures so as to avoid becoming a “messianism.” Thus, we are left with an aporia whereby the invention of the “new international” means constantly striving for and critiquing an (un)known future.

Regarding Derrida’s decision to enter into radical political discourse in 1994 with his *Specters of Marx*, the moment when the future of Marxism was being debated most vigorously, Terry Eagleton wryly remarks, “He has...been an unconscionably long time coming” (“Marxism Without the Marxism” 83). Eagleton continues by asking, “[W]here was Jacques Derrida when we needed him, in the long dark night of Reagan-Thatcher” (“Marxism Without the Marxism” 83)? The implicit answer in Eagleton’s question is that Derrida would not have risked making and taking a stand, as it would have then ran the risk of transforming into dogmatic ideology (“logocentrism”), and would have performed the same act that Derrida targets in his works. Derrida’s method seeks, instead, to question these dogmas, the binary oppositions that favor and oppress, but are forever intertwined with one another. Thus, in an effort to avoid committing the

same act he criticizes, Derrida refuses to move beyond his analyses and critique to posit a concrete and more egalitarian alternative. However, at the time of Marxism's collapse, Derrida also makes the claim that deconstruction is a but a "radicalization" of Marxism, and "[e]ven where it [Marxism] is not acknowledged, even where it remains unconscious or disavowed, this debt remains at work, in particular in political philosophy which structures implicitly all philosophy or all thought on the subject of philosophy" (114-115). All we are left with, according to Eagleton, is a "preoccupation with slippage, failure, aporia, incoherence, not-quiteness, its suspicion of the achieved" ("Marxism Without Marxism" 86). Like Derrida's refusal to go "back-to-the sophists" despite his works' affinity to Sophistic thought, Derrida's (re)turn to Marx results in what Eagleton characterizes as "Marxism without Marxism"—a radical critique without a politics ("Marxism Without Marxism" 87).

### **Whither Radical Politics?**

For many thinkers, the connection between deconstruction and radical Marxist politics fails on all accounts: it gives no concrete political recommendation, nor does it provide any substantiated grounding from which to think about the political. Indeed, as was spelled out in the opening pages, critique's unmooring from leftist politics has left critical theorists and radicals alike searching for some place to hang their hats. Perhaps Antonio Negri's commentary on *Specters of Marx* best lays bare the alleged impotence, and, indeed the danger, of a politics of an (anti)metaphysical (anti)Marxist deconstruction:

When the analysis passes from the hermeneutic and ontological viewpoint to the experience of the political, the picture given is terrible. The conspiracy against Marxism and the world evangelization of the free market, the construction of a global power "without place" and "without time," the structuring of the "end of history," the media's

colonization of consciousness and the impoverishment in the quality of work, the emptying out of meaning from the word “democracy—within individual countries and in international relations—these represent only a few of the hegemonic orders of capitalism in one phase of the spectral construction of the real. (“The Specter’s Smile” 9)

Those who echo Negri’s observations include Fredric Jameson and Eagleton, who argue that the separation of critique from political leftism warrants a return to the originary radical politics of Karl Marx. In 2010, Jameson published *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One* and Eagleton released *Why Marx Was Right*. Within philosophy, Alain Badiou points to the need for the “reconstruction or re-emergence of the category of truth” as a corrective to poststructuralism’s lack of genuine philosophical thought (“Philosophy and Desire” 36). He suggests, “Our epoch can be said to have been stamped and signed, in philosophy, by the return of the question of Being” (*Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* 19). Thus, as mentioned in the opening pages and developed in the discussion of Derrida’s work, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been marked by the following situation: poststructuralist critique, with its “deconstruction” of binary thought, refusal of monolithic structures of meaning, and challenge to “grand narratives,” has been both unmoored from political leftism and co-opted by contemporary capitalism, as have the leftist political tactics been appropriated by the political right. As a result, many—particularly Badiou and Žižek—have sought to replace the outdated, outmoded, and outflanked critical theory with a resurrecting of and return to metaphysics and Marxism.

### **Rhetoric and Anarchism**

Bearing the above in mind, my aim here is to provide an alternative to the return to metaphysics and Marxism by pursuing many of the ideas handed down by critical theory’s “linguistic turn.” As I hope will become clear, a turn to rhetoric can be seen as extending many

tenets of critical theory's poststructuralist expression, and, as such, provides a salient (and persuasive) set of ideas through which to interrogate the death of critical theory and radical politics. Instead of returning to those concepts that critical theory has sought to overcome, rhetoric provides a new and generative perspective on today's political and critical impasse. What's more, by turning to rhetoric to address the above questions, one might deduce a curious situation whereby instead of setting Western metaphysics on its head, poststructuralist critical thought might be seen as an opening act to the main event: a whole hog embrace of philosophy's Other—rhetoric. Indeed, in what comes next, I claim that turning to rhetoric implies another Other: anarchism.

In his book, *Saving Persuasion*, Bryan Garsten writes, "In both theory and practice today, the reigning view of rhetorical speech is that it is a disruptive force in politics and a threat to deliberation" (3). In place of the State, the practice of rhetoric holds the possibility of a polity "being subjected to the rule of persuasive speakers." Garsten argues this anxiety begins with Plato and can be traced through philosophers such as Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant. Indeed, Plato's suggestion that "self-adornment is to gymnastic, so is sophistry to legislation; and as cookery is to medicine, so is rhetoric to justice" largely set the stage for subsequent dismissals of rhetoric from progressive social theory; rhetoric, more often than not, is simply positioned as the probable or contingent masquerading as the transcendental or just (*Gorgias* 72). As a result of this vilification, argues Garsten, the dominant practice has been to eliminate rhetoric from the political arena, which, in turn, has alienated citizens from democratic participation. In other words, rhetoric holds the potential to violate notions of the sovereign State and its embodiment of reason and the capacity for judgment. Therefore, one might reasonably say that because

rhetoric is void of any meaningful content, the rhetoricians who practice this craft pose a potential threat to the State.

So, is the insinuation here that rhetoricians are anarchists? While I in no way claim that all who engage in rhetoric are anti-Statists, there is a striking resemblance between anarchist politics and certain strands of rhetorical theory. To elaborate, because of its very nature, anarchism, as both a politics and philosophy, is notoriously difficult to define. As Peter Marshall writes, “It would be misleading to offer a neat definition of anarchism, since by its very nature it is anti-dogmatic. It does not offer a fixed body of doctrine based on one particular world-view” (3). Despite this, every study of anarchism begins with an obligatory explanation that attempts to explain the major tenets and aims of anarchism. While this essay is no different, I want to emphasize anarchism’s inherent skepticism and contingency.

Anarchism can be characterized as “[t]he philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary” (Goldman 50). Its goal is “to establish the condition of anarchy, that is to say, a decentralized and self-regulating society consisting of a federation of voluntary associations of free and equal individuals,” which allows for humans to “realize their full potential” (Marshall 3). To realize this goal, anarchism adopts a dynamic and experimental approach to fostering social change. Paul Goodman’s short “Reflections on the Anarchist Principle” captures the pragmatic, contingent, and kairotic nature of anarchism:

[T]his relativity of the anarchist principle to the actual situation is of the essence of anarchism. There *cannot* be a history of anarchism in the sense of establishing a permanent state of things called “anarchist.” It is always a continual coping with the next

situation, and a vigilance to make sure that past freedoms are not lost and do not turn into the opposite, as free enterprise turned into wage-slavery and monopoly capitalism, or the independent judiciary turned into a monopoly of courts, cops, and lawyers, or free education turned into school systems. (56)

Anarchism's skepticism and kairotic nature has resulted in several varying trends. Depending on the emphasis of the practitioner, anarchism is often categorized as either "social" or "individualist," each of which has a unique set of practices and aims. Marshall notes, "The individualists see the danger of obligatory cooperation and are worried that a collectivist society will lead to the tyranny of the group. On the other hand, the social anarchists are concerned that a society of individualists might become atomistic and that the spirit of competition could destroy mutual aid and general solidarity" (6). While this division has given birth to several schools of thought and practice—mutualist, collectivist, communist, syndicalist, anarcho-capitalist—all anarchists reject the institutionalized concentration of power. Consequently, the only way to check this concentration is through a flexible approach that rejects any "incontrovertible blueprint for future generations" (Marshall 6).

Standard histories of political anarchism, while acknowledging the work of William Godwin's "philosophical anarchism," begin with Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and his disciple Mikhail Bakunin. While these two laid the foundation for the views described above, what is also of note here is their relationship to Karl Marx. Indeed, the conflict between the anarchists and Marx largely laid the foundation for radical politics for well over a century. In fact, Marx's philosophy was largely developed in response to the anarchist movement over a nearly thirty-year period. Proudhon's well-known 1846 letter to Karl Marx best illustrates the debate between the two. Responding to Marx's invitation to engage in a series of letters, Proudhon writes:

I applaud with all my heart your thought of bringing all opinions to light; let us carry on a good and loyal polemic; let us give the world an example of learned and far-sighted tolerance, but let us not, merely because we are at the head of a movement, make ourselves the leaders of a new intolerance, let us not pose as the apostles of a new religion, even if it be the religion of logic, the religion of reason. Let us gather together and encourage all protests, let us brand all exclusiveness, all mysticism; let us never regard a question as exhausted, and when we have used our last argument, let us begin again, if need be, with eloquence and irony. (“Proudhon to Marx”)

Against Proudhon, Marx would develop his own philosophy, a dialectical view of historical progress that poked a finger in the eye of Proudhon’s anarchism. In fact, a year after Proudhon’s letter, Marx would publish *The Poverty of Philosophy* as a direct refutation of Proudhon’s *The Philosophy of Poverty*. This trend would continue throughout Marx’s work and eventually boil over during the 1872 Hague Conference of the First International. During the conference, Marx and the Congress voted to expel the anarchist wing of the International thereby laying the foundation for the reign of Marxism as the paradigmatic radical political program.

The role of the State constituted the primary point of contention among Marx and the anarchists. While the Marxist and anarchist programs have always shared the desire for a Stateless society, they differed on the means for realizing this goal. Whereas Marx’s historical materialism retained an important role for the State in ushering communism, the anarchists argued that a “dictatorship of the proletariat” would simply be replacing one oppressive force with another. Indeed, Bakunin, Marx’s rival in the First International, polemically writes, “In a word, we reject all legislation, all authority, and all privileged, licensed, official, and legal influence... This is the sense in which we are really anarchists” (35). For the anarchists, the State,



no matter the form, was an obstacle to emancipation. In positioning themselves against the State, the anarchists, then, were left to seek modes of rhetorical engagement that did not rely on appealing to the State for social or political reforms or participating in the State via the electoral or legislative processes. In light, then, of the seemingly anti-Statist Occupy Wall Street and Tea Party movements, a reconsideration of anarchism and its strategies of persuasion and coalition building seem timely.

### **Marx vs. the Sophists?**

The connection between anarchist politics and certain strands of rhetorical thought is not an uncanny one. As the epigraph by Benjamin Tucker points up, anarchist politics, in its refusal of “first principles,” seemingly does what Plato and a long line of dialecticians saw as the danger of rhetoric and those sophists who practiced it; rhetoric and rhetoricians are a threat to reason and its codification in institutions and processes. Such a connection becomes apparent when examining Marx’s quarrel with the anarchists. As Marx—possibly the archetypal dialectician—was developing his system of thought against the anarchists, he forwarded a critique that echoes Plato’s dismissal of Sophistic rhetoric that reveals, despite his own ambivalence towards the Greek philosopher, a veiled Platonism. For example, in stark contrast to Proudhon’s above letter, Marx’s 1871 letter concerning Bakunin’s writings sounds rather Platonic:

This infant's [Bakunin] spelling-book found favour (and still has a certain hold) in Italy and Spain, where the real conditions of the workers' movement are as yet little developed, and among a few vain, ambitious and empty doctrinaires in French Switzerland and Belgium. For Mr. Bakunin the theory (the assembled rubbish he has scraped together from Proudhon, St. Simon, etc.) is a secondary affair – merely a means to his personal

self-assertion. If he is a nonentity as a theoretician he is in his element as an intriguer.  
 (“Marx to Friedrich Bolte”)

In this light, anarchism, like rhetoric, lacks a metaphysical or intellectual grounding, and, because of this, is empty, void of any meaningful content. That is, we hear in Marx’s critique of Bakunin’s anarchism Plato’s assertion that rhetoric is simply an “experience” void of content and unable to bring one into contact with metaphysical conceptions of the “good” or “just.” Furthermore, in enacting the sort of Platonism that he always sought to avoid, Marx’s criticism and expunging of anarchism during the First International established the *modus operandi* for all successive critiques of anarchism. Namely, as E.J. Hobsbawm writes, “the main appeal of anarchism was emotional and not intellectual;” and, as a result, “it has almost been designed for failure.” Thus, tracing this homology out, one might say that as anarchism is to Marxism (and politics in general), rhetoric is to metaphysics and philosophy.

In suggesting this homology, one is left not only with two competing views of epistemology and metaphysics, but also with two competing political ends: taking power or challenging power. Extending this line of thought, theories of political engagement founded on dialectics lead to “taking power.” As Richard McKeon notes:

The dialectical invocation of truth as guide in action and in use of power is easily transformed into the assumption that those in power possess wisdom and defend truth (totalitarianism) or into the use of power (as in the dictatorship of the proletariat) to establish conditions of “freedom” which have no clear connection with the common good. (24)

Certainly, Plato’s “guardians of the republic” (those with an understanding of dialectical *logos* that allows them to see past reality to the eternal realm of metaphysics) are mirrored in Marx’s

class-conscious vanguard (those with an understanding of how the “real conditions” of capitalist production obscure “species-being”). The result, according to Bakunin, is that the “[t]he highly inspired *must* be listened to and obeyed by the less inspired, and the less inspired by the uninspired, and with it the fundamental institutions of slavery: Church and State” (53). Figured in this way, both Platonism and Marxism give way to a first and guiding principle that is to direct and determine action and engagement, which in Plato’s case, is discovered via dialectical/philosophical exchange and is to be embodied in the Republic, or, in Marx’s case, discovered via historical materialism and is to be enforced by the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” In short, both politics rely on the power of a metaphysical *arkhê* and its manifestation in the State form. The result is a strict limiting, restricting, and determining of the acceptable forms of rhetorical engagement.

In stark contrast to dialectical/metaphysical philosophies that seek to consolidate and concentrate thoughts and actions in the State form, rhetoric serves to democratize power. In his reading of the *Phaedrus*, Jacques Rancière argues that Plato’s concern with writing (rhetoric) is not that it is unable to defend itself against the dialectician, but that it is “too loquacious”; rhetoric can “transmit anything, anywhere.” Further, Rancière suggests that “[m]ute in the face of the philosophers’ questions, it [rhetoric] cannot restrain itself from speaking to the uninitiated” (*Philosopher* 40). As such, rhetoric “put the *logos* at the disposal of men whose work had damaged their bodies and mutilated their souls” (*Philosopher* 40). By resisting dialectic and speaking to the “uninitiated” and unqualified, rhetoric undermines the *arkhê* determining political action and organization. Unrestrained by dialectics/metaphysics and the State, rhetoric becomes democratically grounded in the lives of individuals who have the ability to question the

principles that are meant to guide action and present counter-arguments so as to shape and create the lives they deem fit for living.

Following this line of argument, one might say, then, that the State, with its foundational *arkhê*, is by and large an institution formed to protect against rhetoric's an-*arkhê*-istic function—its democratic loquaciousness. By keeping rhetoric within acceptable bounds and in the proper hands, the State protects the powerful. Bearing this distinction in mind, the following chapters aim to connect the rhetorical tradition and the anarchist tradition to develop an “anarchic rhetoric.” Or, in other words, the rest of this essay seeks to show what James Arnt Aune suggests Marxism with its veiled Platonism has failed to answer: “[W]hat sorts of communicative processes enable historical actors to see liberatory possibilities” (13)?

### **Anarchism and the Academy**

I see the argument I am making here as contributing to much contemporary thinking on anarchism, while also advocating for a new theoretical and methodological frame. To be specific, while I see this study as participating in a recent “anarchist turn” in cultural studies that was largely inaugurated by Todd May's *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, I contend that much of the work within this “turn” does not escape the pitfalls outlined above concerning poststructuralism's connection to politics. In connecting poststructuralist thought to anarchism, May begins by noting that although many thinkers, particularly French thinkers, including Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, and Badiou, have made politics explicit in their writings, their engagements have been with Marxist thought. May suggests that because of the tenuous connections between these thinkers and the Marxist tradition, it may be time to move beyond Marxism (if one can call today's radical politics Marxist in the first place). He writes:

There has been much dialogue between these thinkers and the Marxist tradition. Often, this dialogue involves various kinds of modification of Marxist thought. However, given the contortions made in order to bring Marx into alignment with current thinking, one might wonder whether it would be better to seek a new tradition in which to embed their thought. (11)

Indeed, May's own work has sought to connect the "classical" anarchism of Bakunin, Proudhon, and Stirner with the poststructuralist thought of Deleuze and Foucault ushered in a small "turn to anarchism."<sup>3</sup> Since the publication of May's text, there have been many other attempts to synthesize anarchism and poststructuralism. These connections have resulted in various theories of "postmodern anarchism" (Lewis Call) and "postanarchism" (Saul Newman).<sup>4</sup> These studies are joined by those other scholars, who, along with May, have pointed to anarchism as an alternative to the Marxism that permeates discourses on radical politics, most notably Jacques Rancière, David Graeber, and Simon Critchley. The works of Rancière, Graeber, and Critchley have enjoyed a widespread readership, thus they serve as frequent reference points throughout this dissertation.

While I agree with the general aims of these studies, I find their desire to connect philosophy, even the sort of poststructuralist philosophy we described above, and anarchism somewhat ironic. As Benjamin Tucker, who called himself a "philosophical anarchist," reminds us, anarchism is opposed not just to government or the State, but all "archē," all fundamental and guiding principles, those very things that philosophy seeks to provide. I address this issue explicitly in chapter two and suggest that Tucker's response to the alleged bombing of police by

<sup>3</sup> See the newly-minted journal *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies*.

<sup>4</sup> See Newman's *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001, and Call's *Postmodern Anarchism*. Lexington: Lexington Books. 2002.

Chicago anarchists reveals a rhetorically-inflected anarchism that stands in opposition to the search of and appeal to immutable truths. To put it bluntly, in opposition to any sort of philosophical anarchism, my figuration of “anarchic rhetoric,” I hope, provides a model of communicative interaction that allows for a particularly timely and persuasive political intervention that takes the form of a collective “declaration of independence” from the body politic.

Perhaps because of its uncanniness, anarchism has been relatively absent within rhetorical studies. Any studies that have investigated anarchist rhetoric have, in large part, focused on individual rhetors such as Emma Goldman or Mikhail Bakunin. A study such as Martha Solomon’s “Ideology as Rhetorical Constraint: The Anarchist Agitation of ‘Red Emma’ Goldman,” reveals the sort of rhetorical scholarship surrounding anarchism. Solomon writes, “close study of her [Goldman’s] work suggests, in the final analysis, the self-contradictions of anarchist rhetoric” (185). This “final analysis” is one that is too narrow in scope. Though it does offer an interesting read on Goldman’s rhetoric, Solomon’s dismissal of anarchist rhetoric illustrates a naïve understanding of anarchist philosophy, one that fails to account for the historical situation surrounding Goldman and the movement at large. Further, if one considers the fact that Emma Goldman was imprisoned and deported by the American government, as well as the resulting legislation that sought to limit anarchist activity, one might reasonably say that Goldman’s rhetoric was in fact *successful*.<sup>5</sup> In short, Solomon is unable to locate Goldman’s rhetorical practice within larger historical and political frameworks.

Other studies dismiss anarchism altogether. In *Persuasion and Social Movements*, a seminal text in social movement rhetoric, authors Stewart, Smith and Denton Jr. write,

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<sup>5</sup> The United States’ Immigration Acts of 1903 and 1918 were otherwise called the “Anarchist Exclusion Acts.” See “Alien Anarchists,” *The New York Times*, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1919.

“[p]erhaps the most prominent advocate of revolutionary argument was the anarchist Johann Most. While others simply blew buildings to pieces, Most delighted in using language to describe violent acts” (198). Described as such, the authors reduce anarchism to a disturbing and oversimplified dichotomy, whereby one either willingly commits violence or takes a sadistic pleasure in describing it. In either case, the authors pay little attention to the larger rhetorical situation, thereby castigating anarchist rhetoric to the periphery, where it has remained, deemed unworthy of attention. This dissertation aims to remedy the neglect of this tradition within rhetorical scholarship by analyzing the specific tropes and strategies of persuasion used within anarchist rhetoric and how those reference points might allow us to rethink the possibilities for radical political rhetoric, persuasion, and critical thought in the present.

### **Methodology**

To develop what I call “anarchic rhetoric,” I employ a genealogical method indebted to Michel Foucault. The genealogical method, according to Foucault, examines the formations and uses of knowledges and concepts in the service of power. Foucault suggests that genealogy is “a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history” (“Truth and Power” 59). In other words, genealogy demands the isolation and documentation of the points when a particular interpretation of a concept “emerges,” as well as “the use it serves” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 86). Such a method, then, allows me take up a set of individuals and groups, who, at first blush, seem wholly unconnected. In fact, only chapter two takes up the work of a self-identified anarchist. This does not mean, though, that the title of this project is a misnomer. As the epigraph by the Detroit anarchist Joseph Labadie underscores, America has been home to an often neglected and

maligned radical anti-Statist tradition since its founding. A genealogy focusing on the strategies of persuasion that these “anarchists” employed reveals a rhetoric without a partisan home or metaphysical underpinnings that has often been used in advocating paradoxical and conflicting ends. Specifically, what becomes clear throughout this dissertation is that whereas anarchist rhetoric was once used to challenge the English Empire and its colonial practices and the concentration of power in the Federal Government following the American Revolution, it is now being used to justify the unrestricted and unfettered growth of Empire.

Because of the recent resurgence in the use of Revolutionary symbols and rhetoric by the conservative Tea Party, the “Founding Fathers” serve as bookends for the entire project. More specifically, the first chapter takes up Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence. In doing so, I attempt to answer the question: why do anarchists, whether on the Left or the Right, look back fondly on the American Revolution and its Declaration of Independence? In other words, what tropes and figures did Jefferson, in his penning of the Declaration, employ that resonate so strongly with anarchists?

To clarify the question, the American anarchist Benjamin Tucker, who I take up in chapter two, suggests that anarchists are “unterrified Jeffersonian Democrats” (“State Socialism: How Far they Agree and Wherein they Differ” 13). In fact, the pages of Tucker’s radical anarchist periodical *Liberty* are filled with references and allusions to Jefferson and Jeffersonian democracy. Moreover, the anarchism of the New Left thinker Paul Goodman’s is also heavily influenced by Jefferson’s vision of government and citizen engagement. Thus, this chapter examines the intersection of Jefferson’s writings and anarchism in order to explain both his appeal to anarchists and lay the foundation for my figuration of “anarchic rhetoric.” By contextualizing Jefferson’s view of rhetoric and politics and analyzing the Declaration of



Independence, I argue that Jefferson lays the foundation for anarchic rhetoric. In opposition to those scholars who place Jefferson in the liberal or republican camps, I suggest Jefferson, in his complicating of these two traditions, points to the following figuration of an anarchist society: a society can be considered anarchistic in proportion to the rhetorical engagement of its inhabitants. The more rhetoric there is, the less concentrated power there will be.

Chapter Two takes us from the macro to the micro level. Whereas Jefferson provides us with a view of an anarchist society, the response of Benjamin Tucker and his compatriots, who are often called the “Boston Anarchists,” to the Chicago Haymarket Affair offers a look at the rhetorical exchange between individuals and groups of people within an anarchist arrangement. The bombing of a column of police officers, which was allegedly committed by a group of European immigrants and anarchists, led to anarchism’s vilification among politicians, citizens, and other leftist radicals. However, in the face of widespread condemnation, repression, and intimidation, Tucker proudly donned the anarchist label. Thus, at a time when anarchism becomes synonymous with terror, violence, and infiltration, Tucker still sought to attract others to the cause. So, what tropes, figures, and strategies did Tucker employ to navigate this problem? I argue that Tucker draws on Adam Smith’s figuration of “sympathy,” the rhetorical construction of moral sentiments. In foregrounding the sympathetic process, Tucker provides a foil to the Platonic dialectic, which seeks persuasion through reason, empathy, and consensus, and begins to draw our attention to the affective dimension of anarchic rhetoric and the ways in which the rhetorical construction of moral sentiments (sympathy) can take the place of the State while avoiding absolute moral relativism.

While chapter three is largely a demonstration of anarchic rhetoric from a leftist position, it also draws our attention to the aesthetic dimension of such a rhetoric. Specifically, this chapter

examines the Marxist C.L.R. James' intervention into what was called the "negro question" among radical leftist groups. Contextualizing James's work within the leftist movements of the early twentieth-century reveals his dissatisfaction with both American liberalism and the dominant Stalinism in addressing the needs of African Americans, whom he identified as the most radicalized population in the United States. Although he began his venture into American radical politics as a Trotskyist, he would eventually forge his own path and advocate for a decentralized and autonomous African American politics. In doing so, he would seek to build a coalition by seeking "sympathy" around the particular affect of anger. What is more, in rejecting both the liberal and Stalinist attempts to represent African Americans, James would ironically appropriate the Roosevelt's "fireside chat" in order to advocate for Bigger Thomas, a character from Richard Wright's novel *Native Son*, occupying the White House. James' turn away from Trotskyism, and call for an autonomous African American political movement violates what Rancière calls the "police order," and works "the interval between identities" in order to "reconfigure the distributions of the public and private" and the "universal and particular" (*Hatred of Democracy* 62-63). By taking us into the realm of the aesthetic, James underscores the role of rhetoric in determining politics, instead of the common assumption that politics determines the rhetoric.

In the concluding chapter, I take up the rewriting of social studies curriculum by the Tea Party-influenced Texas State Board of Education in order to suggest that the latest iteration of anarchic rhetoric is a conservative one. The revamped curriculum foregrounded America's Christian tradition, while downplaying and/or eliminating its progressive strains. In fact, it all but removed Thomas Jefferson from its textbooks. However, whereas most on the Left have chastised the Board's actions and its version of American "history," I argue that its rhetoric

enacts many of critical theory's central tenets, particularly its emphasis on social constructivist epistemology. It is also in this chapter where I make the case for anarchic rhetoric within critical theory and rhetorical studies. In doing so, I make the argument that anarchic rhetoric performs much of the same tasks of the critical tradition, yet evacuates its tenuous connection to Marxist dialectics. That is, I claim that critical theory cannot be wed to a particular politics because it is thoroughly anarchistic, democratic, and egalitarian, and only a rhetorical view of politics and the critical tradition, as opposed to a philosophical one, lays bare this notion.

To be clear, part of the argument over the next few chapters is that “anarchic rhetoric” is a rhetorical formalism that is “without content.” As such, this rhetoric has been available to a whole host of seemingly disparate American political figures to achieve often-conflicting political goals: the pre-partisan Thomas Jefferson (chapter one), the anarchist Benjamin Tucker (chapter two), the Marxist C.L.R. James (chapter three), and the far-right Tea Party (chapter four). While many might make the claim that such a situation reenacts the contemporary “death of theory/radical politics” discourse, I argue that “anarchic rhetoric,” in its non-allegiance to any particular person, groups, or politics, is inherently democratic and egalitarian, which are characteristics to be celebrated and further developed. Instead of developing rhetorics that reflect certain partisan politics and using them to conquer—persuade—other partisans, which, in essence, circumscribes politics to a Platonic dialectic, we develop politics that reflect certain rhetorics. Doing so endlessly challenges the codification of politics in the State form and opens rhetoric to the non-dialectical, the affective, and the aesthetic. To phrase it another way, a rhetoric that emphasizes those concepts that are said to have contributed to the death of critique and radical politics—the non-dialectical, the affective, and the aesthetic—points to new futures and new “ends” of both radicalism and critical thought. In short, it allows for six billion

Declarations of Independence from the ubiquitous Platonism that seemingly determines all of our politics and thought.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THOMAS JEFFERSON, RHETORIC, AND THE (ANTI-)FOUNDATIONS OF ANARCHY

“I hold that it a little rebellion now and then is a good thing” (Thomas Jefferson, “To James Madison” 27).

“Thomas Jefferson, were he alive today, would probably be an anarchist. His philosophy pointed straight in the direction of absolute liberty” (Benjamin Tucker, “On Picket Duty” 1).

In the prologue to his seminal biography of Thomas Jefferson, Joseph Ellis details Jefferson’s “ideological promiscuity” and the paradoxes of his legacy. He writes, “Soon after his death in 1826, Jefferson became a touchstone for wildly divergent political movements that continued to compete for his name and the claim on his legacy” (7). These competing claims—which are in no short supply—have created some conflicting portraits:

Southern secessionists cited him on behalf of states’ rights; northern abolitionists quoted his words in the Declaration of Independence against slavery. The so-called Robber Barons of the Gilded Age echoed his warnings against the encroaching powers of the federal government; liberal reformers and radical Populists referred to his strictures against corrupt businessmen and trumpeted his tributes to the superiority of agrarian values. (Ellis 7)

However, the ironies of Jefferson’s legacy are not confined to the past. In his book *To Save America: Stopping Obama's Secular-Socialist Machine*, Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the House and architect of the 1994 “Republican Revolution,” as well as former Republican presidential candidate, suggests that Thomas Jefferson would stand in opposition to President Obama’s “progressive” and “secular” government (14). In contrast, Michael Hardt’s recent commentary on the Declaration of Independence sets out to “reclaim” Jefferson by placing the

Declaration of Independence in line with the revolutionary writings of Marx and Lenin. Hardt explains that Jefferson, despite being so intimately connected to the “anti-revolutionary vocation” of the United States, can “help us move beyond some of the obstacles to thinking about revolution today” (vii). Consequently, Jefferson’s lack of a partisan home, Ellis suggests, has resulted in Jefferson being “America’s Everyman,” a “free-floating icon” whose words and ideas provide a rhetorical topos that transcends political categories (7).

While the use of Jefferson and his ideas in political discourse is an interesting question, what is of interest here is how Jefferson seems so easily to violate our categories of liberal and republican, right and left, or conservative and progressive. In the age of the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street, two movements that themselves have questioned both our thinking about and practice of partisan politics, it might serve us well, as an alternative, to (re)examine Jefferson’s connection to a politics that actively seeks to transgress these categories: anarchism.

As strange as this might seem, the connection between anarchism and Jefferson is an old one. Indeed, looking through anarchist literature reveals a common affinity between Jefferson and anarchism. For example, the 19<sup>th</sup> century American radical—and first to embrace anarchism as a political category and project in the United States—Benjamin Tucker argued that an anarchist is simply an “unterrified Jeffersonian democrat” (“The Anarchist View of the Expansion Question” 14). Moreover, Mortimer Adler described Jefferson as a “philosophical anarchist” (378). Paul Goodman’s own anarchism was greatly indebted to Jefferson; he called the American Revolution the “only achieved liberation movement” (59). On the whole, Noam Chomsky suggests, “Anarchist thinkers have constantly referred to the American experience and to the ideal of Jeffersonian democracy very favorably” (135). After all, it was Jefferson who penned the Declaration of Independence, a document that makes it the right and duty of citizens

to “throw off” any government that prevents “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” (16-17).

However, Ellis suggests that the idea that a government would ever be able to *not* infringe upon these self-evident and inalienable rights “is a wildly idealistic message, the kind of good news simply too good to be true” (8-9). According to Ellis, Jefferson’s words in the Declaration are “a recipe for anarchy” (9). So, the question becomes: how can a document be both a foundational text for a nation-state, as well as an anarchist tract? Ellis answers, rather self-assuredly, “But, of course, the words were not intended to serve as an operational political blueprint. Jefferson was not a profound political thinker. He was, however, an utterly brilliant political rhetorician and visionary” (9).

The insinuation here is that the paradox of the Declaration of Independence just described—and maybe Thomas Jefferson’s “ideological promiscuity” as a whole—is thanks to his being a brilliant rhetorician. In particular, Ellis argues that “[t]he genius of his vision is to propose that our deepest yearnings for personal freedom are in fact attainable. The genius of his rhetoric is to articulate irreconcilable human urges at a sufficiently abstract level to mask their mutual exclusiveness” (9). For Ellis, in other words, Jefferson’s rhetoric, replete with abstraction, pointed to an egalitarian vision of human existence, and, as such, suggests that government is unnecessary. To put it another way, Jefferson’s rhetoric was anarchic, and thus unfit for the work of creating and maintaining a new nation. That is, on the one hand Jefferson is a Founding Father, the *patriarch* who laid the foundation for a new nation, while on the other hand, he is an obstinate son, an heir to Continental radical thought who sought to overthrow the rule of the British fatherland. Starting with this idea, I want to examine Jefferson’s rhetoric in order to figure out what exactly makes Jefferson’s rhetoric anarchic. In short, why has Jefferson

become a rhetorical topos for American anarchists and radicals? This will entail pointing to the Declaration of Independence as an example of “anarchy in action” before connecting the resultant rhetoric to the tradition of political anarchism. To make this connection, I will turn to Hugh Blair’s rhetorical theory and the writings of the American anarchist Benjamin Tucker. Finally, this essay will situate an anarchist Jefferson within the larger scholarly debates surrounding Jefferson’s rhetorical and political legacy.

### **A Recipe for Anarchy**

This essay began by discussing Joseph Ellis’ take on the Jeffersonian legacy, which included the allegation that Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence and his entire rhetorical program were, and are, a recipe for anarchy. While Jefferson’s connection to anarchism has been made explicit, what remains to be answered is “how” this recipe works, and “why” it has created a conflicting, ironic, and *anarchic* legacy. The answer to this question can be found in Jefferson’s view of rhetoric and its role in creating and maintaining a Stateless society. In what follows, I make the argument that Jefferson’s view of self-government presupposes the ability an individual to act rhetorically. To be specific, analogous to Jefferson’s view of republicanism, a society can be anarchistic only when individuals are free to make arguments that challenge the tendencies of the State to circumscribe rhetorical action within acceptable channels of political action and engagement. To that end, I will first discuss Jefferson’s view of rhetoric, before making the case for the Declaration of Independence as the anarchist document par excellence.

While Jefferson was not known for being a particularly engaging or effective orator, Jefferson’s view of rhetoric reflected his beliefs in self-government; self-governance depends on the ability to act rhetorically. Stephen Browne makes a similar argument in his reading of Jefferson’s First Inaugural Address. Browne locates within the speech a theory of rhetoric that



exemplifies Jefferson's republican virtue. Brown suggests Jefferson's First Inaugural Address "is a rhetorical expression of the republican creed, and the republican expression of a rhetorical creed" (411). Although my argument will by and large concur with Browne's, mine will posit an alternative definition that points to a rereading of Jefferson's republicanism as the first expression of anarchism in America. To be specific, I suggest, rhetoric functioned in two ways within Jefferson's republicanism: 1) it prevented the intrusion of the State on the individual by challenging the public/private dichotomy, which, in turn, 2) allowed for the unhindered and non-teleological exchange of ideas. Characterized in this way, one might be able to revise Jefferson's definition of republicanism to reflect his "anarchic rhetoric." To be clear, Jefferson's definition of republicanism is as follows: "government is more or less republican, in proportion as it has in its composition more or less of this ingredient of the direct action of its citizens." The role of rhetoric in Jefferson's thought might provide the following alternative: society is more or less *anarchistic*, in proportion as it has in its composition more or less of this ingredient of the direct *rhetorical engagement* of its citizens.

In a well-known letter to Edward Carrington, one can see Jefferson's anarchic rhetoric is both the basis of self-government, and the check on the State's expansion and intrusion on self-government. Jefferson suggests that "[t]he basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right" (24). The way to "keep that right" and foster anarchy is to uphold the unhindered exchange of arguments. Jefferson specifically identifies the newspaper as the organ that fosters this two-pronged process. He writes, "were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter" (24). This free-exchange of arguments provides the defense against the concentration of power in the State and

encourages self-governance. “I am persuaded myself,” Jefferson writes, “that the good sense of the people will always be found to be the best army” (24). Therefore, a Stateless society suggests a rhetorical society; anarchy is a State of rhetoric.

In the same letter, Jefferson famously points to the Native Americans as exemplars of rhetoric and anarchy. He writes:

I am convinced that those societies (as the Indians) which live without government enjoy in the general mass an infinitely greater degree of happiness than those who live under the European governments. Among the former, public opinion is in the place of law, & restrains morals as powerfully as laws ever did anywhere. Among the latter, under pretence of governing they have divided their nations into two classes, wolves and sheeps. I do not exaggerate. (24).

Jefferson’s embrace of rhetoric and a State-less society is not limited to his private correspondences. Jefferson also makes the connection between rhetoric and a Stateless society in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, the only book Jefferson published during his lifetime. The Native Americans “astonish you with the most sublime oratory; such as prove their reason and sentiment strong, their imagination glowing and elevated” (135). In fact, for Jefferson, the speech made against Lord Dunmore, the colonial Governor of the State of Virginia, by Logan, a Native American Chief, surpasses the greatness of the ancients. He writes, “I may challenge the whole orations of Demosthenes and Cicero, and of any more eminent orator, if Europe has furnished more eminent, to produce a single passage, superior to the speech of Logan, a Mingo chief, to Lord Dunmore, the governor of this State [Virginia]” (*Notes* 60). Jefferson’s favor, though, is not isolated to the Native Americans. In a letter to Abraham Small, he writes that the “unanswerable speech of Carnot” against Napoleon Bonaparte is another exemplary rhetorical

performance. Describing Carnot's speech, Jefferson asserts, "This creed of republicanism should be well translated, and placed in the hands and heart of every friend to the rights of self-government" ("To Abraham Small" 347). It is no coincidence that Jefferson commends these two speeches. They are both made against State powers, and, as such, also exhibit the ability to self-govern. They can be said to reflect Jefferson's "republican ethos, which according to Browne in his discussion of the First Inaugural Address, aims to "reveal the delusion of others, correct their errors, [and] remind them of the republican way" (426). It is clear, then, that for Jefferson, anarchy depends on rhetoric, and rhetoric depends on anarchy.

Jefferson's anarchic rhetoric also echoes against the work of Hugh Blair, a theorist whose work was widely read in America during the eighteenth-century, and who along with the works of Richard Whately and George Campbell, according to James Berlin, best reflected America's belief in "individualism, equality, and self-government" (33). Jefferson read Blair's work and recommended it to those interested in oratory and rhetoric. In fact, when Jefferson sold his library to the U.S. Government in 1815 to form the Library of Congress, Blair's *Lectures* was included. In one of the few pieces to deal directly with Jefferson's contribution to rhetorical theory, Berman and McClintock posit that one of Jefferson's contributions to rhetorical theory is his insistence on the importance of Blair's work (7). Jefferson, one might reasonably presume, would agree with Blair's evaluation of "eloquence" in Ancient Greece and Rome. Blair defined "eloquence" as "the art persuasion," and "[i]t is not till the rise of the Grecian republics that we find any remarkable appearances of eloquence as the art of persuasion" (238). Athens became the birthplace of eloquence because, according to Blair, "The genius of their government was entirely democratical; their legislature consisted of the whole body of the people" (239). To no

surprise, then, the downfall of oratory and eloquence among the Romans was due to the expansion of State power. Blair writes:

Under their government, it was naturally to be expected that taste would be corrupted, and genius discouraged. Some of the ornamental arts, less intimately connected with liberty, continued, for a while to prevail; but for that masculine eloquence, which had exercised itself in the senate, and in the public affairs, there was no longer any place.  
(249)

Thus, we find in both Jefferson and Blair the notion that rhetorical engagement—the free exchange of arguments by and among self-governing individuals, which also serves as the foundation of a Stateless society—decreases in proportion to the rise of government.

In what follows, I further the connection between rhetoric and political anarchism via a reading of the Declaration of Independence. Doing so will begin to lay the foundation for the concept I aim to develop throughout the proceeding chapters: “anarchic rhetoric.”

### **Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Rhetoric**

To trace the influence of Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence would require volumes. In the history of modern politics, its mark has been indelible. David Armitage notes that “more than two centuries since 1776, over half the countries of the world have their own declarations of independence” (3). More to the point, during the composition of these other Declarations, “many of these documents drew directly on American Declaration for inspiration. They adopted and sometimes adapted specific phrases from the Declaration. More often, they took its structure as a model for their own” (3). However, as was suggested in the opening pages of this essay, there is a certain irony in this situation. In his hostile “review” of the Declaration, Jeremy Bentham, foreshadowing the views of later American anarchists and highlighting the ironic function of the

document, argues that if one were to follow the Declaration to its logical conclusion “[t]here never was, never can be, established, any government on earth” (180). Despite, Bentham’s allegation, the Declaration of Independence has repeatedly operated as a founding document for hundreds of governments. Thus, the Declaration is a liminal document. It simultaneously calls into question the State, but also operates as a foundational document for many Nation-States. It is both arkhê-istic and an-arkhê-istic. The following analysis suggests that this indeterminate space reveals Jefferson’s anarchism. This anarchic rhetoric reflects a “self-evident” overstepping of the State that has prohibited individual rhetorical action, or what Fliegelman calls the “public revelation of a private self” (24), and a non-teleological development of self-government. While these many of these ideas have already been discussed, the following section examines how the Declaration—the document that has come to be synonymous with Jefferson—embodies and plays out Jefferson’s anarchic rhetoric. For it is these facets that give Jefferson and his Declaration their continuing influence and anarchic function.

The syllogistic structure of the text lays bare its appeal. The structure of the Declaration, by and large, is a list of “facts” that seek to prove “the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these States” in order to “dissolve the political bands” between the Colonies and England (“The Declaration of Independence” 16-17). These “facts,” however, take the form of wrongs when judged against the major premise of the Declaration: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” (17). Moreover, governments derive their powers from people and are formed “among men” in order to “secure these rights.” The minor premise is a list of “injuries,” “usurpations,” and “invasions” made by the British on these “self-evident” rights. The logical conclusion of these two premises is that the

British government, because they have violated the “unalienable Rights” of mankind, must be thrown-off.

The “self-evident” truths contained in the major premise of the syllogism reveal the Declaration’s profound anti-metaphysics, a dominant theme of the Enlightenment era. That is, recognizing government intrusion on “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” does not presuppose an appeal to a Platonic figuration of right or wrong. As Willis and Fliegelman argue, the Declaration reflects the epoch’s reliance on the tropes of “common sense” or “self-evident” truths provided by the Scottish Moral Sense Philosophers of Hutcheson, Kames, and Reid, as well as John Locke. Regarding the effectiveness of the “self-evident” truths in the Declaration’s syllogistic structure, Fliegelman argues that “syllogisms grounded on self-evident truths furnished their own eloquence, required no argumentation, and freed the Declaration from the charge of innovation or individualistic utterances” (51). Similarly, Alain Badiou’s recent works point to the power of politics founded on axioms or self-evident truths. A political decision stemming from an axiom, Badiou writes, “tears itself away from any dialectic of the subjective and the objective...The beginning, under its eventual injunction, is pure declaration” (qtd in Hallward 772). A self-evident declaration is disruptive and resists any metaphysical or dialectical logos. In other words, such a view evokes Aristotle’s characterization of “contentious reasoning” or “sophistical refutations,” which, unlike dialectical exchange that reasons from “opinions that are generally accepted” in order to arrive at the “true” and “primary,” are disruptive/contentious to the search for the “true” and “primary” because they reason from opinions that are not generally accepted or “merely [seem] to reason from opinions that are or seem to be generally accepted” (Aristotle 188).

Fliegelman also suggests that the form and content of the Declaration enact Jefferson's desire to "believe in Bacon's inductive dream" (53). By endowing the deductive syllogism with seemingly inductive content, the Declaration reframes the "Aristotelian commonplaces to a basis in self-evident truth [that] paralleled the simultaneous sanctioning and containing of nonrational appeals effected by the concept of a natural language" (51-52). In other words, Jefferson adopted a rhetorical approach based on the Enlightenment ideals, which, according to Wilbur Samuel Howell, "delivered its ideas by the method of science to a generation which greatly respected scientific standards of thought and expression" (214). The result of Jefferson's approach is a document that exists between, as Fliegelman notes, "transcendent representativeness and personal revelation...between rational persuasion and affective appeals; between logic and rhetoric...between argument and self-evidence" (190). The result is a liminal document that reflects the eighteenth century epistemology wherein "[t]he old distinction between dialectic as the discipline of learned discourse and rhetoric as the discipline of popular discourse is destroyed (Berlin 769); it is both profoundly rhetorical in that it makes a deductive argument about the role of government, as well as anti-rhetorical because of its reliance on seemingly unarguable axiomatic, "self-evident" truths.

A close examination of the minor premise—the list of wrongs committed by the British Government against the colonists—reveals that the majority of the wrongs concern the prohibition of self-government qua rhetorical action. Like those scholars such as Maier and Willis who find distinct categories within the list of allegations, I find three groups pertaining to the prohibition of rhetoric by the King. They can be classified as 1) Platonic preclusions of rhetoric, 2) spatial and temporal restrictions on rhetorical engagement, and 3) acts of violence. For example, the Declaration reads: "He [King George] has refused to pass other Laws for the

accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only” (17). The Colonists are prevented from self-governance because of the will of King George, which acts as an immutable and transcendent form that bars any rhetorical/political alternative. The ability of the Colonists to construct political arguments in opposition to the King is forbidden. To further prevent this process, King George “has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people” (17). This dissolving of “Representative Houses,” places where individuals engage in deliberation and debate, was, in effect, an effort to prevent the gathering of individuals in order to stifle and prevent rhetorical engagement. Lastly, the Declaration lists several incidents of violence. For instance, “He [King George] has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people” (18). Taken together, these three categories underscore the extent to which the Declaration—and the American Revolution itself—represent a conflict over the ability to pose arguments that question the legitimacy of the State. Furthermore, the Declaration also acknowledges the King’s recognition of the anarchic function of rhetorical engagement and his desire to keep argument within certain bounds. Judged against the major premise of the Declaration, the list of wrongs clearly demonstrates two motivations for declaring independence: 1) King George has violated the right to “life” by physically attacking the Colonists, and 2) limited “liberty” (rhetorical action) through the invocation of immutable conceptions of the “good” or “just,” as well as the placing of spatial and temporal strictures on the colonists’ ability to self-govern and question the State.

What, then, is left of the third term? For Jefferson, simply having the rights of life and liberty do not promote happiness. Reflecting the republican ideal of participatory governance,



Jefferson recognizes that it is the exercising of these rights through self-governance that leads to happiness. Recalling Jefferson's valorization of the Native Americans and their anarchistic communities, it is clear that when it comes to the "pursuit of happiness," Jefferson believes that rhetorical engagement among individuals is its sine qua non. According to Jefferson, "I am convinced that those societies (as the Indians) which live without government enjoy in the general mass an infinitely greater degree of happiness than those who live under the European governments ("Letter to Edward Carrington" 24). If decentralization and permanent revolution—two tenants of anarchistic politics—is created and maintained through rhetorical action and just government is that which is "most likely to effect...Safety and Happiness," then the pursuit of rhetoric within the anarchy is the basis for happiness. Such a sentiment is echoed by Paul Goodman:

[A]s Thomas Jefferson pointed out, only such an organization of society is self-improving; we learn by doing, and the only way to educate co-operative citizens is to give power to people as they are. Except in unusual circumstances, there is not much need for dictators, deans, police, pre-arranged curricula, imposed schedules, conscription, coercive laws. Free people easily agree among themselves on plausible working rules; they listen to expert direction when necessary; they wisely choose pro tem leaders.

Remove authority, and there will be self-regulation, not chaos. (94)

For one to retain his/her liberty by resisting the growth and reach of the State, one must exercise that same liberty by engaging in the anarchic rhetorical process.

In short, a rhetoric grounded in self-evident truths is what gives the Declaration its lasting appeal. Self-evident truths are unarguable, yet their abstractness leaves them empty. As a result, the Declaration is a seemingly "empty" document with its content left to be supplied by a rhetor.

Moreover, because the Declaration reflects what Darren Staloff calls the Enlightenment’s “metaphysical disenchantment,” it creates an egalitarian vision of politics. To put it another way, Howell argues that the Declaration “employed the forms of philosophical address at a time when such forms were believed equal to the tasks of persuasion and appropriate as means of expressing the doctrine of human rights” (214). As such, the Declaration permits anyone and everyone to make arguments about the justness of government. The text, then, because of its call for rhetorical action, models its own ideal. If individuals have the ability to act rhetorically, and rhetoric plays an an-arkhê-istic function by unmasking and calling into question the metaphysical and political arkhê that unjustly determine and limit the actions of individuals, while also serving as the grounding for anarchist communities, the Declaration, when put into rhetorical action, is the anarchistic and an-arkhê-istic document par excellence.

### **“The earth belongs always to the living”**

Although I have been making the case for an anarchist Jefferson, even a cursory look at Jefferson’s writings suggest that he saw a role for government, albeit a very particular role. While this may seem to put Jefferson at odds with anarchism—or at least its common connotation as the complete lack of government and organization—in what follows, I hope to suggest that Jefferson’s vision of government, which includes concrete proposals for the organizing of a society and its institutions, does not put him at odds with anarchism. On the contrary, Jefferson’s vision of government, which reflects his resistance to institutionalized government—the State—actually lays the foundation for the politics of the first American anarchist Benjamin Tucker and consequently allows us to rethink Jefferson and anarchism’s contribution to radical thought.

Jefferson suggests that government can be—and should be—dynamic, voluntary, and subject to change depending on the will of those people who will be directly affected by it. In the most pointed lines of the Declaration, Jefferson makes clear his view of government. He asserts:

Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends [life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness], it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, & institute new government, laying it's [sic] foundation on such principles & organizing it's [sic] power in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. (The Declaration of Independence 10)

Reflecting this notion, Jefferson advocated for republican arrangements that would minimize the concentration of power and allow for democratic self-government. In a letter to Joseph C. Cabell, Jefferson proposes that “the way to have a good and safe government, is not to trust it all to one, but to divide it among the many” (62). This means continuously dividing and subdividing the nation into states, counties, and wards with each division having certain responsibilities that were appropriate to it. Important to Jefferson’s idea of government was the notion that the higher up an institution was on the republican ladder, the less power and influence it had over the multitude. The aim, according to Jefferson, was to trust “fewer and fewer powers in proportion as the trustees became more and more oligarchical” (“To Joseph C. Cabell” 62).

Of all these divisions, however, the power rests in the hands of individuals, who, through their direct participation in their local wards, would have the opportunity to exercise his/her liberty and self-govern. Jefferson’s ward system would create an environment where “the voice of the whole people would be thus fairly, fully, and peaceably discussed, and decided by the common reason of the society” (“To Samuel Kercheval” 75). Reflecting (rather gleefully) on his idea, Jefferson suggests, “These wards, called townships in New England, are the vital principle

of their governments, and have proved themselves the wisest invention ever devised by the wit of man for the perfect exercise of self-government, and for its preservation” (“To Samuel Kercheval” 71). Jefferson’s very definition of republicanism reflects his beliefs in liberty and self-government. Acknowledging that definitions have been “very vague,” Jefferson offers a rather succinct account of his own republicanism:

Were I to assign this term a precise and definite idea, I would, purely and simply, it means a government by its citizens in mass, acting directly and personally, according to rules established by the majority; and that every other government is more or less republican, in proportion as it has in its composition more or less of this ingredient of the direct action of its citizens. (“To John Taylor” 65)

What is called Jefferson’s republicanism, then, is a radically democratic program that seeks to prevent the rise of an inherently unjust State by democratically allowing everyday citizens to exercise their liberty by participating in the debates that would directly impact them and their locale. The direct participation of citizens in the governing process would ensure that there exists a plurality of opinions, ideas, and debates, which would also prevent the stagnation of the same. Michael Hardt suggests that “Jefferson’s insistence, in particular, on the direct action of the population in government—not through representatives determined by election or otherwise—is one element that make this a radically democratic conception” (xv). In other words, a republican arrangement of society would give individuals the opportunity to participate in the free-market of argument and debate and represent their own concerns and interests.

Yet, republican arrangements in and of themselves will not preserve liberty and promote self-governance. Implicit in Jefferson’s republican-ward system is what has often been said to be Jefferson’s contribution to radical thought. To be specific, several scholars, particularly Richard

Matthews and Michael Hardt, have argued that the nexus of Jefferson's radicalism rests in his notion that only the living can decide their politics. Jefferson argues that the dead have no rights, thus cannot dictate and/or influence the politics of the living. As a result, individuals must continually rebel and revolt in order to determine their own "living" politics. He writes, "The earth belongs always to the living generation. They may manage it then, and what proceeds from it, as they please, during their usufruct. They are master too of their own persons, and consequently may govern them as they please" ("To James Madison" 56). As a result of such a belief, it follows that "no society can make a perpetual constitution, or even a perpetual law" ("To James Madison" 56). Jefferson's view stands in sharp contrast to those such as John Adams', who argued that a just republic is an "empire of laws, not of men" (Adams 236). In other words, apart from the impracticality of representative government, the notion that there can be created a document or institution that acts as a transcendent and everlasting arbiter between individuals and/or individuals and the State is unjust. To prevent this injustice, Jefferson suggests that "[e]very constitution, then, and every law, naturally, expires at the end of 19 years. If it be enforced longer, it is an act of force and not of right" ("To James Madison" 57). Such a principle—what Hardt calls the "eternal return" of rebellion (xiii)—prevents the concentration of governmental power in the form of the State, as well as its negative effects on individuals, which, in turn, allows for self-governance. Hardt notes that for Jefferson, "rebellion has an intrinsic value, regardless of the justness of its specific grievances and goals. Periodic rebellion is necessary to guarantee the health of a society and preserve public freedom" (xiii). Thus, Jefferson's ward-republics undergirded by a philosophy of constant and continual revolution would be the best arrangement to both foster self-government and prevent the rise of a despotic State.

Jefferson's views—unjust government as an intrusion on liberty, continual rebellion as a duty of the populace, decentralized political power—allow the opportunity for the full exercise of one's liberty and ability to self-govern, while also staving off State power. Summarizing this idea, Jefferson writes:

Where every man is a sharer in the direction of his ward-republic, or of some of the higher ones, and feels that he is a participator in the government of affairs, not merely at an election one day in the year, but every day; when there shall not be a man in the State who will not be a member of some one of its councils, great or small, will he let the heart be torn out of his body sooner than his be wrested from him by a Caesar or a Bonaparte.  
(“To Joseph C. Cabell” 63)

Jefferson's ideal political arrangement—anarchy—sought to allow for individuals to willingly and directly participate in the managing of the public's affairs, which, because it was also localized, was bound to matter and affect him/her directly. It would also stave off the establishment of static and coercive political, social, and/or economic arraignments. In short, the anarchist Paul Goodman seems to capture the spirit of Jefferson's anarchism when he posits that anarchism “is always a continual coping with the next situation, and vigilance to make sure that past freedoms are not lost and do not turn into the opposite, as free-enterprise turned into-wage slavery and monopoly capitalism, or the independent judiciary turned into a monopoly of courts, cops, and lawyers, or free education turned into School Systems” (56).

Jefferson's republicanism, which includes concrete proposals for the arranging of a society, foreshadows the anarchism of Benjamin Tucker. Throughout his lifetime, Tucker would attack the “monopoly,” which he defined as:

any person corporation, or institution whose right to engage in any given pursuit of life is secured, either wholly or partially, by any agency whatsoever—whether the nature of things or the force of events or the decree of arbitrary power,—against the influence of competition (qtd. in Martin 210).

As a remedy, Tucker would advocate government by “non-compulsive organization” and “associative combination” (qtd. in Martin 218): self-government. Like Jefferson, Tucker recognized that liberty could only be exercised and maintained by voluntarily and directly engaging with other individuals who, being non-coerced and willing themselves, also recognized some benefit in the interaction. In short, people were free to establish groups and institutions as long as they served particular purposes, were dissolved after those purposes were met, and did not intrude on the liberty of others.

It is clear that Jefferson’s political philosophy and the republican arrangements that reflected it seem at home within the anarchist tradition. Although the anarchist Rudolf Rocker places Jefferson in the liberal tradition, he argues that, along with Thomas Paine, Jefferson laid the foundation for American anarchism: “The anarchism which developed on American soil has its starting point in the philosophic ideas of the Eighteenth Century which circulated in England and were brought here by the Fathers of this country and were modified under the influence of a new environment” (155). As an alternative to the State, Jefferson posited a non-teleological process of continual rebellion and rebuilding: permanent revolution. Moreover, as has been shown, Tucker recognized the anarchist strands of Jefferson’s thought. It was also Tucker who argued that “[t]he Anarchists are simply unterrified Jeffersonian democrats” (“State Socialism: How Far they Agree and Wherein they Differ” 13).

### “Unterrified Jeffersonian Democrat”

While Jefferson himself would not have been aware of anything called the anarchist movement (anarchism was first embraced in America as a political program by Benjamin Tucker in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), his politics has distinct shades of anarchism. Jefferson was a seminal figure among the American anarchists of the nineteenth-century. The anarchist Benjamin Tucker, whose quote serves as the epigraph of this essay, made the anarchism-Jefferson connection in no uncertain terms in *Liberty*, the journal he both edited and published for nearly thirty years. In fact, included in the journal’s promotional material was a quote from Samuel Cooper, a Philadelphia lawyer, which read: “*Liberty* is a journal that Thomas Jefferson would have loved” (qtd in. Tucker, “Advertisement 3” 7). Thus, to make solid the connection between anarchism and Jefferson explicit we can look to *Liberty* and the work of Benjamin Tucker.

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1882, Tucker published a brief piece titled “Anarchism and Consent” that links Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence with an anarchist rejection of government by tacit consent. The piece begins by pointing to the strange acceptance of the Declaration among “law and order” aristocrats in the U.S. and Europe. Tucker suggests that among such circles, the Declaration represents “a chimera of generalities imbibed by Jefferson through familiar contact with French atheists” (2). This reputation is ironic, Tucker suggests, as the Declaration has “numerous internal evidences to show that, were Thomas Jefferson living to-day [sic], he would be a pronounced anarchist” (“Anarchism and Consent” 2). To make this connection Tucker draws out Jefferson’s claim in the Declaration that “governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.” According to Tucker, the logical conclusion of this claim suggests that government is an unjust intrusion on the individual because consent to be governed was never rendered. He points to the Constitution’s limiting of voting rights, protection of slavery,



and “other constitutional bars” as instances that drastically limit those who can consent to being governed. The restrictions have resulted in “less than one-tenth of the whole people” having the opportunity to actively consent (or dissent) to being governed by the State. Therefore, according to Tucker, it “follows that when any individual is governed by a government without his or her consent, that government is exercising unjust power and is a usurpation” (2). By extending Jefferson’s argument in the Declaration, Tucker reaches anarchist conclusions. In short, “Under any conceivable interpretation of Jefferson’s talk about the consent of the governed, every existing government is outlawed beyond recovery, and the ‘just powers’ vanish into thin air” (2).

Tucker’s assertion is not without warrant. Throughout Jefferson’s writings, one finds a profound skepticism of both the practical and ethical facets of institutionalized government. In a letter to James Madison, Jefferson made known his aversion to institutionalized government and its desire to embody the interests of a people. According to Jefferson, there is no form of government that is able to obtain and/or embody the will of the majority because any claim of complete representation is forever undercut by the inability to bring individuals together to voice their opinions, as well as the damning effects of personal interests when codified in laws, practices, and institutions:

The people cannot assemble themselves; their representation is unequal and vicious. Various checks are opposed to every legislative proposition. Factions get possession of the public councils. Bribery corrupts them. Personal interests lead them astray from the general interests of the constituents. (“To James Madison” 57)

The result of Jefferson’s claim is that a just government based on the consent and will of the majority is an impossibility. Peoples are too spread apart, their differences too great, and humans too self-interested to be fully and justly represented in a static institution.

Moreover, apart from being impractical, institutionalized government violates Jefferson's view of individual liberty, a view that resembles and precedes the anarchist one. In outlining his complaints against statist governance, Jefferson also reveals his vision of just governance. That is, one can detect in his admonishments above, the ideals of direct participation and individual liberty. Liberty, according to Jefferson, is the "natural condition of human life" (Yarbrough 9). Moreover, synonymous with liberty is self-government. Jefferson writes, "Every man, and every body of men on earth, possesses the right of self-government: they receive it with their being from the hand of nature" ("Jefferson's Opinion" 195). Describing this idea, Matthews observes that for Jefferson "[s]elf-governance is essential, vital, natural" (87). Indeed, in the draft of the Declaration of Independence that Jefferson included in his autobiography, he asserts that government is an intrusion on self-government. In reference to King George and the British government, he argues, "He [King George] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's [sic] most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him" ("Draft" 13). While these exact words were omitted from the final draft of the Declaration, this idea—institutionalized government as an intrusion on liberty—would remain in the final draft and his writings as a whole. Jefferson concludes that because humans are naturally endowed with liberty (the ability to self-govern), government as a static institution that attempts to speak for or represent an individual, robs individuals of their natural ability, and is thus an artifice that promotes subjugation.

This conceptualization echoes against Tucker's anarchism. Tucker defined liberty as "simply and solely the freedom and power to choose," and government as "invasion, nothing more or less," (qtd. Martin 215). The freedom and power to choose what to do with one's liberty—self-govern—can only be exercised in the absence of government. More pointedly, one

can detect the similarity between Jefferson and Tucker in the description of the journal *Liberty*. The journal was described as “[a]n anarchistic journal, expounding the doctrine that in Equal Liberty is to be found the most satisfactory solution of social questions, and that majority rule, or democracy, equally with monarchical rule, is a denial of liberty” (“On Picket Duty” 1). Putting these two together, it is evident that both Tucker and Jefferson share the belief that government, no matter the form, is an intrusion on liberty qua the ability to self-govern. For one to be able to fully exercise his/her personal liberty and ability to self-govern, the State as a codified system of governmental institutions, must be abolished or at least severely limited.

Jefferson suggests that a strong centralized government, based on what Gordon S. Wood calls “virtual representation<sup>6</sup>,” fundamentally excludes the majority of the people from determining their politics. This idea creates a distinction between those who can participate and determine the public’s affairs, and those who are excluded and left to the inferior private realm. One, then, finds Jefferson sounding rather like Jacques Rancière. For Rancière, as with Jefferson, such a politics is “an oligarchic form, a representation of minorities who are entitled to take charge of public affairs” (*Hatred of Democracy* 53). Challenging this movement means creating and fostering a democratic “movement that ceaselessly displaces the limits of the public and the private, of the political and the social” (*Hatred of Democracy* 62). While we have already outlined Jefferson’s own democratic challenge, we have yet to situate the resulting anarchist Jefferson within the larger scholarly debates surrounding his political and rhetorical legacies.

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<sup>6</sup> Wood describes “virtual representation” as the dominant political ideology of the eighteenth-century, which suggested that the populace could be represented in governmental and public institutions by individuals who—because of their “disinterestedness”—would embody and carry-out the will of the public good. “Virtual representation” was placed against “actual representation,” a profound “mistrust” of elected officials to represent individual interests. Wood claims that “American democracy grew out of this pervasive mistrust” (30)

### **Liberal, Republican, Anarchist**

The divergent use of Thomas Jefferson in political discourse has only been paralleled by the scholarly interpretations of Jefferson and the other Founding Fathers. While the conventional wisdom has always suggested that Jefferson was a model Lockean, the twentieth century saw the proliferation of a variety of competing interpretations. Describing the many alternatives to a Lockean Jefferson, Forest McDonald points to:

a Bolingbrokean and English Oppositionist Jefferson (Lance Banning), a Scottish Enlightenment moral-sense Jefferson a la Frances Hutcheson (Garry Wills), a Scottish Enlightenment rationalist Jefferson a la Thomas Reid (Morton White), an antimodern agrarian expansionist Jefferson (Drew McCoy), and a champion of commercialism and capitalism Jefferson (Joyce Appleby). (396-397)

Despite all of the ink that has been spilled trying to place Jefferson in this or that paradigm, it has done little to explain his status as a “free-floating icon.” In fact, it more or less has contributed to Jefferson’s indeterminacy. That is, it would be hard to imagine the Populists evoking the “champion of commercialism and capitalism” Jefferson. Moreover, the scholarly debates surrounding Jefferson’s politics do little to explain Jefferson’s anarchist appeal.

Richard Matthews, however, provides a counterpoint to the Jefferson debates, while also providing a substantive grounding to the anarchist claim. Matthews argues in his 1984 book that Jefferson’s political philosophy provides an alternative to both the liberal and republican interpretation of Jefferson in the form of a radically democratic and communitarian anarchism (16-18). Against those such as Joyce Appleby, Carl Becker, and Louis Hartz who argue that Jefferson’s Declaration is a rehashing of Locke’s *Second Treatise*, which, in turn, also laid the groundwork for America’s “unique brand of market liberalism,” Matthews suggests that

Jefferson's "vehement arguments against economic exploitation and in favor of substantive economic and political freedom" points to Jefferson's inherent humanism. Jefferson's reverence of the Native Americans, Matthews also argues, reveals Jefferson's "communitarian anarchism," while his figuration of "permanent revolution" suggests a radically democratic vision of self-governance. Although Matthews targets most explicitly the liberal interpretation of Jefferson, he is not willing to align himself with those who advocate a republican Jefferson. Pointing to the work of J.G.A. Pocock, Matthews notes that while "the language of the civic-humanist paradigm is indeed helpful for understanding Jefferson," "his ideal human would balance the public and the private, for a life totally devoted to either would be less than fully human" (17).

Likewise, Jay Fliegelman, in his situating of Jefferson among the "world of eighteenth-century theories and practices of rhetoric," concurs with Matthews's assertion regarding the balance between public and private. He points to Jefferson and the Declaration as being emblematic of an "oratorical revolution" that is of "greater significance than his [Jefferson's] indebtedness to Locke or Hutchinson" (4). Fliegelman locates a shift in rhetorical theory and practice that "sought to replace artificial language with natural language and to make writing over in the image of speaking" (24). The result was the collapsing of the public/private binary:

Once a decorous, rule-governed, and class specific behavior that articulated the public virtues of civic-humanism—the honor of the office and the public good—public speaking became reconceptualized in the mid eighteenth century as an occasion for the public revelation of a private self. (24)

In doing so, the "oratorical revolution" largely leveled the playing for rhetorical and political action. By questioning the public/private binary, the "oratorical revolution," Fliegelman argues, allowed for the "declaring of independence" (24-25). These shifts in rhetoric sanctioned the

ability of anyone and everyone to make political arguments that question the legitimacy of government while also expressing their own personal wants and beliefs.

Formulated in this light, eighteenth-century rhetoric existed as something of an aporia.

Fliegelman posits:

The oratorical revolution was rife with internal conflicts—between self-control and passionate expression...between transcendent representativeness and personal revelation...between rational persuasion and affective appeals; between logic and rhetoric...between argument and self-evidence. (190)

As such, rhetoric possessed a certain deconstructive force that undid the epistemological and metaphysical assumptions of the eighteenth-century. Fliegelman claims, “The oratorical ideal that loomed so large in the America of 1776 presumed to contain or mediate these conflicts” (190). He continues by suggesting that the ways in which rhetoric served as a site for these conflicts has been “historically neglected” despite being a “crucial battleground of American Revolutionary culture” (190).

In his reading of Jefferson’s famous letter to Maria Cosway, Jeremy Engels locates in the tension between the calls political rationality and irrational romanticism that characterized the later eighteenth century a rhetoric that leads to political anarchism. He writes, “Jefferson did not fear anarchy per se but its consequences: that anarchy would yield powerful rhetorical justifications for despotism” (429). Against the conclusions of Matthews and Fliegelman, Engels suggests that although Jefferson clearly demonstrates anarchist tendencies, Jefferson is also quick to temper those tendencies by calling for a rational and enlightened educational program that would enable the polis to operate within a republican society and avoid the pitfalls of a pejorative anarchism characterized by relativism and irrationality.

## Conclusion

Jefferson's distrust of the State and his embrace of rhetoric in challenging that power, sustaining individual liberty, and producing happiness hold sway for contemporary rhetorical and political theory. The continual appropriation of Jefferson's image and writings among various radical groups, today's Tea Party being the most obvious, as well as the recent expunging of Jefferson from social studies text books by the Texas legislature, suggests that Jefferson's political thought represents a challenge to State and institutionalized power while also acting as the animus for anarchy in America.

The following chapters will sharpen our understanding of this rhetoric "without content" and underscore its shifting allegiances. That is, like Jefferson, anarchic rhetoric has no partisan home, and, as such, has been used by those on the right and left of the political spectrum. Before elaborating on this claim, though, chapter two will trace Jefferson's influence on the nineteenth century anarchists by grounding anarchic rhetoric within the debates and polemics following the Chicago Haymarket bombing in order to more fully develop our understanding of this concept. Specifically, chapter two will examine the anarchist Benjamin Tucker's response to the events at Haymarket in order to connect anarchic rhetoric with Adam Smith and his figuration of "sympathy." Chapter two will be followed up by a discussion of the Marxist C.L.R. James's appropriation of anarchic rhetoric during the middle of the twentieth century. The final chapter will take up the recent resurgence of anarchic rhetoric by today's Tea Party. The second half of chapter four will discuss the implications of anarchic rhetoric for contemporary critical, rhetorical, and political theory.

## CHAPTER TWO

### IMAGINING COLLECTIVITY: TASTE, SYMPATHY, AND THE “ENDS” OF

#### ANARCHIC RHETORIC

“As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what ourselves should feel in the like situation” (Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* 9).

“Mind your own business” is its [anarchism’s] only moral law (Benjamin Tucker, “State Socialism” 15).

We established in chapter one that Thomas Jefferson’s republicanism points to a societal arrangement with a rhetorical grounding. In order to best foster liberty and stave off intrusions on that liberty, Jefferson suggests that a free and happy society must take as its *raison d’être* the dynamic exchange of ideas among its members. Specifically, by revising Jefferson’s own definition of republicanism, we established that a society is considered anarchistic in proportion to the engagement of its members in determining their own politics. The opposite of this figuration—the attempt to circumscribe rhetorical action within the State—is an intrusion on and usurpation of liberty.

And while in the last chapter we began to spell out the differences between these two competing figurations of rhetorical action—one which is dependent on the State form and the other which seeks to undermine it—we by and large focused on rhetoric’s general (and ideal) role within an anarchist society. Regarding anarchic rhetoric and its role in creating and maintaining a Stateless society much remains to be parsed. Expanding on this issue, though, means tackling the most common critique of anarchism, which, according to our logic here, echoes the Platonic critique of rhetoric: how can anarchism (rhetoric) be theorized as a positive societal arrangement instead of pure chaos and moral relativism? That is, if the critique of



anarchism (and rhetoric) is that it lacks all transcendent arbiters—the State, Truth, God—and these arbiters serve to prevent anarchy (in both its positive and pejorative senses), how can one expect equitable interaction within such a society? In short, what can be said about the “ends” of these competing rhetorics when it comes to questions of persuasion and ethics?

This essay will argue that “sympathy” represents the rhetorical and political “end” of anarchism, which might be contrasted against what I will refer to as the “dialectical empathy” that is prominent in much liberal and Marxist thought. My conceptualization of “dialectical empathy” will allow me to connect two views, which, at first blush, seem rather dissimilar: Plato’s view of dialectical rhetoric and Marx’s view of historical materialism. In turning to this binary, I hope to add to the discourse(s) known as the “affective turn” in critical and rhetorical studies, which has sought to theorize non-representational logics of solidarity, community, and politics in the wake of poststructuralist thought. Indeed, as Brian Massumi has suggested, “There seems to be a growing feeling...that affect is central for an understanding of our information- and image- based late capitalist culture, in which so-called master narratives have been perceived to have foundered” (18). Yet, in contradistinction to Deleuze and Guattari or Hardt and Negri, all of whom turn to Spinoza to connect the affective and political, I turn to Adam Smith and his concept of “sympathy,” which may prove more useful in thinking about affect’s role in ushering in political and social change. To be specific, I hope to show that anarchic rhetoric, with its seeming rejection of all forms of representation, reliance on axiomatic truths, and dynamic exchange of ideas, takes Adam Smith’s figuration of “sympathy” as its goal.

I will make this argument by examining the response of the individualist anarchists located in and around Boston to the Chicago Haymarket Affair. The Haymarket Affair produced a unique rhetorical situation whereby the followers of anarchism were left to combat the public’s

outrage against anarchism, as well as continue to propound the anarchist agenda. Examining the responses found in the pages of Benjamin Tucker's *Liberty* will reveal anarchic rhetoric's "sympathetic" ends. More pointedly, through my analysis, I hope to argue that in tackling the question outlined above—how can individuals interact equitably without the mediation of the State?—the anarchists offered a figuration of affect that has much to offer our thinking about the role of affect in human interaction today. Indeed, while many have argued for the centrality of affect in theorizing ethics, politics, and ontology, little has been said about the process through which affect might be able to constitute more equitable human relationships and/or interactions. To take one example, while Hardt and Negri suggest that the valorization of affective labor has become part and parcel to contemporary capitalism, as well as the idea that "[v]alue-affect opens the way to a revolutionary political economy in which insurrection is a necessary ingredient and which poses the theme of the reappropriation of the biopolitical context by the productive subjects" (Hardt and Negri 88), we are, according to someone like Timothy Brennan, left without an understanding of how the latter might actually take place. <sup>1</sup> Further, Ruth Leys makes explicit the idea that today's theories of affect "imply such a radical separation between affect and reason as to make disagreement about meaning, or ideological dispute, irrelevant to cultural analysis" (40). Smith, I argue, provides what today's thinkers have not: an account of how affect can constitute equitable relationships and community. Finally, the essay will end by situating my argument against Plato's description of dialectical rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*, which will allow me to draw out what I call "empathetic Marxism," anarchic rhetoric's affective and political opposite.

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<sup>1</sup> Brennan suggests that the role of affect in Hardt and Negri's *Empire* points to "a gathering of subjectivities (the multitude) who never actually meet or converse and who therefore can never be guilty of repressing their political foes or, for that matter, of exercising their political wills" (350).

### **Tucker's *Liberty***

Published in Boston from 1881 to 1908, *Liberty, Not the Daughter But the Mother of Order* has the distinction of being the longest-lasting anarchist periodical, and, as such, may be the best record of anarchism in America. In fact, as Peter Marshall notes, its editor, Benjamin Tucker, was the “first American thinker to call himself an anarchist with pride” (389). However, despite being a prolific writer, Tucker and his unique brand of anarchism have received little notice. Indeed, Tucker, his compatriots, and his journal have all but been forgotten. Thus, an explanation of his work is in order.

In the first full-length study of American anarchism, James J. Martin, pits “individualist anarchism” against “syndicalist anarchism” and suggests that the growth of what came to be known as “anarcho-syndicalism,” which developed in Europe in opposition to the work of Karl Marx, was paralleled by a “kindred but nearly unconnected phenomenon in America, seeking the same ends through individualistic rather than collective dynamics” (ix). Specifically, Martin suggests that the forerunners of “individualist anarchism,” American radicals such as Josiah Warren, Lysander Spooner, Stephen Pearl Andrews, William B. Greene, and Ezra Heywood, reacted to “the crystallization of the means of political expression into a conventional series of ritual-like gestures,” and that such a tendency violated their “Jeffersonian” beliefs (1). However, “individualist anarchism” as a distinct political category began to take shape when Benjamin Tucker introduced to other American radicals via *Liberty* the ideas of Proudhon, Bakunin, Max Stirner, and Herbert Spencer (Martin 203). Benjamin Tucker’s work, then, “is the cultural synthesis of the earlier exponents and innovators of the various elements of which this variety of American radicalism was composed” (xii). Frank H. Brooks supports this claim when he writes that “the anarchism expressed in *Liberty* owed only a general debt to individualist thinkers in

America such as Thoreau or Jefferson and a substantial debt only to one American thinker, Josiah Warren. The major intellectual influences were British, French, and German” (2). Specifically, Brooks points to Herbert Spencer’s “law of equal freedom,” Proudhon’s “mutual banking,” and Max Stirner’s egoist ethics (Brooks 2). One might say, then, that “individualist anarchism,” which came to “maturity” in the late nineteenth century within the pages of *Liberty* (Martin 208), represents the joining of the native radicalism(s) of Jefferson, Paine, Thoreau, Emerson, and others, with the European anti-statism(s) of Pierre Joseph-Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Max Stirner, and Herbert Spencer.

The result of such a synthesis has born competing interpretations, especially when compared to the European anarchism imported to America by such figures as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman. For instance, David DeLeon argues that “individualist anarchism” represents a “right libertarianism” when placed against the “communist anarchism,” or “left libertarianism” of Goldman and Berkman (85). Specifically, DeLeon argues that “right libertarianism” is a “capitalist” view that overlaps with “militant Liberalism” and stands in opposition to the anti-capitalist views of “left libertarianism” (61-85). Peter Marshall posits that Tucker grafts “Left Hegelianism onto the American Individual tradition of natural rights” (390). That is, while locating certain “rightist” positions in Tucker’s thought, Marshall argues that Tucker ultimately falls on the side of “left-wing libertarianism” (391). For Brooks, such an anarchism might be “a meeting point of right and left” (xii). However, Martin is quick to suggest that the differences between these anarchisms were thrown into relief only after the Chicago Haymarket affair when anarchism was put under the political microscope (x). Indeed, prior to Haymarket, little attention was paid to the differences between the American and European anti-statist programs. Partisan labels aside, one might paint the following picture: “The individualists

see the danger of obligatory cooperation and are worried that a collectivist society will lead to the tyranny of the group. On the other hand, the social [communist] anarchists are concerned that a society of individualists might become atomistic and that the spirit of competition could destroy mutual aid and general solidarity” (Marshall 6). In short, the difference between the communist and individualist programs is one of means not ends. While they both share the desire for a Stateless society, they differ on the methods for realizing that goal.<sup>2</sup>

However, because the focus of this essay is on the American or “individualist” anarchist tradition, a more detailed discussion of its particular aims and methods is in order. David DeLeon isolates three beliefs of the individualist anarchist. First, the powers of the State “were not based upon valid contracts” (76). Following Jefferson’s maxim “the earth belongs to the living,” the anarchists argued that “since all of those who had signed the Constitution were now dead, this moldy old document should be null and void. It violated the supremacy of the present” (DeLeon 76). Secondly, the anarchists argued that “the state was a bastion of privilege, such as monopolies in patents, copyrights, legal benefits, limited banking, land restrictions and tariffs” (DeLeon 76). Indeed, throughout the pages of *Liberty*, Tucker identified and railed against the government’s four monopolies: money, land, tariff, and patent (“State Socialism” 9). Lastly, the anarchists argued “the state was unjust because people were never given the choice of accepting or rejecting its power” (DeLeon 76). Taken as a whole, then, the anarchist program in America amounted to the abolition and replacement of all “unnatural,” non-consensual monopolies with new forms of organization based on voluntary association. DeLeon calls this notion “Jeffersonianism” (79).

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<sup>2</sup> For a summary of anarcho-communism see Alexander Berkman’s *What is Anarchism?*.

How was such a transformation to take place? DeLeon argues that “the anarchists relied more on education than on nitroglycerine to demolish government” (76). The American anarchists argued that the use of violence, as opposed to peaceful boycotts and education, would simply result in the more rapid and aggressive concentration of power in the State. To be specific, the anarchists relied on an agenda that sought to educate and inform the masses about anarchism in general, but also about what the anarchist alternative might look like. Apart from dispelling the myths surrounding anarchism, the rhetorical agenda would include illustrating how “alternatives to state functions should be built through schools, labor and community exchanges, cooperative banks, businesses, and labor unions” (DeLeon 76). The results would be that “[a]narchism would be irresistibly attractive if it were properly understood” (DeLeon 76).

Yet, what is of note here is not this seemingly pedestrian rhetorical goal, but rather how Tucker seems to reach that goal. Indeed, one can detect in the description of *Liberty* that Tucker included in the first issue a rhetoric that violates conceptualizations of dialectical and rational persuasion. Tucker emblazoned the first page of the periodical with a forceful description of his editorial aims:

It may be well to state at the outset that this journal will be edited to suit its editor, not its readers. He hopes that what suits him will suit them; but if not, it will make no difference. No subscriber, or body of subscribers, will be allowed to govern his course, dictate his policy, or prescribe his methods. *Liberty* is published for the very definite purpose of spreading certain ideas, and no claim will be admitted on any pretext of freedom of speech, to waste its limited space in hindering the attainment of that object. (“Declaration of Purpose” 1)

*Liberty* certainly reflects Tucker's view; Tucker spent pages responding to critics, often to a detriment. Martin suggests that much of Tucker's writing was "wrangling and hair-splitting of little or no value which in the alter days gave the paper the tenor of a debating society" (208). With this characterization in mind, it appears that Tucker seems to neglect one of rhetoric's most tried and true tenets: the construction of arguments that accord with audience expectations. In essence, when Tucker writes, "He hopes that what suits him will suit them," he flips the script on rhetorical invention. Instead of composing arguments that appeal to his audience, he asks his audience to appeal to his argument. To phrase it another way, Tucker expects to "spread" the gospel of anarchism not by dialectical persuasion, but by the evoking of affective judgments that reflect Adam Smith's concept of "sympathy." Even more pointedly, in response to the question—how can such a non-dialectical rhetoric persuade individuals to join the anarchist cause?—Tucker answers "sympathy," which, as will be discussed below, asks interlocutors to judge an orator's argument not on how well the rhetor speaks to his/her particular beliefs and assumptions, but by imagining his/her own response to the same exigency. Before explicating my claim here, it is necessary to outline the Chicago Haymarket Affair: one of the most important events in American radical politics, the nadir of anarchism in America, and the event that precipitates Tucker's "sympathy."

### **The Haymarket Affair**

According to the labor historian James Green, Post-Civil War Chicago epitomized the "Gilded Age—an age of excess when businessmen accumulated huge fortunes, constructed lavish mansions, exploited the public domain and corrupted public officials" (38). In addition to the prevalent social and economic inequities that characterized Chicago, the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, a growing immigrant population, the failure of socialist electoral politics, and a series of

labor battles resulting in overt police brutality would result in the bombing of a battalion of police officers and the arrest and execution of several prominent anarchist labor agitators. Indeed, the trials and tribulations of Chicago radicalism and politics were by and large shaped by the prominent labor agitator and orator Albert Parsons, his wife Lucy, and his comrades August Spies, and George Engel in their drift from reform-minded socialists to militant anarchists.

The late-1870s saw an explosion of radical clubs and trade unions in response to the failures of the Socialistic Labor Party, a newly formed Marxist-influenced party that had enjoyed a rapid period of growth among Chicago's immigrant population. After a defeat at the polls in 1879, the absorption of many socialist candidates and supporters into the Democratic and Republican ranks in 1880, and a voting scandal in 1881 that nullified the election of a socialist city council member, many German radicals who once comprised the Socialistic Labor Party were left searching out alternative routes for social and political change (Green 90). That is, the debates surrounding the relationship between of electoral politics, trade unionism, and radical politics "hardened hearts and closed minds, leading passionate young socialists like [Albert] Parsons and [August Spies] to reject electoral politics completely" (91). As a result, many of the SLP's former members, led by Spies and Albert and Lucy Parsons, became dispersed among the anarchist International Working People's Association (IWPA) and/or the militant Knights of Labor.

The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor (KL) was founded in 1869, and, because of its embrace of a mystical Catholicism, appeared to be a sort of off-shoot of the Free Masons (Green 96). Like many other radical groups of the time, the Order believed that capitalism should be replaced by a "cooperative economy that would allow dependent wage workers to become independent producers" (Green 97). The group's aim attracted Albert



Parsons, who would join the Order on July 4th, 1876 and found the Knight's first Chicago branch. The Order operated as a point that "amalgamated the fractured trade unions into one solidified organization," which, consequently, attracted thousands of American to join the KL. Indeed, the cause of the KL's ascendancy was the organization of a mass strike in 1885 against the railroad magnate Jay Gould, which saw its membership swell to over 700,000 (Dubofsky and Dulles 131). Despite its prominence on the national stage, in Chicago it was a different story; in 1883, just as quickly as the KL rose to eminence among Chicago's working-class, its membership dropped by 49,000 in less than a year after being defeated by Western Union in their attempt to secure better working conditions (Green 98-99). The KL in Chicago, however, after a series of successful strikes and organizing by the Chicago anarchists, would experience another sustained period of growth in 1886, which would pave the way for the dramatic events of May.

In the wake of the KL's dramatic fall from grace in 1883, Chicago presented fertile conditions for the IWPA, a European anarchist organization formed in London in response to the ousting of anarchists from the First International by Karl Marx in 1872. In 1881, the followers of Mikhail Bakunin convened in London to found the International Working People's Association (IWPA). Against the Marxist International Workingmen's Association, the anarchists who formed the IWPA in London "acted on their belief that socialist propaganda could not effectively reach workers through trade unions and political parties; nor would revolutionary change result from strikes, mass demonstrations and election campaigns" (Green 93). The result was a program that stressed "propaganda by deed," "a violent act planned by a secret conspiracy and committed by a dedicated militant, [which] could impress the world with the evil of the despotic state and with the fearless determination of those who intended to destroy it" (Green 93). Albert

Parsons and August Spies attended the 1883 meeting in Pittsburgh that established the American branch of the IWPA. In fact, Parsons, along with the newly-minted Chicagoan Johann Most, wrote *The Pittsburgh Manifesto*—the IWPA’s statement of principles in America, which opened with a quote from the Declaration of Independence. Soon thereafter, the “militant socialists of Chicago began identifying themselves as anarchists” (Green 129).

Near the end of 1893, the Chicago economy was growing at a rapid clip. Indeed, “the net value of goods produced by the city’s leading manufacturers leapt from \$28 million to a staggering total of \$760 million” (Green 102). Unsurprisingly, the dramatic increase was the result of increased downward pressure on worker’s wages and the expanded use of technology in the production process (Green 105). In addition to the changes in mass production and the effects they had on Chicago’s wage workers, a depression soon befell the city and country. Consequently, Chicago’s major trade unions and radical groups, led largely by the speeches and publications of Albert Parsons and his comrades, would engage in a massive organizing effort, which would result in an unprecedented expansion of membership roles, including the reemergence of the Knights of Labor after a series of successful strikes against Jay Gould’s Southwest Railroad System and the organization of workers in the vehemently anti-union McCormick Reaper Works in Chicago in early 1886 (Green 145-159). Indeed, what has come to be known as the “Great Upheaval,” the coordinated efforts and sympathy strikes that appeared across the United States, had Chicago as its “epicenter” (Green 146).

To be specific, Chicago’s anarchists, radical socialists, and trade unionists, notably the IWPA and its trade union the Central Labor Union (CLU), galvanized around the surging Knights of Labor and the reinvigorated calls for an eight-hour workday (Green 154). This coordination would result in unprecedented action that surprised anarchists, unionists, and

capitalists alike. In a warm-up to a planned May 1st rally and strike, 15,000 members of the anarchist-led CLU marched through downtown Chicago on April 25th, 1886 in front of an estimated 50,000 onlookers to argue for a shortened working-day. After giving rousing speeches full of allusions to dynamite, Albert Parsons and August Spies were singled-out in the press as dangerous agitators who were plotting to use violence during the May 1st rally (Green 158-159). Much to the police's surprise, the May 1st rally came and went without incident; thousands of workers went on strike and paraded through the streets of Chicago. Dances were held and speeches were given, and the festivities continued well-into the weekend (Green 164-167).

However, the mood began to change on May 3rd. A fatal clash between workers and police in front of the McCormick Reaper Works, the open drilling of Chicago police officers, the firing of KL workers from the Gould railway system, and the summoning of National Guardsmen ripened the discord among the striking workers (Green 168-169). The strikes resumed on May 4th and were to culminate in a protest at Haymarket Square against the rampant police violence. Among others, Albert Parsons and August Spies gave fiery speeches denouncing the police's actions against striking workers at McCormick's. Then, at 10:20pm, despite most of the crowd having left, six columns of Chicago police marched into the square to disperse the remaining protestors. As the police marched forward, a bomb was thrown into the center of the columns. The police then opened fire on the protestors. Over the ensuing days the exchange would result in the death of seven police officers and an unknown number of anarchist protestors and civilians, as well as the arrest of dozens of anarchist agitators (Green 180-189). After a sensational trial where eight anarchists were tried for murder, the Haymarket Affair would result in the hangings of four, the suicide of one, and the life-imprisonment of two.

In sum, the political and economic conditions of late-nineteenth century America provided fodder for a growing radicalism and labor movement, which pitted not only radicals against capitalists but radicals against radicals. In other words, concomitant with the fight against the injustices caused by capitalism and the State was a fight about how best to wage that war. As we will see in the following sections, it was the latter battle that occupied the writings of the Boston anarchists in the weeks and months following the Haymarket blast.

### ***Liberty's Sympathies***

From 1886 to 1887, like most of America's other newspapers and periodicals, the events at Haymarket occupied the pages of *Liberty*. Because the bombing had attracted so much attention to anarchism, Tucker and his compatriots had to tip-toe between two competing motivations: separating themselves from the anarchism associated with the Haymarket bombing while still arguing for the relevance of their program. From 1886 to 1888, Brooks notes that "Tucker and writers tried to differentiate individualist anarchism theoretically, economically, and strategically from the 'Chicago anarchism' represented by the defendants in the Haymarket case" (7). In a response called "The Boston Anarchists," which Tucker published on May 22nd, he writes, "the Boston anarchists are ready to denounce the savage Communists of Chicago, who, falsely sailing under Anarchistic colors, commit murder, arson, and mob violence" (5). However, despite the scrutiny of anarchism as a result of the actions of the Chicago anarchists, Tucker argues, "I see no reason why we should take in our shingle and so give the appearance of running away from our philosophy. We propose to let the old sign-board stand" (5). What is more, in another piece published in the same issue, Tucker also suggests, "The outbreak at Chicago, whether the actors in it were good or bad, is a very small one, compared to those that proceed from 'bad laws' in this and other parts of the world" ("Coming to Its Senses" 5). Tucker's

exigency, then, consisted of negotiating the paradox of denouncing the Chicago anarchists while simultaneously raising the anarchistic banner higher on the mast.

To meet such a challenge, Tucker aimed to pique his readers' "sympathies." In response to the impending execution of the Chicago anarchists, Tucker included a piece written by "A.H.S."<sup>3</sup> titled "A Fellow-Feeling" on November 5th, 1887.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, this short piece (about 250 words) is aimed at "those Anarchistic members of the Order" ("A Fellow-Feeling"). A.H.S. here refers to the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor, who, because they had become so closely tied to Haymarket bombing, supported the execution of the Chicago anarchists in an effort to salvage their reputation in the face of public anger. As Dubofsky and Dulles note, "The Knights of Labor were as violent in condemning them [the anarchists] as the most conservative newspapers" (112). The Knights' decrying of the action at Haymarket was all the more offensive to the anarchists because among those to be executed was the anarchist and founding member of the Knights of Labor in Chicago, Albert Parsons. As the two groups were closely aligned in the struggle for worker's rights, the anarchists reacted negatively. To be specific, the piece begins with a portrait of a speech by the Order's leadership to its members; the author writes, "'While we as individuals have sympathy for the men about to be executed, as an order we believe in the majesty of the law, and that the anarchists, having been condemned, should be punished,' said General Treasurer of the K. of L. Frederick Turner. And 'me too' echoed Secretary Charles H. Litchman" (A.H.S 1). According to A.H.S., the motivation for asking the Knights of Labor to suppress their sympathy for the condemned anarchists is that "perhaps the secession of some of the 'brothers' was anticipated by some of the Grand and Petty

<sup>3</sup> A.H.S. is most likely A.H. Simpson, a regular contributor to *Liberty*.

<sup>4</sup> On November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1887, the anarchists Albert Parsons, George Engel, August Spies, and Adolph Fischer were executed by hanging.

Masters, and that is why they have used the funds of the Order to get into the law-making business” (1).<sup>5</sup> In short, A.H.S. argues that the leaders of the Knights of Labor commanded its members to disregard their identification with the condemned anarchists in order “to maintain discipline” because sympathy poses a threat to order—to the Order (1). Reflecting the anarchists’ dismay with the Knights’ actions, “A Fellow-Feeling” culminates in the following question: “How does this [the Knights’ support of the execution of the anarchists] strike the Anarchistic members of the Order who believe in discipline and red-letter tyranny—when it is used to preserve the majesty of the Order” (1)? By ending this piece with such a question, the author asks the anarchist members of the Knights of Labor to resist the Order’s call to suppress their sympathy with the soon-to-be-executed anarchists and obey the rule of law.

As a counter, then, to the Knights of Labor’s appeals to “law and order,” wherein they ask/command their members to resist their own identification with the anarchists bound for the gallows, A.H.S.’s rhetorical tack foregrounds the concept of sympathy. Apart from explicitly evoking Adam Smith’s definition of sympathy as “fellow-feeling,” A.H.S. seems to borrow directly from the pages of Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. That is, like Smith, A.H.S. relies on a scene of a “brother’s” torture and execution to exemplify the sympathetic function. Noting the explicit evocation of Adam Smith’s “sympathy,” what follows is an examination of the sympathetic process and its connection to anarchist politics.

Adam Smith begins his treatise on ethics with the following claim, which also serves as the epigraph of this essay: “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what ourselves should

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<sup>5</sup> In response to the events at Haymarket, the Knights of Labor would throw themselves headlong into reformist and electoral politics in the fall of 1886. See Dubofsky and Dulles 132-133.

feel in the like situation” (9). He continues, “Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us what he suffers” (9). Against a vulgar empiricism, Smith grounds his ethical system in a seemingly anti-representational logic that suggests that humans cannot know or experience the sentiments of others, even those of kin. Because “we have no immediate experience of what other men feel,” our cognitive representation of the Other’s subjective experience cannot bring us into knowledge of the Other and his/her subjective position. “True knowledge” of an Other is impossible. Instead, “By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them” (9). For Smith, we come to know the experiences of others by imaginatively placing ourselves in the Other’s position. However, this imagining of oneself in the position of the Other does not mean taking on the Other’s subjectivity. Although one’s subjectivity may, in fact, change as a result of such an exercise, the sympathetic process relies on the two participants retaining their own subjectivities so as to remain distinct. According to Smith, sympathy, while possibly being synonymous with pity or compassion, “denote[s] our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever” that results from imagining ourselves in the position of the Other (10).

Stephen McKenna has argued that sympathy, the process by which affects are engendered as shared moral sentiments, is an inherently rhetorical project (117). In fact, against the view of most Smith scholars who find his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* derivative of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, McKenna argues the opposite—Smith provides us a “Theory of Persuasive Sentiments” (114). To be specific, sympathy is a natural human tendency that

grounds Smith's ethics, yet its expression can only be realized through communicative interaction. McKenna argues that Smith's rhetorical ethics "rejects the either/or fallacy of a choice between foundational knowledge (or transcendent criteria) on the one hand or pure contingency of value on the other as a basis for morality" (139). Thus, one might say that the anarchist response to the question posed at the beginning of this essay—how can anarchism (or rhetoric), with its rejection of transcendent arbiters, be theorized as a positive societal arrangement instead of pure chaos?—would be sympathy. In other words, in place of a transcendental criteria that is used to ground ethical action, such as the Knights of Labor's appeal to "law and order," and the seemingly chaotic, "anything goes" view that anarchism is so often accused of fostering, Tucker and the Boston anarchists promote "sympathy"—the rhetorical construction of ethical norms and moral sentiments.

However, the process through which sympathy occurs, its connection to anarchism, and the implications for connecting the two still deserves explanation. According to Smith, in order to sympathize, the hearer must understand the causes of the speaker's joy or grief and evaluate the response to such a situation. He writes, "The first question we ask is, What has befallen you?" (11). That is, for sympathy to take place, the hearer must know the exigence motivating the speaker. Smith continues, "Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from the situation which excites it. We sometime feel for another, a passion which he himself seems to be altogether incapable; because, when we put ourselves in his case, that passion arises in our breast from the imagination, though it does not in his form the reality" (12). For sympathy to occur, the speaker must formulate a response to an event that demonstrates "propriety." According to Smith, "In the suitability or unsuitability, in the proportion or disproportion which the affection seems to bear to the cause or object which excites it, consists



the propriety or impropriety, the decency or ungracefulness of the consequent action” (18). To achieve the rhetorical propriety that will lead to sympathy between rhetor and interlocutor means constructing an argument that is aimed not at a particular audience, but an imagined “impartial spectator.” Because Smith begins his ethics with the premise that one cannot experience the feelings of another, this means that a rhetor cannot appeal to the beliefs and feelings of an audience. Instead, an imagined “impartial spectator,” or what Smith calls “reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct” guides our affective response to a given situation (Smith 139). According to McKenna, the “impartial spectator” that “grounds rhetorical and ethical propriety” is the archive of experience comprised of previously formed sympathies (McKenna 67, 131). That is, the “impartial spectator” is the internalization of social norms and practices that determines propriety in the rhetorical/ethical. Responses, then, are constructed with an eye to this storehouse of experience and social norms (“impartial spectator”), which, because the interlocutor has also had sympathy with others, functions as the bridge between the communicants.

In effect, then, Smith’s figuration of sympathy might be characterized as the following: A rhetor who finds him/herself in a particular situation that warrants a response must call upon his/her past experiences and social interactions (the “impartial spectator”) so as to craft an appropriate response. The hearer, then, must judge the speaker’s response to that situation appropriate by understanding the rhetorical exigence and placing him/herself in the same situation. In essence, the hearer must answer the following: “Judging from the speaker’s expression of the situation, which is also an appeal to the synecdoche of our cultural practices and norms called the ‘impartial spectator,’ would I feel and act the same way in that same situation?” If the hearer answers “yes,” the result is sympathy, a shared moral sentiment that

induces the hearer to action and guides political action without any sort of institutionalized meditation, be it the State or transcendent criteria, while also avoiding absolute ethical relativity.

As McKenna points out, such an evaluation may at first blush appear to simply be a matter of taste or personal preference. In this light, the hearer's judgment that results in sympathy, in "fellow-feeling," often overlaps with Smith's figuration of aesthetic judgment (McKenna 118). However, McKenna points out that the difference between the two has to do with the interlocutor's interestedness. That is, aesthetic judgment for Smith involves a disinterested individual's evaluation of a how well an object expresses its subject. However, Smith admits that sympathy is not the end of aesthetic judgment as aesthetic judgment is often one of personal taste. In short, while two people may share an affective response to an object, there is no need to actively seek sympathy. On the contrary, when an individual is (self-) interested in an orator's subject, the response to some sort of joy or grief-inducing situation, the evaluation moves from the aesthetic realm into the rhetorical/ethical and thus serves as the material that will ground the judgment.

Framed in such a way, the role the sympathetic process has distinct Kantian overtones, particularly Kant's description of taste and its ability to foster community through communication. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant suggests:

Now taste is at bottom a faculty for judging of the sensible illustration of moral ideas (by means of a certain analogy involved in our reflection upon both these); and it is from this faculty also and from the greater susceptibility grounded thereon for the feeling arising from the latter (called moral feeling), that the pleasure is derived which taste regards as valid for mankind in general and not merely for the private feeling of each. Hence it appears plain that the true propaedeutic for the foundation of taste is the development of

moral Ideas and the culture of the moral feeling; because it is only when sensibility is brought into agreement with this that genuine taste can assume a definite invariable form.

(152)

Kant's make clear in no uncertain terms that collectivity and community can be built through taste: the evaluation of a "sensible illustration of moral ideas." To be specific, the judgment of such sensuous "pleasure" moves from the subjective and "disinterested evaluation" of an individual to questions of "interestedness" and the "good" (i.e. ethics) through communicative interaction with others. Indeed, Kant's description of humanity explicitly points the importance of the sympathetic process and its manifestation through rhetorical exchange. He suggests that humanity "on the one side indicates the universal feeling of sympathy, and on the other the faculty of being able to communicate universally our inmost [feelings]" (151). Taste, in other words, "makes possible the transition, without any violent leap, from the charms of Sense to habitual moral interest" (Kant 150). Like Smith and the anarchists, aesthetic judgment for Kant has the ability to foster relationships between individuals without the need for a common epistemological or metaphysical grounding.

The sympathetic process, as suggested earlier, seems to function not through the construction of arguments to accord with audience beliefs and assumptions ("You should feel the same way as I do because it is in your interest to do so."), but by inviting the interlocutor to evaluate the argument as though it were his/her own ("I feel this way because of this situation. Judge for yourself whether or not you would too"). In short, a rhetor creates a message that is to appeal to an "impartial spectator" (an imagined audience constructed from past experiences), which is then evaluated by an interlocutor, who, by imagining him/herself in the rhetor's position, draws upon their own potential affective response to guide his/her judgment of the

rhetor's original message. Cast in this way, one might say that throughout the sympathetic process, both rhetor and interlocutor overcome their inherent egoism—their inability to feel that which others feel—by focusing on their own self-interestedness. Indeed, it is at this juncture that the connection between sympathy and anarchism becomes clear. That is, the focus on one's own self-interest that characterizes the sympathetic process might be detected in Benjamin Tucker's assertion that the only moral law is "Mind your own business," or his claim that "[t]he most perfect socialism is possible only on the condition of the most perfect individualism" (qtd. in Marshall 390). In other words, the most perfect socialism—*anarchism*—is possible only when one rejects both chaos and the transcendental and evaluates rhetorical/ethical propriety by imagining oneself (replete with "interestedness") in the position of others. According to Benjamin Tucker and the other Boston Anarchists, sympathy, then, can serve as the basis for self-government in the absence of a State.

Apart from publishing the piece by A.H.S. in the days prior to the Chicago anarchists' execution, Tucker also makes this view explicit in a piece titled "Ralph Waldo Emerson on Law" published a month after the hanging. In this particular piece, Tucker excerpts selections from Emerson's essay "Politics." The longest selection Tucker includes is a section wherein Emerson describes the process through which individuals can make their own laws. This process is none other than that of sympathy:

For, any laws but those which men make for themselves, are laughable. If I put myself in the place of my child, and we stand in one thought, and see that things are thus or thus, that perception is law for him and me. We are both there, both act. But if, without carrying him into the thought, I look over into his plot, and guessing how it is with him, ordain this or that, he will never obey me. This is the history of governments,—one man

does something which is to bind another. A man who cannot be acquainted with me, taxes me; looking from afar at me, ordains that a part of my labor shall go to this or that whimsical end, not as I, but as he happens to fancy. Behold the consequence. Of all debts, men are least willing to pay the taxes. What a satire is this on government! Everywhere they think they get their money's worth, except for these. ("Ralph Waldo Emerson on Law")

In this long passage, we see the sympathetic process and its implications for a Stateless society. To be specific, like Smith's sympathy, Emerson/Tucker suggest that just laws are not constructed by imagining how the Other might feel if and when he/she is subjected to a particular law, but by using the Other's response to gauge one's own reaction to the law. In other words, there is no "guessing how it is with him." A law can be just only "[i]f I put myself in the place of" the Other, which is to say, if I imagine myself being subjected to a particular law. The result of "both being there, both acting" is a "shared perception" that can serve as law. Sympathy, the rhetorical construction of a shared affective response, allows the participants to remain unique in their subjectivity and can serve as the ethical motivation to engage in collaborative action without the mediation of the State with its alleged embodiment of transcendent criteria. For Emerson/Tucker, just laws are those that individuals construct for themselves through the rhetorical construction of a shared moral sentiment ("sympathy"), which, in an anarchist society, takes the place of the transcendental laws that are said to be embodied in the State and also avoids falling into disputes of personal preference and taste. Moreover, because laws that are developed through sympathy are constructed in a particular moment to meet a certain aim, they themselves resist the institutionalization and codification of law that, on the anarchist view, results in elevating that law to the metaphysical and transcendent.

### **Empathy or Dialectic?**

In the passage of Emerson's that Tucker excerpts, one also sees the opposing process through which laws can be made and enacted. That process I mention is the one whereby an individual "look[s] over into [an Other's] plot, and guess[es] how it is with him, [and] ordain[s] this or that" ("Ralph Waldo Emerson on Law"). Emerson further suggests, "This [process] is the history of governments,—one man does something which is to bind another. A man who cannot be acquainted with me, taxes me; looking from afar at me, ordains that a part of my labor shall go to this or that whimsical end, not as I, but as he happens to fancy" ("Ralph Waldo Emerson on Law" 7). That is, whereas Adam Smith's sympathy, or anarchism's rhetorical ethic, presupposes that individuals cannot "know" the thoughts and feelings of an Other, its opposite, what I call "empathetic identification," is founded on the idea that one can, thanks to a dialectical knowledge, "know" the thoughts and feelings of an Other. Before elaborating on this claim, it is necessary to note what I mean by empathy. According to University of Cambridge Developmental Psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen, empathy "is our ability to identify what someone else is thinking or feeling and to respond to their thoughts and feelings with an appropriate emotion" (16). It is my argument in the following pages that the ability to identify and respond to what someone else is thinking and feeling—to empathize—is the "end" of the dialectical method theorized in Plato's *Phaedrus* (and, by extension, Marx's theory of revolution). As such, we might think of the dialectic/rhetoric binary that has characterized much of Western thinking for over two millennia in terms of a binary framed in affective terms: empathy/sympathy.

In Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*, Socrates' explanation of dialectic can be said to mirror what Baron-Cohen calls empathy. To unpack my claim, I turn to the succinct summary of dialectical persuasion Socrates offers Phaedrus in opposition to the sophistry of Lysias:

Serious discourse...is far nobler, when one employs the dialectic method and plants and sows in a fitting soul intelligent words which are able to help themselves and him who planted them, which are not fruitless, but yield seed from which there spring up in other minds other words capable of continuing the process forever, and which make their possessor happy, to the farthest limit of human happiness. (141)

While Socrates clearly suggests that the goal of dialectic is to bring one closer to the immutable/transcendent, what deserves some explanation here is Socrates' mentioning of "fitness." It is important to note that to deem one appropriate or "fit" presupposes that one individual possesses the knowledge that allows him/her to deem another appropriate or "fitting." That knowledge that sanctions such an evaluation and selection is dialectical knowledge of one's own "character," or the relationship between self and God. That is to say, because I have dialectical knowledge, I can deem someone appropriate for such knowledge. Summarizing this view, Socrates tells Phaedrus, "Now each one chooses his love from the ranks of the beautiful according to his character, and he fashions him and adorns him like a statue, as though he were his god, to honor and worship him" (127). The Other is deemed fit, then, if one is able to recognize one's own self in the Other. As a result, the Other becomes remade in the image of the dialectician. One, in essence, places him/herself in the position of the Other in order to select oneself. The Socratic dialectic of the *Phaedrus* amounts to the following: I have knowledge that brings me close to God, the all-powerful. You do not have dialectical knowledge, yet I see myself in you. Because I know me, and I see myself in you, I know that you are wont of

dialectical knowledge. Therefore, I will give you the dialectical knowledge that will make you me. All of which is to say, one bases his/her knowledge of the Other on self-knowledge.

In the case of Socrates' dialectic, the interlocutor must labor to ensure that the dialectician remains in power. In other words, the interlocutor must give up him/herself to the dialectician. That is, because the dialectician convinces the interlocutor that his/she is in need of dialectical knowledge about a particular topic (virtue, rhetoric, government) and the acquisition of that specific dialectical knowledge brings one closer to the divine, the interlocutor sees in the dialectician the path to power. To put the situation in simpler terms, I accept that I lack the dialectical knowledge that brings me closer to God, the all-powerful. You have dialectical knowledge, which I need in order to become closer to God, the all-powerful. I see myself in you. Therefore, I will receive the dialectical knowledge because it will make me you. The form of identification for both the dialectician and the interlocutor is the same: Because I am you, I know what you are thinking and feeling.

The result of such a dialectical process is empathy, which, for the anarchists, is the path to unjust laws. That is, the dialectician is marked by his/her "ability to identify what someone else is thinking or feeling and to respond to their thoughts and feelings with an appropriate emotion" (Baron-Cohen 16). To satiate the point, the dialectician "identif[ies] with what someone else is thinking or feeling" because he/she is that "someone else." So, the dialectician can always "respond to their thoughts and feelings with an appropriate emotion." The conclusion is always, already known. The discourse then is made to retroactively fit the conclusion.

On the anarchist view, empathy elides what sympathy makes explicit: that one has "no immediate experience of what other men feel" (9). The dialectician, in placing him/herself in the position of the other, in essence, "guesses how it is with him," which, according to our logic



here, is nothing other more than empathizing with the Other. It is the process that Tucker, Emerson, and the anarchists suggest leads to the construction of laws that serve to keep power in the hands of the few, its “rightful” place. Or, as Emerson himself puts it, “A man who cannot be acquainted with me, taxes me; looking from afar at me, ordains that a part of my labor shall go to this or that whimsical end, not as I, but as he happens to fancy” (“Ralph Waldo Emerson on Law”). In sum, to the dialectician the interlocutor must pay the ultimate tax: his/her liberty.

### **Marxism and Rhetoric**

In his *Rhetoric of Marxism*, James Aune suggests that Marx failed to fully consider the role of rhetoric in ushering in capitalism’s demise. First, Aune picks up on Alvin Gouldner’s work, which suggests that the dialectical conflict between labor and capital is “inevitable” and will result in the concentration of the means of production in the State controlled by the proletarian vanguard before the eventual “withering away of the State.” Such a situation boils down to the notion that there is no need to persuade individuals to join in the work of overthrowing capitalism because the revolution is “inevitable.” Gouldner calls this situation Marxism’s “nuclear contradiction” (13). Refuting this notion, Aune writes, “contrary to Gouldner, Marx’s argument that change will accelerate and be more positive if one chooses to be a revolutionary seems to work somewhat effectively as a response” to the “inevitability thesis” (13). Instead, Aune finds a more significant rhetorical problem within Marx’s thought. That is, Aune suggests that Marx failed to consider “What sorts of communicative processes enable historical actors to see liberatory possibilities” (14).

Aune points to Marx’s work on ideology as Marx’s most concrete statement on rhetoric and the function of language in ushering in social and political change (27). While I recognize that the vast amount of work and debate surrounding the term “ideology,” I take Marx’s

definition of ideology as the “camera obscura” as my starting point. Or, in other words, I’ll begin my reading of Marxist rhetoric with an understanding of “ideology” as, what both James Aune (among many others) suggests is “false or deluded speech about the world and the human being who inhabit it” (28). What is more, because the concept of ideology represents well-worn territory, I want to focus less on what makes ideology “false speech,” and more on what might be “correct” or “right” speech in Marx’s thought. Indeed, it is my claim that despite his allergy to Plato, Marx’s project, or more specifically his rhetorical project, is more Platonic than first appears. Drawing this comparison will then allow me to put forward my conceptualization of Marxist rhetoric as being “empathetic.”

In 1848, Karl Marx, along with Friedrich Engels, published *The Communist Manifesto*, the most well-known call for the “forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions” (Marx and Engels 48). This singular document “deals in turn with the relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between the communists and the proletariat, and between communism and existing socialist doctrines” (Kołakowski 187). For our purposes here, section two of the Manifesto will serve to exemplify Marx’s “empathetic” ends. That is, focusing on the relationship between “the communists and the proletariat” will allow one to detect Marx’s Platonism, which, following our logic here takes the form of an “empathetic dialectic.”

In this section, Marx and Engels describe “communists” in a way that immediately evokes Socrates’ description of those with dialectical knowledge in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. They are described as:

on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly

understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement. (27)

Furthermore, the communists desire the “formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat” (27). To form the proletariat into a class—the driving force behind historical materialism—the communists “point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of nationality,” which means “[i]n the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they [the communists] always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole” (27). Marx and Engels portray the communists, like Socrates himself, as possessing a unique knowledge that allows them to see through ideology/“false speech”, and, as a result, able to lead those without such knowledge to “class-consciousness” or the “immutable.” To phrase it another way, the communists possess the requisite knowledge that allows them to see and express the ways in which capitalist production, in its exploitation of workers, “supply the proletariat with fresh elements of enlightenment and progress” (Marx and Engels 24).

To elaborate, the class-conscious communist draws on two knowledges to bring individuals into contact with the “good” or “just” much like Socrates’ dialectician. First, Marx and Engels note that the communists “have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole” (26). The communist and the proletarian, then, are one and the same. However, though the communist and proletariat are, according to Marx and Engels, indistinguishable, the communists’ understanding and expression of the dialectical progression of history and class conflict separates them from their proletarian comrades. The class-conscious communist “express[es], in general terms, actual relations spring from an existing class struggle,

from a historical movement going on under our every eyes” (Marx and Engels 27). Thus, like the dialectician who uses knowledge of his/her own “character” to choose a “fitting” Other, the communist uses knowledge of his/her relation to capitalist production to choose and form the proletariat. In other words, because both the dialectician and communist possess knowledge of the dialectic that engenders a certain understanding of their own relationship to the “good” (the divine or communism), they have ability to choose and remake others in their own image. Therefore, the communist, like the dialectician, is characterized by “empathy,” or his/her “ability to identify what someone else is thinking or feeling and to respond to their thoughts and feelings with an appropriate emotion” (Baron-Cohen 16). That is, the communist puts to work his/her knowledge of the proletariat and historical materialism in order to “know” what other workers think or feel and respond in a way that brings them into the revolutionary class. As a result, the communist’s knowledge of the conditions of capitalism and class formation gives way to a rhetorical program whereby the communist employs:

the dialectic method and plants and sows in a fitting soul intelligent words which are able to help themselves and him who planted them, which are not fruitless, but yield seed from which there spring up in other minds other words capable of continuing the process forever, and which make their possessor happy, to the farthest limit of human happiness.

(141)

In conclusion, Marx’s rhetoric takes us back to the beginning of this section, as well as Western thought. That is, for Marx, rhetoric operates in the same way that Socrates dialectic in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, which, as I have argued, takes the form of empathetic identification.

**“the ultimate and bitterer conflict will be still to come”**

Sixty-four years after the death of Thomas Jefferson, eighteen years after Marx’s ousting of the anarchists from the First International, and three years after the execution of four Chicago anarchists, Benjamin Tucker, in his seminal 1890 essay, “State Socialism and Anarchism: How Far they Agree, and Wherein they Differ,” describes the evolution of 19th century radical socialist thought and offers a bleak assessment of the relationship between Marxism and anarchism. Originally written for the *North American Review*, one of the most widely read periodicals of the time, Tucker first lays out the commonalities between Marxist/State and anarchist socialism.<sup>6</sup> He posits that “the economic principles of Modern Socialism are a logical deduction from the principle laid down by Adam Smith in the early chapters of his “Wealth of Nations”—namely, that labor is the true measure of price” (“State Socialism” 3). Tucker then delineates between the responses to the labor theory of value, which are represented by the positions of Josiah Warren in America and Joseph-Pierre Proudhon in France with that of Karl Marx in Germany. The philosophies of Warren and Proudhon, which Tucker suggests both point to “the road of Liberty” despite developing independently of each other and on different continents, stand in opposition to Karl Marx’s authoritarian “state socialism.”

In concluding his essay, Tucker borrows from the French journalist and anarchist Ernest Lesigne’s characterization of these two socialisms and presents over forty “crisp antitheses” that spell out the differences between these two political programs. Tucker specifically points to the role of the State as emblematic of their respective philosophies:

The first [Marxism] regards the State as a society sui generis, of an especial essence, the product of a sort of divine right outside of and above all society, with special rights and

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<sup>6</sup> Despite being called one the “ablest” pieces the magazine’s editor had ever read, it was never published.

able to exact special obedience; the second [anarchism] considers the State as an association like any other, generally managed worse than others. (“State Socialism” 16)

According to Tucker, Marxist politics would rely on the implementation of “a régime of Archism fully as despotic as that of the State Socialists themselves” (“State Socialism” 15). These positions, Tucker alleges, “are more diametrically opposed to each other in the fundamental principles of social action and their methods of reaching the ends aimed at than either is to their common enemy, existing society” (“State Socialism” 2). More pointedly, even if these two programs were able to jointly combat and overthrow the existing order, “the ultimate and bitterer conflict will be still to come” (“State Socialism” 3). In short, Tucker locates in the conflict between anarchism and Marxism a conflict more consequential than that between labor and capital.

Tucker’s remarks make apparent that the battle between radical socialisms is a battle between two politics with two very different rhetorical “ends.” When characterizing the telos of each program, Tucker notes, “Both are in pursuit of the great possible welfare for all,” yet “One [Marxism] aims to establish happiness for all, the other [anarchism] to enable each to be happy in his own way” (“State Socialism” 16). That is, on one hand, Marxism seeks dialectical empathy, the result of which will be “a State religion, to the expense of which all must contribute and at the altar of which all must kneel” (“State Socialism” 7). Anarchism, on the other hand, advocates rhetorical sympathy, or “liberty both as end and means” (“State Socialism” 15). To phrase it another way, in place of the State and its supposed embodiment of certain immutable or metaphysical concepts (reason, justice, etc), anarchism proposes a rhetorical ethic called sympathy that allows for individual liberty by to flourish while also staving off the concentration

of power in institutionalized government, as well as the bad sort of anarchy: chaos, violence, and relativism.

Because of its association with political violence resulting from the Haymarket bombing, anarchism as a distinct political category would soon become unrecognizable. That is, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the heirs to the individualist anarchist tradition would “gradually decline into the obscurity of the depression of 1929-1939” (Martin 274). However, as the next two chapters aim to show, the empathetic/sympathetic (dialectic/rhetoric) divide and its persistent entanglement with questions of the State would reappear and find competing partisan homes. Specifically, in opposition to what we might call Jefferson and Tucker’s nonpartisan or pre-partisan anarchism, the next chapters will trace the use of anarchic rhetoric for both leftist and rightist politics. Specifically, the next chapter will show how in his drift away from orthodox Marxism and Trotskyism, the political theorist C.L.R. James enacts anarchic rhetoric, while the last chapter will examine reemergence of anarchic rhetoric in the twenty first century under the Tea Party moniker.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### “BRING[ING] THE UNIVERSAL INTO PLAY IN A POLEMICAL WAY”: ETHOS,

#### AESTHETICS, AND ANARCHISM IN C.L.R. JAMES’ “FIRESIDE CHAT”

“The critical mind must free itself from a Marxism which says that all will be well if only you become a socialist” (Max Horkheimer, *Towards a New Manifesto* 21).

“Politics occurs wherever a community with the capacity to argue and to make metaphors is likely, at any time and through anyone’s intervention, to crop up” (Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement* 60).

In chapter two, we continued our work of explicating anarchic rhetoric by taking up the work and ideas of Benjamin Tucker and his compatriots in order to argue for anarchism’s “sympathetic” end(s). Analyzing the response of the Boston Anarchists to the bombing of police officers at Haymarket Square and the resulting condemnation of anarchism allowed us to connect Adam Smith’s conceptualization of “sympathy” and anarchist politics. The result suggested that anarchic rhetoric seeks the rhetorical alignment of affective responses—the rhetorical construction of “moral sentiments”— can serve as the basis for self-government in place of the State. Extending the argument, we were also able to locate certain strands of Platonic thought in Marx’s historical materialism despite his own ambivalence towards the Greek philosopher. This connection allowed us to construct a foil to “rhetorical sympathy” in the form of “dialectical empathy.” This chapter continues to elaborate on this notion by examining the Marxist C.L.R. James’ response to and remedy for the problems associated with Stalinist-Marxism and the failures of American liberalism in regards to African American politics. In particular, this chapter aims to show that Marxism and liberalism’s desire to represent African Americans and have them identify with the State (Marxist or liberal) was, like our figuration of “dialectical empathy,” simply a ruse to obtain power and opened the door for James’ employment of anarchic rhetoric.



Both the writings and shifting political affiliations of C.L.R. James suggest an oftentimes conflicted relationship with Marxism, which, for our purposes here, hold much import for thinking about the relationship between rhetoric and radical politics. In particular, James came to America as a member of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP), before joining another dissident Trotskyist group called the Workers Party (WP) in 1940, only to rejoin the SWP in 1947. However, in 1951, James would eventually reject Trotskyism all together and go on to form an original “Marxist tendency” with Grace Lee Bogg and Raya Dunayevskaya called Correspondence Publishing Committee. James biographer Paul Buhle suggests that these shifts represent a “philosophical journey,” and that James’ novel approach “told the Old Left what it did not want to hear, and spoke to the rising New Left in a voice that it could not clearly understand” (Introduction xxi). That is, one can see that throughout his writings, James’ recognition that because of its perversion under Stalin, twentieth-century Marxism cannot—and should not—serve as an alternative to liberal capitalism: “The philosophy of Stalinism is the philosophy of the elite, the bureaucracy, the organizers, the leaders, clothed in Marxists terminology. It is the extreme, the historical limit of the rationalism of the bourgeoisie, carefully organized to look like a new revolutionary doctrine” (James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution* 121). On James’ view, the various responses to Stalinism, which included a focus on existentialism and psychoanalysis, were impotent in solving the problems posed by liberal capitalism and Stalinism. The problem facing James and his compatriots was the idea that “There is no longer any purely philosophical answer to all this. These philosophical questions, and very profound they are, Marxism says can be solved only by the revolutionary action of the proletariat and the masses. There is and can be no other answer” (*State Capitalism and World Revolution* 129).

Consequently, there has been much difficulty in trying to pin down James' politics among leftist-oriented academics and activists. For example, James biographer Kent Worcester notes, "James was able to forge a space for his idiosyncratic brand of radical and democratic politics with the context of Pan-African and black nationalist movements" (xiii), while E.P. Thompson suggests that James' work is an "instinctive, unarticulated anarchism" (qtd. in Rosengarten 26). While many are willing to acknowledge his flexible approach to radical politics, his most well-known interpreters have insisted on placing him within the Marxist tradition. Worcester is quick to argue that "James' politics were forged in the crucible of classical Marxism, and in many respects his life and work can only be understood with reference to his lifelong attachment to Marxist principles" (xiii). Regarding the anarchist claim, Paul Buhle posits that "[t]he misapprehension of James' position" as "'syndicalist' or 'anarchist' in its treatment of party and state" is "sincere but mistaken" ("Marxism in the USA" 56). What, then, to make of James' politics? James' political indeterminacy, I argue, can best be understood as a rejection of dialectical/metaphysical Marxism/liberalism in favor of a rhetorical anarchism.

However, as was mentioned in the last chapter, in being labeled a dangerous European phenomenon that espouses violence and dynamite, anarchism's future in America was all but cut off at the legs. Indeed, James Martin notes that after the Haymarket Bombing and the death of Benjamin Tucker, anarchism in American and Europe would seemingly disappear within "*avant garde*...literature, philosophy and art," smaller syndicalist movements, and "small libertarian groups ranging from experimental educators to exponents of social decentralization" (277). Thus, despite nearly disappearing as a distinct political category, as I hope to show in this chapter and the next, anarchism and its strategies of persuasion become appropriated for dueling political purposes. That is, in contradistinction to Jefferson's pre-partisan anarchism and

Tucker's non-partisan anarchism, there is a reemergence of anarchist thought and strategies in leftist American radicalism of the twentieth century, as well as far-right conservatism in the twenty first century. Regarding the former, this chapter argues that CLR James, who, in his drift away from dogmatic Marxism and Trotskyism and distrust of liberal politics, would begin to advocate for a localized, decentralized, and autonomous (i.e. anarchist) African American politics. After all, James observed in the 1956 preface to the second edition of *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, "The great fact of the present organizations is that they suppress and crush what is always required for the building of a new society, the powers and energies of those have to build it" (xxxiii). Whether it is the Marxist or liberal State, or the labor unions working for political reforms on behalf of its members, "the bigger the traditional organizations grow and the more power they wield, the more they act as a brake upon these creative energies" ("Preface" xxxiii). In response to the failure of liberal and Communist statism and to foster the "construction of a new society from the bottom up ("Preface" xxxiv), James enacted an anarchic rhetoric that, like in our previous chapters, demonstrates the anarchistic/an-arkhê-istic qualities of decentralized, localized, and affective rhetorical acts. It is important to note, however, that while James confirms much of the work done in preceding chapters, he also extends our figuration by emphasizing anarchic rhetoric's presupposition of absolute equality, demonstrating the power of anger within the sympathetic process, challenging traditional conceptualizations of ethos, as well as privileging the role of aesthetics in creating/judging anarchistic/an-arkhê-istic arguments.

To that end, I first trace a brief history of James' engagement with American politics, before moving into a discussion of his "My Friends': A Fireside Chat on the War by Native Son."

### **C.L.R. James Comes to America**

In 1932, upon moving to Britain from his native Trinidad, James made a name for himself as a sports reporter, creative writer, and political thinker. After the success of his political writings, notably his *World Revolution 1917-1936* and *The Black Jacobins*, James found himself in high demand. In late 1938, at the request of Leon Trotsky, James left Britain for the US “to contribute to the work of the newly formed Socialist Workers Party” (LeBlanc 4), the organization representing Trotsky’s views in America. According to his friend and collaborator Grace Lee Boggs, James arrived in the US eager to engage in political activism, which included taking up the “negro question” with Trotsky, an issue that had increasingly come to the fore within American radical politics. She notes that upon landing in the US, James “had already studied and internalized the most important achievements of European civilization. But as a black man, a colonial, and a Marxist, he also knew that European barbarism had not just begun with Hitler” (Boggs 165).

With this knowledge, and soon after landing in the US, James began meeting with workers, writers, and activists to discuss revolutionary politics. James first took up residence in Harlem where he socialized with many radical New York writers and activists. During his stay in Harlem, James met Richard Wright, and, despite their initial disagreements—James was a Trotskyist and Wright a Stalinist—they would go on to become friends. In fact, as will be discussed below, James located in Wright’s novel *Native Son* a figure through which he would develop his vision of radical socialism. James then embarked on a speaking tour in early 1939, which included a public debate concerning “pacifism” and “socialist revolution” with Bertrand Russell; according to McLemee, “[B]y a vote of audience, James won the debate” (xiii). These experiences began to solidify James’ role within American radical politics, as well as offer him a

glimpse into the American political, economic, and social scene that would greatly shape his own unique brand of revolutionary socialism.

As suggested above, James' American sojourn also solidified his reputation as an effective orator and polemicist with an uncanny ability to synthesize a variety of authors in his critiques of capitalism, racism, and dogmatic Marxism. In his first encounter with James, Martin Glaberman describes being "entranced by this tall (six foot, four inch) dark man who kept an audience in his grasp for three hours speaking about the British Empire, striding back and forth across the stage without a podium, without a note. I thought then, and I think now, that he was of the great orators of the twentieth century" ("C.L.R. James: A Recollection" 47). Charles Van Gelderen seconds Glaberman's observation when he writes:

James was probably the finest orator our movement has produced, at least in the English-speaking world, and the movement made full use of his talents. In Britain he was the one person feared by the Stalinists as being more than a match for people such as Communist party leaders Harry Pollitt and R. Palme Dutt. Only once did the Communist party pluck up enough courage to engage him debate. In the Islington Library on Holloway Road he devastated the CP spokesperson Pat Sloan, himself no orator. (43)

Apart from being a highly renowned lecturer and orator, James' rhetorical talents found him to be a leading propagandist for revolutionary socialism in America. McLemee notes James' "abundant journalistic output included a fair quantity of what might be called 'revolutionary boilerplate': newspaper columns denouncing racism, capitalist hypocrisy, and the misleaders of the African American community" (xxxix).

Although James' work has been taken-up within cultural and literary studies and political science, his work remains neglected within rhetorical studies despite his rhetorical prowess and

importance as a radical political thinker. However, as I hope will become clear, his “revolutionary boilerplate” offers a rich body of texts for rhetoricians interested in the intersections of race, rhetoric, and radical politics, and, more specifically, strategies of persuasion that run counter to liberal and Marxist thought.

### **Marxism and African American Autonomy**

The impetus behind James’ tackling of the “negro question” was the position of African Americans in regards to liberal and Marxist politics. That is, while Jim Crow prevented full political and economic participation by African Americans, the Stalinist Communist Party, the most prominent alternative to liberalism, did no better. According to James, the Communist Party (CP) had:

passed through three stages in its Negro work: (a) up to 1928 when the Negro work was neglected, (b) 1929-1935 when it made a drive, the period which coincided with the period of [denouncing all other left currents as] social fascism, and (c) 1935-1939, the open abandonment of the revolutionary line by the C.P. and the catastrophic loss of nearly all its Negro membership. (“The Communist Party’s Zigzags” 116)

In other words, before promoting the idea of a Popular Front against the rise of fascism, a move that largely stifled any revolutionary tendencies outside of the CP and resulted in left-leaning coalition governments in France and Spain, the CP called for “self-determination” and the establishment of a “Negro Soviet Republic” within the “Black Belt” South. According to Cedric Robinson, the policy of “self-determination” advocated by the CP at the behest of Stalin was “political opportunism searching for theoretical justifications” (226). In other words, the CP’s call for “self-determination,” which was undergirded by historical materialism, was simply a tactic to strengthen the CP’s influence in America in order to seize power. Thus, when it did take

up the “negro question,” the CP in America, under the direction of Stalin and the Third International and in accordance with Marxist theory, presented two answers, both of which involved adhering to the State form.

However, from 1928 to 1938, the Trotskyites, with whom James had aligned himself, “took even less interest in the Negro question than did the Communist Party” (James, “Historical Development” 74). In fact, in 1933, Trotsky himself did not agree with the stance his own organization had taken (McLemee xix). Whereas the SWP was advocating for the “liberal” idea of equal rights, Trotsky thought self-determination the more radical idea, although he refused to take a hard stance. What he did do was call for “a serious discussion of this question, perhaps in an internal bulletin” (“The Negro Question”).

Trotsky and the SWP would soon be brought in-line thanks to James. In April of 1939, James traveled to Mexico to meet Trotsky and discuss the relationship between African Americans and Marxism. As McLemee notes, James wrote two resolutions concerning African Americans and the radical socialist movement that were accepted by the national convention of the Socialist Workers Party. The resolutions were not a call for a “separate black state,” but “affirm[ed] the right of the African American people to national self-determination, if they so chose, in the course of the revolutionary process” (xxii). Thus, the Trotskyist position on the “negro question” was the result of James’ work and discussions with Trotsky.

In choosing to “affirm” and support rather than dictate and “lead” the actions of African Americans, James had developed a position, which despite its mundane appearance, stood in direct opposition to the CP’s stance. The CP had turned the “negro question” into a “national question,” and therefore stressed the necessity of forming an African American state in the South. Perhaps Jay Lovestone, leader of the Communist Party in the USA, best captured the

party's stance: "The especially intense exploitation and heavy oppression to which millions of Negroes in America are subject make it imperative for the Party to devote its best energies and its maximum resources toward becoming the recognized leaders and champions of the Negroes as an oppressed people" (674-675). This view, according to James was "(1) economically reactionary and (2) politically false because no Negroes (except C.P. stooges) want it. For Negroes it is merely an inverted segregation" ("Preliminary Notes" 8). The idea that an organization would work to establish a State without having the assent or involvement of those who would occupy the State amounts simply to "they want to get rid of us" ("Note Following the Discussions" 15-16). Because the formation of a State was unwanted among the African American population, the idea represented a Communist Party dictate designed to seize power at the expense of the wants of African Americans.

According to James, there was a certain irony in the way African Americans had been treated by radical socialist groups; their action suggested they were the most revolutionary of all populations. Citing the influences of both Black churches and Marcus Garvey, James argues:

The success of the Garvey movement, the Divine Movement, and the millions of dollars poor Negroes pour annually into the churches out of their almost empty purses, all these are evidence of their fanatical devotion and capacity for self-sacrifice. And the revolutionary energy, the readiness to give all which distinguished the Garvey movement in particular, in return for nothing tangible but the promise of a new society, show that here, in contradistinction to the great movements of organized workers for wages, closed shops, etc., we have perhaps the most important manifestation in American capitalist society of one most powerful current in the coming socialist revolution. ("Notes Following the Discussions with Leon Trotsky" 16)



James recognized that the difficulty lay in reaching and organizing the African American populations. Recognizing the CP's mistakes, as well as the revolutionary potential of African Americans, James would begin to advocate for a rhetorical agenda that emphasized local, decentralized, and anti-vanguardist politics. Moreover, if, as Joel Olson suggests, anarchism has by and large paid little attention to issues of race and politics, and James' program is "clearly consistent with anarchist politics" (41), James might be thought of as the first anarchist thinker to seriously tackle this question.

### **"My Friends" and "Anarchic Rhetoric"**

As one of the most prominent and active members within the Trotskyist movement and the Left Opposition, James took up the "negro question" in his writings for such publications as *Socialist Appeal*, *Labor Action*, and *The Militant*, which included tackling the question in a variety of genres. Although James often found himself writing for an "audience of Marxist party cadre," James' journalistic writings were aimed at a wider audience and often provided detailed accounts of the conditions of African American workers, reviews of popular books and films, and analyses of African American figures and historical events. Regarding his journalistic writing, James' output was remarkable: "There are scores, possibly hundreds, of these pieces" (McLemee xxxi). Yet, James' use of pseudonyms prevents us from knowing exactly which pieces James composed. However, in addition to his theoretical and journalistic writings, James often penned revolutionary socialist propaganda not restricted to "Marxist party cadre" or periodical subscribers. James' 1940 text "My Friends': A Fireside Chat on the War by Native Son" falls into this latter category. Indeed, McLemee suggests "My Friends" is "a very different sort of text altogether. Printed by the thousands and distributed as widely as possible, the pamphlet is an example of James as revolutionary propagandist" (xxxix). Kent Worcester's

description of “My Friends” also points to its enigmatic character. Worcester suggests the piece is a “bibliophile’s prize.” Yet, he also characterizes it as a “fierce polemic” and “passionate but odd and strangely disingenuous” (68). While Worcester does not elaborate on his claim, his claim suggests that “My Friends” stands apart from the numerous other writings aimed at activists and intellectuals familiar with Marxist theory. James’ “My Friends: A Fireside Chat on the War by Native Son,” allows one to see how James writes, not as a Marxist theorist, but as a propagandist aimed at fostering a decentralized, autonomous, and self-determined African American (i.e. anarchist) political movement.

Recalling the name of Richard Wright’s novel of the same name, which was published months before “My Friends,” James writes under the pseudonym “Native Son,” while also ironically (re)employing the rhetorical strategies taken by President Roosevelt and the Allies during the run-up to WWII, to argue that Roosevelt “should stop being so active in his defense of democracy abroad and pay attention to the crimes against democracy at home” (“Fireside Chat” 20). For instance, James begins the text with Claude McKay’s poem “If We Must Die,” which Winston Churchill had recited in front of the American Congress to garner support for the fight against the Nazis. Furthermore, James parodies both the form and content of Roosevelt’s “fireside chat” throughout the text. James opens the piece by sarcastically pointing-up Roosevelt’s reliance on rational deliberation: “But in order to make you feel like you will be getting the real inside dope in a confidential manner, I shall begin by saying: ‘My friends, let us sit down, you and I, and talk this thing over together.’ That piece of baloney being out of the way, we can now get down to business” (18). The “business” James is alluding to is the “business” of achieving political and social change in spite of the State. By explicitly foregrounding his ironic appropriation of the “fireside chat,” writing as opponent to Stalin, and

arguing against Roosevelt's liberalism, James presents a rhetoric that is motivated by "political affect," equates rhetorical action with absolute equality, and challenges traditional conceptualizations of ethos.

That is, as an astute observer of America culture and politics, James recognized the limitations of American liberalism and Stalinist Marxism as political and rhetorical programs. Particularly, James suggests that both American liberalism and Marxism have only pandered to African Americans, despite their revolutionary potential. In his follow-up notes to his meeting with Trotsky, James makes clear his estimation of the Communist Party's reception among African Americans. He writes, "The C.P. [Communist Party] Negroes are looked upon as touts for Negro converts in exactly the same way as the Democratic and Republican Parties have touts for Negro votes" ("Preliminary Notes" 8). In other words, the desire to bring African Americans into the political process only serves the end of taking power. Both liberalism and Marxism seek to gain power while "representing" the views of African Americans. Marxism and liberalism seek to use African Americans as a means rather than as ends in and of themselves. For James, the goal is not simply to be included in politics by consenting to representation by a governing body or institution, but to create a revolutionary course that challenges the liberal and Marxist programs that insist on representation based on metaphysical principles in order to gain the powers of the State.

James argues against this tendency, and suggests that Roosevelt's liberalism and Stalin's communism masks the condition of absolute equality qua the ability to act rhetorically. More specifically, by appealing to immutable concepts, both liberalism and Stalin's communism seek to put subjects in their "rightful places" and preclude rhetorical engagement by African Americans. What I mean by rhetoric is the ability of a rhetor to raise an argument that challenges

the grounds or *arkhê* on which a political arrangement rests. In making this claim, I am using the work Jacques Rancière, who although does not employ an explicitly rhetorical vocabulary, provides an original and useful way to think through the connection between anarchism, rhetoric and politics.<sup>1</sup> To that end, it is necessary to revisit and provide a brief summary of Rancière's thinking before moving into a discussion of "My Friends."

In Rancière's terms, "dissensus" counters the processes of "consensus" implemented by the "police" in order to recognize the logic of an *arkhê*. "The police," Rancière tells us, "is a distribution of the sensible (*partage du sensible*) whose principle is the absence of void and of supplement" ("Ten Theses on Politics" 36).<sup>2</sup> Echoing Foucault, he suggests:

The police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and way of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and the another as noise. (*Disagreement* 29)

Rancière finds in Plato's *Republic* the first instance of such "partitioning." Rancière calls the result of Plato's "partitioning of the sensible" an "etho-logy" ("Ten Theses on Politics" 41). Because Plato seeks the "complete realization of the *arkhê* of community," all individuals are to occupy certain roles that correspond to their particular knowledge(s), which, consequently,

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<sup>1</sup> With a few exceptions, Rancière's connection to rhetorical theory has yet to be explored in detail. Samuel McCormick, for instance, picked up on Rancière for his reading of Bertolt Brecht's "Mr. Kuener" and the "political identity of the philosopher." Also, Ethan Stoneman recently argued that "Rancière's political theory implies an aesthetic model of rhetorical indecorum of which rhetoricians may avail themselves in order to rethink the relationship between rhetorical performance and political praxis" (131). See McCormick and Stoneman.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Corcoran tells us that Rancière plays on the "double meaning of [the French] *avoir-part*," which means to both "partake" and "partition." That is, the "*partage du sensible*" both determines actions and creates distinctions between groups/individuals. See "translator's note" on page 220 in Rancière's *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*.

ensures the smooth functioning of the polis (*Disagreement* 65). Furthermore, it is Rancière's claim that since Plato, all "political philosophy lies in grounding political action in a specific mode of being," and "works essentially to mask the litigiousness constitutive of politics" ("Ten Theses" 40). As a result of the ontological connection between knowledge and position, the ability of a subject to dissent and present arguments that challenge the arkhê that "partitions the sensible" is null and void.

In his own fireside chat, James critiques Roosevelt's "etho-logy" and its exclusion of rhetoric. In particular, James draws out his critique by pointing up that Roosevelt's desire to speak for all and enter the war is reliant upon individuals consenting to a metaphysical arkhê that suggests certain individuals are to perform certain roles that correspond to the certain knowledge they possess. As James ironically points out, "I notice that a good fireside chat always has something in it about God and prayers. But I notice too that Hitler in all his speeches talks about God and asks for his blessing" ("Fireside Chat" 21). In this passage, James makes the case that by appealing to God, Roosevelt's position as commander-in-chief is substantiated not by the US Constitution, but the arkhê of Christianity. On James' reading, Roosevelt effectively masks the political by adopting the seemingly non-political form of "the fireside chat" and endowing with it appeals to the Almighty instead of the Constitution. Yet, in suggesting that Hitler's position is also sanctified by God, James calls into question this arkhê, as well as the imperative to assent to it. The appeal to such an arkhê becomes, then, simply an effort to stave off dissent and arguments that challenge the validity of the State. It is simply a justification for the exercising of power. James writes, "Roosevelt, Hitler and [President] Wilson not only pray to God, but see to it that they have guns, battleships, and planes" (21-22).

To undermine the reign of the arkhê and resulting “etho-logy,” one must exercise his/her absolute equality by acting rhetorically. In response to impending war and the Popular Front, James writes, “In this moment of crisis, it is proper that the voice of the working man should be heard. The President governs for all, the priests pray for all, the soldier fights for all (so, at any rate, we are told) but it is the working man who pays for all” (18). James point out that the President, despite his claim of embodying metaphysical figurations of the “good,” “just,” or “right,” cannot meet his own expectation: creating an all-encompassing system, logic, or arkhê that avoids crisis or dissension. Specifically, exercising one’s absolute equality by acting rhetorically upsets the reign of “archi-politics.” As Rancière writes, “The problem is not the always more but the *anyone at all*, the sudden revelation of the ultimate anarchy on which hierarchy rests” (emphasis in original, *Hatred of Democracy* 16). Confirming Plato’s suspicion, James’ rhetorical response seeks to question the metaphysical arkhê on which Roosevelt’s liberalism rests. Any attempt to speak for “all” can be undercut through rhetorical action. That is, “when the president talks about preparing America for war I demand my right to be heard” (James, “My Friends” 18). In short, any claim to political representation based on metaphysical concepts attempts to preclude rhetoric, the “litigiousness constitutive of politics.” The ability of rhetoric to question politics based on a metaphysical arkhê is an-arkhê-istic. It attempts to make the arkhê account for itself. In doing so, such a rhetoric performs the very function that Emma Goldman assigns to political anarchism: “Anarchism urges man to think, to investigate, to analyze every proposition” (50). James’ anarchism, then, can be thought of as a rhetorical response to a claim of representation based on a metaphysical arkhê, which invites an interrogation of the very premises on which the claim to representation relies. In other words, James enacts critique, which, as Wendy Brown writes, “[P]assionately reengages the text,

rereads and reconsiders the text's truth claim. In so doing, critique reasserts the importance of the text under consideration (whether a law, nation, principle, practice, or treatise), its power to organize and contain us, its right to govern us" (16). This interrogation reveals the rhetorically constructed nature of the metaphysical *arkhê* on which politics, whether liberal or Marxist, appear to rest.

Moreover, what I call James' anarchic rhetoric presupposes Rancière's absolute equality; one always has the ability to speak for oneself. James argues, "So that when the President talks about preparing America for war I demand to be heard. I know how to make a fireside chat. You are all sitting down listening to me and I am sitting down talking to you. You know it, I know it, everybody knows it" ("My Friends" 18). The "it" everyone possesses is the ability to act rhetorically in order to make a counter-fireside chat. This argument suggests that despite claims to the contrary, there is no ontological connection between the knowledge one has and the position he/she occupies. To act rhetorically, that is, to construct and present arguments that undermine what one might call Roosevelt's metaphysical politics, means one has the ability to create and occupy new spaces and subjectivities.

Painted in such a way, a picture of the connection between anarchist politics and rhetorical practice begins to emerge; it is anarchistic to be rhetorical. Or, in other words, rhetoric has the ability to call into question the *arkhê* on which political arrangements rest, which confirms Brian Garsten's observation that "the reigning view of rhetorical speech is that it is a disruptive force in politics and a threat to democratic deliberation" (3). Indeed, Rancière's own definition of politics relies on this calling-into-question the legitimacy of the *arkhê*. He argues, "Politics occurs wherever a community with the capacity to argue and to make metaphors is likely, at any time and through anyone's intervention, to crop up" (*Disagreement* 60). This

response to and rejection of a metaphysical *arkhê*, or what I call James' anarchic rhetoric, presents several implications still to be parsed. In what follows, I explore the relationship between anarchic rhetoric and judgment, as well as its relationship to the classical appeal of *ethos*.

### **Affect and Judgment**

Despite his ambivalence towards the Communist Party in 1939, James recognized the need for thinking through the "negro problem." James suggested that the SWP "must give its frank, sincere, and unwavering support" in "the awakening and bringing into political activity of the large mass of Negroes" ("Preliminary Notes" 11). Yet, the support must be unconditional; *"it must be insisted upon that support of a Negro mass movement must not be conditional upon whether it is or soon will be socialist or not"* (emphasis in original, "Preliminary Notes" 11). More pointedly, "The Negro much be won for socialism. There is no other way out for him in America or elsewhere. But he must be won on the basis of his own experience and activity" (James, "Preliminary Notes" 8). If there was to be an African American political movement it would have to develop autonomously with a minimum of outside influence. Because of the failures of both American liberalism and Soviet Communism, the only viable option was a self-determined political program.

To help foment political engagement among African Americans, James proposed that the Trotskyist Fourth International form a "section entirely devoted to the Negro question." This section should "embark on an unremitting study of the Negro question, and immediately make arrangements for the publications of articles." The section should also reach out to the active "Negro organizations in Harlem and elsewhere" ("Preliminary Notes" 12-13). The goal was to develop and compose a rhetorical program aimed at those African Americans active in the



NAACP, the Urban League, and other groups that were “reformist” and not seen to be radical. The program would “fight for the party’s ideas in a manner carefully adapted to their hearers’ point of view” (“Preliminary Notes” 13). By reaching out to these groups and appealing to their particular demands, “the transition to revolutionary socialism will not ultimately be difficult” (“Preliminary Notes” 11). James argued that the Fourth International could correct the mistakes made by the Stalinist Communist Party and play a role in the development of an African American movement by aiding instead of dictating. He concludes, “What the party must avoid at all costs is looking upon such a movement as a recruiting ground for party members, something to be ‘captured’ or manipulated for the aims of the party, or something which it supports spasmodically at the time it needs something in return” (“Preliminary Notes” 9). Thus, the challenge for James was constructing a rhetoric that avoided appearing vanguardist or prescriptive, yet assisted in fomenting a radical political movement.

A quick note of clarification is needed before proceeding. While the next few paragraphs echo our earlier discussion of the rhetorical construction of shared “moral sentiments” (“sympathy”), I want to offer here an example of how the sympathetic process coalesces around the particular affect of anger, which Simon Critchley suggests is that which “moves the subject to action” (130). In other words, I want to draw attention to the role of anger in motivating anarchic rhetoric—an idea that will also be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

For James, the response to Roosevelt stems from a seemingly axiomatic and affective judgment. That is, when Roosevelt claims that the moral act is joining in the fight against Hitler in order to protect American democracy, James responds, “Our democracy! My friends, when I heard that I laughed for ten minutes. Yes. Laughed. I’ll tell you why. It was because I was so damned mad that if I didn’t laugh I would have broken the radio.” James further argues, “I have

no democracy and the democracy I haven't got Hitler didn't take from me" (19). Describing the enemies of democracy in the US, which include President Roosevelt and the entire Democratic Party, as well as the American Federation of Labor and those "Negro-hating, Negro-baiting little American Hitlers from the South," James argues "[t]hey have been lynching me and my people, giving us the dirtiest job, at the lowest pay, Jim Crowing us, taking the taxes we pay to teach while children, treating us worse than they treat their dogs" (19-20). The judgment stemming from this crisis is not an evaluation of how well a claim corresponds to a transcendent conception of the "good" or "just" (Rorty xvii). Rather, the judgment is a self-evident and affective response to a certain political and social situation that challenges the "correspondence" notion of judgment. Describing this notion, James writes:

My friends, the President warns us about the fifth column. I understand that this is the new name for the enemies of democracy. Where have the President's eyes been all this time? If he wants to find out who these fifth column people are, he just has to ask the Negroes. We know them. We spend our lives fighting against them. ("My Friends" 20)

Anarchic rhetoric, then, does not seek validation in aligning a claim or course of action to a metaphysical figuration. It instead echoes John Protevi's concept of political affect, which he describes as "the historically and socially embedded aspect of affective cognition" (35). Affective cognition is described as the ability of a body to be affected and make sense of that affection in order to develop a course of action (Protevi 51). If a claim of representation creates a sense of anger or wrong, one is motivated to exercise his/her absolute equality by acting rhetorically. In doing so, it "exposes the embodied and imitative nature of the political animal, its condition of political affect—that is, precisely that which disrupts the transcendent vision of the intellect" (Protevi 71). Against appeals to reason and/or rationality that seek to tame one's

affective response in order to maintain order, and against Spinoza-influenced post-Marxist/Autonomist theories that center on affect's "constitutive power,"<sup>3</sup> anarchic rhetoric recognizes the potential affect in general and anger in particular has in effecting radical political change by vetoing the very distinctions between "right" and "wrong" judgment. One might say, then, that rather than constitute an antagonism between two classes/groups within a static world, such a figuration of affect reveals the gap between two sensory worlds by making "visible that which had no reason to be seen; it places one world in another" (Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics" 38).

### **Anarchy and Ethos**

Scholars of rhetoric will find that James' rhetoric, when read through Rancière's notion of "etho-logy" challenges rhetorical understandings of the ethical appeal, as well as reveals its aesthetic dimension. Risa Applegarth provides a useful definition of ethos when she writes:

As simultaneously a spatial and social concept, ethos is a situated practice, neither fully and freely chosen nor yet thoroughly determined, but shaped through the interaction between individual rhetors and the social and material environments within which they speak. (49)

For James, this definition of ethos is exactly the problem; the dialectic between a rhetor and the social/spatial, which is seen as the space in which a rhetor exercises his/her agency, is simply the dominant power's *acceptable* process of invention. One can only "be" and "say" that which is permitted by his/her lot. As a result, within an "etho-logy" a rhetor's ability to challenge the very

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<sup>3</sup> The State, according to Antonio Negri, is a limit of desire, and can only be "overcome...to the extent to which we express love rather than hatred or other negative passions." See Negri 170

terms of the argument is effectively preempted. The problem is not that only this or that is “sayable,” but that whatever is said remains ineffectual.

Against the spatial-social figuration of ethos described above, anarchic rhetoric allows for the construction of subjectivities that, although unrecognizable under the reign of an “etho-logy,” exist nonetheless. Rancière calls this process “subjectification” and is the “action of subjects who by working the interval between identities, reconfigure the distributions of the public and the private, the universal and the particular” (*Hatred of Democracy* 61-62). That is, subjectification “constantly bring[s] the universal into play in a polemical way” (*Hatred of Democracy* 62). This process means one is able to observe more and different means of persuasion than those admitted under an “etho-logy.” To be specific, it allows for a wider body of ethical topoi from which a rhetor can draw, including those means that were once thought illegitimate or invalid. Thus, anarchic rhetoric readily opens up new rhetorical, ethical, and political possibilities, including using those that were formerly used as a weapon in the forming of an “etho-logy.” In short, anarchic rhetoric takes as its goal the upsetting of traditional figurations of ethos, which, in turn, opens up the available means of persuasion to both construct new spaces and subjectivities.

By writing under the pseudonym “Native Son” and evoking the “fireside chat,” James violates the racial and political order of early-to-mid-twentieth century America. Scott McLemee suggests “My Friends” is a “fiction of a black sharecropper taking President Roosevelt’s place at the microphone” (xxxix). The setting is a living room replete with presidential amenities: newspapers, a radio, a fireplace, and literature. However, the pseudonym “Native Son,” which evokes Richard Wright’s character Bigger Thomas, as well as Bigger’s murder of a white woman to prevent rape allegations, creates a Burkean “perspective by incongruity:” a black sharecropper occupying the White House.

The figure of Bigger Thomas is an important one for James. A month before “My Friends” was published, James published “On *Native Son* by Richard Wright” in *Labor Action*. In this piece, James takes up the question: “Is Bigger ‘typical?’” The answer foreshadows Rancière’s notion of “etho-logy” and James’ anarchic rhetoric. He writes, “What is a ‘typical’ Negro? ‘Typical’ of what? In capitalist society at the present time, no ‘typical’ Negro could express the point of view that Wright wished to portray. Bigger Thomas represents the Negro in revolt” (56). Under 1940s capitalist logic, certain actions, rhetorics, and subjectivities were allowed and/or forbidden. However, according to James, because Bigger’s actions are not “typical” or correspond to the logic of an *arkhê*, they violate the accepted understanding of ontology, politics, epistemology, and rhetoric. Indeed, Bigger “does not quote Marx and say, ‘Workers of the world unite,’ or, ‘Black and white, unite and fight.’ He does not even know what the ‘Reds’ stand for. But he is a revolutionary nevertheless, instinctive but none the less powerful” (56-57). In other words, although Bigger lacks an understanding of revolutionary Marxism, his knowledge, which lacks the requisite correspondence to an abstract and metaphysical category, is revolutionary nonetheless. In describing Bigger Thomas in such a way, and drawing on this image in “My Friends,” James asks the 1940’s reader to consider a new subjectivity, that of Bigger Thomas, a black man who does not fit within the liberal American or revolutionary Marxist schema, occupying the White House.

Cast in this way, James’ take on Bigger seems to violate the notion of “typicality” put forth by Georg Lukács.<sup>4</sup> Instead, James seems to argue for the sort of art that Lukács derides: “If a work of art depicted only the overflowing abundance of new concepts, only those aspects

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<sup>4</sup> Lukács argues, “The work of art must therefore reflect correctly and in proper proportion all important factors objectively determining the area of life it represents. It must so reflect these that this area of life becomes comprehensible from within and from without, re-experiencable, that it appears as a totality of life” (38)

which provide new insights...then the reader would merely be confused instead of involved” because “the appearance of such aspects in life generally confuses people and leaves them at a loss” (39). As already stated, James here employs what Kenneth Burke calls “perspective by incongruity,” which Burke describes as the intermediate stage in the creation of “new meanings” that involves the “rending and tearing” of formerly held “orientations” (69).

Through this “perspective by incongruity,” whereby James asks the audience to consider a subjectivity that violates the logic undergirding political and rhetorical engagement, the connection between rhetorical action and political anarchism becomes explicit. James argues that because anyone can act rhetorically, there is no connection between the knowledge one has and the position they occupy; anyone can occupy the White House and offer a fireside chat. Moreover, the figure of the White House, which was once used to suppress dissent, is now the site of dissension; the tool of the oppressor becomes the tool of the oppressed. As a result of anyone and everyone having the ability to act rhetorically, which allows for the construction of an-arkhê-istic subjectivities, it invalidates the ontological connection between knowledge and position and consequently points to the irrelevance of the White House and government as a whole. If anyone and everyone can govern, then no one need govern; government is simply unneeded in so far as government is epitomized by the State.

The summoning of Bigger Thomas in James’ text also points to the aesthetic dimension of politics and rhetoric. In line with Rancière’s thought, James blurs the line between rhetoric and aesthetics. “Subjectification,” or the process of creating an an-arkhê-istic/anarchistic political subjectivity, is an aesthetic process: “politics is aesthetic in principle” (*Disagreement* 58). More specifically, Rancière writes, “Political invention operates in acts that are at once argumentative and poetic” (*Disagreement* 59). By evoking the figure of “Native Son” and creating the

“perspective by incongruity” mentioned above, James makes the implicit argument that a radical politics demands a corresponding aesthetic and that the aesthetic is always political. That is, one reads in James’ text an aestheticized rhetoric that collapses the division between rhetoric/poetics or rhetoric/aesthetics. Further, the figure of “Native Son” suggests James’ discontent with both Roosevelt’s liberalism and Marxism. While “Native Son” explicitly takes issue with Roosevelt’s liberal policies, James’ characterization of Bigger Thomas as unaware of Marxism and revolutionary socialism suggests that James’ own malcontent with Stalinist Marxism and CP politics are coalesced in the figure of “Native Son.” Without an awareness of or acceptance by the Communist Party, James’ “Native Son” suggests that the only way forward is to create one’s own politics. Indeed, James’ anarchic rhetoric seems to resonate with Max Horkheimer’s suggestion, which also serves as the epigraph of this chapter, “The critical mind must free itself from a Marxism which says that all will be well if only you become a socialist” (21).

**“an entirely new comprehension of the meaning of socialist politics”**

Already a well-known figure and writer within radical circles and Trotsky’s Left Opposition, James’ time in America proved to be a formative experience both for him and his approach to radical politics. Throughout his extended stay in the U.S., which ended in imprisonment and deportation by the U.S. Government, James began to develop his wholly original approach to revolutionary politics. James himself suggested that his years in the U.S. were “the most important years of my life, intellectually and personally” (qtd. in McLemee xiv). Worcester argues, “It is indisputable that the United States offered James a set of relationships and challenges that stimulated some of his best writing while it also opened him up to an entirely new comprehension of the meaning of socialist politics” (“James and the American Century” 177). In short, because of his engagement with the American scene, James’ political writings can

be seen as his effort to translate and transform European socialism and Marxism into an American political program. In other words, when James wrote that “[t]here is no longer any purely philosophical answer to” the problems of Marxism and liberalism, and that these problems “can be solved only by the revolutionary action of the proletariat and the masses” (*State Capitalism and World Revolution* 129); James provided an alternative in the form of anarchic rhetoric.

What’s more, James’ rhetoric, anticipating certain strands of poststructuralist thought, lays bare the stifling effects and consequences of metaphysical politics, be it Marxist vanguardism informed by dialectics, or liberalism and its assumption of rationality within dialectical exchange. In addition, James foreshadows Rancière in arguing that the arkhê borne of metaphysical/dialectical politics masks absolute equality, as well as Rancière’s aestheticization of politics. Finally, James points up the way in which anger can motivate—via the sympathetic process—the disruption of the political status quo. As such, James also sets the stage for its appropriation by twenty-first century conservatives, which we will explore in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### WHAT'S LEFT OF THE RIGHT AND RIGHT WITH THE LEFT?: FINDING THE FUTURE OF CRITICAL THEORY IN THE END(S) OF RADICAL POLITICS

“We have corruption unlike anything we’ve ever seen. We have socialism and communism. I read a Web site today from — I think it was the Communist Party USA — they’re taking credit for a lot of the victories recently in the elections here in the last week. I mean, did you even know these guys were around anymore? They’re rearing their ugly heads, revolutionaries and anarchists” (Glenn Beck, “The Enemies of America Are Hard at Work”).

“When in doubt, in American politics, left, right, or center, deploy the Founding Fathers” (Jill Lepore, *The Whites of Their Eyes* 14).

“The historian’s ancestry goes back to Socrates.” (Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 91).

The last chapter demonstrated how C.L.R. James in his drift away from dogmatic Marxism and Trotskyism enacted anarchic rhetoric from a leftist position. That is, in response to the failures of both liberalism and Marxism, James began to question the role of both the liberal and Marxist State and their ability to create, manage, and/or protect an equitable political arrangement, and, as a result, enacted anarchic rhetoric to advocate for a localized, decentralized, and autonomous (i.e. anarchist) African American politics. As we have seen throughout the last few chapters, such a rhetoric is both anarchistic and an-arkhê-istic because it presupposes absolute equality; aims for the aligning of rhetorically constructed “moral sentiments” (sympathy); questions traditional conceptualizations of ethos; blurs the boundary between rhetoric and aesthetics; and seeks the dynamic non-teleological exchange of ideas and arguments.

While this dissertation has traced the genealogy of anarchic rhetoric as a series of strategies running parallel to the more “traditional” varieties of American leftism, this chapter presents a rather peculiar situation by suggesting that the best example of anarchic rhetoric today

has taken shape under the Tea Party movement associated with America's radical conservatism. In other words, as in the epigraph above, when Glenn Beck asks his audience if they are aware that “anarchists” are “still around,” this essay answers: “Yes, Glenn. And you are one of them.” In making such an accusation, my aim here is to argue that instead of placing its faith in the more “traditional” liberal, socialist, or Marxist politics, which includes the once ubiquitous Occupy Wall Street movement, a reevaluation of the rhetorical strategies of today’s far-right conservatism might better serve today’s Left as it looks for a new ways to intervene in the social, political, and economic inequities that mark the world today. Or, perhaps more pointedly, applying our model of anarchic rhetoric to the Tea Party will demonstrate the elasticity of anarchic rhetoric, which, I hope, will also ask us to reconsider our political categories and practices by pointing out that the deeply engrained rejection of representative thinking (dialectics) and politics (liberalism, Marxism, socialism) present in American radicalism is an attitude that begins to blur the contemporary boundaries between “right” and “left.” To be clear, those on the Left, or those who are simply concerned with today’s inequities, would do well to recognize that there exists a body of rhetorical topoi—*anarchic rhetoric*—that not only has done much to intervene in these areas of human life, but also redirects our attention back to the legacy of critical theory, by challenging the teleology stemming from the metaphysics undergirding our political arrangements and institutions. Instead of emphasizing reason over the affective, empathy over sympathy, the dialectical over the rhetorical, the teleological over the open-ended, in order to wrest away power from another group, those who desire a just, participatory, and egalitarian should, I suggest, recognize that anarchic rhetoric gives individuals the tools needed to determine their own ends, their own *telos*. In doing so, such a project evokes an all but forgotten (and/or maligned) political tradition: anarchism.

Taking up anarchism, then, means doing what the radical anarchist “ex-worker collective” CrimethInc, who implicitly express both the connection of rhetoric to anarchist politics and the importance of such a connection, suggest is necessary for creating a just, equitable, and participatory society. In what I would argue is the most succinct summary of the anarchic rhetoric, they write in *Fighting for Our Lives: a Primer on Anarchy*:

Meddle with The Truth, undermine it, create a *space* in which new truths can form.

Introduce *questions*, not answers—though remember, not all questions end in question marks. For the revolutionary, the essence of a statement lies in its *effects*, not in whether or not it is “objectively” true—this approach distinguishes her from philosophers and other idle bastards. (10)

For today’s radicals and critical theorists, in other words, the goal should not be to create a politics that aims to become more faithful to the “Truth” than its predecessors like today’s return to metaphysics and Marxism. Rather, on the anarchist view, we ought to revive what Kenneth Burke (and Derrida after him) taught us: “all effective medicines are potential poisons” (Burke 126). One might say, then, that radicalism today means rejecting both the illnesses and remedies associated with politics and political thought by “declaring our independence” from the body politic outright. In “declaring our independence” from the body politic, today’s critical theorists and radicals ought to strive for creating innumerable societies founded on the free-flowing exchange of affective/aestheticized responses to subjective and empirical perceptions that allow for the endless congealing and dissolving of human sympathies.

### **False Negatives: How Politicians Diagnose and Cure Political Illness**

Like the politics of Jefferson, Tucker, and James, there has been a certain awkwardness among politicians, pundits, and critical theorists in addressing and assessing both the rhetorical

approaches and political expediencies the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movements. For instance, upon the clearing-out of OWS protestors in Zuccotti Park, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg asserted, “Protestors have had two months to occupy the park with tents and sleeping bags. Now they will have to occupy the space with the power of their arguments” (Bloomberg). These remarks reveal Bloomberg’s inability or unwillingness to recognize the *point* of OWS. Prior to clearing-out the park Bloomberg bluntly stated, “It was just an opportunity for a bunch of unions to complain or to protest or whatever they want to do” (M. Lee). However, whether he is unable or unwilling is of little concern; his actions reveal the wont to put protestors back into recognizable positions. Because OWS protestors did not engage in the deliberative process, their arguments were either unrecognizable or inadmissible within the realm of political rhetoric. In short, Bloomberg’s desire to have protestors “occupy the space” with “the power of their arguments” is simply the desire to have protestors reengage the acceptable spaces and arguments.

There was also a similar reaction to the earlier Tea Party movement. In its early stages, much like OWS, the Tea Party did not engage in deliberation and consensus building. The resurgence of the “Town Hall Meeting” during the debate surrounding President Obama’s “Affordable Care Act” serves as a case in point. After suspending his town hall meetings with constituents due to “angry, sign-carrying mobs and disruptive behavior,” Democratic congressman Tim Bishop remarked, “There is no point in meeting with my constituents and [to] listen to them and have them listen to you if what is basically an unruly mob prevents you from having an intelligent conversation” (qtd. in Isentadt). Indeed, the scenes of citizens openly and polemically engaging their elected officials in response to health care reform shocked American politicians on both sides of the aisle. Republicans made a hard right to appease an angry

electorate, while, like Congressman Bishop, President Obama called for a roundtable discussion in order to “procedurally” and “methodically” examine the differing health care proposals in order to reach some sort of mutual agreement (Brown and Allen). Both of these responses—the sudden embracing of far-right conservatism and the call for reasonableness and rationality—were moves that sought to engage the Tea Party in the political process.

The difficulty in understanding both the Tea Party and OWS movements has also been played out in the media coverage of these movements. In an attempt to define and explain the Tea Party, *The Christian Science Monitor*, for instance, suggested that the Tea Party movement is best characterized as the slogan “You can't fix stupid, but you can vote it out” (Jonsson). Ambiguous as it might be, the description suggests that the Tea Party, at least in its earlier incarnation, was not interested in making “demands.” They simply sought to vote out those who did not agree with certain conservative principles. While the Tea Party made no qualms about what they were against, their positive agenda was, according to some, nowhere to be found. Like the Tea Party, the OWS movement and its lack of “demands” left pundits and commentators befuddled. Indeed, the lack of an apparent agenda motivated a group of *Huffington Post* writers to turn “to a panel of marketing experts to find out what this unlikely startup [OWS] can do, marketing-wise, to survive and grow” (Chun). Because the OWS and Tea Party movements adopted a tack that foregrounds their rejection of deliberation and consensus, pundits and politicians have been left to construct caricatures and straw men in order to respond to both of these movements.

Similarly, for left-oriented critical theorists, most notably Slavoj Žižek, OWS has provoked a response that seems to undercut the contemporary critique of liberal politics within critical theory. Interestingly, Žižek, whose work would appear to embrace the rhetorical program

of OWS, suggests that the lack of demands will eventually have to change. In fact, his comments about OWS apply just as well to the Tea Party movement, which he calls both a “sister movement” to OWS and the “only true opposition to liberal consensus” (qtd. in A. Lee; *Living in the End Times* 464). Noting the effectiveness of *not* engaging in dialogue, Žižek argues, “This silence, this rejection of dialogue, of all forms of clinching, is our ‘terror’, ominous and threatening as it should be” (“Occupy First”). In place of negotiation and dialogue, the OWS and Tea Party movements favor an unrelenting critique of the current political and economic institutions. However, Žižek also argues that OWS “will have to coalesce not only in some new master-signifiers, but also in concrete answers to the old Leninist question, ‘What is to be done?’” (“Occupy First”). In making this claim, it appears that Žižek, who, despite his vehement and often violent condemnations of liberal politics, holds on to the notion that equitable politics must be won either by participating in the State through representative process, or by adopting the Marxist approach and simply taking it over.

Despite the competing partisan leanings, what is clear, judging by the responses of politicians, commentators, and political theorists, is that both the OWS and Tea Party movements violate liberal notions of deliberation and consensus. Liberalism, as John Rawls argues, is concerned with “political society as a fair system of social cooperation” with “citizens as reasonable and rational, and free and equal” (134-135). Picking up on this definition, Bryan Garsten suggests that the rhetoric of liberalism “assumes that people can find some shared point of agreement and asks how they can engage in deliberation within the boundaries set by that underlying agreement” (6). Thus, participants in the liberal political process begin with a shared set of assumptions and work towards building consensus on some issue or policy. Both OWS and

the Tea Party stand in opposition to the rhetoric of liberalism; they refuse to engage in rational dialogue, liberalism's defining form of communicative interaction.

While these similarities are striking, each group rages against a different machine, which has borne out varying successes. Indeed, the descriptions *The New York Times* provide are indicative of the ways in which these two movements are viewed; OWS "stand[s] against corporate greed, social inequality and the corrosive power of major banks and multinational corporations over the democratic process" ("Occupy Movement"), while the Tea Party is "is an antigovernment, grass-roots political movement," whose "supporters tend to unite around fiscal conservatism and a belief that the federal government has overstepped its constitutional powers" ("Tea Party Movement"). Further, the results of these two movements are today beginning to become clear; whereas by early 2012, the OWS movement has seemingly vanished from the political scene and national discourse (Freidman), "Tea Party-style politics is likely to remain for some time to come, a pivotal part of ongoing, fierce disputes about what the U.S. government should do and not do" (Skocpol and Williamson 2015). Given that both OWS and the Tea Party have forwarded pointed critiques of liberal politics, which have also met with varying success, we might wonder: In terms of coalition-building and political influence, what has led to the success of the Tea Party? And, more importantly, what implications does this have for critical and rhetorical theory, and the radical Left?

I argue that the Tea Party's longevity and political successes are thanks to its enactment of anarchic rhetoric, which, consequently, may also have something to offer to those on the Left concerned about social, political, and economic justice. To make this case, I will paradoxically take up a recent event that saw the Texas State Board of Education rewrite its social studies curriculum to reflect an overt conservatism. The changes included dramatically playing up the

role of Christianity in influencing the American Revolution while relegating Thomas Jefferson to a minor role (Lepore 13). What is of interest in this situation is the way in which the Texas State Board of Education was able to make such sweeping changes. In fact, part of my argument here is that the actions of the Texas State Board of Education are representative of a larger shift within American political and cultural life that, in addition to serving as the catalyst for this current study, has warranted a reevaluation of critical theory and its attachment to radical politics. To be specific, as the philosopher of science Mario Pigliucci points out, the Texas State Board of Education (ironically) retooled leftist critique for its rightist goals.

The irony of this rear-guard action by conservatives is that they have learned the right sort of politically correct language, talking about uprooting the allegedly left-imposed “ideological bias” of public education, or about “teaching the controversy” (concerning creation-evolution) so that students can “freely” make up their minds about the supposed inconsistencies of evolutionary theory. (“Ideology vs. Education”)

As I hope will become clear, my analysis of this event offers a more optimistic diagnosis of the state of critical theory than most: critique is not dead. In fact, it is alive and well, albeit in a different form. To be specific, in my estimation, which stands against those on the Left who are actively seeking to disregard critical theory’s legacy or have simply admitted its “defeat,” critical thought’s political unmooring reveals its radical, egalitarian, and democratic potential. In other words, critique—as the examination and laying bare the contingent nature of any claim of representation or appeal to immutable “truth”—is thoroughly rhetorical and anarchistic. To be specific, instead of critique being wed to a dialectically-informed Marxist vanguardism,<sup>1</sup> which

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<sup>1</sup> In his seminal essay, “Traditional and Critical Theory,” Max Horkheimer suggests, “It is the task of the critical theoretician to reduce the tension between his own insight and oppressed humanity in whose service he thinks” (221).



seemingly reifies the sort of representative thinking and politics we have been criticizing throughout these pages, the aims of critical thought takes shape under anarchic rhetoric with its presupposition of equality, aestheticized and affective responses to perceived wrongs, rhetorical construction of moral sentiments (“sympathy”), and endless questioning of all claims of representation or transcendent truths. In short, the uptake of critical thought among today’s far-right conservatives, which, to many thinkers, has meant the “end of radical politics” and the “death of critical theory, gives us good reason to connect the goals of critical thought to anarchism: the most radical, egalitarian, democratic, and *rhetorical* (anti-)politics.

Before I continue, I want to offer a point of clarification: In what follows, I endorse the form of today’s conservative politics, but, it is important to note, I am generally weary of the Tea Party’s political goals, particularly its desire for an unfettered capitalism. My point here is that the elasticity of anarchist politics and anarchic rhetoric—two concepts that are “without content”—may more effectively contribute to developing communicative strategies that aide in the creation of a just and equitable society than the Platonism that undergirds the Left’s liberal, socialist, and/or Marxist politics.

### **The Tea Party?**

Because the Tea Party is a relatively new phenomenon, much of the scholarship has focused on defining and explaining the Tea Party’s politics. In their ethnographic study of Tea Party activists, Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, two political scientists at Harvard, suggest that “the Tea Party is fundamentally the latest iteration of long-standing, hard-core conservatism in American politics” (82), which, as a result, has “pulled the Republican Party sharply toward the right, and shifted U.S. public debates at a critical juncture” (205). In contradistinction, the libertarian and Constitutional scholar Elizabeth Price Foley argues that the

Tea Party “has shown a ruthless ability to reject any candidate, of any party, who doesn’t embrace their principles and a persistence in pursuing their agenda with any candidate who’ll listen. To the extent that the Tea Party has been more successful in obtaining the ear of the Republican Party may be (or is becoming) accountable to the Tea Party, and not vice versa” (xiv). Ronald P. Formisano splits the difference between Foley and Skocpol and Williamson and argues that the Tea Party is “[n]ot quite an independent political party and not quite a full-fledged populist social movement but [has] some characteristics of both” (15). While the above descriptions do little to provide a stable picture of Tea Party politics, they are diagnostic in that they highlight the political ambiguity of the Tea Party that we discussed in the opening pages.

The difficulty in assessing the status of the Tea Party as a political and social movement can be owed to the fact that it “is an amorphous, factionalized uprising with no clear leadership and no centralized structure” (Barstow). However, such a difficulty is not simply the result of the Tea Party not having a clearly defined organizational structure; it also lacks a clearly articulated political telos. For instance, political scientists Miller and Walling, calling on the work of social movement scholars Stewart, Smith, and Denton, cannot determine whether the Tea Party seeks to “revive” a storied past or “resist” changes to the status quo (6). Pointing out the Tea Party’s lack of vision and goals, the historian Mark Lilla suggests, “Anarchistic like the Sixties, selfish like the Eighties, contradicting neither, it [the Tea Party] is estranged, aimless, and as juvenile as our new century” (“Tea Party Jacobins”). Summarizing these views, one might say that the Tea Party seems to defy the neat ideological categories that political and social scientists are wont to prescribe to it because it is immature and has no positively identified set of ideals to be achieved; its partisan promiscuity is thanks to its lack of a political teleology.

Yet, as was outlined above, the Tea Party's lack of a political telos gives pause to today's partisans on both the Left and Right. To no surprise, then, the conservative commentator David Brooks's negative definition proves to be the most succinct characterization of the group. He writes:

The tea party movement is a large, fractious confederation of Americans who are defined by what they are against. They are against the concentrated power of the educated class. They believe big government, big business, big media and the affluent professionals are merging to form self-serving oligarchy — with bloated government, unsustainable deficits, high taxes and intrusive regulation. (“The Tea Party Teens”)

Such a characterization is certainly prevalent in the platform of the Tea Party Patriots, “the most grassroots entity among tea party organizations” (Formisano 33). Citing Thomas Jefferson and the other Founding Fathers, their “mission is to restore America’s founding principles of Fiscal Responsibility, Constitutionally Limited Government and Free Markets” (“About Tea Party Patriots”). Despite the appearance of clearly articulated set of goals, when one recalls the Tea Party’s unwillingness to engage in dialogue with the Left that we addressed earlier, a defining paradox seems to emerge: by not participating in the American political process, the Tea Party will restore America’s founding political values. Moreover, if, as was argued in the first chapter, those particular political values can be considered anarchist, then one might say that the Tea Party is the inheritor of a long line of American anarchism.

Taken as a whole, the above discussion of the Tea Party suggests that one might think of the Tea Party less in terms of a “party” or a “politics,” but what Kenneth Burke calls an “orientation.” Burke writes, “Orientation is thus a bundle of judgments as to how things were, how things are, and how they may be” (14). Thus, the orientation propelling today’s

conservatism is undergirded by an overtly “anti-government” sentiment and distrust of elites and experts.

Comparing the Tea Party’s “orientation” to that of the most visible anarchist group in the US, the CrimethInc ex-Workers Collective, the Tea Party’s inherent anarchism comes to the fore. According to CrimethInc:

Whenever you act without waiting for instructions or official permission, you are an anarchist. Any time you bypass a ridiculous regulation when no one’s looking, you are an anarchist. If you don’t trust the government, the school system, Hollywood, or the management to know better than you when it comes to things that affect your life, that’s anarchism, too. And you are especially an anarchist when you come up with your own ideas and initiatives and solutions.

To reiterate, then, one can clearly begin to recognize within the Tea Party’s distrust of governmental institutions and regulations, scientists and academics, and its non-teleological underpinning, the distinct shape of anarchist politics. The result is that the radical Left and radical Right begin to overlap.

The conservative commentator David Brooks also picks up on the Tea Party’s anarchistic tendency and suggests that the blurring between left and right is the result of the Right’s appropriation of the Left’s earlier use of non-dialectical rhetoric. He suggests, “The Tea Partiers have adopted the tactics of the New Left. They go in for street theater, mass rallies, marches and extreme statements that are designed to shock polite society out of its stupor” (“The Wal-Mart Hippies”). Ronald Formisano makes explicit the Tea Party’s non-dialectical approach when he notes that the Tea Party “claim[s] to be above the nitty-gritty of politics and the established parties” while “proudly declar[ing] their unwillingness to negotiate or compromise” (17). The

result of such an approach, much like the New Left of the sixties, is that the Tea Party is unrecognizable as a worthy politics in today's liberal-democratic arrangement. To put it succinctly, the Tea Party is overtly anti-political and the strategies of persuasion they employ exemplify the anarchic rhetoric we have been discussing throughout the last chapters; it is an-arkhê-istic and anarchistic. In other words, the Tea Party today provides the most visible alternative to the Platonism present in today's liberal, Marxist, and socialist politics. An examination, then, of the Tea Party's use of history reveals a rhetoric that presupposes absolute equality qua the ability to construct arguments that challenge the arkhê on which a political arraignment rests, which, in doing so, seeks sympathy as its end, or the aligning of affective responses through aesthetic judgment.

### **Bitter Tea: Angry, Old, Rich, White Men as Persecuted and Disenfranchised Victims**

The Tea Party's critique of liberalism is undergirded by a palpable anger and disaffection. It is an affective response to the perceived failures of the State. The source of such anger is the belief that the US has morphed into its Other: a socialist/communist State. As a matter of fact, most journalistic and scholarly commentary locate the origin of the Tea Party in the passionate "rant" of CNBC anchor Rick Santelli against President Barack Obama's governmental policies during the "Great Recession." In response to the passing of the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*, which was passed less than a month after Barack Obama took the presidential oath of office, Rick Santelli decried on live television the government's decision to cut taxes and engage in "stimulus" spending as way to promote economic activity and stave off a recession. Expressing his belief that the government had violated America's defining traits, the US Constitution and free-market capitalism, Santelli screamed: "This is America!" ("The Power of Rick Santelli's Rant"). After being sardonically called a "revolutionary" by another anchor, the

red-faced and foaming-mouthed Santelli responded by shouting, “If you read our Founding Fathers, people like Benjamin Franklin and Jefferson — what we're doing now in this country is making them roll over in their graves” (“The Power of Rick Santelli’s Rant”). To phrase it another way, Santelli’s vitriol and anger was aimed at the perceived concentration of power in the Federal government and its ability to interfere with the Constitution and capitalism, the bastions of political and economic freedom the Founding Fathers established as a result of the British government’s own intrusion and overreach into the lives of American colonialists. The remedy Santelli offered completed his analogy: For the morally misguided Keynesian economic policies of President Obama, Santelli proposed “[a] Chicago Tea Party” (“The Power of Rick Santelli’s Rant”). Possibly more telling, however, might be the fact that as he stood on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange staring and yelling into a camera, Santelli’s rant was met with sympathetic cheers and applause from fellow traders, or the “real Americans” (i.e. capitalists and constitutionalists) as Santelli referred to them.

Soon thereafter, Santelli’s “shout heard ‘round the world” was being proliferated by bloggers, conservative groups, and Fox News. Formisano notes, “In early 2009, economic, political, and cultural shocks came together to activate ordinary persons across the country—mostly conservative Republicans, but also independents and others—to organize and mobilize” (27). The election of the first African American Democratic President, the recession, and Santelli’s rant resulted in “Tax Day” protests “in some 750 towns and cities across the country” on April 15, 2009” (Formisano 27). The fuel for these protests was, in the words of Michael Barone, the idea that “Taking money away from those who made prudent decisions and giving it to people who made imprudent decisions...cast[s] society's vote for imprudence and self-indulgence. It mocks thrift and makes chumps out of those who pay their own way” (“The Power

of Rick Santelli's Rant"). Such a visceral reaction on the part of many libertarian Americans produced fertile ground for an easy alliance between Americans of different political stripes. That is, suddenly, thanks to Santelli's anarchic rhetoric, a coalition of libertarian, religious conservatives, moderates and independents, and conservative democrats—the Tea Party—was born.

In addition to being a rather angry population, the demographics of the Tea Party suggest that it is "whiter, older, wealthier, and more educated than other Americans" (Formisano 106). Thus, it goes without saying that this is a particular group that has benefitted immensely from the State in terms of education, social security, and tax policy. However, as Formisano continues, "Besides wholesale reaction against government, the movement also expresses a 'heartland' ethos of ethnocentrism among older white Americans experiencing rapid change in the kinds of people who make up the nation" (110). What is of interest here, however, are the ways in which this population chooses to present itself; in response to its anger at the federal government's Keynesianism, it is not afraid to create counter-subjectivities where they are seen as repressed, targeted, and victimized. Indeed, present at the first "Tax Day" protests were signs equating President Obama with Adolf Hitler, people dressed as American colonists and Revolutionaries, and many a Gadsden Flag ("Thousands of Anti-Tax 'Tea Party' Protesters Turn Out in U.S. Cities"). Tea Partiers, in order to express their own malcontent with government and concentrated power, are not afraid to effectively remix history in order to aesthetically self-fashion themselves as members of a victimized minority group. Whether it is equating themselves as colonists living under the rule of a tyrant monarch or victims of the Third Reich, Tea Party activists have sought to create new subjectivities in order to undermine the principles guiding political action. Such a situation recalls David Brook's rather adept observation

discussed above: “The Tea Partiers have adopted the tactics of the New Left. They go in for street theater, mass rallies, marches and extreme statements that are designed to shock polite society out of its stupor” (“The Wal-Mart Hippies”). Like C.L.R. James in the previous chapter who sought to create a “perspective by incongruity” by portraying a black sharecropper occupying the White House, today’s Tea Partiers, in order to drum up sympathy among the American population, employ the same process and fashion themselves in the same sort of position as a black sharecropper: the victim of governmental malpractice. In this way, the Tea Party seems to echo Simon Critchley’s neo-anarchism when he suggests that the first political emotion is anger, and that it can be used to foster and create political subjectivities that can challenge State power (131-132). Thus, the Right, much like the Left in earlier days, produced an aesthetic politics capable of producing new and subversive subjectivities founded on affective responses to a perceived wrong, which, in turn, fostered sympathy between seemingly disparate populations.

However, today’s conservatism has done more than appropriate the Left’s earlier aesthetic and form of rhetorical invention for a different purpose, it has also claimed the Left’s epistemology. That is, in an effort to fashion subversive subjectivities, Tea Partiers have drawn on constructivist epistemologies in order to challenge and open up the historical record. Indeed, as we will see below, the Tea Party’s anarchic rhetoric, which questions history as both an object of study and methodology, resembles the effects of Nietzschean genealogy on the Christian morality. To be clear, I am not arguing that the Tea Party is employing the genealogical method. Rather, the Tea Party shares Nietzsche’s view of the rhetoricity of the historical record: history is a linguistic construct and is always open to reinterpretation, repurposing, and redistribution. In what follows, I first detail the changes made by the Texas State Board of Education to its social



studies curriculum in early 2010, as well as the ensuing backlash, in order to show how the Tea Party's use of history is an affective response to the Left's Platonism, which has spurred its anarchic rhetoric and might also suggest that today's conservatives have effectively appropriated many of the Left's cherished forms of critique.

**“Education is too important not to politicize.”**

Second only to California, Texas is the second largest producer and seller of education textbooks in America. Indeed, “The state's \$22 billion education fund is among the largest educational endowments in the country. Texas uses some of that money to buy or distribute a staggering 48 million textbooks annually — which rather strongly inclines educational publishers to tailor their products to fit the standards dictated by the Lone Star State” (Shorto). In other words, any state that buys its textbooks from Texas is also buying Texas's curriculum. In 2010, the Texas State Board of Education, an elected board that was largely comprised of lawyers and led by a dentist named Gary McLeroy, overhauled the Texas Social Studies curriculum. Regarding the curriculum changes and ensuing media firestorm, McLeroy suggested:

The proposed changes have attracted national attention because they challenge the powerful ideology of the left and highlight the great political divide of our country. The left's principles are diametrically opposed to our founding principles. The left believes in big, not limited, government; they empower the state, not the individual; they focus on differences, not unity. (“Opposing View”)

McLeroy notes that the resulting curriculum “rejected changes that referred to America as imperialistic, that deleted the role religion played in the foundations of representative government, and that downplayed the First Amendment's protection of the ‘free exercise’ of religion” (“Opposing View”). More specifically, *The New York Times* notes, “the board

considered an amendment to require students to evaluate the contributions of significant Americans. The names proposed included Thurgood Marshall, Billy Graham, Newt Gingrich, William F. Buckley Jr., Hillary Rodham Clinton and Edward Kennedy. All passed muster except Kennedy, who was voted down” (Shorto). And, what is sure to bore students to the point of revolution, the Texas State Board of Education proposed that “[e]ach school district shall require that, during Celebrate Freedom Week...students in Grades 3-12 study and recite” the opening lines of the Declaration of Independence (Texas State Board of Education 12). The result of such changes was an overtly conservative curriculum that had the potential to affect social studies curricula across the country.

Unsurprisingly, the changes provoked an immediate outcry among academics and concerned citizens. Over one thousand historians, for instance, signed a petition calling a delay in the Board’s vote arguing that the curriculum should be voted upon “only after public consultation with classroom teachers and scholars who are experts in the appropriate fields of study” (Erekson et. al). According to the petition’s authors, “recent proposals by Board members have undermined the study of the social sciences in our public schools by misrepresenting and even distorting the historical record and the functioning of American society” (Erekson et al). Moreover, John Gehring, *the Director of Communications for the group Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good*, suggested in *The Washington Post* that the actions of the Texas State Board of Education neglected the “common good” (Gehring). Similarly, the philosopher of science Massimo Pigliucci argued that the curricular changes were a rewriting of history that implemented a conservative “ideology” at the expense of reason and scholarship (“Ideology vs. Education”).

For the most hostile critique of Texas’s curriculum changes, one can look to a recent study by the Harvard historian Jill Lepore about the Tea Party’s most prominent tropes: the Founding Fathers and the American Revolution. In her study, Lepore calls the Tea Party’s “version” of the American Revolution and the Founding Fathers “antihistory” that “has no patience for ambiguity, self-doubt, and introspection” (15). Furthermore, Lepore characterizes the Tea Party’s “antihistory” as “reactionary,” “outside of argument,” without “interest in evidence,” “reductive,” unitary,” and “dangerously antipluralist” (96). Yet, recalling Jefferson’s own ambivalence towards “history” and its stifling influence on social and political change, which was discussed in the first chapter, one might say that the Tea Party’s “antihistory”—including its reframing of Jefferson within social studies textbooks—is thoroughly Jeffersonian (anarchistic). Indeed, part of my argument here is that the Left’s dependence on “argument,” “introspection” and “evidence,” far from creating spaces for the construction of a new and equitable society, actually undercuts its own goals of creating pluralistic, tolerant, and self-governing populations.

**“For a free society, history is everything.”**

In an *USA Today* opinion piece, Don McLeroy suggested that the changes to the Texas curriculum that he championed reflected a belief outlined by Thomas Jefferson and reflected in Abraham Lincoln and Ronald Reagan. He argues, “The theme is freedom. These men understood America and the principles upon which she stood: self-evident truths; liberty, with its twin corollaries of limited government and individual responsibility; the embrace of Judeo-Christian values; and a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence” (“Opposing View”). McLeroy further writes, “The Texas school board is currently adopting changes to the curriculum standards to ensure these principles are taught” (“Opposing View”). According to McLeroy, the

importance of history, education, and politics could not be understated: “For a free society, history is everything” (“Opposing View”). The changes to the curriculum, then, reflected a larger battle; it was a battle between the State and the individual. Recalling the quote above, McLeroy suggests that the Left’s view of history “empower[s] the state, not the individual,” and, as such, “focus[es] on differences, not unity” (“Opposing View”). The picture McLeroy paints portrays, once again, a battle between the State and the individual. The battle over American history is a battle between Statism and liberty/freedom. Also, noting Lepore’s negative characterization of McLeroy and the Tea Party’s history, this is also a battle between reason, with its “focus on differences” and “pluralism,” and self-evident truths, which are “reactionary” and “antipluralist.”

What is of note here is the way these two orientations produce and use history. For Lepore, the Tea Party, the Texas State Board of Education, and their biggest champions—the media personalities Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity—“shared...a set of assumptions about the relationship between the past and the present that was both broadly anti-intellectual and, quite specifically, antihistorical, not least because it defies chronology, the logic of time” (15). Legitimate history, on the other hand, “requires research, that raises questions about perspective, that demands distinctions between fact and opinion, that bears audience in mind” (Lepore 161). Moreover, “The study of history requires investigation, imagination, empathy, and respect. Reverence just doesn’t enter into it” (Lepore 162). In other words, the study of history requires the placing of one’s self in the subjective position of another in order to separate fact from fiction, true from false (the empathetic function). According to Michel Foucault, such a methodology presupposes the notion that “historical consciousness is neutral, devoid of passions, and committed solely to truth” (95). As a method of inquiry, history is an expert’s uninterested and detached search for an original Truth that must be expressed today. Foucault writes, “We

want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities” (89). One can begin to see, then, that the sort of history Lepore embraces and Foucault dismisses is, because it relegates the passions and the rhetorical in order to present a view of the transcendent, is overtly Platonic and dialectical.

To explain, the method employed by the Tea Party and the Texas State Board of Education is, according to Lepore, “Antihistory,” and it has no interest in expertise, reason, evidence, and pluralism (96). Indeed, one can detect the opposition between reason/non-reason and expert/novice in an impassioned polemic against evolution that McLeroy gave in front of a crowd of Texas teachers, parents, and students; McLeroy—a dentist—took issue with the scholarship of Stephen Jay Gould by citing Darwin’s description of evolutionary stasis as “the greatest challenge” to the theory of evolution scholarship. According to McLeroy, the critique of evolution is self-evident: “It’s not complicated. It doesn’t take mathematics.” Indeed, such an argument needs to be made, according to McLeroy, because “[s]omeone needs to stand up to experts” (“Don McLeroy: ‘Someone has to stand up to experts!’”). For McLeroy and his sympathizers, then, the Left’s embrace of difference, political correctness, and reason means that history is always, already imbued with questions of politics and ethics. Thus, McLeroy’s use of history is always, already imbued with questions of politics and ethics. Thus, McLeroy’s use of history is purpose-driven. In being used as a way to forward a certain position, McLeroy’s history can be used to undermine the sort of historical Platonism utilized by the Left.

Ironically, then, McLeroy and the Tea Party’s history resembles what Foucault calls Nietzsche’s “effective history.” Foucault argues that Nietzsche’s study of “descent” and “emergence”—genealogy—might be characterized as “effective history,” which stands in

opposition to the historian whose “ancestry goes back to Socrates” (91).<sup>2</sup> This historian “is given to a contemplation of distances and heights; the noblest periods, the highest forms, the most abstract ideas, the purest individualities. It accomplishes this by getting as near as possible, placing itself at the foot of its mountain peaks, at the risk of adopting the famous perspective of frogs” (89). It is these historians who “take unusual pains to erase the elements in their work which reveal their groundings in a particular time and place, their preferences in a controversy—the unavoidable obstacles of their passion” (90), and harbor a “belief in eternal truth, the immortality of the soul, and the nature of consciousness as always identical to itself” (87). “Effective history” challenges history’s metaphysical grounding and its attendant asceticism. According to Foucault, “effective history” is “parodic, directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition; the second is dissociative, directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representative of a tradition; the third is sacrificial, directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge” (93). “Effective history,” undoes “traditional history” and “its dependence on metaphysics” by questioning its grounding and guiding principle (89). Indeed, “effective history” calls into question the *arkhê* guiding the sort of historical inquiry exemplified by Jill Lepore and other Left-leaning academics. The result of such a procedure might be that “genealogy can be considered the anarchist method par excellence” (May, *Political Philosophy* 90).

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<sup>2</sup> According to Foucault, “An examination of descent also permits the discovery, under the unique aspect of a trait of a concept, of the myriad events through which—thanks to which, against which—they were formed” (81). Furthermore, according to Foucault, “Emergence is always produced through a particular stage of forces. The analysis of *Entstehung* [emergence] must delineate this interaction, the struggle these forces wage against each other or against adverse circumstances, and the attempt to avoid degeneration and regain strength by dividing these forces against themselves” (83-84).

Once again, it should be noted that I am not arguing that the either the Tea Party of the Texas State Board of Education is performing genealogical analyses. However, they do recognize, like Foucault and Nietzsche, that history is imbued with perspective, interest, and power. That is, they are readily aware that the ability to persuade in the present means constructing a past that one can use as rhetorical topoi for the present. To phrase it another way, one can shape the past so as to become usable for persuasion today. Despite the seemingly adolescent and awkward donning of tricorne hats, flying of the Gadsen flag, and wholesale assuming of the Revolutionary ethos by the Tea Party, such an approach suggests that critical theory's emphasis on the power of language in shaping subjectivities and knowledge, far from being dead, is alive and well (and being used rather effectively).

Thus, when those on the Left accuse the Tea Party's use of history as being "ideological," "distortion" and "amateurish," they raise history and reason above the concerns of individuals whose feet reside firmly on the ground (which includes themselves), as well as preclude the creation of counter-narratives. In elevating history to the metaphysical, the expert historian denies his/her own affective and emotional preferences and responses: the historian is "divided against himself: forced to silence his preferences and overcome his distaste, to blur his own perspective and replace it with the fiction of a universal geometry, to mimic death in order to enter the kingdom of the dead, to adopt a faceless anonymity" (Foucault 92). Such subjectivity results from "a necessary belief in providence, in final causes and teleology—the beliefs that put the historian in the family of ascetics" (Foucault 92). The expert historian, like Plato's dialectician, venerates the metaphysical at the expense of one's own affective responses and processes, as well as the potential politics an affective and non-dialectical approach might produce.

### **The Elasticity of Anarchism, or T.E.A. Party (anti)Politics**

The situation described above is not without irony, nor is it without precedent. Indeed, there has been growing tendency among those on the radical Right to employ the philosophical and rhetorical methods that were developed in and around the turbulent sixties and meant to operate as anti-capitalist, anti-statist, and anti-hegemonic forms of resistance and subjectification. Indeed, according to Hardt and Negri, poststructuralist and postmodern thought has always been void of all political implications. “The ideology of the world market,” they suggest, “has always been the anti-foundational and anti-essentialist discourse par excellence” (141), and is the “symptom of a rupture in the tradition of modern sovereignty” (143). More to the point, postmodernist and poststructuralist thought, according to Hardt and Negri, “indicate[s] the passage toward the constitution of Empire” (143), “the center that supports the globalization of productive networks and casts its all inclusive net to try to envelop all power relations within its world order—and yet at the same time it deploys a powerful police function against the new barbarians and the rebellious slaves who threaten its order” (20). Describing the explicit use of these same tools among those with retrograde political goals, Bruno Latour suggests, for instance:

entire Ph.D. programs are still running to make sure that good American kids are learning the hard way that facts are made up, that there is no such thing as natural, unmediated, unbiased access to truth, that we are always prisoners of language, that we always speak from a particular standpoint, and so on, while dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives. (227)



While many on the Left might decry the notion that certain elements of critical theory are/have been used for seemingly retrograde political goals, I question whether it might not serve as a site through which to think a new path towards political emancipation. That is, while critical theory's appropriation by the Right may seem a like nadir in the struggle for a just and egalitarian society, I hold that it points to a series of implications for rhetorical and critical theory, which might also allow for a reevaluation of radical politics in America. It might just point to the need to reappropriate that which has been reappropriated, while also pointing up the points of contact between the various appropriators whose continual use of the of the critical toolbox does not suggest "failure" or "death," but the potential for liberation from representative thinking and politics—a hallmark of the critical tradition from Kant to the Frankfurt School and French poststructuralism to Rancière today.

To clarify, my argument throughout these chapters has been that the philosophies of Marxism and liberalism, which, despite their supposed antagonism, share a certain Platonism that results in the State being viewed as the vehicle for creating and/or maintaining political justice. To phrase it another way, Marxism, with its dialectical view of history and class-consciousness, and, liberalism, with its dialectical view of reason and reasonableness, both depend on the State to embody their respective dialectics, which, consequently, also forecloses any thinking about what a non-statist politics might look like and/or offer us today. As a result, politics has been synonymous with the State, and any effort to think an alternative has met immediate resistance as both liberals and Marxists share a common foe in anarchism. Yet, the developments within critical theory and American politics have demanded a reevaluation of two traditions that stand in opposition to dialectics and the State: rhetoric and anarchism. Drawing upon America's often neglected and maligned history of anti-statism/anarchism, which includes

both indigenous and imported forms, has revealed an elastic rhetoric that has been appropriated for both left and right political goals. Such a rhetoric presupposes absolute equality qua the ability to construct arguments that challenge the arkhê on which a political arraignment rests, which, in doing so, actively seeks sympathy as its end.

Regarding the implications of such a view, anarchic rhetoric asks rhetorical and critical theorists to end the assumption that meaningful social change must take place via the State and/or be dialectical, and, instead, emphasize the role of affect and aesthetics play in ushering in social change page. Asking rhetorical and critical theorists to do away with the State, or at least entertain alternatives to State-based politics, points not to cosmopolitanism whereby individualism gives way to a certain universal consciousness in place of the State, but to seven billion “declarations of independence” from the State and global capitalism. Such a move from the global and to the local also points, then, to the importance of voluntary associations based on sympathy.

Lastly, I hope that this genealogy of radical politics in America, with its emphasis and valorization of anarchism’s (and rhetoric’s) lack of content and elastic nature, aids in a reconsideration of what is meant by “anarchism” itself. Indeed, as these chapters have sought to illustrate, anarchic rhetoric allows for what might seem like an oxymoron: a more plural anarchism. To clarify what I mean, these chapters have aimed to show how anarchic rhetoric, with its employment by Thomas Jefferson in the “pre-partisan” Colonial period, the anarchist Benjamin Tucker in the nineteenth century, the Marxist CLR James in the twentieth century, and twenty-first century far-right conservatives, might allow us to reevaluate our very political categories so as to find points of contact and rhetorical topoi from which to draw upon in order to move towards creating a more just and equitable society. To phrase it another way, recognizing

that “anarchy” really means “anarchies” opens the door for critical theorists to examine events, groups, and movements that appear politically disagreeable at first blush, which may reveal, in contradistinction to both our historical and contemporary thinking, that politics is not a series of problem to be solved; *politics is the problem*. However, before I elaborate further on these claims, I want to provide a gloss of the ways in which the most prominent contemporary theorists and philosophers have addressed politics and (the death of) critical theory.

Because anarchic rhetoric is both an-arkhê-istic in the sense that it is anti-Platonic, and anarchistic in the sense that it resists the codification of Platonism in the State form, anarchic rhetoric stands in direct opposition to the current trends in critical and social theory. That is, in response to many of critical theory’s most reliable tools—ideology critique, social constructivism, and an anti-essentialist theory of the subject—being appropriated by the Right, one can isolate four dominant trends with critical and continental thought. Some thinkers, exemplified by Alain Badiou, have advocated for a renewed emphasis on “philosophy.” Badiou has argued, “The world needs philosophy to be re-founded on the ruins of metaphysics as combined and blended with the modern criticism of metaphysics” (*Infinite Thought* 42). For Badiou, the connection between a reconstituted metaphysics and politics is concerned with thinking about “justice,” which is the “name by which a philosophy designates the possible truth of a political orientation” (*Infinite Thought* 53). In other words, for Badiou, philosophy is to determine politics and political subjects; philosophy’s role is to show that “justice designates the contemporary figure of the political subject,” and “it is by means of such a figure that philosophy assures, via its own names, the inscription of what our time is capable of in eternity” (*Infinite Thought* 56). What is more, when it comes to anarchism, Badiou’s thought presents a paradox. He writes:

We know today that all emancipatory politics must put an end to the model of the party, or of multiple parties, in order to affirm a politics ‘without party’, and yet at the same time without lapsing into the figure of anarchism, which has never been anything else than the vain critique, or the double, or the shadow, of the communist parties, just as the black flag is only the double or the shadow of a red flag. (*The Communist Hypothesis* 155)

Thus, Badiou gives anarchism both a laudation and denunciation. His goal is anarchy, yet his method is not anarchistic; philosophy is instead to give rise to anarchy. And while many have identified a certain anarchist bent in Badiou’s work,<sup>3</sup> his veneration of philosophy as that which gives rise to politics seemingly reifies the sort of Platonism that anarchic rhetoric is wont to question and resist.

Similar to Badiou’s project, Slavoj Žižek advocates a return to philosophy in the wake of poststructuralist and postmodern thought. However, for Žižek the return to philosophy means a return to and/or a repeat of a Leninist-Marxism. He writes:

to *repeat* Lenin does *not* mean a *return* to Lenin — to repeat Lenin is to accept that “Lenin is dead,” that his particular solution failed, even failed monstrously, but that there was a utopian spark in it worth saving. To repeat Lenin means that one has to distinguish between what Lenin effectively did and the field of possibilities that he opened up, the tension in Lenin between what he effectively did and another dimension, what was “in Lenin more than Lenin himself.” To repeat Lenin is to repeat not what Lenin *did*, but what he *failed to do*, his *missed* opportunities. (“Lenin’s Choice” 310)

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<sup>3</sup> For example, See Benjamin Noys’s “Through a Glass Darkly: Alain Badiou’s Critique of Anarchism” and Simon Critchley’s *Infinitely Demanding*.

In essence, Žižek wants philosophy to perform the same act as Badiou proposes: philosophy should illuminate the path forward to political emancipation. One can clearly see the affinity between Badiou and Žižek in the text *Philosophy in the Present*. In fact, Žižek makes it apparent as he continually showers Badiou with praise that there is little difference in the way they view the relationship between philosophy and politics. Citing Badiou approvingly, Žižek posits that philosophy “literally exists only through the excessive connections to external politics, which are of either an amorous, political, scientific, or artistic nature” (69). Despite the similarities between the two, it is evident that their political allegiances differ. Whereas Badiou appears at least willing to entertain non-Statist, non-liberal and non-Marxist approaches, Žižek is thoroughly embedded in the Marxist tradition. However, noting Žižek’s discussion of Lenin, his Lenin is not the historical Lenin and advocate of the vanguard party. In fact, Žižek’s Lenin cannot be the historical Lenin. Thus, we are left with a vague picture of what Marxism today might look like. Or, as Peter McLaren writes in *JAC*, “Consequently, it is unclear how he would suggest that we proceed—politically and organizationally—in our mission to slay the beast of capital” (644). Indeed, one might agree with Todd May when he suggest that “given the contortions made in order to bring Marx into alignment with current thinking, one might wonder whether it would be better simply to seek a new tradition in which to embed their thought” (“Anarchism from Foucault to Rancière” 11). In other words, Žižek’s project points to a Marxism that is no longer a Marxism, which, as such, leaves us with nothing but a politics hidden in clouds of dialectics and parallax.

The work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri seems to suffer the same fate as Žižek’s. While Hardt and Negri might provide us with the most succinct diagnosis of the today’s political climate, their solutions leave us wanting. As a corrective to the postmodern emphasis on the

negative (anti-essentialism, difference, etc), Hardt and Negri seek to transform the fight against capitalism and the State into a “positive, constructive, and innovative activity” (413). Drawing on the ideas of Marx, Machiavelli, Deleuze, and Spinoza, they argue, “Their thought is always grounded within the real processes of the constitution of modern sovereignty, attempting to make the contradictions explode and open the space for an alternative society. The outside is constructed from within” (184). Yet, as many have pointed out,<sup>4</sup> while Hardt and Negri are in no short supply of content, their politics lacks form; they provide no model for how their model of political subjectivity—the “multitude”—might come into existence and replace the existing order. Indeed, the vagueness of the last two sentences of the book might serve as a piece of seemingly axiomatic evidence of Hardt and Negri’s lack of form, as well as recall Marx and Engel’s own vague definition of communism in *The German Ideology*. They summarize, “This is a revolution that no power will control—because biopower and communism, cooperation and revolution remain together, in love, simplicity, and also innocence. This is the irrepressible lightness and joy of being communist” (431). In short, despite the acclaim Hardt and Negri’s works have received, we are still left without a concrete statement on how such a theoretical amalgamation is to come to fruition and aid in the struggle for a just world. The result, according to Timothy Brennan is that Hardt and Negri “[will] their readers to accept their assertions—‘This is so, is it not?’” (“The Magician’s Wand” 374).

Žižek’s philosophical Leninism, however, has its opposite in what today has become known as “postanarchism” or “poststructuralist anarchism.” Drawing on the constellation of postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers of Deleuze, Guattari, Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard, many have argued that poststructuralist thought leads to the anarchist politics of Max Stirner,

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<sup>4</sup> See Timothy Brennan 337-340.

Mikhail Bakunin, and others (Kuhn 20-21). Todd May inaugurated such thinking in his 1994 book *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*. In this book, May forwards the thesis that joining the philosophies of Deleuze, Lyotard, and Foucault to that of “classical anarchism” might “sketch the framework of an alternative political philosophy, one that differs from its dominant predecessors, especially free-market liberalism and Marxism, not only in the vision it provides but also in the level and style of intervention it advocates” (3). Many others, including Saul Newman and Lewis Call have furthered May’s ideas in order more fully elaborate the “possibilities of anarchist moments entrenched in the postmodern condition” (Kuhn 19). While I am sympathetic to the general aims of this work, much of it seems to neglect many contemporary anarchists’ own distrust of poststructuralist and postmodernist thinking (i.e. philosophy). In *The Coming Insurrection*, for instance, the authors—a group of imprisoned anarchists—explicitly reject poststructuralist and postmodernist thinking:

Today Western imperialism is the imperialism of relativism, of the “It all depends on your point of view”; it’s the eye-rolling or the wounded indignation at anyone who’s stupid, primitive, or presumptuous enough to still believe in something, to affirm anything at all. You can see the dogmatism of constant questioning give its complicit wink of the eye everywhere in the universities and among the literary intelligentsias. No critique is too radical among postmodernist thinkers, as long as it maintains this total absence of certitude. (92)

In other words, anarchism as a political project cannot be substantiated by a groundless philosophy. Indeed, for *The Invisible Committee*, once revolution begins, everyone will “be forced to take sides” (13); one will have “to choose between anarchy and the fear of anarchy” (130). The point here is that political, economic, and social justice will not stem from using

anarchist political philosophy to develop alternative epistemologies, ontologies, and ethics that secure the tenure-track. Indeed, I agree with Jesse Cohn when he writes, “anarchism has more to offer poststructuralism than Newman and May seem to recognize, and that poststructuralism affords other and better resources for the development of anarchist theory” (“What is Postanarchism ‘Post’?”). In addition to using anarchist political philosophy as a framework to develop and expand philosophical and/or critical thought, the goal is to investigate the ways in which the various “post-isms” might be used to create, cause, and confirm anarchy.

The ideas of Jacques Rancière, which we have addressed at some length in this study, have begun to take us in that direction. Rancière, unlike many of his comrades on the Continent, evokes anarchism as a politics, while also arguing for a reconceptualization of “philosophy” and its relationship to politics. By supplanting the notion of the people “as lacking” equality, Rancière argues that equality is the *sine qua non* of politics. On Rancière’s view, politics is grounded on an egalitarian presupposition, and that the opposite of politics—the Foucault-esque “police”—designates categories that determine political subjects and their acceptable roles. Indeed, political philosophy from Plato to Marx functions as “the police.” The “police” participate in a process called the “partitioning of the sensible” (“Ten Theses on Politics” 36). In such an arrangement, all members of a society have a part to play, which results in “consensus” on the part of the populous. However, such an arrangement is undone by a process he calls “dissensus;” this process entails subjects putting into actions those very ideas that were under the logic of the “police” once unavailable to them. “Dissensus” creates a “supplement,” an unaccounted part of the whole that creates a “rupture with the logic of the *arkhê*” (“Ten Theses on Politics” 33). This rupture occurs as a result of rhetorical action; Rancièrian politics “occurs where a community with the capacity to argue and to make metaphors is likely, at any time and



through anyone's intervention, to crop up" (*Disagreement* 60). To explain, making aesthetic arguments operates anarchistically; such arguments question the guiding principles on which a State (the "police") rests. Framed in such a way, "dissensus" is thoroughly concerned with rhetoric and, like the Tea Partiers who have and continue to don tricorne hats, the construction of subversive political subjectivities. While Rancière is mum on the rhetorical tradition, in his rejection of political philosophy and development of the "egalitarian presupposition," he provides a sort of rhetorical formalism that seems to take the shape of a neo-anarchism, which has revived an interest in the anarchist tradition as an object of study.

Bearing in mind the four positions above, this current study has sought to direct our attention away from the "return to philosophy" in the works of Badiou and Žižek; the incessant desire to change philosophical and/or critical thought in order to fit Marxist politics found in the works of Hardt and Negri and Žižek; and, the fusion of poststructuralist/postmodern thought to anarchist political philosophy. Instead, this study has aimed to develop and give a full-throated enunciation of the rhetorical formalism that Rancière's work suggests by performing a rhetorical and genealogical analysis of American anarchism.

As we've seen throughout the last few chapters, we have developed a model called anarchic rhetoric that presupposes, like Rancière, absolute equality qua the ability to construct arguments that challenge the *arkhê* on which a political arraignment rests. Moreover, anarchic rhetoric puts forward an ethic of shared moral sentiments that can be said to resemble Adam Smith's figuration of sympathy. To be specific, the rhetorical interaction of self-interested individuals who, not through rational persuasion but the expression and judgment of affective and aestheticized responses, join together in "sympathy" to perform common actions can take place of the State. Because anarchic rhetoric provides a process that can take the place of the

State, politics, then, becomes a dynamic and ever-changing state of affairs. It becomes what we might call a “rhetorical State” that has no political telos other than the staving-off of infringements on individual liberty (which each individual is free to define for him/herself). Anarchic rhetoric is, in its essence, without content. It is readily available to partisans of all stripes, which is, in my estimation, an idea that should be developed so as to resist the “us” versus “them” worldview that seems to mark contemporary radical politics while also reifying the critique of representative thinking and politics we have been arguing against. In what follows, I conclude this study with a short discussion of what such a rhetoric might have for today’s radical politics and rhetorical theory.

While I hope it has become readily apparent, our model of anarchic rhetoric asks rhetorical studies to move beyond its emphasis on reason, dialogue, and mediated forms of communicative interaction. In other words, it asks rhetorical studies to overcome its own veneration of the Platonic, liberal, and Marxist dialectics that seems to ground the field. Indeed, as I hope I have showed, these approaches leave little room for thinking about the power of non-dialectical, affective, and aesthetic communication can have in creating a more just world. Such a veneration of these communication models echoes Deleuze’s observation that “[t]o ground is to determine” (272). Indeed, I hope that the model of anarchic rhetoric that I have put forward throughout these pages suggests a new starting point for scholars interested in questions of social, political and economic justice. That is, whereas the Platonic, liberal, and Marxist rhetorics presuppose a scarcity of dialectical knowledge and that it is the job of dialecticians to give them the give of such knowledge, anarchic rhetoric presupposes everyone has the ability to make arguments and that one always, already has the necessary content to effect change: one’s own affects. Lastly, because anarchic rhetoric is without content, yet can easily be supplied with

affective content, the resulting messages resemble the aesthetic rather than the ritualized and mechanistic forms of communication that dialectical models engender. While my view may open me up to accusations of moral and political relativism, I would respond by pointing to the anarchist Paul Goodman who once wrote, “Men have a right to be crazy, stupid, and arrogant. It’s our special thing. Our mistake is to arm any with collective power. Anarchy is the only *safe* polity” (57). Thus, whether it be the enlightening the masses to the ideal forms of justice, beauty, etc, cultivating universal procedures for the use of reason, or fomenting class-consciousness, anarchic rhetoric resists the concentration of knowledge and power. Anarchic rhetoric, on the contrary, is overtly democratic in the sense that it trusts in the skills, actions, and judgments of humanity, which is simply another way of saying that “[a]narchism is the revolutionary idea that no one is more qualified than you are to decide what your life will be” (CrimethInc 7). Anarchic rhetoric provides the form that allows one to exercise his/her equality and freedom and determine the life he/she deems fit for living.

Before pointing up the implications of anarchic rhetoric, I want to provide another quote from Paul Goodman who, I think, provides a concise view of anarchic rhetoric while also returning us to Thomas Jefferson. He writes:

And, as Thomas Jefferson pointed out, only such an organization of society is self-improving; we learn by doing, and the only way to education co-operative citizens is to give power to people as they are. Except in unusual circumstances, there is not much need for dictators, deans, police, pre-arranged curricula, imposed schedules, conscription, coercive laws. Free people easily agree among themselves on plausible working rules; they listen to expert direction when necessary; they wisely choose pre tem leaders. Remove authority, and there will be self-regulation, not chaos. (94)

To put it more directly, instead of subscribing to the Platonic dream of finding and fostering the best leaders to create and usher in a just society, which, as we discussed in an earlier chapter, is simply one individual's implementing of a single moral vision, we find, create, and/or foster better societies where everyone and anyone can participate in determining and debating what is just. This is what the Tea Party's inheriting and employment of anarchic rhetoric, a rhetoric deeply embedded in American radicalism, reminds us of today.

In conclusion, anarchic rhetoric presents two implications, which deserve a brief explanation. As Don McLeroy and his comrades on the Texas State Board of Education prove, critique is no longer wed to a particular politics. As such, we might say that critique *is* dead, at least in the sense that it no longer serves an outdated Marxist and dialectical vanguardism such as Horkheimer suggests (221). Its partisan promiscuity suggests, in fact, that the aims of critique reveal an anti-political bent; the examining and exposing of the contingent nature of any claim of representation or appeal to immutable "truth," as well as the power(s) they serve is anarchistic. And, like the rhetoric Plato warned against, the aims of critique challenge all claims of representation and/or transcendent truths. Critical thought today takes the shape of anarchic rhetoric—an aestheticized and affective response to a perceived wrong that seeks the dynamic congealing and dissolving of sympathies in place of the State and absolute ethical relativism.

With that said, anarchic rhetoric draws our attention to a facet of rhetoric that has been neglected or overlooked by today's rhetoricians: rhetoric's an-arkhê-istic function. In fact, when compared to most rhetoricians, one might say that philosophers have more readily acknowledged rhetoric's ability to challenge and undo political institutions and ethical arrangement founded on "immutable" knowledge. In this sense, the preceding pages have sought to valorize what rhetoricians have not seen and philosophers since Plato have belied: rhetoric is democratic,

egalitarian, and a threat to any philosophically-informed politics. To phrase it another way, in place of the concentrated power and knowledge that both liberalism and Marxism assume, as well as the notion of absolute moral chaos that is often assigned to rhetoric, anarchic rhetoric puts the power to determine one's own life in the hands of anyone and everyone. Painted as such, this rhetoric—a rhetoric “without content”—provides the framework for seven billion Declarations of Independence: the beginning of anarchy.

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**ABSTRACT****WITHOUT CONTENT: RHETORIC, AMERICAN ANARCHISM, AND THE END(S)  
OF RADICAL POLITICS**

by

**MICHAEL JOHN RISTICH****August 2013****Advisor:** Dr. Jeff Pruchnic**Major:** English (Rhetoric and Composition)**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

My study suggests there is a homology between the Platonic critique of rhetoric and the critique of anarchism made by both Marxism and liberalism. I investigate this problematic by taking up a genealogical examination of anarchism in America that begins with America's founding and concludes with a discussion of the resurgence of populist/anti-Statist rhetoric(s) in the early twenty-first century. In doing so, I argue that anarchism is a politics "without content;" it is a rhetorical politics that challenges the (re)turns to metaphysics and Marxism in the wake of poststructuralist and postmodern thought. Specifically, in light of the contemporary Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements, I develop what I call "anarchic rhetoric," and suggest that rhetoricians, critical theorists, and those on the Left would do well to look beyond the dialectical and State-based models of communicative interaction that undergird metaphysics and Marxism to the "anarchistic" facets of rhetoric, which includes an emphasis on the affective, aesthetic, and non-teleological.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I received my B.A. in English Language and Literature from Western Michigan University (WMU) in 2005. I spent much of my undergraduate coursework studying American Literature and critical theory under Dr. John Saillant and Dr. Elizabeth Bradburn, both of whom encouraged me to continue on to graduate school. Upon entering Wayne State University, I continued the study of American Literature and critical thought, but my interest in teaching undergraduate writing led me to the field of rhetoric and composition. Eventually, because of my involvement in the *Marx/Das Kapital* Reading Group and my reading in the ancient rhetorical tradition, I began laying the foundation for a dissertation project examining the connections between radical politics and rhetorical theory.

The intersection between rhetoric and politics also spurs much of my teaching. I am currently a fixed-term faculty member in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures at Michigan State University, where I teach “Law and Justice in America,” “Radical Thought in America,” and “Preparation for College Writing.”