

Utopia as Heresy:
Hope, Possibility, and the Cultural Imaginary

by

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ABSTRACT

The utopian impulse represents hope for another world; a reflection of the injustices inherent to the hegemonic order that are understood as natural, necessary, desirable, and unchangeable. Those who challenge this orthodoxy are heretical utopians; pioneers of the counterintuitive who explore the types of relations that rather than reproduce the dominant order, shatter it, and manifest new ones based upon principles of justice. This project explores how ideological mechanisms of control embedded within the hegemonic fascist imaginary landscape of the United States render the visions of emancipatory social movements, that challenge dominant ways of knowing and being, as the "merely utopian" so as to instrumentalize the behavior of civil-society towards the maintenance of the established social order and the suppression of alternatives (Gordon 2004). In a rapidly changing world reeling under the pressures of late-stage capitalism, it is essential for those who value social and political justice to incessantly cultivate the cultural imaginary so as to shift the boundaries of what types of social relations are possible, feasible, and desirable through the process of struggle in heretical spaces.

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INTRODUCTION

I wanted to give you a good story, for one thing, because when you mention utopia, most people, even those sympathetic to hearing the word spoken, immediately want a very practical example or evidence or explanation—a story—that will make them believe you are not just wasting their time with impossible fantasies, faraway lands with seas of lemonade, unrealistic futures, or worse, tyrannical delusions and evil social experiments. (Gordon 2004, p.113).

This passage from Avery Gordon's *Keeping Good Time* illustrates an important point; "utopia has a bad reputation." Throughout history, renderings of utopian projects have called forth visions of justice that shatter time and possibility, placing human consciousness in unfamiliar spaces that challenge what they had previously understood as truth. When someone speaks of truth, they are always describing the limits of their capacity to explore the world further and in turn, are revealing the underlying structures of their imaginations that are difficult, maybe even impossible, to transmute. Cultural significations that are congruent with the way one imagines the world are understood as possible, but those that have traveled beyond the limits of these assumptions, are unconventional, dangerous, and utopian. In this way, these imaginaries are schizophrenic, in that their capacity to distinguish between that which is real and that which is imagined is blurred by the dominant understanding of what is possible. Where the utopian is always unfamiliar, "we almost always know that we are struggling over the truth when we confront it, and that such a struggle is inextricably bound up with the

question, not simply of what is real or realistic, but with the question of what is possible, what could be” (Gordon 2004, p.121).

It is impossible to discuss “what if” and “what could be,” without bringing up hope. Hope is a glimmer of possibility that drives people to behave in the present so as to arrange its trajectory towards a specific outcome in the future; the more unlikely the chances of succeeding, the more potent the sense of hope must be in order to compel agency in the present. In this way, while the experience of hope always begins with a delighted fantasy of the future, but actually functions as a form of perpetual torment that one can’t help but subject themselves to. This anxiety is rooted in the desire for a particular outcome, one that does not appear to be entirely in a someone’s control, which will determine the nature of their experience in the future according to how they imagine it.

A person experiences hope only after they establish a specific position with regard to how they desire the future to unfold; an expression born of one’s desire to dictate the aftermath of the unforeseeable future that will inevitably result from the incessant conflict between countless, often hidden, forces and wills unfolding across time and space. In this way, it is a moment of cognitive dissonance when one experiences the simultaneous acceptance and rejection of free will, while attempting to subconsciously determine whether some combination of desperation, honor, stubbornness, bravery, stupidity, and devotion is enough to make them believe that something is possible despite what reason says will most likely occur.

Even though a person can most definitely experience hope under circumstances where their victory is all but guaranteed, it is almost always more powerful and dynamic

when it is experienced by those who assume themselves to be less powerful or equal to their opponent; like a steadfast warrior who maintains the will to fight, in spite of facing a clear disadvantage on the field of battle. This is because a person with little accountability to the outcome of a conflict, who will maintain great power regardless of how it unfolds, carries less hope for his army's victory than those people he wishes to enslave and anyone who could potentially lose their life in the process. In this way, hope is much more useful during times of crisis when a person or group is trying overcome some sense of powerlessness.

Hope compels us to work towards accomplishing something that is understood to be entirely possible and imperative to accomplish, even at great cost and despite likely failure. It is for this reason that hope is the most useful to the stubborn, the naive, and the oppressed, but also the self-determinant, the compassionate, and the discontent. In trying times it reminds people of who they are, who they want to be, what they believe in, and that sometimes it is worth it to pursue an objective regardless of the fact that it appears to lie beyond their immediate grasp; to shape a future which is guaranteed to blossom into either freedom or tragedy, but most likely the latter. In this way, hope is both disempowering and overwhelmingly authorizing; effectively placing freedom before fear and humanity before reason. Without it, no one would have agency in anything in which they were not sure that they could win easily. It is the irrational drive towards fulfilling meanings that challenge what one's other faculties are telling a person can or probably will occur; to negate the hypocrisy of perpetual surrender, and to move forward despite staggering adversity.

When hope and possibility are constrained by the imagination, it creates a formidable barrier to social justice because there is rarely agency in crisis without any hope for success and never where even concrete successes are dismissed as too good to be true; like a child who continues to fear the monster in their closet, even after their guardian shows them it is empty. Without the capacity to change one's assumptions about the world due to their innate fears, which render the possibility of another world as mere wishful thinking, a person remains subject to the tyranny of the way they imagine the present; one with no prospects for a better future.

It is the role of what Erik Olin Wright (2010, p.10) refers to as *emancipatory social science*, which “seeks to generate scientific knowledge relevant to the collective project of challenging various forms of human oppression” to address this this problem of hopelessness. Where the first step is to “identify existing social institutions and social structures systematically impose harms on people,” the second is to “develop a coherent, credible theory of the alternative to existing institutions and social structures that would eliminate, or at least significantly mitigate, the harms and injustices identified in the diagnosis and critique” (Wright 2010, p.10). The final step is to engage in social transformation and consciously contribute to the process of social reproduction.

I will deploy Wright's methodology to address three key questions: First, if utopian thinking is impractical and inevitably leads to disaster, why do we need it? Second, what is the nature of hopelessness? Finally, how do we address this sense of hopelessness that limits the possibility of building another world based on principles of justice so that we can begin to explore alternative ways of knowing and being on the path towards self-determination?

CHAPTER 1

JUSTICE AND UTOPIA

What is Utopia and why is it dangerous?

The Greek etymology of the word *utopia* is a combination of “good place” and “no place,” which is appropriate when you consider that when it comes to delivering justice in the material world, utopias have a bad reputation (Gordon 2004). Ever since the word was coined by Thomas More in the year 1516 (2004), utopia has been a concept of great controversy. It invokes fears of totalitarianism and visions of impracticality in the minds of the dogmatic and rational, while simultaneously offering hope that another world is possible to anyone willing to indulge themselves in trying to imagine what freedom feels like.

Despite the fact that utopian thinking appears to have offered humanity only misfortune in the past when used as a guide towards erecting a perfect society, without it, we are lost in a time and place where unjust relationships are conflated with the conditions of an objective social reality; where “the given is a prison” (Gordon 2004 p.116). Utopian visions are emancipatory and for this reason are often invoked when a person realizes the discontinuity between the world they *want* to live in and the one in which they *must* live. These visions, which contradict the given truths about reality as we understand it, compel us to question our ways of knowing and being. When a person takes a utopian vision seriously, it transforms them:

He’s beginning to realize that if he recognizes no other society except the one around him, he can never be anything more than a parasite on that society. And no mentally healthy man wants to be a parasite: he wants to feel he

has some function, something to contribute to the world, something that world make the world poorer if he weren't in it. But as soon as that notion dawns in the mind, the world we live in and the world we want to live in become different worlds. One is around us, the other is a vision inside our minds, born and fostered by the imagination, yet real enough for us to try to make the world we see conform to its shape. This second world is the world we want to live in, but the word "want" is now appealing to something impersonal and selfish in us. (Frye 1964, p.151)

These utopian visions occur when the conditions of one's material reality does not meet their needs or desires, and alternatives to this world manifest themselves as fantasies, or "collages of experience" that are "made up of bits and pieces of the here and now" (Jameson 2005, p.xii). Because utopian visions are constructed from experiences and perspectives, they are also limited by them. As a result, a person's attempts to adjust all of the factors in the imagined world that would be affected by their conscious modifications to it, are futile because the human consciousness is not complicated enough to comprehend the infinitely complex material reality where nothing operates completely independently of anything else real or imagined. Reality is a set of unimaginably complex relationships that we do not have the capacity to fully understand, account for, or replicate unless formed according to the conditions presented by a specific time and space.

Visionaries who generate, carry, and share utopian creations often oblige others to imagine these worlds in paintings, film, poetry, music, architecture, and various types of literature, but the ideas that are represented through these various mediums are often

political in nature. While the visions can be harmless pleasures, they tend challenge taken for granted universal assumptions about human sociality that can directly affect political-economic reality because of the way that the way humans behave and the way they imagine the world can hardly be separated. Because the ideals on which these visions are extended can be linked to any abstract concept, if implemented in reality with no regard for the limitations or inconsistencies of the ideals, they are often impractical and dangerous in terms of the types of political relationships they manifest.

The early “utopian socialists” engineered predetermined, models for a perfect society, such as the worlds imagined in Thomas More’s classic *Utopia* (2004), William Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793), and the various works of Charles Fourier including *The Theory of Four Movements* (1808), based upon what they understood as the universal requirements and desires of humanity. These are examples of what Martin Buber (1996, p.11) has labeled “schematic fictions,” where we see “a kind of abstract imagination, which starting from the nature of man, his capacities and needs, deduces a social order that shall employ all his capacities and needs.” Here, the visionary begins from a single ideological abstraction and then expands upon it in order to create a world that is unrestricted by the conditions of social and material reality.

Often these predetermined models are condemned as totalitarian by their critics who argue that “self-determination, even in an emancipated society, could not be static: It cannot be the endlessly repeated determination of ‘we who choose to remain the same; or, even if that decision were taken each day, self-determination would require that it should at least be at issue each day. If autonomous space does not constantly move

beyond itself, then it becomes a prison, a holding in check of the push towards creation” (Holloway 2010, p.209). In sum, the inability of these types of utopian visionaries to account for difference among its claimants and the limitations of material reality, alongside the inability to adapt to changes over time make them unrealizable, or at least unsustainable as functional societies.

In 1855, the Vegetarian Kansas Emigration Company founded what was referred to as Octagon city with the intent on building a predetermined, vegetarian, community that abstained from meat, tobacco, tea, and coffee and other “stimulants” (Fitzgerald 1988, p.130-133). It was a colony of 108 people that were able to acquire around 32,000 acres in Northeastern Kansas through homesteading provisions of the time and around \$75,000 in startup capital. When the settlers were told that living accommodations were available and that everything required for agricultural production was almost complete in 1856, they left their homes in the east, but were sorely disappointed when they arrived and found that hardly any infrastructure had been built. A number of settlers fled and several died in the first summer when they faced powerful storms and a harsh drought, which caused crops to fail and creeks and wells to dry up. The utopian project was a complete failure for the incapacity of its claimants to account for both their limited skills (only one third were practical farmers, while the other had technical training) and for their inability to adapt to the harsh ecology.

Projects like octagon city serve as an example of why pre-planned utopian projects are dangerous; because their claimants make universal assumptions that are inconsistent with a specific time and space and the people that inhabit it. It is for this reason among others that Anarchist thinkers such as Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin,

and Emma Goldman were simultaneously inspired by and weary of the inherent fallacies of the early utopian socialists and in turn, broke away from the line of thought that sought to establish perfected, enclosed, predetermined models to pursue instead, alternative “pre-revolutionary” strategies based on “organic planning” where the “dominant purpose is to inaugurate from an impartial and undogmatic understanding of contemporary man and his condition, a transformation of both, so as to overcome the contradictions which make up the essence of our social order” (Buber 1996, p.10-11). Rather than attempting to build a new, perfect, static society from their assumption as the utopian socialists did, they attempt to address specific challenges and tools presented by the material conditions arising from the ascent of industrial capitalism in order to. In other words, the utopian visions of these thinkers reflected their conditions; where they saw the subjugation of man to religion, capitalism, and the state as unjust, they advocated for their abolition through direct action politics as the path to a more just society.

While the ideas of the “utopian socialists” managed to influence politics in many parts of the world to varying degrees, they were simultaneously revered as visionaries and critiqued as naïve dreamers by “post-revolutionary” utopians or adherents of “scientific socialism” such as Karl Marx and Frederic Engels (Buber 1996, p.10)(Marx and Engels 1972). Engels attributed the limitations of the early utopian socialists such as Fourier, Godwin, and Saint Simon to the fact that they were forced “to construct the elements of a new society out of their heads because these elements...” those of capital “...had not yet become generally visible in the old society” (Buber 1996, p.3).

Whereas many utopian socialists were attempting to manifest utopian visions as a strategy for revolution, for Marx and Engels utopia can only *after* the revolution, when

the state has “withered away” and produced conditions for the “dictatorship of the proletariat” (Marx and Engels 1972). In turn, Marx and Engels denounced their “utopian competition as lacking any conception of agency or political strategy, and characterized utopianism as an idealism deeply and structurally averse to the political as such” (Jameson 2005, p.xi). In other words, while pre-revolutionary thinkers like Bakunin (1970, p.vi) “refused to recognize the existence of any preconceived or preordained laws of history...” but rather asserted “that men shape their own destinies, that their lives cannot be squeezed into a Procrustean bed of abstract sociological formulas,” Marx and Engels argued in the *Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels 1972) that the transformation of social relationships towards an inevitable utopia, communism, was the result of conflict between social groups and will only take place according to the gradual unfolding of objective historical conditions, outlined in Marx’s dialectical historical materialist methodology. From this perspective, any attempt to enact a utopian society outside of this model will fail because the material conditions, such as the industrialization of society and the collective ownership of the means of production, have not yet occurred, meaning the material conditions are not yet ripe for communism. More than that, any attempts at building a classless and stateless society outside of this model under current material conditions will actually be detrimental to social change because they will take away resources and momentum from movements acting in accordance with the historical materialist model.

Because Marx’s method was understood as objective truth and relegates justice to future according to the dialectical historical materialist model, the Anarchists calling for direct action in the present were understood as idealists whose strategies for social

transformation were inconsistent with the conditions of material reality (Marx and Engels 1972). In turn, post-revolutionary utopians contended that social transformation can only take place by first centralizing power in the state, which can be utilized to organize labor and abolish private property, leading to the initiation of the socialist stage of history as the precursor to communism. Communism is the society at “the end of history” in Marx’s model, where the state becomes unnecessary to coerce society’s behavior and “withers away” (Buber 1996, p.101)(Marx and Engels, 1972). Vladimir Lenin understood this model as scientific truth, which negates strategies that are not consistent with that truth such as attempting to build utopian worlds in the present; “in Marx, you will find no trace of Utopianism in the sense of inventing the ‘new’ society and constructing it out of fantasies” (Buber 1996, p.99). Ironically, those who have managed to centralize power in the state through various methods while attempting to negate the capitalist stage of history have resulted in failure, including Lenin himself.

By organizing a revolutionary vanguard party, the Bolsheviks, Lenin created a totalitarian statist society maintained through a highly organized system of “authoritarianism and bureaucracy” based on “his belief that *no social order at all* could exist without top-down control, which meant the hegemony of the proletariat over all other social classes, and the hegemony of various professional cadres over the proletariat” (Day 2005, p.61). Such a perspective perpetuates the idea that civil-society is completely ignorant of its own interests and is incapable of organizing itself without the presence of rigid hierarchies. As a result, self-determination and the recognition of human difference are castoff as “merely utopian” (Gordon 2004).

The deterministic orientation towards utopian possibilities that is presented by Marx and Engels describes a system operating almost independently of the agency of its claimants. A legacy that is carried on, but adjusted in contemporary Marxist thought. For example, in *Utopistics: Or Historical Choices in the Twenty-First Century* (1998), Emmanuel Wallerstein, the creator of world systems theory argues that “when systems are functioning normally, structural determinism outweighs individual and group free will. But in times of crisis and transition, the free will factor . . . [is] at its maximum, meaning that individual and collective action can have a greater impact on the future structuring of the world than such action can have in ‘normal’ times” (Wallerstein 1998, p.1).

For Wallerstein, the “free will factor” represents “the capacity for rational thought and action in circumstances where the outcome of such thought and action is not predictable, but sensitive to intervention” (Gordon 2004, p.118). Avery Gordon explicitly rejects Wallerstein’s deterministic line of thought, asserting that his “free will factor has little instinct for freedom” because “its instincts and impulses are always contained by a system which dominates so thoroughly that it decides when we can “have an impact” on restructuring the world, which is always relegated to the future” and there are “no guarantees” of success (Gordon 2004, p.119, 131). In other words, Gordon recognizes how Wallerstein’s understanding of the way human agency relates to justice is directly linked to the parameters laid out by the system he seeks to transform, which takes place at the cost “of the freedom and autonomy that utopian thinking cannot and does not, in practice, do without” (Gordon 2004, p.119).

If a framework for justice always relegates the prospect of a better world to the future, it anaesthetizes the “instinct for freedom,” which occurs where the environment of an organism which is no longer capable of adapting to the competitive performances required for well-being under domination, is no longer capable of tolerating the aggressiveness, brutality, and ugliness of the established way of life,” and effective utopian thought demands its presence at all times and especially in times where the “free will factor” is not in effect (Gordon 2004, p.124-125). For this reason and many others it is in the interest of those concerned with the current condition of social and political injustice to attempt to cultivate the instinctual basis for freedom in those around us:

Cultivating an instinctual basis for freedom is about identifying the *longings* that already exist--however muted or marginal or *extreme*--and turning these *longings* into *vital needs*, into things that we cannot and will no longer live without...
...Cultivating an instinctual basis for freedom is about being obstinate that survival is a condition which does not exist when it is obtained at the expense of the suffering of others or of oneself. Cultivating an instinctual basis for freedom is about cultivating an individual and collective indifference to all the promises of happiness, worth, and freedom that deliver their opposites or morally degraded versions of themselves...
...Cultivating an instinctual basis for freedom is about the "ingression of the future into the present." Cultivating an instinctual basis for freedom, then, is the delicate and difficult process of making the *qualitative difference* possible and realistic, a part of who we are as a people and thus

accepted as reality instead of rejected as the merely utopian. (Gordon 2004, p.125)

If the utopian is always relegated to the future, it is impotent as a framework for justice. In fact, the most valuable aspect of utopian thinking as an emancipatory framework is that it “doesn’t wait for authorization from a superior system or higher power to direct our fate. From this standpoint, we authorize ourselves a monumental act of freedom in the authoritarian world in which we live” (Gordon, 2004, p.126). It is only after we give ourselves permission to be free in the present, will we ever be able to be.

As Gordon points out, the way a person imagines their role in political-economic reality, which shapes what they understand as possible, does not operate independently of the order in which they have come find themselves subject (Gordon, 2004). For this reason, the way one envisions utopia, established according to the taken for granted universal truths that structure our imaginations, can function as a tool of domination; a fantasy that compels us to think and behave in a certain way to achieve this fantasy, despite the presence of contradictory material conditions that could be better served by alternative ideologies, but are effectually subverted.

In *Raven* (2008), Tim Reither tells the story of how a radical Christian community organizer by the name of Jim Jones convinced almost 1000 people to break contact with their family 1970’s to build a new community in Guyana, Africa

where he ruled as the supreme spiritual leader. The People's Temple was a utopian fantasy rooted in the ideal of serving a God, and in turn followers were coerced, either through psychological manipulation or threats of violence, to work long hours under difficult conditions in the hope of realizing a perfect society. However, what appeared to be a dream was actually a nightmare as the world slowly began to realize that Jones was exploiting his followers; bending their will towards his own twisted means, including sexual assault and the funneling of his followers money towards his pharmaceutical drug addiction.

Many supporters remained oblivious to what was occurring in the People's Temple even in the end, when fearing the consequences of an impending raid by federal authorities, Jones convinced his followers to commit "revolutionary suicide" in order to attain eternal life in heaven. The 913 victims (including 200 children) that resulted from the assault serve as a warning to how the imposition of a utopian vision upon others through violence or manipulation is a recipe for dystopia (Raven 2008, p.267). It is important to point out that the tragedy was not just the result of direct violence, but the belief in a universal, superior, dogma that took priority over all others that may have averted the tragedy. Those who simply went along with Jones' plans to commit suicide as well as the followers who carried out violence on those who did not, behaved in such a way because of the ideal on which their devotion to the utopian vision was based; serving God. A God whose requirements could only be appeased through submission to his prophet.

The tragedy of Jonestown is a useful example for illustrating how invoking divine righteousness serves as a powerful tool of domination because it functions as a universal ideological framework based on assumptions rooted in an authority that lies beyond material reality, making it difficult to contest those who claim to be in direct contact with it. In other words, belief in the concept of God enables “prophets” to establish a power relationship with their followers because once they manage to convince others of their divinity, their leadership becomes incontrovertible and their punishment for disobedience is relegated beyond the limits of the mortal body to a castigation of eternal suffering in hell:

Christianity is precisely the religion *par excellence*, because it exhibits and manifests, to the fullest extent, the very nature and essence of every religious system, which is *the impoverishment, enslavement, and annihilation of humanity for the benefit of divinity*. God being everything, the real world and man are nothing. God being truth, justice, goodness, beauty power, and life, man is falsehood, iniquity, evil, ugliness, impotence, and death. God being master, man is the slave. Incapable of finding justice, truth, and eternal life by his own effort, he can attain them only through a divine revelation. (Bakunin 1970, p.24)

Bakunin’s (1970) words offer insight into how operating from a perspective that assumes a predetermined, fixed, metaphysical reality reproduces an ideological framework that automatically places the authority of church above any other that could possibly exist on earth because the cost of failure runs far beyond the limits of material reality. Religion creates a shared imaginary that contains masterfully designed ideological mechanisms of control that all but guarantee its preservation and in turn, the

legitimacy of authority. The ultimate mechanism of control being when a religious authority convinces his followers of the necessity of their personal role in their path to salvation; the idea that without access to the authority's alleged capacity to interact with the divine, they are forsaken by God and will be subject to eternal punishment and torture. God is powerful, indeed.

Religion operates as an ideology, which Louis Althusser (1971, p.162) describes as a "representation" of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" that "occludes or misdirects our understanding of the world." In other words, "ideologies offer, ultimately, a means to train or organize the imagination," producing a static framework that shapes one's behavior and what a person is capable of understanding as possible (Haiven 2014, p.230). In the case of Christianity, the ideology produces an imagining of the world is split into the spiritual and the profane, where the fate of one's eternal soul is at stake according to their level of subjection to the "truths" passed on through texts and religious leaders.

Arguably, the most effective of these "truths" in Christianity is the belief in "free will," which is necessary to make its followers believe as if the individual is entirely responsible for their behaviors, beliefs, and conditions and therefore is personally accountable to a higher authority. Nietzsche (1990, p.64) argued that "an account of will is an account of becoming accountable, of becoming guilty; "the doctrine of will has been invented essentially for the purpose of punishment, that is, of finding guilty" (as cited in Ahmed, 2014, p.7). This emphasis on the individual will combines with other mechanisms of control in the imagination, such as the fact that Satan is supposed to tempt and deceive humans, effectively threatening its claimants with eternal damnation for the

crime of exploring other ways of knowing and being in the world. In turn, those operating from this framework attempt to impose it upon others for their own well-being and even the worst atrocities are forgiven and understood as a necessary means to an ends because the imaginary state of the soul is privileged over the condition of the living, conscious, will of human beings.

While the tragedy at Jonestown in 1973 was born of acting on utopian visions rooted in Christian ideology, they do not have to be metaphysical in order to constrain possibility, but rather, they can be rooted in anything from the aesthetic, to the rational, to the absurd, which are very difficult to distinguish. For example, in *Seeing Like a State* (1998), James C. Scott explores how utilizing the logic of “high-modernist ideology” as a framework for large-scale utopian social engineering projects in the twentieth-century has inevitably led to tragedy and failure in every context where it was deployed. He defines this way of organizing the imagination, or ideology, as a “supreme confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws” (Scott 1995, p.89).

Similar to belief in the divine, the imaginary framework that comprises a high modernist perspective contains ideological mechanisms of control that cause it to be understood by its claimants as universally superior to alternatives and in turn, compels them to dismiss anything inconsistent with their way of knowing and being as valid or relevant. The fact that it is understood as coming from an objective or scientific position, one that has always been about the domination of man and nature, its claimants view

themselves as justified and obligated to impose it upon others for their own good, despite its practical limitations.

The failures that result from high-modernist ideology are very much linked to the fact that it places rational aestheticism before functionality, creating within the resulting system, inconsistencies between the ideal and material reality that result from ignoring complex relationships. Scott illustrates this concept as applied to utopian visions by offering us the example of Vladimir Lenin's attempts to impose a universal mechanized system of "scientific" agricultural production rooted in high modernist ideology and upon the Russian peasantry (Scott 1998). These villagers had been developing their traditional "backwards" methods over time through experimentation for millennia and they had proved themselves effective as a result of being adapted by the people who lived there and had allowed them to live comfortably and sustainably in a specific locality in the absence of domination.

Like the Christians in Jonestown who heeded the authority of God (or an insane person wielding a machine gun who heeds it), Lenin and other high modernists assumed that only experts wielding scientific knowledge are worthy of leadership and secondly, that everyone else must either obey their logic or be removed. By centralizing power and authority in the hands of a revolutionary vanguard party, Lenin was able to impose this project upon others, believing that it was his obligation according to "scientific socialism" to act as a guide for the people who were too ignorant to guide themselves. When in reality, the peasants instinct for freedom was leading them in a much different direction, but their movement was blocked (Gordon 2004).

When a utopian vision is imposed upon others, as was the case with the collectivization of the peasantry (Scott 1998), it creates several problems that contribute to its inevitable failure. First of all, it does not successfully account for both the immense heterogeneity of culture and ecological specificity across time and space. When universal ways of knowing and being that privilege certain groups over others are introduced into foreign spaces, indigenous ways of knowing and being are dismantled and forgotten to make room for the universal ones that cannot take into account the knowledges that local people have developed through thousands of years of adaptation and experimentation in that ecology. Unfortunately, when those memories are no longer allowed to be practiced or they are no longer relevant¹, eventually they will cease to be passed on. When this occurs, local people lose the capacity to live autonomously and become subject to the primary authority of the system that has been imposed on them. Also, a person who becomes forced to live in another person or group's utopian vision against their will is never utopian, but always dystopian. Once traditional ways of knowing and being are forgotten, the unwilling subjects inevitably come to serve the needs of the authority that maintains the system that has been imposed upon them because they come to lack the knowledge and skills to live otherwise as well as the means to lead an explicit resistance, a process that is hard to separate from slavery.

In order for a utopian vision to circumvent failure in material reality, there are three primary criteria it must avoid. The first, as Gordon (2004) pointed out, is that for a utopia to be useful it must trigger one's instinct for freedom in the present and never be

¹ Perhaps, what is necessary to survive changes or they were forced to relocate from their indigenous space, where their knowledges had no place. It is like forcing a native New York City cab driver into the Amazon rain forest and expecting them to thrive.

relegated it to a future that may or may not occur. Second, it must not be based on a fixed ideological system, such as Christianity or high-modernism as per the examples, because the moment one believes that they have discovered universal truth, “he can only corrupt himself by privilege and corrupt others by power” (Bakunin 1970, p.7). Third, a utopian vision must never be imposed upon its subjects or it will lead to dystopian authoritarianism and tragedy. When a utopian vision is imposed upon others, it fails to account for difference for both its capacity to destroy all that is necessary to maintain autonomy outside of that vision and its failure to account for cultural and ecological difference across time and space.

Now that the dangerous aspects of utopian thinking have been identified, they can be dissected from the type of utopian framework that is useful for imagining the possibilities of social and political justice. I will begin this process by examining what remains of utopia after the procedure, that now allows us to leave universality, imposition, anxiety for a future utopia behind so I can move towards developing a utopian framework that permits human difference and freedom in the here and now. Once this is accomplished, I will be able to explore how the structuring of the imagination determines who is included in a person or group’s sense of justice and in turn, whether their visions for a better world are that of a utopia or dystopia.

Utopia as Heresy

Utopian thinking has always had a bad reputation (Gordon 2004), but like many things with bad reputations, this attitude is rooted in generalized assumptions that were founded not by those who would be served by such perspectives, but rather by those who

have a stake in maintaining the reputation of the rigid system of social order perpetuated by them (Mannheim, 1936). For the purposes of this essay, the *social order*, can be understood as a system or method of organizing political-economic relations between humans and their environment that reproduces itself through methods of control rooted in authority. This is because to most of those subject to it, order appears in the mind as something natural, necessary, and desirable, which blinds them to the fact that it is imposed upon them by for the purposes of maintaining conditions where exploitation and appropriation of the majority are possible and where the relationships it produces incessantly suppress alternative ways and knowing and being that do not serve to sustain the authority as such.

From a position that is skeptical of authority, what Avery Gordon describes to as utopia's "bad reputation" may otherwise be interpreted as the intentional suppression of other worlds and possibilities by the powerful representatives of a given order who "have always aimed to control those situationally transcendent ideas and interests which are not realizable within the bounds of the present order, and thereby to render them socially impotent, so that such ideas would be confined to a world beyond history and society, where they [cannot] affect the *status quo*." (Mannheim 1936, p.193). In this way, maintaining order is the art of constricting the possibility of freedom beyond its borders; "political economy has always confined itself to stating facts occurring in society, and justifying them in the interest of the dominant class" (Kropotkin 2011, p.232).

When the powerful actors of a given order feel their authority is being challenged or they wish to impose it upon others, they must find ways to adapt that do not endanger their privileged position by continuously multiplying, transforming, and reorganizing the

symbolic, linguistic, temporal, cultural, epistemological, and ontological borders that maintain its powerful position. In *Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labor* (2013, p.v), Mezzadra and Neilson describes how this phenomenon as *the multiplication of labor*, arguing that these boundaries “overlap, connect, and disconnect in often unpredictable ways, contributing to shaping new forms of domination and exploitation” that allow for the growth of capitalism. While the structures may transform over time, they engineered so as to maintain the same social structures and privileges.

Besides the constant reconfiguration and production of borders, another important part of maintaining a social order is making it appear natural, necessary, and desirable to its subjects so that they will be less inclined question the authority that it privileges. To accomplish this, dystopian visions are often deployed to produce a collective anxiety about a possible future that occurs in the absence of the social order it is trying to necessitate in the minds of its subjects. In other words, those who take as truth the assumptions that justify the existence of the relations of domination, voluntarily submit themselves to hierarchical power relationships because they have come to believe either that the order is inevitable, that it is the only alternative to chaos, and that the sources of authority that maintain it can make better decisions about their own wellbeing than they can themselves. At the same time, the subjects come to encourage the suppression of anyone or anything that challenges the universal assumptions that rationalize the existence of the authority responsible for maintaining order and condone the imposition of this order upon all others for their own welfare regardless of whether or not they share the same assumptions. In turn, those subject to an order fear not only the consequence of behaving in ways that challenge the perspectives perpetuated by the authority form which

are formed according to the unchangeable god-given, truths about reality, but also direct the repercussions delivered from the authority itself as a result of challenging its power. For example, because the orthodox Catholic depends upon the church for the salvation of their soul, they come to fear the authority of the church as much as the authority of God.

The reason fascist truths are so effective in justifying authority, is that they create terrifying imaginaries regarding what the world would be like in the absence the order it maintains, which compel those who take up these imaginaries to think and behave with the interests of the authority in mind. Where utopia is based in an either conscious or unconscious optimism about the future possibilities of living with other people, order is rooted in the perpetuation of fixed, fear-based, assumptions about reality, ignoring the fact that the order is most often what produces them. For example, the belief that humanity cannot produce enough food to feed every human on earth is a direct result of the conditions produced by the given order: “the omnipresent scarcity we experience is an artifact: of our money system, of our politics, and of our perceptions...for something to become an object of commerce, it must be made scarce first” (Eisenstein 2004, p.29).

Food scarcity drives commodity prices up and labor costs down, creating ideal conditions of exploitation, and justifying increased security, which appears necessary to maintain order. In sum, while the order appears natural, necessary, and desirable by its subjects for its capacity to maintain justice in a world of inherent scarcity, where violence and starvation are rampant, they take for granted the fact that the order itself is responsible for maintaining a system of power relations that separates people from their ability to feed themselves and live autonomously. In effect, the detrimental aspects of the

relations maintained by the order are accepted as just in the present by many of its subjects, because the order promises “progress” towards a more just society in the future that can only result by tightening the grip of the *status quo* upon its subjects, despite the fact that it has only led to increased political-economic stratification.

According to parameters I laid out in the previous section of what comprises a dangerous utopian vision, it is a system of social relationships based upon generalized assumptions which produce a fear-based imaginary that requires it be imposed upon others and where justice is always relegated to the future. In other words, when order is imposed on others it inevitably leads to a dystopian world where difference cannot exist as such across time and space; the negation of self-determined utopian visions as possible. A place where dignity is hard to come by because of the presence of a crushing cultural, political, and economic order that attempts to dictate what its subjects think is important, how they can attain it, and what is possible in terms of human relations. This is a problem for both justice and survival of the species, when you consider that diverse ways of know and being are not only necessary to maintain a group’s dignity and self-respect, but to avoid tragedy and failure.

A utopian vision that provides justice for everyone must recognize difference and be democratically established in order to not only maintain itself over time, but to allow all types of ontologies and epistemologies to thrive in the absence of a system maintained through political-economic domination that produces inequalities in class, race, gender, etc. This is due to the fact that rigid frameworks inevitably produce unequal power relations that do not allow for alternative locally-specific knowledge systems and ways of being that are necessary not only for an egalitarian or democratic society, but for

sustainable human survival, to be desired, to exist in the imagination, or to be manifested in reality.

The utopian is never a totalized space where injustice is nowhere to be found and difference is eliminated, but rather a transhistorical process that is constantly evolving over time, accounting for variation, and reproducing itself through democratic means. This type of vision implies a dynamic understanding of justice upon which experiments in alternative ways of knowing and being are conducted in order to examine the potentials of human sociality. In order to account for the fact that failure is a likely possibility due to the limitations of the human imagination, that which is done must easily be undone without serious consequences and where unlike an ordered society, where freedom is granted in different degrees, everyone participating in its decisionmaking process are accountable to their own choices.

The utopian longing is the vigilant challenge of convention, which incessantly “breaks the bonds of the existing order” that have allowed the authorities that benefit from the order to exist as such (Mannheim 1936, p.192). It is simultaneously a form of resistance against the tyranny of instrumental orthodoxy and a guide on the path towards self-determination that drives its claimants into the incredible and unknowable in the pursuit of justice according to the way they have come to imagine the world. In other words, *utopia is heresy*; opposition to the orthodox ways of knowing and being that reproduce authoritative power structures in a dominant order. It is for this reason that the rebellion of heretics is constantly suppressed by the will of the divine clergy and their faithful followers; those who do not benefit from the order, but are compelled to martyr their dignity and freedom for the sake of the order and deny even the possibility that

another world is possible. A world in the absence of a rigid order that places its inhabitants in relationships with one another that exponentially increases the proportion of people who are deemed unworthy of being included in the dominant form social and political justice.

The claimants of heretical utopias are infidels; nonbelievers, who find themselves located in an order maintained by the most faithful, but still refuse to blindly submit their wills to authority. One can prove their faith and gain power through the order by enforcing their beliefs by imposing them on others as is the case with state actors, including soldiers and police; to protect themselves and others from their biggest fears that may or may not be true, but are necessary to warrant their authority they are subsequently granted and the relationships it preserves. The faithful ignore the fact that heretics only exist as such in the eyes of a specific authority and those who worship it due to the fact that either their ability to imagine the world in another way is impaired by their constrained understanding of what is possible or because they seek to maintain the privileged position they are granted by the established order and in turn, perpetuate beliefs that maintain it as such.

The most devout followers of orthodox religion are those who have managed to make their worldview immune to rendering itself obsolete through exposure to alternative knowledge systems through the practice of willful ignorance. This is accomplished by deploying a fear-based imaginary, such as one where a supreme authority (God) requires under penalty of eternal damnation (a punishment far more cruel than any that threatened by an imaginary rooted in materiality) that the breadth of perspectives his followers are permitted access to, which could potentially challenge the universal assumptions that

shape their imaginary as such, be constrained. This is especially true when those perspectives produce what are considered to be universal truths that contradict the fear-based imaginary they are perpetuating, such as other religions or scientific theory. In this way, “the utopian is not what is actually impossible or unrealizable, rather it represents the limit of permissible truth” (Gordon, 2004, p.122). The same is the case with any type of authority that is deployed to strike fear into the heart of its subjects, which takes place where they either come to believe the assumptions that justify the existence of the authority or where they fear violent repression from it. This a problem for justice when you consider that it is impossible to know the truth when it cannot be challenged first. The more a person refuses to allow themselves to test the limits of possibility, the more their perspectives become inconsistent with the real limitations of reality.

A society is never completely utopian or dystopian, but rather its form is a constant negotiation of what visions are permitted; the extent that authority and democracy that are present in a particular time and space. For example, consider a society with an influential orthodox religious institution and an authoritarian state that is controlled by dominant economic groups operating from an ideology that makes them unconcerned for the welfare of others and who understand human difference as a system of categories and rankings generated from an objective position. This space would be dystopian for almost everyone that found themselves there, especially if these systems of domination organized themselves as interlocking directorates.

Where these ideological webs of power overlap is where they are the most effective because where the beliefs of one system fail to constrict the imagination, they are still potentially vulnerable through another system. For example, those who do not

believe in the myths in the bible because they are scientists and in turn, reject any reality of the curse of Ham, could still potentially be convinced that race exists beyond a social construct through the deployment of racial and cultural pseudoscience. This logic parallels Bakunin's (1970; p.24) where he describes how God relates to the state, writing that as "slaves of God, men must also be slaves of the church and State, *in so far as the State is consecrated by the Church.*" Perhaps this is why Dennis Diderot's character in *Le Religieuse* (1830), Susan Simon, insists that "man will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest."

Now consider a society that denies the authority of orthodox religion the capacity to have influence over non-believers, is democratically organized both politically and economically, in such a way that difference is both recognized and valued as such. This is a heretic's dream; a world whose claimant's sense of justice does not require unwarranted obedience to an authority rooted assumptions that are not understood as being consistent with reality. It is important to point out that rejecting unwarranted authority does not mean rejecting all authority. For example in its self-defeating form, an authority legitimates itself as useful or desirable through the experience of living with one another because its subjects exist as such voluntarily and the hierarchy ceases to function when its purpose has become unnecessary. For example, when a person wants to learn martial arts, they often voluntarily subject themselves to the authority of an instructor, assuming that they possess superior capabilities or knowledge of techniques, training methods, and strategies than themselves. In order to test this assumptions to be sure that the instructors claims are congruent with the reality, it would require that the instructor provide evidence of the effectiveness of what they can deliver their student;

proof of their competence. However, if an instructor either has been surpassed in both ability and knowledge by their student or cannot prove themselves as genuinely superior, they no longer hold legitimate authority over them; it is at the same time self-legitimizing and self-defeating.

Because order requires the suppression of difference, for a utopian vision to require that order be imposed on others, implies that the visionary understands difference in the world through a series of categories and rankings that privileges the authority of certain groups. When order is imposed or voluntarily accepted, it suppresses the utopian visions of those subject to it regardless of whether they see the authority it is seeking to maintain as legitimate or not. In other words, a group's access to justice in an established order is determined according to the way the dominant group imagines the world and behaves accordingly, regardless of whether the groups subject to the order trust the assumptions that are used to justify imposing it on them.

A utopian vision consists of what a person or group desires their society to value, how they imagine a world that has organized itself around these values, and how they are behaving in material reality consequently. Each of which, are reflections of injustices they have come to see in the world according to how we imagine reality and understand difference. This model holds true for the heretic who seeks to burst through the established order, in that utopia is a desire, an imaginary, and a material form occurring across time and space whose claimants understand the world in such a way that does not privilege constructions of authority that cannot prove their legitimacy and includes everyone in its sense of social and political justice; where "all people would have broadly equal access to the necessary material and social means to live flourishing lives..." and

possess “broadly equal access to the necessary means to participate meaningfully in decisions about things which affect their lives. This includes both the freedom of individuals to make choices that affect their own lives as separate persons, and their capacity to participate in collective decisions which affect their lives as members of a broader community” (Wright 2010, p.12).

This sense of justice requires taking democracy seriously; perhaps why Rudolf Rucker suggests, “all people should have a say in decisions proportionate to the degree they are affected by them’ (as cited in Day 2005, p.212). For example, in a socially and politically just society the decision as to whether to build a dangerous chemical plant within close proximity to an impoverished neighborhood, would primarily be left up to the residents of that area because they are the ones that will be most subject to its effects, as opposed to leaving the decision up to profiteers who are not accountable to their own destructive and biocidal tendencies.

The Three Dimensions of Utopia

An act of heresy functions as a sort of counter-orthodoxy that challenges the legitimacy of the limits of possible truth within a given social order. The method of maintaining a social order is not limited to physical coercion, but rather its reproduction also depends upon its capacity to align the desires and imaginaries of its subjects and in turn, heretical behavior occur not just beyond our bodies, but within our conscious experience. In other words, utopia is not bound to a specific space and time, but rather it exists in three separate dimensions in which humans experience the world: the *utopian impulse*, the *utopian imaginary*, and *utopian form*.

Constructing a utopian world always begins with desire, which implies dissatisfaction with the present world and compels us to imagine and build alternatives. In *The Principle of Hope* (1954), Ernst Bloch describes the *utopian impulse* as the universal human need to create a perfect life for ourselves and those that come after us; our discontent with the present world and the desire to live in an alternative one according to our sense of justice. This occurs in the woman longing for a way to feed herself and her family. She has not yet attempted to fantasize about having food, nor developed a solution, but has merely acknowledged injustice according to the way she imagines the world; as a place where her family is of surviving regardless of the opinion of the status quo. The utopian impulse does not imply the production or experience of a utopian world, but merely represents the longing for it. In fact, the imaginaries and material manifestations that result from the utopian impulse are often inconsistent with it.

In *Of Other Spaces* (1967, p.3), Michel Foucault asserts that “utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal places.” Foucault contrasted utopias with what referred to as heterotopias, which are something like “counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which real sites, all the other real sites can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.” Heterotopias are “other” spaces that make “normality” possible the same way that the belief in a heaven degrades reality; if heaven exists and it is paradise, than reality is dreadful compared to it.

According to Foucault (1967, p.3), heterotopias have a similar nature to that of mirrors: “it makes the place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.” While the image in the mirror is a placeless place, the mirror itself a heterotopia, a utopian form, because it serves as a medium through which the utopian consciousness, the desire for and vision of another world, is manifested according to the circumstances presented in how a person imagines material reality. I say “imagine” reality because one does not simply possess the capability to fully comprehend reality as it is occurring throughout space and time, so they rely on their imaginations to construct, according to their experiences that have shaped them both consciously and subconsciously; a world that they imagine to be true.

Similarly to Foucault (1967), in *Envisioning Real Utopias* (2010, p.5) Erik Olin Wright defines utopias as mere “fantasies, morally inspired designs for a humane world of peace and harmony unconstrained by realistic considerations of human psychology and social feasibility,” which distinguishes from what he considers Real Utopias, or utopian forms that “[embrace] the tension between dreams and practice” and are “grounded in the belief that what is pragmatically possible is not fixed independently of our imaginations, but is itself shaped by our visions” (Wright 2010, p.5). These are institutions rooted in “utopian ideals that are grounded in the real potentials of humanity” and “can inform our practical tasks of navigating a world of imperfect conditions for social change” (Wright 2010, p.6). They need not be “feasible or desirable under all social conditions,” but only in “some conditions, likely to be realized now or in the

future, under which the model will succeed” (Huemer 2012, p.196). In sum, real utopias are spaces that represent humanity’s attempts to address injustices in the world in forms grounded in the actual conditions material reality presents at some point in time.

Both Foucault (1967) and Wright (2010) distinguish between utopian visions and manifestations in their frameworks. Those that are merely imagined were constructed in what I will refer to as the *utopian imaginary*, or the human capacity to imagine a more just world and the ways in which people might live in it. This faculty is functioning when the starving woman imagines herself feasting and devising a plan to manifest this fantasy in reality according to her sense of justice and the way she imagines the world, such as taking her share of food directly from those who have denied her access to it. The utopian imaginary is unbound by space and time and is not limited to that which we have directly experienced and in turn, the faculty pulls from how we imagine the experiences of other people, real or imagined. This is why in *The Educated Imagination* (1964, p.101) Northrop Frye argued that “no matter how much experience we may gather in life, we can never in life get the dimension of experience that the imagination gives us.” It is also why utopian visions do not always come out just as their claimants imagine them, because the process of manifesting the utopian consciousness into reality is constrained by the incongruences that exist between a person’s utopian visions and the way they imagine reality. In other words, not only are their cognitive capacities insufficient in their ability to create a utopian vision that recognizes how it’s ideal would shape every relation in the way they imagine the world, but the way they imagine the world is also not sufficient to provide a perfect understanding of it to begin with outside of a limited specific temporal, material, and cultural space.

To ask of someone to build a perfect, universally-just, world is like scattering the experiences that make up a single child's imagination around the floor of a large room that is pitch black, then giving them a flashlight and asking them to construct a perfect world according to how they imagine it. Not only would it be impossible to reflect all of these experiences in their utopian vision, but even if they could, the sum total is not a sufficient representation of reality as it is limited to a single set of frameworks and interpretations that does not account for the desires, imaginings, and material conditions of others:

We cooperate to produce our individual and social lives based on our sense of what is valuable. But the whole scope of that cooperation, the multitude of collaborative, conflicting factors that go into our personal and collective reproduction, is unfathomable. There are simply too many moving parts; there is too much information. To grasp this process, and to give substance to our ideas of value, we rely on the imagination. In this sense, the imagination is inherently and eternally flawed: it is a sense of the whole made up of only partial information. So while the way we imagine the world and our social cooperation is always only partial, it is still necessary. (Haiven 2014, loc. 753-762)

When combined, the utopian impulse and the utopian imaginary form utopian consciousness, which is not in itself dangerous, but does shape the behavior of the one experiencing it. The utopian consciousness represents the experience of having the simultaneous desire and imaginary that are necessary to summon the third dimension of utopia; the *utopian form*.

Frederick Jameson (2004, p.1) defines the utopian form as “the Utopian impulse detectable in daily life.” Because even the very etymology of utopia implies a “placeless place” the utopian form is a hypocritical concept, but the spaces it produces often retain many of the characteristics it acquired in the utopian imaginary, which is born of the utopian impulse. In this way, It represents the act of manifesting other worlds in material reality; acting with dignity. These forms can manifest themselves in a variety of ways, in that that they can be in the form of relationships, artwork, books (fiction or nonfiction), architecture, clothing, food, behaviors, technology because the content is not important, formed according to someones’s experience with privilege and oppression, but rather the container is what counts; Experiencing the world as it could be otherwise. In this way, it is:

through shared experiences, language, stories, ideas, art, and theory we share part of our imagination. People create, with those around them, multiple, overlapping, contradictory and coexistent imaginary landscapes, horizons of common possibility and shared understanding...” and the “...shared landscapes are shaped by and also shape the imaginations and the actions of their participant individuals (Haiven 2014, p.4).

The moment she realized she was incapable of satisfying her hunger within the confines of the established order, the starving woman experienced the utopian impulse and became a heretic. The utopian imaginary entices her with the possibility of a world where her hunger is satiated and she tries to imagine how to bridge the gap between her world by linking it to her material conditions. After careful consideration and planning,

she acts on her imaginary and moves into the realm of the utopian form by distracting a waiter and stealing a platter from the patio table at a bourgeois restaurant. However, unlike the way she imagined executing the heist, she forgets to tie her shoe and falls, dropping half of it on the floor. When woman finally finds a place to rest and eat what remains of her meal, her experience with the utopian form ceases.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this section I described the problem of systemic hopelessness as a barrier to social change. It is a beating down of possibility that occurs through a conflation of real utopian prospects and dystopian nightmares that occurs in the presence of an order that attempts to suppress political-economic possibility by conscripting the imaginations of those subject to the order through the perpetuation of fear-based universal truths that warrant the imposition of authority upon others, which incessantly encroaches upon the very existence of heretics and anyone else whose ways of knowing and being are incompatible with the established order. An order that attempts to eradicate the instinct for freedom and devalues dignity in our lives, resulting in a systemic erosion of the will that is necessary for the manifestation of a world where the dominant conception of justice includes everyone, rather than dividing humanity into categories and rankings based upon illegitimate assumptions concerning the universal nature of social and material reality.

In chapter 2 I will attempt to explain the nature of a few of these taken for granted assumptions that justify a few of the most powerful sources of authority in the United States, which constrain possibility and produce a sense of hopelessness in those who

understand them as truth. From here, I will address why these assumptions are problematic and begin to explore how to effectively restructure the architecture of the cultural imaginary in a way that is consistent with real possibility and the experience of living with one another in alternative ways; a cultural imaginary that allows for the existence of other ways of knowing and being.

CHAPTER 2

ORDER AND THE FASCIST CULTURAL IMAGINARY

What is the Cultural Imaginary and why does it matter?

Albert Einstein called the intuitive or metaphoric mind a sacred gift. He added that the rational mind was a faithful servant. It is paradoxical that in the context of modern life we have begun to worship the servant and defile the divine. (Bob Samples 1976 p.26)

I'm not exactly sure why Albert Einstein would call the "intuitive or metaphoric mind" a "sacred gift," but I assume it is because intuition allows for flexibility in thought and some level of self-determination in the human imagination, despite being immersed in an order produced from the imaginary of a rational structure based upon cultural assumptions that interminably attempt to colonize the utopian consciousness and conduct with the will of the dominant group. This would imply that the rational mind creates a "faithful servant," where the world is understood through a rigid framework of universal, God-given, assumptions about reality that determines who is included in its claimant's sense of justice, legitimates the authority of dominant groups to impose order on others, which inevitably results in dystopian visions. When manifested, dystopian visions produce worlds where power structures are organized in ways that increasingly centralize power by shaping the desires, imaginaries, and behaviors of civil-society in ways that benefit the interests of the visionary.

In *Crises of Imagination, Crises of power: Capitalism, Creativity, and the Commons*” (Haiven 2014, loc. 963), Max Haiven describes the dialectical relationship between value and imagination when he writes:

We rely on our imaginations to give us a coherent sense of experience, of reproductive cooperation, of the world around us. How a person imagines their relations shapes what and who they value. Meanwhile, their values, in effect, shape their imaginations. In other words, their cultural values determine what they think is important and the types of behaviors and attitudes that they believe will allow them to achieve their desires; how they ascribe meaning to the world.



However, because social relationships are far too complicated and dynamic for humans to fully comprehend at any given time, the way they behave in the world is very much the result of the way we imagine reality according to “taken for granted” assumptions, which attempt to fill the gaps in our understanding. In this way, these verities determine the architecture of this political-economic imagination, which arranges these interpretations into a “collage of experiences” as per Jameson (2004, p.xii), which produces a specific of cognition of reality and its constituent power relationships. This process is what is referred to as the *cultural imaginary*, which shapes a person’s sense of justice and who is included in it according to what they think is important, how they can get there, and the way they imagine the world.

For, Charles Taylor (2004, p.23) the “social imaginary” is the faculty that grants humans the capacity to imagine the world around them and where they fit into that vision. However, as Chad Lakies notes in *Challenging the Cultural Imaginary: Pieper on How*

Life might Be (cited in Lakies 2010, p.500), Graham Ward (2005) prefers the term “cultural imaginary” because he contends that “even the idea of the social is situated within and emerges from the cultural.” He suggests that “there need to be then, new understandings of what constitutes the social and society as distinct from the cultural and culture, but it cannot be on the grounds of some myth of the given; human beings in some immediate and ‘raw’ mode of cohabitation.

The cultural imaginary as the magma of social significations makes many forms of sociality possible” (Ward 2005, p.163-164). Where Ward describes the cultural imaginary as the “magma of social significations,” what he means is that the cultural imaginary is essentially a flowing form of representations of the world that are constantly competing for precedence over one another as their claimant moves through space and time. The structures that shape this flow is what will refer to as the *architecture of the cultural imaginary*; the structuring of the mechanisms of control that shape possibility in terms of what a person thinks is important, how to achieve it there, and the way they imagine reality.

Table 1
How the Cultural Imaginary Shapes Utopian Visions

<p>Cultural Imaginary: The dialectical relationship between our <i>cultural values</i> (what we think is important and how we get there) and our <i>political-economic imagination</i> (the way we imagine the world).</p>		<p>Justice: How individuals and groups relate to one another according to what is important, how we get there, and the way we imagine the world.</p>		<p>Utopia: A reflection of injustices we see in the world according to the world produced by our cultural imaginary. When derived from a vision of justice that includes everyone, it is that which breaks the existing order in the present world in a specific cultural, temporal, and spatial context; in some combination of its three dimensions; <i>utopian impulse, utopian imaginary, utopian form.</i></p>
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As is illustrated in *Table 1*, because the cultural imaginary determines a person’s sense of justice and who is included in it, the architecture of one’s cultural imaginary is congruent with the nature of their utopia, which exists in three dimensions; utopian

impulse, utopian imaginary, and utopian form. For this reason, it effectively determines if their vision is utopian or dystopian and whether a person considers utopian alternatives to be possible, necessary, and desirable or naïve, frivolous, and ill-fated based on whether they believe contemporary relations under the present order to be relatively just according to how they understand the world in their cultural imaginary. This is because the nature of one's cultural imaginary determines whether their orientation towards justice is consistent with the dominant conception that is perpetuated by authoritative structures in society such as the religion, the state, and capital. For this reason, the cultural imaginary cannot be separated from the utopian, because the latter exists as a reflection of someone's individual understanding of justice and what groups are included in it, which is formed according what they think is important (utopian impulse), how they imagine achieving it, (utopian imaginary), and how they imagine the world around them (utopian form); three concepts that do not operate independently of one another as I described earlier.

Chris Kyle was a highly decorated Navy SEAL sniper who became well known for his accomplishments in combat in Iraq where he had 160 confirmed kills (he allegedly had 95 more, but they were not confirmed) over the four tours spent there (Kyle 2013). In 2012, he released a memoir titled *American Sniper: Most Deadly Soldier in U.S. History* (2013, p.6), where he describes his experiences and thoughts regarding his time in Iraq: "I loved what I did... I'm not lying or exaggerating to say it was fun." He also describes the fortitude of his hatred for Muslims and Arabs, writing: "on the front of my arm I had a crusader cross inked in. I wanted everyone to know that I was a Christian. I

had it put in red for blood. I hated the damn savages I'd been fighting. I always will" (Kyle 2013, p.219).

In November of 2014, a film based upon the book titled *American Sniper (2014)* was released and quickly became the year's highest grossing movie after taking in over \$250 million dollars in the first three months and being nominated for six academy awards including best picture. The movie was very well received by the American public and the majority of film critics, which is disturbing when you consider the fact that according to the national legal and policy director for the American Arab anti-Discrimination Committee, Abed Ayoub, it sparked a wave of hatred against Muslims and Arabs in the form of physical attacks and violent threats over social media, causing their prevalence to spike to a rate not seen since 2010, when plans were proposed to build a mosque at ground zero (Mosburgen, 2014). These were people who could truly relate to the message that Chris Kyle was putting across and the world that he desired to create; they understood his desires, imaginary, and actions as justified. In other words, they shared a similar cultural imaginary, orientation towards justice, and in turn utopian vision as Chris Kyle, a man who not only blatantly lied about a number his experiences in order to bolster his reputation among conservative America, including killing carjackers, assaulting Jesse Ventura in a bar, and sniping residents of New Orleans from the roof of the superdome after hurricane Katrina, but was overt about his racism, hatred, and psychopathy in his memoirs and interviews.

These resources can provide us some insight into the nature of Kyle's cultural values and political-economic imagination that make shape his cultural imaginary; a world where going to another country, condemning their beliefs, dehumanizing and

torturing them, murdering them in droves, and bragging about it makes you a celebrated hero. This is a world shaped by hegemonic beliefs regarding Muslims, Arabs, terrorism, and security that structure the dominant cultural imaginary of a post-9/11 United States; producing a cultural resentment toward these groups that has contributed to their expulsion from hegemonic sense of justice, as is reflected in the 54 percent increase in the number of Christian and white supremacist groups between the years 2000 and 2008 (Potok, 2010). These political organizations were formed as the result of taken for granted assumptions about how whites must relate to Arabic people in order to protect their interests that are perpetuated by the ruling elite whose interests lie in the political and economic domination of Northern Africa. These beliefs structure both their cultural values and their political-economic imaginations, resulting in the formation of a cultural imaginary and in turn, a sense of justice where acts of unrestrained violence towards these groups are not only justified, but necessary and desirable to protect the people of the United States from the “irrational, religion-frenzied, savages” that cannot be dealt with in any other way.

A conception of justice can only shape a dystopian vision when you consider the dangerous aspects of utopian thought that I laid out in chapter 1. If you break down the utopian vision produced by this cultural imaginary into its three dimensions, it reveals how a universal understanding of reality must be imposed on others. In the first dimension: *utopian impulse*, for Kyle it is to protect “us” (white American) from them (terrorists, who are equated with Arabs and Muslims) at any cost, even torture and mass murder. In the second dimension of the utopian, the *utopian imaginary*, the way they imagine manifesting this world is by slaughtering Muslim and Arabic peoples or anyone

whose utopian vision contradicts their own because it is the only way of dealing with irrational religious fanatics who are incapable of diplomacy. Finally, the third dimension is the *utopian form*, exists where the claimants of this utopian vision manifest their vision to harm Arabs and Muslims in the material world through violence, social networking, joining the military or police, or going to watch patriot porn about the story of a “real American hero.” In the hegemonic cultural imaginary of a post-9/11 United States, Chris Kyle, the racist, psychopathic, mendacious, mass-murderer, is a utopian actor working towards making the world a better place for those who belong to the established order he seeks to protect and maintain.

Now that I have demonstrated how this framework can give us insight into how justice and the utopian are shaped by the cultural imaginary, in the next section I will attempt to explore how the hegemonic cultural imaginary in liberal-democratic capitalist societies, such as the United States, organizes one’s taken for granted assumptions regarding the fundamental nature of reality. I will begin by discussing how cultural values and the architecture of the political-economic are systematically organized in such a way as to constrain the possibility of longing for, imagining, and manifesting another world, while simultaneously perpetuating the dominant order so that I can be imposed upon others. Then I will begin to explore the nature of the systemic hopelessness that plagues the United States so that I can begin to look at ways to emancipate our cultural imaginaries, unleash possibility, and resuscitate the instinct for freedom in the contemporary world.

The Architecture of the Fascist Cultural Imaginary

As I discussed earlier, the cultural imaginary determines how one understands the world and imagines the way people relate to one another. In turn, multiple actors with varying cultural imaginaries will interpret the same experience differently depending upon what they think is important, how they get there, and the way they imagine the world and the people it contains. Such a negotiation is taking place between everyone in the world with regard to all there is to experience, even things that do not exist materially such as the various theories regarding the nature of the divine, which perpetuates constant conflict over how people imagine the same circumstances and choose to behave accordingly.

While not all cultural imaginaries create a perspective that such an orientation is natural, necessary, and desirable for everyone to share the same cultural imaginary as themselves, for those who do it is either because they are not even aware that people do imagine the world differently, because they regard alternatives as inferior to their own and do not respect their validity, or because they simply do not care if other perspectives die out. This type of view that constrains possibility occurs in people who are trying to imagine the world from a position which allows them to comprehend only a very limited amount of information and meanings, which produces an inadequate vision of reality compared to those who do have access other ways of imagining.

The heterogeneity of humanity's capacity to imagine the world is like a room full of people who all speak different languages and some speak more than others; where those who cannot speak multiple languages are actively and purposefully deprived of the ability to grasp the situation when compared to those who can. In other words, their

abilities to comprehend the workings of social and material reality are more diverse, which gives them a great advantage to gain power over those whose capacity to interpret the world is more limited, or as I mentioned earlier: humans are the most vulnerable to manipulation in cognitive spaces they cannot imagine.

There are two primary factors that determine whether a person's cultural imaginary is constrained, the first of which is the degree to which they are exposed to other cultural imaginaries. For example, a person who grows up in an environment where they are exposed to a variety of ways of knowing and being such as a metropolitan city and regularly interacts with people of diverse backgrounds is more likely consider the meanings derived from multiple perspectives as valid and useful, whereas someone who is socialized in a tight-knit, isolated, community will have less opportunities and reasons to imagine the world otherwise and in turn, fail to comprehend the validity of alternative perspectives. This is because for those who are socialized in a heterogeneous environment are more likely to experience contradictions between the way they imagine the world and their experience living in it with other people and in turn, come to realize the specificity of their own taken-for-granted beliefs, while the person from the isolated community is denied access to other ways of knowing and being that not only bring to light, but challenge their specific set of cultural assumptions.

The second factor that shapes whether the claimant's cultural imaginary is constrained is whether it is embedded with ideological mechanisms of control that limit access to other perspectives whose cultural values and imaginaries could potentially challenge the assumptions that justify maintaining a full-fledged devotion to the authority legitimated by their own cultural imaginary. In other words, if there are inherent truths

embedded in a cultural imaginary that must be upheld by their claimants at all costs, they are often protected by mechanisms of control that limit a person's access to other perspectives.

These mechanisms are the most rigid form of what Ward Churchill refers to as “structuring effects,” or the premise that “what we know constrains our ability to imagine what we don't know” (as cited in Liu 2009). According to Ward, Smith, and Finke (1999, p.198), an individual or group's subjection to these “structuring effects can be attributed to creators being led down a path of least resistance. When instantiating the problem of developing a new idea, they are drawn to retrieve typical, specific instances of a known concept and then to project the properties of those instances to the empty frame of the novel idea.” This is evident in Christianity where other ideological frameworks for interpreting divine reality are attributed to being attempts by Satan to confuse and test God's followers; where those who stray from the path of the bible or attempt to learn about other ways of understanding reality are threatened with eternal damnation. In turn, followers are coerced through threats of violence to limit the types of meanings and imaginings that they can utilize to make sense of the world and in turn, are deterred from exploring the possibility that their beliefs are not inherently true, which challenges the legitimacy of the church's authority.

For those who wish to control others, these mechanisms of control are useful for orienting the cultural imaginaries of others towards their own means. This is because a cultural imaginary in which these mechanisms are present is much easier to map and understand because by limiting possibility they become less complicated, which makes it more legible to political predators and therefore more governable: a person is the most

vulnerable in spaces they cannot imagine. Those with access to multiple perspectives can either use it to avoid manipulation by others or to control those who lack them by first mapping their cultural imaginaries to some degree and then using what they think is important, how to get there, and the way they imagine the world in order to perpetuate imaginaries that justify placing their creators in a position where they can exercise power. This can be accomplished by perpetuating ideas that may or may not be consistent with reality in order to justify the exchange of freedom and responsibility for servitude and security by building a set of categories and rankings, which come to be understood by the claimant as objective truths that are appropriate for making sense of reality. These mechanisms of control that constrain possibility are an invaluable to those seeking to maintain order, especially when the truths produced by conflicting hegemonic cultural imaginaries can be used to pit groups against one another, deflecting blame away from the status quo.

What makes these mechanisms of control so dangerous, is that they grant the capacity to manipulate someone in a way that does not require material evidence, but merely a scary story that coincides the way they understand reality. This is evident in cases where a person seeking power attempts to justify their authority by rooting it in the divine, such as the historical English monarchy. When its authority was linked to ideology of the Catholic Church in the early 17th century, the monarchy was elevated to the status of the divine and in turn, so were the consequences of disobeying its will. Not only does celestial ideology allow a person who is not particularly exceptional the ability to claim to be without having to prove it, but it also gives them the capability to construct fear-based cultural imaginaries from which they can construct threats far more terrifying

than anything than could be exacted in material reality in order to compel certain behavior in their subjects. This is an invaluable tool for maintaining order because the more fear the dominant group can invoke in its subjects, the more it legitimates and expands their authority.

While the authority of the English monarchy had effectively maintained control of its subjects through physical coercion, there is nothing in the material world that can threaten humanity with horrific possibilities to the extent that religion can, nor is there any material surveillance apparatus that can be used to hold us accountable to these fears that are as inescapable and invasive as one's own mind, which appears to be under the inescapable gaze of God's judgment. In turn, this type of imaginary is especially useful for those who wish to rule others, but are not exceptional in anything; it does not take a brave, intelligent, powerful, or creative person to make up a scary story, convince some people it is true and make themselves appear as if only they can provide protection. For example, if a devout member of the Catholic Church commits a worthy offense against the church and other followers, such as desecrating the bible or rejecting the authority or jurisdiction of the pope as leader of the organization, they can be excommunicated. In the catholic imagination, excommunication is a punishment that effectively separates a person from the capacity to save their soul from endless torture. In turn, it serves as a powerful threat towards those with the incapacity to know the world otherwise because of the mechanisms of control that lay embedded in their cultural imaginary.

When a person's cultural imaginary becomes limited by ideological mechanisms of control, it often results in a sort of childish, fear-based, extremism that rejects any ideas that challenge the basis of their exclusive or dominant worldview. This dynamic is

demonstrated when a claimant has become so subject to the authority, either real or imagined, that they refuse to adjust their perspective even in the presence of overwhelming evidence that contradicts the “truths” from which the authority that makes their perspective valid to them is derived. This is *fascism*, a political orientation that is born of a cultural imaginary that understands hierarchy as natural, necessary, and desirable for social justice because those operating from such a perspective determine how people must relate to one another through unchangeable, static, God-given assumptions about material reality and the people within it. Such a perspective is utilized by those who seek to rule others for its capacity to instrumentalize the behavior of its claimants so as to funnel public value towards private ends under the guise of necessity.

The fascist cultural imaginary is a way of structuring the way a person understands the world through a series of frameworks that organize human difference into systems of categories and rankings, which are formed according to the assumptions that justify the privilege of the dominant form of authority to control its subjects even in the presence of evidence that contradicts these assumptions; where belief overpowers experience. In this way, a perspective that is not required to provide evidence to justify the authority it grants, merely requires people who are too ignorant to demand it. This is the case of the catholic physicist who rejects the nature of reality as he has experienced it in order to make room for the one he has been ascribed, but has failed to recognize as such.

When an individual or group’s perspectives are explicitly constrained, it allows the established order to offer only a small spectrum of solutions to solve a crisis and then engage in a vibrant debate within that field, which is never threatening to the status quo

(Chomsky 2002). This behavior is easily demonstrated by describing how political parties function, where the members of Republican and Democratic Parties, which are often difficult to distinguish not only because they are both subject to the will of capital through lobbying, but also because they will by default according to the parameters of their position vote to pass laws and decrees that maintain the established order and justify their power to rule others.

The possibilities that exist outside the hegemonic spectrum of possibility that challenge commonsense logic are utopian, beyond limits of possibility within the architecture of the cultural imaginary, and therefore are not taken seriously because they are not compatible with the way the claimant understands the world and what is possible.² In this way, the non-violent exercise of power takes place through the violent suppression of the imagination, effectively creating an incessant negotiation of truth and the limits of possibility. Those who claim to offer universal truth, suggest the belief in a closed world that attempts to rationalize, simplify, and structure a diverse, dynamic, web of cultural imaginaries that overlap, create, destroy, and transform one another as their specificities collide in space and time through physical violence, appropriation, and the exchange of symbols in material reality. If the word “radical” means “to the root,” perspectives that limit access to the interpretations of the world offered by other perspectives create a non-radical imaginary, which is both legible and governable and in turn, cannot move beyond commonsense assumptions about reality under a political-economic order.

² Perhaps this explains why children are so receptive, creative, and fascinated by the world; because they have not invented reasons to dismiss the possibilities provided by non-hegemonic perspectives yet.

The Hegemonic Cultural Imaginary of the United States

When the architecture of the fascist cultural imaginary is organized in such a way that its claimant's make sense of the world through a set of categories and rankings, where some things are inviolably "better" than others, where the claimant's comprehension of reality is reduced to black and white thinking based upon simple direct causalities, effectively limiting the capacity to understand complex relationships available through other perspectives. In turn, the utopian requires the emancipation of the imagination from the constraints of universal truths that must be imposed upon others to limit the possibility of another world to maintain order. This section will elucidate the "taken for granted" structures of its hegemonic cultural imaginary. Uncovering these cognitive mechanisms that compel their possessor to surrender power to the will of the order can provide them the opportunity to see beyond the architecture of the fascist cultural imaginary to comprehend a world rich in possibility; a utopian vision derived from a sense of justice that includes everyone.

A person's culture consists of a set of meanings that they share with other people that help them make sense of the world, while their political-economic imaginations consist of how they have constructed the world they imagine from those meanings. In this way, culture is how humans interpret the world through the stories we share with others that we use to ascribe meaning to reality. It determines how we negotiate the world according to the way we believe we should "naturally" relate to one another. We only know a few stories, we understand the plot of each story to varying degrees, and we like some stories better than others because of the experiences we have shared with other

people who know the same stories and have grown fond of them as well in an environment where they have grown especially relevant and useful. Because these stories are so attached to the processes of daily life, which makes them almost invisible to their claimants, they appear natural and taken for granted.

Some of these stories suggest important reasons to ascribe certain meanings to reality and they become represented by symbols that invoke a specific meaning. A symbol can mean different things to people with different cultures, but it also determines their attitudes and the kind of behavior the symbol compels independently of the meaning. The cross almost universally represents the mythical crucifixion of Jesus Christ, but the degree to which that story is valued when compared to other stories shapes one's attitude towards it and how they behave accordingly. For example, when a Christian sees a cross they might feel inspired and pray, but when a heretic sees it they might be filled disgust and stomp it into bits.

These stories are fictions that we, as humans, share with other people that help us to collectively negotiate reality with the people in our daily lives from the experience of living with others in a particular time and space. The meanings of these stories are difficult to challenge in the mind of someone operating from a limited cultural framework who believe they understand the objective truth of reality and in turn, believe their perspective to be superior to alternative epistemologies, which are considered unnatural and inaccurate. It is important to point out here that both certain cultural values and aspects of the political-economic imagination are often taken for granted as being objective or universal and because their claimants are not required to understand the origin of either component in order to operate from the perspective created by the

dialectic between them. In turn, these components can shape one another without the claimant recognizing it as a result of the relationship or understanding the logic behind either component. In other words, one does not have to be conscious of the nature of what they value in order to imagine the world accordingly, nor do they have to be aware of how the specific way they imagine the world shapes what they understand as important, in order for this relationship to exist and actively shape their behavior. In fact, a claimant is not required to understand the reasoning behind either aspect in order to operate from them and these values and imaginings can exist as taken for commonsense assumptions, completely disconnected from any source of logic, but able to maintain priority through the mechanisms of control embedded with them.

When the architecture of the cultural imaginary is structured independently of conscious logic, it is extremely susceptible to manipulation because either component can be exploited, which shapes the entire faculty. For example, a person who understands a world where private property maintained by the state in as natural, necessary, and desirable would have to value individual freedom as well and vice versa. Understanding one component as commonsense, independent of its conscious logic, makes us understand the other in the same way. In turn, to make either aspect taken for granted is to make the other operate the same way. This implies that the meanings a person ascribes to reality through stories, regardless of whether they are conscious of them or have heard them or not, shape the political-economic imagination, and in turn the architecture of the cultural imaginary.

Thomas Rochon (1998, p.9) defines culture as the “linked stock of ideas that define a set of commonsense beliefs about what is right, what is natural, what works

(Rochon 1998, p.9). The most prevalent “linked stock of ideas” is generally the one perpetuated by the dominant order, one that propagates myths that can cause its subjects into conflate their interests with those attempting to maintain the order from which they benefit:

As Roland Barthes suggests, the production and dissemination of bourgeois ideology require a process of myth-making that distorts and appropriates objects by emptying them of their history and then investing them with new meanings. The new meanings constitute a mystification that naturalizes a concept. This mystification obscures causality and contingency in order to legitimize the bourgeois order, making its values seem natural, eternally given, ahistorical, and inevitable. Dominant discourses of social class mystify poverty by erasing the historical and economic conditions that produce, indeed require, it in advanced capitalism. These discourses then replace history with a cultural myth: that anyone who is willing to work hard will rise out of poverty and that anyone who cannot rise out of poverty is either unwilling to do so--lazy--or naturally incapable of any human development. (Folks and Folks 2000, p.117-118)

This passage makes it clear that myths conceal as much as they reveal about reality and the oppressed are compelled by their understanding of social forces, which are shaped by the logic of stories, to maintain and behave according to the cultural values of the dominant group to which they are subjected (Strauss 1979). This is not always because they desire to be subjected, but rather that they have come to believe that they share the same interests and can also achieve success by organizing their life processes

around these values. This phenomenon is what Antonio Gramsci (1971) calls “cultural hegemony,” which is described by Judith Halberstam (2011, p.17) as “a multilayered system by which a dominant group achieves power not through coercion but through the production of an interlocking system of ideas which persuades people of the rightness of any given set of often contradictory ideas and perspective.”

Hegemony occurs “in the sphere of civil-society, Gramsci argued, [when] the ‘great masses of the population’ give their ‘spontaneous’ consent’ to the ‘general direction imposed on social life by a dominant fundamental group,’” (Gramsci 1971)(cited in Day 2005, p.63). While hegemony pervades civil-society to various extents across space and time, it is important to point out that this “process” is never complete and the actions of a dominant group are always open to contestation” (Day 2005, p.7). In addition, hegemony, whether it exists in the realms of the real or imagined, if they can even be separated, is always cultural (P.M. 2011).

Hegemony operates by creating a specific structure of significations that interlock and are consistent with one another, effectively becoming “commonsense” over time as its specific assumptions become presupposed and function instinctually or without conscience intent. When the specificity of this framework of assumptions ceases to be recognized as such, it becomes “a set of beliefs that are persuasive precisely because they do not present themselves as ideology or try to win consent,” which produces an understanding of the world where systemic domination is taken for granted and other ways of knowing and being are dismissed by the very nature of what is considered objective truth, not epistemological and ontological specificity (Halberstam 2011, p.17).

When a person operates from a hegemonic cultural framework, they tend to interpret the new information according their “taken for granted” preconceptions that appear natural, necessary, and desirable; a framework that keeps their eyes clamped shut in the presence of anything that challenges their understanding of reality. Such a perspective makes a person vulnerable to manipulation and closes off possibility because “it is almost impossible to overestimate the power of cultural ideas to condition observers to see certain facts but not other facts, and above all to suggest interpretations of the facts that are seen” (Rochon 1998, p.60). This is why people tend to believe that we as humans, see things “as they really are, but that everyone else's vision is clouded. We resolve cognitive dissonance in the most self-justifying manner available. Then we develop a tunnel vision that impedes our ability to empathize and switch shoes with someone. Especially an enemy” (Liu 2009, loc. 1810).

When someone experiences conflicting understandings of reality, their commonsense assumptions, which are formed according to the architecture of the cultural imaginary, suppress their capacity to experience the world otherwise; these assumptions tie them to the world as they know it and refuse to let them leave. In this way, hegemony allows the dominant order to manipulate its subjects by making its existence appear natural, necessary and desirable where its specificity is rendered invisible, which compels the oppressed to make their cultural values congruent with their oppressors, which maintains the order without the use of force ; “dominant ideas tend to take on an appearance of naturalness and inevitability that renders them relatively impervious to critique” (Day 2005, p.46).

If one is seeking insight into the architecture of the hegemonic cultural imaginary³ of the United States and the hegemonic cultural values are those of the dominant group, the must first determine who the dominant group is. Modern societies generally consist of three primary modes of power; *the market*, *civil-society*, and *the state* (Wright 2010, p.119). First, the market or economy “is the sphere of social activity in which people interact to produce and distribute goods and services” (Wright 2010, p.119). Second, the state is the “effective capacity to impose rules and regulate social relations over territory, a capacity which depends on such things as information and communications infrastructure, the ideological commitments of citizens to obey rules and commands, the level of the regulations to solve problems, as well as the monopoly over the legitimate use of violence” (Wright 2010, p.119). Finally, civil-society is the sphere of social interaction in which people voluntarily form associations with one another for for various purposes and whose specific form of power “...depends on capacities for collective action through voluntary association and can accordingly be referred to as “associational power” or “social power” (Wright 2010, p.120).

The way these three spheres of power relate to one another determines how a society functions and the identity of the dominant group. It is important to point out that these power relations are never absolute, but always exist in some sort of balance between the three spheres. In other words, “while it is useful for analytical purposes to define “capitalism,” “statism,” and “socialism” as three qualitatively distinct types of economic structure, differentiated by the form of power that organizes economic activity,

³ The hegemonic cultural imaginary represents the dominant understanding of possibility in terms of what to value, how to honor those values, and how they imagine the world.

no concrete economic system is ever purely one or another of these forms” (Wright 2010, p.367). For example, the liberal-democratic society⁴ is a configuration where those who control the market effectively dominate the other two spheres of power, while authoritarian statism exists where the state controls both the market and civil-society. However, if civil-society, or the common people, have power over both through democratic control, it inevitably leads to some form of socialism.

This framework for conceptualizing power provides a simple overview of how influence is organized in liberal-democratic societies. However, if any of these three spheres are conflated, it can lead to alternative ways of understanding power that are not consistent with reality, but can be used to conceal relations of domination through a mechanism of control that is embedded in the hegemonic cultural imaginary. For example, while the state is often perceived as the primary source of social cohesion in modern liberal-democratic societies, it exists primarily for the purpose of allowing for the dominant group in the market to exercise legitimate violence over civil-society and against other states in order to protect their interests while creating a guise of formal equality among individuals where everyone is perceived to possess equal rights and democratic power. In other words, the economic structures maintained through the state produce conditions where “socio-economic inequality and exploitation coexist with civic freedom and equality” (Wood 1995, p.201). Because this system is necessary to maintain the hegemonic order, “it is crucial to liberal ideology that the transfer of individual

⁴ These are nation-states governed by representative assemblies who are elected through democratic processes in order to protect individual property rights.

autonomy to a coercive state apparatus be seen as based on consent, that it take the form of a 'contract' (Day 2005, p.53).

The domination of civil-society by the state and the market is concealed by *social contract theory*, a creationist myth regarding the origins of the state. It was produced with many variations by enlightenment thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes (1994), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1968), and John Locke (1980) in order to justify the conditions produced by the state and capitalism, which appear to be natural, necessary, and desirable. According to this story, before the state first formed humanity existed in a state of nature, which was described as an environment where there is “continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes 1994, p. 76). A realm, where there was no uninterested intermediary to resolve disputes between individuals. In turn, according to human nature, which limited to rational self-interest, these individuals came together to form a *contract*; a written or spoken agreement among consenting individuals over the protection or appropriation of property, according to which these individuals “exchange[d] the insecurities of natural freedom for equal, civil freedom which is protected by the state” (Mills 1997, p.2). By consenting to the formation of this social contract, the individuals’ willingly subjected themselves to the establishment of an official sovereignty; a source of legitimate authority designed to mediate disputes between them. According to this agreement, they would leave the state of nature and cross into a “civilized” society where they pay taxes and obey laws in exchange for the services of the state. These services include the benefits of infrastructure and protection (of both their

bodies and property) from both private criminals and foreign states (Huemer 2013, p.20).

In *The Problem of Political Authority: An Examination of the Right to Coerce and the Duty to Obey*, Michael Huemer (2013) argues that the absence of the necessary parameters to justify the legitimacy of the state based on either explicit or implicit consent, makes the validity of the relationship between the citizen and the state via contract invalid by its own definition. The conditions necessary for a valid agreement include a reasonable means of refusal, the acknowledgment that explicit dissent undermines implicit consent, the recognition that contractual obligation is mutual and conditional, and the assumption that by dissenting to the agreement that the conditions will not be imposed on them anyway (Huemer 2013, p. 25-27). In response to the first requirement for an agreement to be valid, there is no reasonable way of turning down an arrangement with the state and every piece of territory on earth is dominated by some form state power. Other reasons might include the fact that one may not be able leave because of immigration restrictions, financial constraints, or refusing to give up personal relationships to family or friends (Huemer 2013, p. 27).

The second requirement is the idea that the authority rooted in implicit consent can be overruled by explicit dissent. If one is assumed to consent to the agreement, they should be able to nullify it by explicitly saying or writing that they do not consent. However, this is clearly not the case considering Anarchists, who reject the idea of government rule, are still subjected to the laws and taxes of the state (Huemer 2013, p. 30). The third requirement maintains that “an agreement is mutual and conditional” is challenged by social and historical realities. Many would argue that the state does not

effectively provide protection from private criminals and foreign states and in fact, perpetuates conditions and attitudes that encourage violence and crime (Huemer 2013, p. 31-35). The final requirement is that an agreement demands that the conditions will not be imposed on the individual regardless of whether they accept the agreement or not is very important, especially historically with regard to sex and race (Mills and Pateman 2007). There cannot be a proposed “agreement” if the results of the decision will be the same. If an individual is free, equal, and acting on their own independent of coercion, threats, and “force,” in their decision to reject an agreement with the state, but they are still “forced” into subjection by the state than the “agreement” is no agreement at all, but domination. For this reason, David Hume (1987, p.471) maintains that “almost all the governments, which exist at present, or of which there remains any record in story, have been founded originally, either on usurpation or conquest, or both, without any pretense of fair consent, or voluntary subjection of the people.”

Despite these problems, in *Contract and Domination*, Charles Mills and Carole Pateman (2007, p.1) argue that “the simplicity and attractiveness of the idea of a “social contract” have made it an immensely powerful, influential, and long-enduring political concept, with an impact far beyond political theory.” Critics of the social contract, often point to its capacity to conceal the state’s violent history of primitive accumulation and exploitation that it has maintained through its self-granted monopoly on violence that makes private property possible. Max Haiven (2014, loc. 2406), refers to this type of suppression of history as “the policing of memory,” where the hegemonic order attempts to conform civil-society’s understanding of the past to “official histories which... ..render the past as merely the unavoidable precedent of the inevitable present... ..the

process by which the radical event is domesticated and defanged, held to have distinct and discrete causes and effects, and reduced to vignettes in the biography of individuals” In other words, policing of memory allows for the depoliticization of the past, producing a version that obscures the nature of the present by perpetuating the understanding that cause inequalities in wealth and power to appear as the natural result of human difference in order to maintain the legitimacy of those in authority..

When the social contract myth is conflated with historical reality, the state comes to be regarded as natural, necessary, and desirable in the dominant understanding of reality. A reality where those societies which are organized around alternative values and imaginings are perceived as unnatural and as a result, the citizens of liberal-democratic states come to believe it is their duty to help “civilize” them by imposing the conditions of their own order onto others across space and time. The pervasiveness of this attitude is evident throughout history when we consider the fact that in the minds of its creators, the “individuals” who would have formed the social contract had it been a real event, would have been white, male, property owners and that everyone outside of those social ascriptions, including women and people of color, would have only been considered only to have left the state of nature in relation to these individuals as subhumans.

The social contract myth not only conceals how power functions in contemporary liberal-democratic societies, but also how difference was produced and treated historically by the state by compelling the reader to assume that each social group started the “race for power” under conditions of on equal footing with the same intentions; to dominate man and nature. This logic strengthens the dominant notion of social reality in contemporary capitalist society, which emphasizes individual accountability under formal

equality, where structurally disadvantaged both blame themselves and are blamed by others for their circumstances: “a sort of paranoid self-loathing that manifests as a loathing of the public, of convenient ‘others’, a sort of universal punitive judgmentalism rooted in one’s own feeling of eternal lack” (Haiven 2014, loc. 911).

Part of maintaining this system consensually requires that the state provide welfare programs, labor unions, workplace safety requirements, trade barriers, environmental protections, etc. to civil-society in order to effectively reproduce a complicit labor force, maintain long term accumulation, and appear as a legitimate tool at the disposal of the polity. These programs have the potential to protect the some of most vulnerable members of the society from being increasingly susceptible to exploitation by providing them access to resources that would otherwise be unavailable. However, for those who are part of the order, but are not served by these programs because of their elite social status and seek to maximize their short-term profits by accessing new markets and keeping production costs down, these programs are detrimental according to their values; ones that equate tyranny with collectively establishing limits on the degree to which one can exploit their fellow man and the planet for the benefit of the individual. Therefore, in order to counteract these programs and regulations that are meant to protect society from the potential harms of the market, the neoliberal economists deploy the logic of *social naturalism*: “a way of organizing societal knowledge and perceptions around the schematic worldview that human society is subject to the same laws as of nature as the natural world... [which] ...reduces people to their biologically driven instincts and needs for food and reproduction” (Somers 2008, p. 52-53).

The logic of social naturalism perpetuates the myth that there are simply not enough resources to meet everyone's needs and that humanity is fundamentally constrained by the scarcity postulate, or "the constitutive and permanent condition of material scarcity," which is used to justify the institution of private property, which is only to be acquired by the "naturally" superior members of society (Somers 2008, p. 53). It is for this reason that social naturalism "is not just an epistemological stance; it is also an ontology - a theory of being - in which the characteristics of the natural order are mapped onto and conflated with those of social order" (Somers 2008, p.52). It effectively orientates its claimants behaviors and cultural imaginaries by reducing "the social world into those practices and entities that conform to the self-regulating laws of nature, and those that fall under the rubric of nonnatural phenomenon..." and then assigning "...epistemological privilege and ontological superiority [to] those entities deemed natural, such as the market, and demeans all that is deemed unnatural, such as the state" (Somers 2008, p.33). From this perspective, the "secret to societal order and prosperity is to maintain at all costs this condition of scarcity, for only the biological drive to eat can discipline the social masses into the hunger-driven discipline to earn one's keep" (Somers 2008, p.53).

Rather than understanding society as three spheres of power, social naturalism produces a way of imagining power society as being split into two realms: the *natural* realm, which refers to the market, as well as the *unnatural* realm, which refers to the state. In turn, economists can argue that state intervention, which is equated with the political power of civil-society through a system of representative democracy, in the market is "meddling with nature" and that "welfare relief will have perverse unintended

consequences of worsening the very problem it has was intended to solve” (Somers 2008, p.53). In turn, this perspective acts as a means by which to justify the material deprivation of the majority, for if these tragedies did not exist, civil-society would fall apart because nobody would have an incentive to work and everything would fall into chaos. This allows the capitalist class to justify the neoliberal agenda, where social welfare programs and the protection of common resources are dismantled and allocated towards security and the private sector to control the dissent that arises in response to the conditions it produces; where the order comes to be maintained through violent coercion whether than willful subjection in order to tighten the grip of capital upon its subjects.

In order for a society to willingly grant power to a person or group, it requires that they make this relationship appear natural, necessary, and desirable under the circumstances as they are imagined in a particular time and space. This is almost always accomplished by generating fear of a larger threat then making it appear as if only those seeking power have the capacity to protect the society from this danger. In turn, the word “crisis,” “is deployed in number of situations to describe a complex, massive and overwhelming, unimaginable in scope problem that involves us all, but to which the solutions are entrusted to the powerful” (Haiven 2014 p.32).

For liberal-democratic capitalist societies such as the United States, which is dominated by market power, this means generating a specific type of fear that relegates power to the market as the only solution. Margaret Somers (2008, p.3) refers to the discourses that produce this type of understanding as *crisis conversion narratives*, which can here be understood as “fear inducing predictions intended to convert a culture’s dominant narratives from social to market precepts by foretelling the dire moral and

economic implications of continuing on the current social policy course” (Somers 2008, p.3). This type of discourse functions by proposing “alternative understandings of reality, which aim to normalize and justify the market’s ever-increasing expansion into political, cultural, social, and civil sites once insulated from market penetration” and seek to “delegitimate once popular legislative agendas that embodied a modest acceptance of the social ethos of shared fate, equal risk, and social justice, as well as a commitment to redressing centuries of gender and racial exclusions” (Somers 2008, p.3).

The disempowering, fear-based, interpretation of reality fashioned by crisis conversion narratives, such as social contract theory and social naturalism, enable the capitalist class to justify bending the will of the state⁵, in the favor allocating funding towards solidifying class relations while simultaneously abolishing the aspects that reduce profits (social welfare, trade barriers, public education, healthcare, environmental protection etc.) through increased taxes, regulations, and trade tariffs. In turn, crisis conversion narratives make society vulnerable to “market fundamentalism,” or “the drive to subject all of social life and the public sphere to market mechanisms” (Somers 2008, p.2). This drive towards market dominance displaces the state as the sphere of negotiation between civil-society and the market and in effect subjects the state to the market, leaving civil-society vulnerable to its power, as is articulated by Margaret Somers (2008, p.40):

under market fundamentalism the institutions of the state are conquered by powers constituted in the economic sphere that have crossed the boundary into the polity, where market power is illegitimately exercised. The extension of market

⁵ Keep in mind the conflation of the state and civil-society into the *public* realm

principles into the polity transforms it into a market-driven state. The ethic of contract displaces that of the social state, and translates the relationship between citizen and state into one of contractual *quid pro quo* conditionality. In that conversion the state's mediating position between citizens and market is dissolved.

The market is taken for granted as the dominant sphere of power in the United States because the dominant understanding of power is shaped by the social contract, scarcity postulate, social naturalism, and market fundamentalism, which reduces the three spheres of power into just two: the *public* and the *private*. While the public realm represents the power relationships maintained by the state⁶, the private sector contains both the relationships produced by the market and civil-society and in turn, their values are conflated. In other words, understanding power in the United States as a dichotomy between the public and the private obliges people to see interests of the market and civil-society as one and the same, despite the fact that it only benefits the status quo. As such, the inequalities in wealth and power produced by capitalism are portrayed as unavoidable truths that are the result of human specificity, where starting from an equal position at the formation of the social contract, the naturally superior individuals have risen to the top of the social ladder due to possessing superior values than the rest of society.

Because market values appear to be objectively superior to alternatives, “to be successful in the present order is to somehow synchronize the reproduction of capital with the reproduction of our individual lives” by maximizing our levels of accumulation

⁶ Theoretically, the state operates according to the will of civil-society through procedural-representative democracy.

and consumption (Haiven 2014, p.111). As a result, it appears that those who have achieved “success” according to the dominant notion of the social order, have done so by embracing the values of the market and in turn, it is natural, necessary, and desirable to do so within the given order, which is understood as the only possible way of organizing human relations. While this is a creative notion, it fails to take into account the fact that “the ability to accumulate and overconsume resources is a reproductive advantage only in a society where resources are not equitably shared” and for societies that are structured socially and culturally to prevent extreme stratification in wealth and power, it is pointless to overconsume or overproduce (Eisenstein 2004, p.368). In fact, when one considers the biocidal effects capitalism has had on the planet’s ecosystem in just a short time, maintain this hegemonic notion of success functions as the conscious and inevitable, suicide of man. This reflects Somer’s (2008, p,41) assertion that as our activity has become increasingly subject to market fundamentalism, there has been a “shift in the dominant knowledge culture from a social problems approach that valorizes the common good, to economics and market model of human organization” (Somers 2008, p.41).

The drive towards society’s complete subjection to the market not only makes civil-society increasingly vulnerable to the will of private individuals, but necessitates the conversion of activities people used to do for themselves or got for free into commodities, which in order for them to have access to, must sell their labor for wages or extract surplus value from labor of others for profit (Marx 1992). This is due to the fact that as the dominant sphere of power in liberal-democratic societies, the market, uses the state as an instrument of domination to appropriate what was once common, converting it

to private property which is protected through the exercise of legitimate violence. In turn, what was once common becomes subject to the power of the market, which decides who has access to what in a rather undemocratic way; by converting the commons into universal value for the purpose of profitmaking; “money is the corpse of the commons, the embodiment of all that was once common and free, turned now into property of the purest form” (Eisenstein 2004, p.68).

As universal value is accumulated in the hands of fewer and fewer people, it allows them to gain exclusive access to more of the commons, which can be transformed through exploited labor in order to produce more value, and the people of civil-society are increasingly denied access to the resources necessary for alternative modes of production. In other words, as more aspects of people’s lives become commodified (including access to food, housing, education, and healthcare), in order to access them people must compete with others to acquire universal value to be exchanged for these goods and services they once produced for themselves because there is no alternative due to the fact that majority do not have the means to defend or gain access to the commons in the presence of the state and its monopoly on violence (Eisenstein 2011). In this way, the institution of private property effectively maintains conditions where people are forced to sell their labor to property owners so that its value can be appropriated because they have no other way to gain access to what they need to survive.

When one considers the power over life and death granted by capitalist relations maintained through the state, it becomes clear that such conditions were never reached consensually, but rather they reflect Kropotkin’s (2011, p.190) claim that “wagedom was not instituted to remove the disadvantages of communism; its origin, like that of the State

and private ownership, is to be found elsewhere. It is born of slavery and serfdom imposed by force, and only wears a more modern garb.” Any attempts to reverse the process of privatization are suppressed by state’s monopoly on violence or its legal apparatus and the subversives branded as dangerous political radicals. In turn, civil-society is subjected to the market and state, producing an order where the majority is exploited by both spheres of power as the means to survive in an alternative system are simultaneously denied and subverted.

Because private property is maintained under the threat of state violence, the only way to access the commons for the vast majority of people is to acquire it through the exchange of universal currency that is only to be acquired by going into debt and/or participating in *abstract labor*, which is a mechanism and relationship for the purpose of appropriating “surplus value” from the unpaid efforts of the producers, who have no control over the product of their labor:

along with the useful qualities of the products themselves, we put out of sight both the useful character of the various kinds of labour embodied in them, and the concrete forms of that labour; there is nothing left but what is common to them all; all are reduced to one and the same sort of labour, human labour in the abstract... The labour.... that forms the substance of value is homogenous labour, expenditure of one uniform labour power. (Marx 1867/1965, p.38-39)(Marx 1867/1990, p.128-132).

As civil-society is increasingly forced to participate in abstract labor where their activity is not their own and they have no control over the product, in order to survive, their activity becomes but a means to an ends; *instrumental domination* that directs

collective effort towards serving the interests of the status quo in more and more aspects of American's lives. In other words, most of their activity becomes devoid of all meaning and time becomes universal, one minute just as valuable as the next, as they are subjected to labor to produce surplus values to be appropriated and relegated to idling property owners who hide behind the state and its massive security apparatus. One might spend twelve hours a day for 30 years making plastic packaging for cheese snacks, but they could have been making rat poison, or assembling sex toys; it no longer matters what the activity a person carries out. In addition to being bound to the system, our exploitation which produces surplus-value, will inevitably be used to expand the system into new markets and to subject new populations to the system of abstract labor. As a result, those subject to abstract labor contribute to the process of capitalist globalization, which incessantly closes off spaces where people can live in ways that operate independently of the logic of capital by which it reproduces itself.

When people trade living for working, meaningful activity for abstract labor, their activity becomes instrumentalized and so do their values⁷ and imaginations, resulting in what Max Haiven (2014, loc. 1727) refers to as the *financialized imagination*, which “encourages us to understand the future and act in the present based on the short-term calculation of risk and the individual maximization of monetary benefit.” Such an orientation reduces how humans behave and the way they relate to one another and the planet, to a means to an ends. In this way, “abstract labor is the basis of instrumental reason... ..in which truth has meaning only as a measurement of the effectiveness of

⁷ Having the social relations of abstract labor imposed on civil-society compels its participants to appropriate the hegemonic values of the order.

means to achieve an end, in which people themselves come to be seen simply as a means to an end” (Holloway 2010, p.147).

It is due to the capacity of abstract labor to instrumentalize the logic and behaviors of its participants that Pheng Cheah contends in *Inhuman Conditions* (2006, p.6), that “instrumental or technical reason, which is the essence of scientific knowledge and material progress, is synonymous with power. What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings. Nothing else counts.” In this way, science has always been about the domination of nature and man; in the case of abstract labor, it is the conquering of man by man for the purposes of exploitation. Because what is understood as “truth” is limited to instrumental reasoning, it has implications in terms of how people can understand the world and social change. In this way, capitalism is not just an economic system, but rather:

a system for conscripting our imagination and our action. It succeeds and thrives to the extent that it informs what we believe is valuable, and compels us to act in the world on the basis of those values. Or at least it works to the extent that it so perverts and confuses our sense of value that we fail to recognize its inherent pathology and so fail to demand collectively something very different. (Haiven 2014, loc. 826)

Because these relations are taken for granted as natural, necessary, and desirable, improving one’s condition only appears possible within the confines of the established order. Therefore, if the order which reproduces instrumental domination is maintained through the state and market and the utopian is that which breaks through the existing order; the utopian in the hegemonic cultural imaginary of the United States is the

empowerment of civil-society to act in their own interests with regard to their desires, fantasies, and how they choose to manifest their dreams in reality, rather than those ascribed to them.

The hegemonic understanding of justice that results from the oppressed appropriating the cultural imaginary of the oppressor has numerous implications for the utopian vision it creates and the possibilities it permits. In the first dimension, the *fascist utopian impulse*, desire is equated with maintaining the established order because the interests of civil-society are congruent to those of the dominant class that benefits from the existing order. This occurs because in the hegemonic cultural imaginary produces an understanding of the world where the three realms of power (state, market, civil-society) in the United States are reduced to only two; the public and private. A world where the state maintains fair, equal, and just conditions and where those who possess superior values are able to rise to the top and be successful according to the hegemonic notion of maximizing one's accumulation and consumption of value. In other words, those subject to the present order are compelled to appropriate the values of their oppressors because they believe their status as such to be legitimately acquired through individual effort and that embodying their values will allow them to be successful as well, which is never threatening to the status quo and can never produce a sense of justice that includes everyone and recognizes difference. This form of the utopian impulse is responsible for making "that which breaks the existing order" appear unnatural, unnecessary, and undesirable. For this reason, the hegemonic cultural imaginary limits possibility so as to make the utopian impulse impotent as a tool for social and political justice.

In the second dimension of utopia, or the *fascist utopian imaginary*; where the claimant of a utopian vision imagines a better world and how to achieve it. For those operating from the hegemonic cultural imaginary,⁸ the vision a better world is either left up to the claimant's ability to succeed within the established order as an individual competing in the market or the responsibility is relegated to the state to uphold the order through the law, which is equated with justice. This is problematic if you consider what was discussed earlier; while the state appears to serve the interests of the majority through representative democracy and the maintenance of formal equality for the benefit of all of civil-society, it is subject to the financial elite who truly benefit from it and in turn, the prospect of building a future based on principles of justice is relegated to those who benefit from the current one; like asking the local butcher to encourage his customers to go vegan. Because the hegemonic cultural imaginary generates fascist assumptions about political-economic reality and human nature through the perpetuation of creationist myths, it not only constrains the possibility of imagining alternatives that exist outside of this framework as possible, but prevents us from being able to imagine functional alternatives at all.

Finally, in the hegemonic cultural imaginary of the United States, the sense of justice that is produced is responsible for the manifestation of the *fascist utopian form*. One that equates law with justice and in turn and never breaks the existing order, but simply maintains or transforms the conditions that uphold its hierarchical relations rooted in fascist assumptions regarding the fundamental nature of humanity and its relationship

⁸ The fascist cultural imaginary of the United States exists as the process occurring due to the dialectical relationship between market values and the financialized imagination.

to the natural world. Because justice is conflated with the law, it is abstracted from the responsibility of civil-society, which understands the state as an unbiased mediator between individuals as per the social contract, consisting of individuals who were freely elected to represent its interests and in turn, issues of justice are always conducted through the vehicles the state provides. This includes activities like following the law for its own sake, paying taxes, serving in the military or police force, participating in peaceful and legal methods of social change like voting or writing letters to politicians, and always supporting the decisions made by state officials. At the same time, the fascist utopian form also includes fascist movements whose ideological frameworks are congruent with the taken for granted assumptions that are embedded in the cultural imaginary, especially those relating to race, gender, and religion, such as the Patriot Guard, men's rights activists, and radical Christian extremism, which are never repressed to the degree that heretical movements are because they reinforce the structures that maintain the established order. The utopian form is never a threat to the status quo, but creates the illusion that civil-society is in control of its own fate through fair and democratic processes when in reality, it is just spinning its wheels and digging itself into a deeper hole.

Conclusion

The rules of social life which they learn and internalize as they grow up seem natural. People are preoccupied with the tasks of daily life, with making a living, with coping with life's pains and enjoying life's pleasures. The idea that the social world could be deliberately changed in some fundamental way that would

make life significantly better for most people seems pretty far-fetched, both because it is hard to imagine some dramatically better workable alternative and because it is hard to imagine how to successfully challenge existing institutions of power privilege in order to create such an alternative. Thus, even if one accepts the diagnosis and critique of existing social institutions, the most natural response for most people is probably a fatalistic sense that there is not much that could be done to really change things. (Wright 2010, p.24)

In this passage, Erik Olin Wright explains how features of the architecture of the hegemonic cultural imaginary of the United States are taken for granted as truth and as a result, cause social change beyond the established order to appear as the “merely utopian.” As I explained at the beginning of chapter 2, such an orientation produces a sense of justice that conceals the fact that it privileges white, male, property owners who acquired their power through the brutal appropriation of the commons and the suppression of alternatives to abstract labor through the enforcement of the law and the use of violence against groups whose ways of knowing and being contradict their own (Pateman and Mills 2007)(Holloway 2010). In other words, the architecture of the fear-based hegemonic cultural imaginary leads to the widespread abandonment of possibility of alternatives within the given order, shapes a person’s sense of justice and who is included according to the what they think is important, how they can get there, and the way they imagine the world. This is due to the fact that the ideological mechanisms of control that limit the number of perspectives from which someone can interpret the world makes them vulnerable to manipulation by others and compels them to grant authority to

a specific group or individual; constraining possibility by producing a vision of the world that subjects their behaviors, attitudes, and rationales to instrumental reasoning.

Both the social order's capacity to exact violence on its subjects and effectively embed the hegemonic mechanisms of control and fascist assumptions within their cultural imaginary serve as powerful barriers to challenging the existing order and in turn, building a more just world. However, in chapter 3 I will begin the second step of emancipatory social science and attempt to emancipate the cultural imaginary from its hegemonic constraints in order to make room for freedom and possibility so that it can be applied to material reality through individual and collective agency. If the hegemonic vision of success in the United States is engineered to maintain the reproduction of liberal-capitalist order, I will attempt to explore a cultural imaginary that could be responsible for failure. Therefore, in chapter 3 I will demonstrate how *low theory* can be deployed to produce a cultural imaginary where civil-society can create its own notion of success according to the experience of living with one another in solidarity and in turn, be compelled to break the conditions of the established order in an attempt to build another world. In other words, this counter-hegemonic cultural imaginary is heretical and utopian; where human difference is permitted to exist in terms of its desires, imaginings, and ways of being.

CHAPTER 3

UTOPIA AND THE HERETICAL CULTURAL IMAGINARY

Heresy and Failure

The capacity to understand the world from the perspectives offered by unfamiliar cultural imaginaries not only allows people to comprehend other people's ways of knowing and being, but it also gives them the ability to pick and choose which meanings they choose to ascribe to the world based upon their experience of living in it with other people. For those who refuse to vacate the nest of absurd certainty, but instead remain the comfort of a universal illusion offered by a group seeking authority, the world appears small and frightening. However, for those who find a way to move beyond the rigid architecture of their cultural imaginary to confront reality and refuse to stop moving forward even after consciously accepting the limitations of their current worldview, the world is boundless and offers us hope for alternatives. In this way, heretics are pioneers of the imagination: those who dive into the void of possibility, unsure where they will land, but certain it will be in a place where there is room to grow.

Heretics understand the necessity cultivating the imagination and recognize the value of learning to use different perspectives across various points in time and space, depending upon which is the most useful. This type of imaginary is essential for freedom, because it offers one the capacity to compare the validity of multiple perspectives according to their experience of living in the world, rather than to blindly accept the claims of predatory social actors and groups attempting to make their authority appear natural, necessary, and desirable for the purposes of instrumentalizing the rest of society to serve their agenda.

When someone is subjected to the ways of knowing and being in the world that serve the interests of hegemonic groups, the assumptions that shape the architecture of the cultural imaginary will disrupt their capacity to look beyond them and in turn, the person's ability to understand social relationships is inhibited. When they can no longer look beyond their commonsense understanding of the world, they fail to see how power operates outside of this framework. In other words, these structuring effects designate the "limit of of permissible truth" and produce a cultural imaginary that exists exclusively to serve the *practical* (Gordon 2004, p.122). The practical being, the spectrum of possible positions and acceptable arguments in political discussions within a particular order. In this way, the limit of permissible truth represents the deliberate ignorance of real possibilities and is fundamentally anti-utopian. Therefore, in order to emancipate utopian, one must gain the capacity to look beyond "truth" to become what Ursula Le Guin calls "a realist of a larger reality," where people learn to collectively decide what is possible through the experience of living with one another (National Book, 2014). To accomplish this task, those who are interested in social and political justice need utopia because when we don't know what we're trying to do we can't even begin to do it.

If someone desires to emancipate the cultural imaginary from the imprisonment of practicality ascribed by the dominant group, they need to look alternatives to the commonsense aspects of it that are responsible for reproducing the relations necessary for order. At the same time, they need to be careful not to simply establish another set of fixed assumptions that will place them in the same situation. Therefore, to accomplish this task I will deploy a methodology that Judith Halberstam refers to as *low theory* in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). Whereas most emancipatory methodologies will

reproduce “hierarchies of knowing that maintain the *high* in high theory” (Halberstam 2011, p.16), low theory “makes peace with the possibility that alternatives dwell in the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative realm of critique and refusal” (Halberstam 2011, p.2). Rather than being bound to explore possibility in the world through a framework that only allows certain truths to exist as such as a result of the understanding of the world that is bound by hegemonic assumptions regarding success, winning, remembering, making, doing, and becoming, low theory considers the fact that “under certain circumstances, failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (Halberstam 2011, p.2). \

Low theory is particularly useful for emancipating utopian possibilities because rather than being subject to the practical and successful according to the hegemonic cultural imaginary; it allows for that which is understood as impractical or unsuccessful to exist as a path towards a more politically and socially just society. If one is to break the bonds of the existing order and make room for alternatives, they must have the capacity to move beyond the limits of permissible truth designated by the architecture of the hegemonic cultural imaginary and attempt to determine what values and political-economic imaginaries are born of the instinct for freedom. In other words, if a person wants self-determination in their lives in the present, they must first learn how to live with one another in the absence of instrumentality.

The Heretical Cultural Imaginary

Low theory allows us to explore the emancipatory potentials of failing to meet the dominant notion of success according to the hegemonic cultural imaginary in the United States. However, in order to ensure that one can avoid constructing another form of systemic domination, their values must be linked to resistance. In other words, civil-society must develop and embody alternative meanings and symbols that reflect human difference across space and time in order to combat the establishment of hegemonic values. A world that values self-determination requires that one's value system and the political-economic imagination be heretical and unbound by dogmatisms that close off real possibility because it require a cultural imaginary that will incessantly and effectively shatter hegemonic understanding of the existing order so that instrumentality can never become taken for granted as truth.

If the hegemonic notion of success requires that one align their cultural values with market principles to maximize individual accumulation and consumption leading to the reproduction of the liberal-democratic capitalist order, the heretic should learn to embrace failure. Failure, in this case would be to free oneself of the instrumental domination maintained through abstract labor and the hegemonic cultural imaginary that maintain the existing order. In turn, it requires the capacity to imagine a world beyond the state and abstract labor, which produces “a system of social cohesion... ..that has as its core a relation of exploitation, the production of surplus value” and into realms of self-determination and meaningful activity where the producers have control over the products of their labor (Holloway 2010, p.149). In this way “the real determinant of society is hidden behind the state and the economy: it is the way in which our everyday

activity is organised, the subordination of our doing to the dictates of abstract labour, that is, of value, money, profit” (Holloway 2010, p.133).

Whereas abstract labor is a specific type of social relationship that instrumentalizes one’s behaviors, values, and imaginations, *concrete labor* refers to “a necessary condition, independent of all forms of society, for the existence of the human race; it is an eternal nature-imposed necessity, without which there can be no material exchanges between man and Nature, and therefore no life” (Holloway 2010. p.90). In other words, unlike abstract labor, concrete labor or use labor is “productive activity of a definite kind and exercised with a definite aim” that “produces use-values, things that are useful” as opposed to things that simply function as surrogates of the surplus value appropriated from the exploited workers that can be exchanged for universal value on the market required to reproduce or expand the given order (Holloway 2010, p.90). Concrete labor does not imply any specific production system, but it requires that the activity take place under democratic conditions based upon free association. In turn, useful activity as a mode of production necessitates the emancipation of the commons and the rejection of private property as natural, necessary, and desirable; the negation of the social contract as a structuring of the imagination, where the brutal appropriation of land and peoples of North America by Europeans as the origin of the state is concealed by the veil of liberal objectivity and blind individualism (Smith 2005).

The end of the social contract requires the dissolution of social naturalism; the imaginary framework of objectively determined categories and rankings, or natural hierarchy used to comprehend human difference and rationalize the subjection of the many to the few. This rationalization is the product of reducing a much more complex

social reality to a juxtaposition of characteristics composed from the detached eyes of a small group of white men who feel compelled by the way they understand the world to conquer both nature and man. A belief system that attempts to excuse psychopathy by reducing human nature to rational self-interest; a logic that denies social justice so vigilantly to the majority that liberty could be equated with slavery.

If this system of categories and rankings is understood as truth, an objective comprehension of human difference, low theory holds that the alternative understanding is derived from untruth and unknowing; a state that can be arrived at from anywhere groups of people establish from the experience of living with one another as complex, dynamic, and self-determinant beings. Therefore, the cultural imaginary I am attempting to uncover must value the capacity for difference to define itself as such through direct democracy. Rather than trading one's self-determination for security by relegating power to a source of authority to represent their interests from a framework that attempts to dehumanize the unfamiliar as is the case with representative democracy, direct democracy allocates power directly and specifically to the people subject to the consequences of the decision to be made.

Capitalist relations represent a system designed to maximize the efficiency at which value can be pilfered by its most successful and privileged participants. In this way, every participant in abstract labor is subject to it; compelled by both necessity and desire to participate in abstract labor in order to survive and make a life for themselves despite the incessant encroachment of the market into their lives. Market fundamentalism produces conditions where human relationships are abstracted from meaning and we come to only relate to people through things. The cold exchange of

universal value that takes place in impersonal conditions and bears no future obligations effectively destroying communities and alternative modes of production that allow for autonomy and self-determination and produce where humans are in constant competition for never enough; where human nature is reduced to rational self-interest (Eisenstein 2011). When we apply low theory, the counterintuitive reveals that the cultural imaginary must reflect mutual aid, free association, and concrete labor which allow for the reciprocal exchange of goods and services in ways that tie people's fates together and build solidarity and democracy as opposed to the alienation and hierarchy of abstract labor relations. A system built on mutual aid values the reciprocal exchange of resources and services for the purposes of meeting everyone's needs and is never understood something that is unchangeable or that needs to be imposed upon others, but instead is radically democratic and dynamic; constantly evolving alongside the changes taking place in political and economic reality.

By using low theory to explore the hegemonic cultural imaginary of the United States, I have uncovered utopian possibilities that challenge the logic of the status quo and outline how a heretic in the United States might attempt to organize their relationships with others to build another world. In this way, a form of utopia has been revealed that is derived from a sense of justice that includes everyone due to the capability of the heretical cultural imaginary to provide increased self-determination in terms of what a person thinks is important, how they intend to get there, and the way they imagine the world. If the hegemonic cultural imaginary exists as the dialectical relationship between market values and the financialized imagination, the architecture of

the heretical cultural imaginary is structured by the dialectical relationship *between cultures of resistance and the radical imagination*.

Why “cultures” of resistance? Because we who are subject to the order often have only that in common. In other words, while each group may oppose the types of relationships imposed by the hegemonic order, we do so for different reasons and with hope for the manifestation of dissimilar utopian worlds in mind. This is due to the fact that our social identities and the histories attached to them are heterogenous and only these groups and individuals can know what is best for them. For example, as Lisa M. Poupart (2003, p.87) points out, “over five hundred years of social, political, and economic domination, Western society [has] enforced its cultural codes of otherness upon American Indians to gain our complicity in the power structure.” Therefore, the decolonization of indigenous peoples as it occurs in the in the realms of ideology, social structure, and spirituality is dependent upon the displacement of this “otherness,” by reinforcing traditional epistemologies as a cognizant strategy or aspect of direct cultural revitalization praxis. Therefore, the decolonization of indigenous peoples as it occurs in the in the realms of ideology, social structure, and spirituality is dependent upon the displacement of this “otherness,” by reinforcing traditional epistemologies as a cognizant strategy or aspect of direct cultural revitalization praxis.

Michelle M. Jacob describes the invaluable ethnomethodological function of teaching traditional dances across generations in indigenous societies when she asserts in *Yakama Rising: Indigenous Cultural Revitalization, Activism, and Healing* (2013, Loc. 541) that: “dances accomplish several important functions. They affirm the importance of the oral histories and traditional cultural lessons that the elders teach; they affirm the

importance of the girls who are dedicated to learning these lessons and carrying on the traditions. They affirm the importance of the audiences, who witness and honor the girls and the traditions. And at a fundamental level, the dances teach – they instruct – Yakama peoples how to live and what should be valued.” In other words, the act of teaching and performing these dances becomes an act of resistance and contributes to the decolonization of native peoples in its various realms (mentioned above). As a vehicle for decolonization, teaching traditional dance strengthens intergenerational bonds that promote indigenous understandings of symbiotic interconnectedness and provides an appropriate context and practical method for passing on cultural lessons and oral histories. This is essential to the decolonization process considering that “indigenous resistance is inherently intergenerational. Without the guidance of elders, younger generations will not have a pathway to follow. These intergenerational connections are important for all aspects of culture, and especially so for language, due to the predominance of the English language among American Indian children, families, schools, and broader US society” (Jacob 2013, loc. 1060).

This form of resistance also challenges Western values regarding gender roles by placing the girls in a position of respect. Because the practice affirms the importance of the women in native societies and simultaneously challenges western patriarchal values, it has implications for decolonization in all three realms. Addressing patriarchy is especially essential to indigenous decolonization because “as Andrea Smith articulates, colonizers naturalized hierarchy by instituting patriarchy,” so by displacing patriarchy, indigenous peoples are simultaneously displacing the hierarchical ideologies and structures that were forced upon them and have contributed to the erasure of their

traditional ways of knowing and being (as cited in Jacob 2013, loc. 1765). This applies not just to how the girls that are participating in these ceremonies conceptualize the ways they relate to one another and their society, but also the ways in which the members of the audience come to understand this relationship. During these events, the members of the audience are invited to participate in intergenerational knowledge sharing and relationship building, where the act of passing on and performing traditional native dance (both the individual dances and the practice in general), shape the epistemologies of everyone involved so that they can more accurately reflect traditional native values.

It is important to note that while these practices are effective for this particular group it is because they are specifically congruent with the participant's heretical cultural imaginaries. However, they would not serve the interests of another group, such as African-Americans Los Angeles seeking solutions to the gang violence and police repression that plagues in their communities. In this way, accounting for human difference is important, but at the same time, one must always remember that the deliverance of a single group is never sufficient and that the true potentials for emancipation lie in solidarity with others.

Heretics may be shaped individually by their distinct combinations of oppression, but from a radical perspective all heretics exist as such because of the sense of justice produced by the fascist cultural imaginary that attempts to categorize and rank human difference while simultaneously concealing the brutal origins of contemporary social reality. Because one's political-economic imagination is shaped by their cultural values, they are subject to the taken-for-granted limitations of the established order. However, if they can think and behave according to social values that they establish from the

experience of living with people in different ways, they can change what is possible, which is essential for getting momentum behind alternative strategies: “how we imagine social relations and the possibilities for change will shape what sorts of broad strategies we believe might be effective” (Haiven 2014, p.230). In other words, by expanding one’s cultural imaginary through the process of building relationships and tying their fates to those of other people, they gain the capacity to comprehend as possible alternative forms of social relations that do not serve the status quo. In this way, ”imagination is an intimate part of how we empathize with others, the way we gain some sense of the forces that impact our lives, and the way we project ourselves into the future and gain inspiration and direction from the past” (Haiven 2014, p.4).

Human emancipation is something that is never finished and must never be if we are seeking justice for everyone, for if the cultural imaginary had an end it would cease to splinter the restraints ascribed by established order and in effect become what it was attempting to destroy. It is for this reason that “the politics of the imagination can’t just be about imagining universal, one-size-fits-all alternatives to the current order. It must be about working ‘transversally’ to bridge our imaginations and create common imaginaries of the way the world might be” (Haiven 2014, loc. 3295). The radical imagination is never universal or static, but always specific and dynamic, making it both fundamentally utopian and anti-fascist. At the same time, it is something that takes place in the individual, group, and collectivity of heretics. While specific frameworks of thought such as the *Black Radical Imagination* (Kelly, 2002), *Feminist Radical Imagination* (Bell, 2000), and *Green Radical Imagination* (Weston, 2012) represent the specific

interests of various groups, they all share a heretical imaginary landscape that opposes the power relations imposed by the established order.

The perpetually-unfinished process of building solidarity provides different groups the opportunity to look at the value of alternative social relationships, epistemologies, and ontologies that challenge the “truths” inherent to the hegemonic cultural imaginary: “the expansion of the imagination is the work of solidarity, and solidarity is, in part, a broadening of the imagination” (Haiven 2014, p.24). Because people share their imaginations with those around them, sharing experiences with people who operate from alternative cultural imaginaries in spaces that reflect them has the potential to emancipate their cultural imaginaries from the one that maintains the existing order through the reproduction of capital and the state. In turn, the *radical imagination*, or the “collective process of developing alternative modes of reproducing ourselves as social beings” (Haiven 2014, loc. 302) “emerges from the experience of ‘acting otherwise’, from the friction between one’s values and the reigning paradigm of value, and from the process of building alternatives” (Haiven 2014, loc. 302). The friction between the hegemonic political-economic and the radical one, draws out the contradictions present in the way one understands the world and the way they experience it.

The heretical cultural imaginary, or the process formed according to the dialectical relationship between our cultures of resistance and the radical imagination, is one that allows for human difference to exist as such, because it produces a sense of justice that values all human life. It is primarily for this reason that a heretic’s utopian vision looks much different than that of the fascist. In the first dimension, the *utopian*

impulse, heretics desire social and political justice; where *all* people not only have access to the material and social means necessary to live flourishing lives, but they can participate in collective decisions that affect their lives. In turn, the heretical utopian impulse is simultaneously contains both the instinct for freedom and the instinct for solidarity. It contains the instinct for freedom because it never waits for the authorization of the established order to take action and the instinct for solidarity because it is congruent with one's conscience, without which, justice is but a formality. In *Mutual Aid* (1902, p.5), Petr Kropotkin explains the relationship between conscience and instinct for solidarity:

Love, sympathy, and self-sacrifice certainly play an immense part in the progressive development of our moral feelings. But it is not love and not even sympathy upon which Society is based in mankind. It is the conscience—be it only at the stage of instinct—of human solidarity. It is the unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each man from the practice of mutual aid; of the close dependency of every one's happiness upon the happiness of all; and the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his own.

Kropotkin's words reflect how a sense of social and political justice that includes everyone and accounts for difference across time, space, gender, ability, and culture requires a cultural imaginary that values the instinct for solidarity. Because of the artificial scarcity produced by capitalism throws civil-society into competition with one another for survival, it is only when the principle of mutual aid is embodied in different

ways of knowing and being that difference will be free to exist as such independently of the established order.

The *heretical utopian imaginary* envisions various ways of meeting the needs of both the instincts that make up the heretical utopian impulse; they authorize agency in the present and they compel symbiotic mutuality between its claimants. However, another factor to consider is that the heretical utopian imaginary, if it is to be taken seriously, must be congruent with the limits of one's conscience. In other words, if a person is not willing to cross a particular moral barrier that would inevitably come up from following a certain path towards self-determination, they should never start on it. Taking this into consideration, the most obvious paths that remain are either those that have been paved by the state and end up just circling back around, despite the illusion of progress. All that remains are forbidden paths that look dangerous or impossible. One might say that to follow them without being forced to would be counterintuitive and stupid, probably ending in a pit of snakes or a dead end. However, the heretic knows that lasting change always occurs when people choose to pave new routes themselves alongside their communities to begin the journey to reach another world together. The heretical utopian imaginary never constructs a set of relations that it is understood as universally appropriate, nor one that must be imposed upon others, but embodies democratic values and permits human difference and autonomy across space and time.

In the third dimension lies the *heretical utopian form*, where one attempts to manifest their utopian imaginary in reality according to the nature of their utopian impulse and the resources that are available. If the utopian form is the "utopian impulse detectable in daily life" as per Jameson (2004, p.1), its heretical variety is what it looks

like to know the world and live in it in ways that transverse the limitations existing order. Because neither one is sufficient on their own to manifest possible heretical utopian worlds of tomorrow, the utopian form always involves a combination of two processes; the construction of alternative spaces and relations that embody the kind of cultural values that are prioritized alongside direct resistance to dismantle the hegemonic order. A single utopian form can influence one or both of these processes to varying degrees across space, time, and cultural context.

The utopian form is how heretics communicate their ideas and live out their utopian fantasies alongside others, whether through the process of creating and experiencing art such as literature, film, or painting or living alternatively in various ways, such as through co-operatives, intentional communities, housing squats, indigenous solidarity groups, or education initiatives (Wright 2010)(Holloway 2011)(Goodyear-Ka'opua 2013). The fact that these dreams are shared is what makes them so powerful and attractive to those whose instincts for freedom and solidarity have not been anesthetized by the fascist cultural imaginary and they breathe life back into those who have gotten lost in the hegemonic order; those who have become estranged from other dreamers and become lost in a nightmare.

This dimension of the utopian is limited by two primary factors; the hegemonic notion of success and the exercise of the law. Because the hegemonic notion of success is equated with maximizing one's individual capacity to consume and accumulate value, it is difficult to find people who are willing to contribute resources and effort towards projects that do not serve these immediate ends. Not to mention the fact that the majority are struggling to survive and barely have the resources to provide for themselves,

nevertheless build another world. At the same time, the law prevents civil-society from being able to gain access to these resources because they are privately owned and protected by the state. The law also requires that civil-society live a certain way (zoning, structural, formal education, and cohabitation laws) and pay taxes, which must occur through the exchange of universal value only to be acquired through participation in abstract labor and the commodification of the commons. In other words, artificial scarcity and the law that maintains it and shape possibility and create conditions that contain the utopian form within the confines of the established order, which makes it more difficult to build alternatives because they must meet certain specifications.

Besides the financial costs, often not available to the most vulnerable of society who would most benefit from heretical utopian forms, alternative projects often must be filtered through government bureaucracies at various levels that are not structured to facilitate them. For example, building codes, zoning laws, and occupancy, taxes cut deeply into the heretical utopian form and often prevent it from becoming whole. In this way, the dominant group suppresses the utopian form and traps its subjects within the confines of the existing order, subjecting them to the power of the market and therefore, requiring their participation in abstract labor where they can be exploited, taxed, and conscripted.

Conclusion

In this section I described the architecture of the heretical cultural imaginary and how its components, cultures of resistance and the radical imagination, effectively produce a sense of justice that includes everyone and recognizes difference. A utopia

whose claimants desire social and political justice, imagine alternative ways of knowing and being that are incongruent with reproducing the social order, and is manifested in material reality in ways that simultaneously pose a challenge to, and are challenged by, the hegemonic order. The heretical cultural imaginary is never universal, static, or imposed upon others, but rather it is cultivated through the process of living with other people in ways that are distinct from the fascist cultural imaginary and the hegemonic social order.

In chapter 4 I will explore how the utopian form can be used to prioritize utopian thought as a framework for justice by emancipating the heretical cultural imaginary from the shackles of practicality and hegemonic success that must be worn to reproduce the fascist social order; the limits of permissible truth. This requires studying how both values and imaginations transform, both consciously and subconsciously, as well as how this knowledge can be applied in a democratic fashion that does not reproduce another social order.

CHAPTER 4

EMANCIPATING UTOPIAN POSSIBILITIES

Transforming Cultural Values and the Political-Economic Imagination

When it comes to utopian thought, emancipation is about shattering the chains that bind humanity to the universal truths ascribed to reality by the status quo, but in order to shatter these chains we must possess the proper tools, which are never those that are provided by the dominant group: *the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house!*" (Lorde 2007, p.6). In other words, one needs to possess a particular aptitude that is only offered by the heretical cultural imaginary; a perspective which grants a person the capacity to consciously select and privilege the values they wish to embody and to imagine the world beyond the fascist assumptions about the nature of a universal material reality that are perpetuated by the dominant group. Because the cultural imaginary is the process that results from the dialectical relationship between one's cultural values and political-economic imaginations, changes to one component will affect the other and in turn, both are possible vehicles for the emancipation of possibility. In turn, both of the components of the cultural imaginary are not only subject to one another, but to those of the people around us:

Imagination allows us to fill in the gaps, to build a mental picture of the world that creates us and that we create. For this reason, the imagination is both beautiful and dangerous. It is beautiful because it exists at the seam or overlap between the individual and society, between the way we are each unique and the way we are bound together. In other words, the imagination weaves together the

common and the uncommon. The imagination is both a private terrain and a shared landscape, or, more accurately, multiple shared landscapes which we experience in different ways with different people. Fundamentally, the imagination is how we conceive of what and who is valuable; systems of power work, in part, by conscripting our imaginations and (mis)informing our sense of value. What we imagine to be valuable affects how we act and react to others, to ourselves, to the world. Our actions, in turn, impact and inform our own imagination and the imaginations of others. Value shapes the sorts of cooperative actions we take, and what we think of as normal, acceptable, reasonable and just cooperation. The absence of the radical imagination sees the totalitarian world of Walmart as normal and reasonable. (Haiven 2014, loc. 3435-3446)

Humans do not imagine the world from an individual or objective view, but rather the imagination which is a faculty that organizes our cultural significations into a “shared landscape,” to which we look when we make decisions about how to act in the world. When one’s cultural significations are organized according to a fascist ideology, which privileges certain aspects of human difference over others, the limits of what is considered possible are constrained. In turn, the ways in which one behaves in the world will reflect the limitations of both the significations and the ideologies that organize them and in effect, normalize them in the cultural imaginary of those who share the experience.

In *Culture Moves: Ideas, Activism, and Changing Values* (1998), Thomas R. Rochon describes how “cultural change occurs when we alter the conceptual categories with which we give meaning to reality” (Rochon 1998, p.15). In this way, cultural

change shifts the parameters of the spectrum that contains the hegemonic conception of what views are considered valid with regard to a specific social issue. When a person's cultural values contradict those of the hegemonic order, they disrupt the way the imagination is organized and what significations are privileged, which contributes to the shifting the limits of what is considered possible.

Whenever instances of police brutality come to light in the United States, they are almost exclusively framed in terms of whether or not the individual is accountable or not. At the same time, when someone operating from the heretical cultural imaginary enters the conversation, they might question the role of the police entirely, as well as the nature of the law that the offender may have allegedly broken. Unfortunately, this perspective is suppressed because it is understood as being inconsistent with the fascist cultural imaginary, which understands the law as just and police as a natural, necessary, and desirable feature of society; a group of people who selflessly serve their communities in an unbiased fashion according to the "impartial" application of the law for the betterment of their communities. In turn, any cases of inexcusable police wrongdoing are perceived as the result of individual agency rather than structural conditions maintained through the existing order.

The officer that breaks the rules is always the "bad apple" and never the taken for granted agent of a fascist order who happened to get caught, which displaces blame from the state and places it on the individual so as to preserve the legitimacy of its authority. Therefore, if those concerned with social and political justice wish to manifest a world that allows for alternative ways of relating to one another, maybe even one that does not need police, they must emancipate the heretical cultural imaginary, which occurs through

the experience of interacting with other people across space and time in ways that embody heretical cultural values and political-economic imaginaries.

I will begin this discussion by describing the various ways that cultural values transform. For Rochon (1998, p.22), the first step in the diffusion and propagation of alternative values is the creation of a critical community, or a small group of people who have “developed a sensitivity to some problem, an analysis of the sources of the problem, and a prescription for what should be done about the problem.” These critical communities are “composed primarily of scientists, academics, and a variety of social analysts and commentators” who have established a relatively similar discourse regarding the nature of the problem they have collectively identified and grown concerned about (Rochon 1998, p.95). Once these ideas are appropriated by leaders of social movements, they are transformed and the critical communities “fade into the background,” which leads us to the second step; the incubation and cultivation of these values through social and political movements (Rochon 1998, p.55-57).

Rochon (1992, p.38) defines a *social movement* as “any collective action that employs protest to further the goal of producing change” and in turn, its “optimal form of organization is one that maximizes participation, creating settings for interactions that serve to articulate, publicize, and disseminate critiques of existing institutions, practices, and values” (Rochon 1998, p.33). While not all social movements are heretical utopian forms, as is the case with fascist movements, all heretical utopian forms contribute to social movements. These social movements have the capacity to transform cultural values into those that serve the interests of specific groups, rather than those that seek to

instrumentalize their cultural imaginaries and behaviors for the benefit of the dominant group.

Rochon (1998) identifies three ways that cultural values change: *value conversion, value creation, and value connection*. *Value conversion* “is the replacement of existing cultural values with new ideas on the same topic about what is important, equitable, or legitimate” in a particular space. (Rochon 1998, p.54). In other words, it occurs when an explicit set of values for a particular context become insufficient for some reason in a particular time and space. Rochon (1998, p.54) offers the example of the end of racial segregation in the United States, which occurred when the logic of racial categories and rankings was deemed indefensible and “socially imposed barriers to equality of achievement [became] more visible to us because the presumption no longer [existed] that differences in achievement [reflected] differences in ability.” This mode of cultural change is usually difficult to accomplish because it involves changing already existing values, but it is very important when we consider the degree to which women, the poor, and people of color are valued in the United States.

The second type of value change is *value creation*, or “the development of new ideas, concepts, or categories of analysis that apply to situations that had not previously been the subject of explicit cultural values” (Rochon 1998, p.54). In other words, this process occurs in spaces that do not have any set, explicit values for “phenomena were simply not taken into account in judging human behavior” previously (Rochon 1998, p.55). For example, the development of agriculture led to the establishment of stationary societies where large amounts of people could live within a small proximity with each other. In turn, they had to develop new cultural values that cater to their new

environment. This mode of altering cultural values is inevitable and in turn, very susceptible to change.

The final way that values change is through the process of *value connection*, or “the development of a conceptual link between phenomena previously thought either to be unconnected with each other or to be connected in a different way” (Rochon 1998, p.54). This occurs where those seeking to institute new values connect their ideas to those of already established values in order to make their argument and as a result are often in control of who is involved in the issue (Rochon 1998, p.86). By connecting state funded social programs that serve the most vulnerable members of society (implying they are of value) to the massive national deficit and high rates of taxation, corporate-owned propaganda agencies in the mass media conceal how public funding is being funneled into hands of the wealthy financial elite through various mechanisms such as the war on drugs, the petro-military-industrial complex, the prison-industrial complex, the white-savior-industrial complex (Cole 2012), corporate subsidies, economic plunder, increased surveillance and security, and so-called international development programs. As the values and political interests of the poor come to mimic those of the wealthy and powerful to the point of their own detriment, their political-economic imaginations are constrained and financialized. At the same time, their behavior and logic becomes instrumentalized; a means to end, but never one’s own.

Now that it is clear how cultural values transform, I can move on to exploring how the political-economic imagination can be unbound from fascist ideological structures that constrain utopian possibilities. Once again, the radical imagination is the capacity to see the world otherwise; a collective process that exists as the friction

between instrumentality and self-determination. When one embraces the radical imagination rather than myths and fear-based imaginaries, the experience thrusts their cultural imaginaries into motion, freeing them from their fascist controls that tell them “this is how it is and all it can ever be,” compelling the person to push towards self-determination and allowing them to express who they really are, when they have the means to be. This is exactly why the dominant social order acts incessantly to scandalize and suppress the utopian impulse and the imaginings and forms that tend to follow.

While desires and imaginings can remain private, utopian forms are more difficult to conceal and in many cases impossible. In fact, heretical utopian forms typically do not try to hide unless they are trying to avoid being made legible to the status quo as a threat to the established order and almost never in terms of the ideas they are attempting to normalize. This is because their primary purpose is to embed new ideas, destabilize old ones, and transform each of them in the process by fostering widespread participation and awareness in the public.

In the hegemonic social order, heretical utopian forms such as radical social movements that emphasize collective solidarity simultaneously pull from and contribute to the process of the radical imagination, resulting in “shared landscapes of possibility and contestation that confront and contradict the reigning imaginaries of capital and power” (Haiven 2014, p.223). These “shared landscapes are shaped by and also shape the imaginations and the actions of their participant individuals” (Haiven 2014, p.4). In other words, when one engages in behaviors or relations that challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions used to justify the existence of the hegemonic order in the fascist cultural imaginary, the spectrum of possibility in one’s political-economic imagination is

broadened as they redefine what is truly possible across time, space, and culture in terms of how humans relate to one another and the planet.

The “key to sustaining and building the radical imagination, then, is the establishment of alternative spheres of values and radical forms of social cooperation where we can reproduce ourselves and our world outside the dictates of the reigning paradigm” (Haiven 2014, loc. 3467). These spaces, such as Foucault’s (1967) *heterotopias* and Wright’s (2010) *real utopias*, cultivate the radical imagination by drawing people together to share experiences that challenge the nature of reality and possibility as they know it: to “catch a glimpse, as if from the corner of the eye, our raw potential as cooperative beings, unmitigated or unorchestrated by the structures of capital and daily life. We glimpse our own unalienated selves” (Haiven 2014, loc. 2451).

Social movements that emancipate either aspect of the heretical cultural imaginary do not necessarily have to explicitly perform the function in order to so, but rather “the very fact of participation puts people in new situations and enables them to develop previously unsuspected abilities” that challenge the assumptions that make the architecture of the fascist cultural imaginary so resilient (Rochon 1998, p.138). While people participate in social movements for all sorts of reasons such as religion, solidarity, or even racking up volunteer hours to put on a resume, it is often the case that “alternative doing grows out of necessity” where “the functioning of the capitalist market does not allow us to survive and we need to find other ways to live, forms of solidarity and cooperation” (Holloway 2010, p.3-4).

Regardless of their origins, experiencing these counterhegemonic utopian forms provide us the opportunity to imagine the world otherwise; to fantasize about other ways

of knowing and being that prioritize human dignity over the market. This phenomena is especially useful in the context of the fascist cultural imaginary not only because it is so effective at blinding its claimants to the possibility of another world, but also because it instrumentalizes their behavior so effectively. Because the fascist cultural imaginary compels its claimants to dismiss alternatives as “merely utopian” by containing potential futures within the hegemonic spectrum of possibility in which only the established order is possible, the cultivation of the cultural imaginary is about “deferring the blink—keeping eyes pried open—and suspending the process of judgment formation” (Liu 2009, loc. 1133). In other words, it is about considering the alternative before automatically dismissing an idea as undesirable, irrelevant, or impractical.

Emancipating the heretical cultural imaginary does not always result from direct participation in the creation of, or participation in, social movements because such behaviors have what Rochon (1998, p.54) refers to as “ripple effects,” where sympathetic spectators, members of the group whose interests are being advocated, families and friends of activists are affected, either consciously or subconsciously, by a specific social movement. Gaining the awareness that other people are actively fighting to normalize alternative values and imaginaries in concrete ways, shatters the limits they have embedded in their cultural imaginaries as well; knowledge of the utopian form is itself emancipatory. Because they do not have to experience these values directly in order to be affected, all forms of human expression that shatter the hegemony of the existing order in a particular space and time play an immense role in the cultivation of the heretical cultural imaginary because rather than reproduce commonsense understandings, they

thrust the static aspects of cultural imaginaries into motion where the claimants can take them seriously.

Creative utopian forms such as music, visual art, literature, architecture, and visual ethnography beg us to reconsider even the most confident and comfortable certainties. When a piece of artwork really moves its viewer and the chains of impossibility that have been ascribed by the established order are smashed, it is never because of the material form itself, but rather the ideas people manifest in their cultural imaginaries as a result of experiencing it. In this way, the most inspirational art is rarely that which comes from pure technical skill, portraying world as it is, but instead it is that which most effectively convinces us of the worth of considering the world otherwise. The most powerful pieces of art are never decorations to egoize in the here and now, but rather they are portals that both compel and authorize us to experience another world. In this way, the utopian form while sometimes aesthetic, is always about heresy and rebellion against the limits of space and time: a warping of material reality to reflect a specific possibility derived from the link between the body and the imagination:

We said that the desire to fly produced the airplane. But people don't get into airplanes because they want to fly; they get into planes because they want to get somewhere else faster. What's produced the airplane is not so much a desire to fly as a rebellion against the tyranny of space and time. And that's the process that we can never stop, no matter how high our Titovs and Glenns may go. (Frye 1964, p.30)

Art can potentially bypass fascist limitations in the cultural imaginary by juxtaposing similar types of relations and scenarios in another time and space where they can imagine alternatives. Where painting is one of the best methods to directly portray the visions someone manifests in their imagination, literature, both fiction and non-fiction, but especially science fiction “gives us an experience that stretches us vertically to the heights and depths of what the human mind can conceive” (Frye 1964, p.101) and in turn, “literature belongs to the world man constructs, not to the world he sees; to his home, not his environment” (Frye 1964, p.27). When one imagines the same types of relations they take for granted in reality in another context, the taken for granted once again becomes a specific and conscious reality, regardless of their context to which it is applied (Jameson 2004). This is why free expression is so important and why the types of knowledge it produces are suppressed, degraded, and commodified into its most docile forms when compared to forms of creativity or innovation that generate value: “Capital, since the beginning, says to people, ‘your creativity is valid only within the bounds of value production: if you do not produce value, your creativity counts for nothing’” (Holloway 2010, p.247). For this reason, “money goes toward those who create new goods and services...” which is “...why there are many paying jobs to be had doing things that are complicit in the conversion of natural and social capital into money, and few jobs to be had reclaiming the commons and protecting natural and cultural treasures” (Eisenstein 2011, p.103).

When someone experiences heretical utopian forms, they are forced to confront their hegemonic assumptions and in turn, the types of instrumental relationships and behaviors these beliefs coerce us to participate in. They examine the types or political-

economic relationships in which they participate either willingly or unwillingly, as well as the values that perpetuate these behaviors; they put themselves in a position to confront the fact that “people tend to adjust their beliefs and values so as to make their own choices appear better (Huemer 2013, p.113). Such an approach is necessary because when the taken for granted the nature of a system of beliefs still remains it is impossible to consciously change it and for this reason, it is more difficult to persuade someone they have been deceived than it is to deceive them.

This dynamic is obvious in organized religion, where the most devout are so fearful of divine retribution, that they will not face any ideas that challenge their beliefs, even if the reasons for their validity is placed right in front of the person. This is why “great cultivators of imagination—great teachers—will deliberately obscure a crucial part of the story,” because without personally drawing out the contradictions between ones experiences and the ways they are encouraged to think about them, they will always be subject to that which is commonsense; that which maintains order (Liu 2009, loc. 1054). For example, if a young woman in an isolated patriarchal society had never experienced an alternative world where gender relations were non-hierarchical, not only would they lack the capacity to imagine what it might look like, but they may not have ever even considered it a possibility. It would be like trying to imagine what it would look like to live in the United States without white supremacy; I have no idea what that would look like. In fact, I have trouble imagining it as possible considering its history and the relationships that are necessary to maintain the nation as it is now. What about a world where privilege and social status were only to be gained by contributing to one’s

community rather than serving rational self-interest? What does that look like in a society that values science as well as the natural environment?

In this section I described how each aspect of the heretical cultural imaginary is released from its fascist limitations when someone experiences the concrete utopian forms produced by people whose cultural imaginaries are only limited according to their heterogeneous, dynamic, cultures of resistance and the landscapes produced by the radical imagination process, both of which, are constantly evolving processes. In the next section, I will offer examples of these utopian forms and describe how they function as such in the hegemonic cultural imaginary of the United States.

Manifesting Heretical Utopian Forms

In order to identify concrete examples of the heretical utopian form as it exists in the United States, initially I must isolate its seven characteristics, the *first* of which is that the utopian form always seeks to transcend the existing order and shatter the assumptions that justify its interlocking webs of power such as the state, religion, and capitalism, which can hardly be separated from one another. In turn, the utopian form empowers civil-society and attempts to prioritize its influence over the other two spheres of power; the state and the market. The *second* characteristic of the heretical utopian form ensures that the utopian form avoids the dangerous aspects of utopian thinking by dissecting any position of superiority or universality as well as any sense of necessity it be imposed upon others; when a utopian form is imposed on others, inevitably leads to failure for its incapacity to account for specificity across time, space, and cultural context. *Third*, these utopian forms are always experimental and in turn, their implications must be easy to

reverse in case they result in tragedy. *Fourth*, because one's sense of justice is separate from their morality, these utopian forms must be congruent with behaviors they understand as morally acceptable if they are to be effective. The *Fifth* aspect of the heretical utopian form requires that they not be relegated to the future; subjecting their fate to the system they are attempting to escape. The *sixth* characteristic of the heretical utopian form is derived of a cultural imaginary that produces a sense of justice that recognizes human difference as such and rejects systems of categories and rankings that limit possibility and feed fascist movements. In the contemporary United States this implies that the values and imaginaries a utopian form projects are those of the heretical cultural imaginary, which emphasizes the value of the commons, direct democracy, mutual aid, concrete labor, and self-determination. The *seventh* and final characteristic of the heretical utopian form is that it must never be permanent, but rather it must be incessantly dynamic and sensitive to change.

Now that I have operationalized the characteristics of the heretical utopian form they can be deployed in order to explore what types of strategies a heretic might utilize to emancipate the cultural imaginary as well as how each of them would actually function in relation to the established order. Wright (2010) identifies three strategies of social transformation: *Symbiotic*, *Ruptural*, and *Interstitial*. Each of these categories have unique benefits and problems, but they all contribute to the never ending process of manifesting the heretical utopian vision in the heart of the established order. These are visions filled with "heroic victories over existing structures of oppression followed by the tragic construction of new forms domination, oppression, and inequality" (Wright 2010, p.24). In this way, they dwell what Haiven (2014, p.130) describes as the space between

“not-success” and “not-failure,” that becomes apparent when one understands that “forms of social relations are processes, processes of struggle, live antagonisms...” perpetuated by people who possess ways of knowing and being that exist ‘in the mode of being denied’ (Gunn 1995, p.14).

The first mode of social transformation is *symbiotic transformation*, which occurs where social movements drive towards “extending and deepening the institutional forms of popular social empowerment” in order to enact social change (Wright 2010, p.306). In other words, symbiotic social change takes place through already established structures of the state and capital. Often times, this type of change serves the interest of both civil-society and the status quo, “a positive class-compromise... ..between the *associational power* of the working class and the *material interests* of capitalists” (Wright 2010, p.338-339). For example, a labor union calling for a specific safety regulations to be legally required in a workplace might benefit businesses by preventing accidents and reducing turnover, while it simultaneously benefits the workers by creating a safer work environment. Because symbiotic transformation always occurs within the limits of the existing order, it is never explicitly heretical. However, the gains that one makes through the social order can benefit civil-society in ways that strengthen the other types of transformation. For example, when the state establishes a minimum-wage, workers become less exploitable and have to work less in order to survive. In turn, they have more time and resources to dedicate to interstitial and ruptural strategies that always occur outside the hegemonic order.

Advocates of *ruptural strategies* “envision creating new institutions of social empowerment through a sharp break within existing institutions and social structures...

...through direct confrontation and political struggles it is possible to create a radical disjuncture in institutional structures in which existing institutions are destroyed and new ones built in a fairly rapid way (Wright 2010, p.303). These types of strategies engage in a complete rejection of the existing social order through direct action politics, often seeking out confrontation with the state and capital. In many cases, ruptural strategies take the form of armed insurrections, as is the case with the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, the barricading of the Paris Commune in 1871, or the all-female Peoples Protection Unit (YPG) that has been fighting for autonomy and gender equality in Syrian Kurdistan since 2012. While these conflicts do fall under the ruptural transformation category, it also includes less-fatal types of confrontations, such as those that occurred on a fall day in Seattle, Washington in 1999, where through the collective efforts of over 40,000 protesters, the anti-globalization movement sabotaged the World Trade Organization's Ministerial Conference.

What made this particular demonstration fall under the ruptural transformation category was the fact that around 200 demonstrators formed a black bloc⁹ and effectively controlled the streets for three days before they were dispersed; freeing protesters being arrested, barricading the streets, destroying corporate and state infrastructure, and engaging in street fighting with the authorities. This type of strategy is often framed in the media as a group of teenagers looking for a reason to cause destruction, so even progressives in the United States often oppose such actions because they are used to justify the use of police violence against non-violent protesters who are there to

⁹ A tactic where protesters cover their faces and form a group with the intention of concealing their identities from the authorities.

demonstrate within the limits of what is acceptable to the state. However, black blocs represent a complete rejection of the established order and my advice to progressives who oppose such tactics are that they should consider the dire condition of the global ecology and heed the words of Lauren Olamina, a character from Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* (1993, p.7): "A gift of God may sear unready fingers."¹⁰

Rather than seeking confrontation with the forces of the state and capital, *interstitial transformation* occurs where networks of people "seek to build new forms of social empowerment in the niches and margins of capitalist society, often where they do not seem to pose any immediate threat to dominant classes and elites" (Wright 2010, p.305). This process always occurs outside the state and as independently as possible from capitalism because it seeks to create emancipatory alternatives that embody non-hegemonic or counter-hegemonic values and imaginings. In this way, interstitial transformation is simultaneously utopian and anti-dystopian (anti-anti-utopian); concurrently creating counter-hegemonic desires, imaginaries, and forms and hostile towards that which attempts to suppress any of these aspects of the utopian.

Not only does interstitial transformation offer alternatives to abstract labor wagedom, but it also seeks to disrupt the reproduction of the social order: "like a complex ecological system in which one kind of organism initially gains a foothold in a niche but eventually out-competes rivals for food sources and so comes to dominate the wider environment. (Wright 2010, p.307). Experiments and projects such as "worker and consumer co-ops, battered women's shelters, workers factory councils, intentional

¹⁰ Lauren Olamina equates "God" with "change" analogically (Butler 1993).

communities and communes, community-based social economy services, civic environmental councils, community-controlled land trusts, cross-border equal-exchange trade organizations” empower civil-society by attempting to “build a new society in the shell of the old (Wright 2010, p.324-325). To construct another world in the “shell of the old,” is to attempt to “prefigure” the future of social relations, subjectivities, and behaviors to will a “world that is not yet but could be, exists not-yet as real anticipation in the struggles of the past and present” (Holloway 2010, p.170).

It is important to point out that prefigurative politics is not the same as the survivalist or “prepper” movement, where individuals or groups of people prepare for various disaster scenarios such as alien invasion, rapture, environmental disaster, or foreign military occupation. These theories shape countless tactics and strategies including building fortified bunkers, acquiring martial training, hoarding supplies and ammunition, even psychological training for spending long periods of time in underground compounds in order to have a leg up on the rest of what remains of the species. However while both heretics and preppers are concerned about the potential future and lack faith in the capacity of the established order to protect them, they are very still very different because heretics are trying to dismantle structures of illegitimate authority through forms of conscious and alternative social reproduction that decentralize power and build solidarity to in order to give people the tools necessary to save the world from itself, while survivalists are concerned with preserving their privilege in the future independently of the interests of others by investing their surplus share of the commons in their security on the chance of a final event. In this way, they choose to privatize the preservation of their future in the end of the world rather than try to save it. The

endgame disaster scenario is an artifact of today's hopeless world; manifested by either the hopeless cynic or the paranoid psychopath, both of which, could benefit greatly from experiencing and understanding the world as it could otherwise be.

Conclusion

The heretic seeks to emancipate the commons from the established order, which incessantly strives to privatize and commodify every aspect of human life according to the logic of market fundamentalism. As everything around them is increasingly enclosed by capital and the state, the heretic is forced to pay for that which they used to get for free, which requires that they engage in a “contractual” relationship with a property owner to whom they can sell their labor for less than its full value; to submit to exploitation and the instrumentalization of their ways of knowing and being. When abstract labor replaces a person's meaningful activities, they often forget who they are, which is why “the signature quality of commons is that they are part of who we are; they blur the line between individual and community” (Haiven 2014, loc. 1374).

The existence of the commons requires that every person have direct democratic power in deciding on the “purposes to which the means of production are put and on the allocation of the social surplus” (Wright 2010, p.116). Participation in direct democracy provides the people of civil-society with the opportunity to remember who we are and act it out, rather than simply serving as someone's means to an ends or relegating social change to the future. It is for this reason, that those engage in prefigurative politics advocate that “if you can embody the change you struggle for, you have already won - not by fighting but by becoming” (Holloway 2010, p.45).

When heretics refuse to endure indignity in their lives, they become the changes they wish to see and produce what John Holloway (2010) as *cracks* in the established order. These cracks “are the acting-out of a world that does not exist, in the hope that by acting it out, we may really breathe it into life” (Holloway 2010, p.37). Cracks are never a means to an ends, but rather “an opening outwards” towards possibility; one that “is never entirely closed, even when it is violently suppressed” (Holloway 2010, p.35). They command us to imagine the world otherwise and effectively draw out taken-for-granted contradictions between the way we desire the world to be and the way we experience it that challenge the legitimacy of the existing order. This process can form cracks of all shapes and sizes, but what is most important is where they connect and overlap, contributing to a larger process. When these cracks intersect through collective solidarity, utopian dreams shine through the fissures in the shell of the old world to reveal new potentials for freedom and self-determination. At the same time, the order attempts to heal its wounds and divert its subject’s eyes from what lies beyond them; utopian possibilities.

CONCLUSION

As I discussed in chapter 1, utopia is connected to hope, which always implies that one may not necessarily be in control of a desired outcome in the future. A person never “hopes” for something they know will certainly occur if they desire it to be so. In this way hope and utopia are anxieties imposed upon those who come to know dignity in a world without, and possess the courage to embrace it despite the presence of overwhelming power; a gift of refusal that tells the people of civil-society that we are both worthy and capable of being who we want to be. When they are heretical, these desires (utopian impulse), visions (utopian imaginary), and manifestations (utopian form) challenge the assumptions that legitimate the authority that seek to maintain the established order.

In chapter 2, I explored how hopelessness is a symptom of the order’s capacity to conscript the cultural imaginary of its subjects and submit them to domination by subjecting possible futures to the will of the status quo. In the United States, this is accomplished through the hegemonic fascist cultural imaginary; the process that takes place as a result of the dialectical relationship between market values and the financialized imagination. The architecture of the fascist cultural imaginary subjects its claimants to the instrumental logic of abstract labor, which renders them faithful to a system that negates self-determination and autonomy outside the capitalist order.

In chapter 3, I explored the heretical cultural imaginary by deploying *low theory* in order to determine what failure looks like in a social order where they hegemonic notion of success is maximizing the extent of one’s exploitation by others and of others, in conditions where the state and market are left relatively unopposed in their efforts to

privatize what was once common. The heretical cultural imaginary represents the process resulting from the dialectical relationship between cultures of resistance and the radical imagination, which challenges the hegemonic ways of knowing and being that instrumentalize the will of its subjects to reproduce the established order.

In chapter 4 I tried to imagine what heretical ways of knowing and being look like, how they function, and the way they emancipate cultural imaginaries from the limits of ascribed instrumentality. I discovered that the relationship between the utopian consciousness and the utopian form is a dialectical one in the sense that when one experiences the previously unthinkable and it challenges the legitimacy of the existing order, they often desire and imagine utopian worlds; cracks in the chains that bind the cultural imaginaries of civil-society. At the same time, these desires and imaginaries compel us to manifest them in reality; cracks in the established order. Both the utopian consciousness and the utopian form are essential to building a more just world, but they should be developed in different proportions if they are to be effective because of the specific circumstances that exist across time, space, culture, and imagination.

While some societies possess heretical desires and imaginaries (perhaps spaces with enough clean water to fulfill the desires and needs of the people), but they are heavily suppressed by the existing order, (where water is privatized and common access is restricted), the people should emphasize developing achievable strategies that they can use to strengthen their social power (developing or emancipating alternative sources of water and even concealing, defending, or liberating them if necessary). However, if a society possesses the resources and capability to build another world, but lacks the desire and imaginary, they might go about social change much differently.

In cases where utopian consciousness is incessantly suppressed by the status quo, it must be cultivated by those concerned with the state of social and political justice. Otherwise, it will be forever trapped in a cycle of perpetual instrumentality and hopelessness; a world where taken-for-granted forces of the existing order increasingly shape our lives as members of civil-society, but we are only permitted to believe that we have ourselves to blame for societies problems. A world where prisons, drone strikes, and starvation are taken for granted as unavoidable realities of the human experience. Where democracy and justice are equated with procedures that keep us running in circles, but never towards justice.

The widespread sense of hopelessness and lack of agency that exists in civil-society, despite the existence of utopian forms, informs me that the United States is in desperate need of the heretical cultural imaginary. If the people are to build a more just society and render the old obsolete, it is necessary that we emancipate our cultural values and political-economic imaginaries from their hegemonic constraints to make room for freedom and possibility.

I suggest that we take advantage of the fact that the people of the United States are addicted to entertainment, social media, and online exploration by making concrete examples of alternative worlds appear natural, necessary, and desirable to people who have never understood them as such through these various mediums of communication. This is the role of all types of artists, including critical scholars, writers, storytellers, film makers, and anyone else who have found ways to explicitly remain as themselves, despite the overwhelming powers of the state and capital that attempt to instrumentalize their utopian desires, imaginaries, and forms. I believe that expressions of freedom through

visual ethnography, documentaries, films, and alternative media, such as Submedia.tv, infoshop.org, and anarchistnews.org, have an especially important role to play in this process. Not only because they offer concrete examples of possibilities and demonstrate agency, but also because they provide us some level of access into the architecture of the cultural imaginary of other heretics. Both of which, are necessary to address the two primary factors that contribute to hopelessness: the hegemonic assumptions formed in the fascist cultural imaginary and the scarcity of spaces where heretics can organize, strategize, transform, and emancipate the heretical cultural imaginary. Spaces where we can learn to how to best fail together, rather than taking our chances be ineffective and hopeless apart.

Utopian thought is a source of real political-economic possibility for humans and without it we are lost, we are vulnerable, and we are doomed to serve the will of an order built with the bones of those who came before. For this reason, imagining and living in the interstices of utopian possibility is never something that one should be ashamed of, because when we exist in a fundamentally unjust state of relations, heresy is the only way of preserving dignity and treating others with respect. We must peer into the cracks of the counterintuitive and let the light bathe our souls in the potentials of human agency because when others see dignity in a space of injustice that is ignored or forgotten, they cannot avoid experiencing hope about it in the future. As the flame of discontent with the world builds in their chests as they experience the world in a way that had never been understood as possible, they realize the depravity of the one they are in. As the instinct for freedom takes over, that which was always been a utopian dream becomes a passionate inclination and that which was impossible, suddenly and unexpectedly,

becomes the only option in a world that is so instrumentalized that freedom requires heresy. A world where the self-loathing slave prays to nothing as they cast their ballot, while the heretic conjures portals to another time and space teetering on the edge of possibility.

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