Sheldon Wolin's Anarchism

A thesis presented to

the faculty of

the College of Arts and Sciences of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Science

Isaac Abram

December 2013

This thesis titled

Sheldon Wolin's Anarchism

by

ISAAC ABRAM

has been approved for

the Department of Political Science

and the College of Arts and Sciences by

Judith Grant

Professor of Political Science

Robert Frank

Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

ABSTRACT

ABRAM, ISAAC, M.A., December 2013, Political Science

<u>Sheldon Wolin's Anarchism</u>

Director of Thesis: Judith Grant

This thesis will argue that Sheldon Wolin's theory of democracy is conceptually similar to anarchist theory. Wolin is often citedas the key figure who reignited democratic theoryin the United States, and he is still regarded as a leading theorist of democracy within academia. Given his esteemed reputation among political philosophers, it is worth illustrating the affinities between his vision of democracy and anarchism, especially because his conception of democracy is oftentimes more anarchic than anarchism.

Anarchism is understudied in academia compared to other political forms. It is also commonly derided in popular culture as either frivolous or a recipe for chaos. It is precisely because of anarchism's unfavorable reputation, along with its tendency to be dismissed as an unviable political option, that its similarity to Wolin's vision of democracy deserves attention. A careful reading of Wolin reveals that both his conception of democracy and anarchism might be conceptually symmetrical, or even indistinguishable. There is much to be gained from identifying and elaborating these similarities: If the ideas that are usually associated with democracy - such as equality of political power, inclusion in decision-making, deliberative decision-making, freedom from arbitrary rule, skepticism toward authority, attention to the ordinary, opposition to hierarchy and centralization, the value of localism, and the celebration of diversity - are

also mainstays of anarchism, then the struggle to achieve democracy could be identical to the struggle to achieve anarchy: Achieving one would mean achieving the other.

This thesis will canvass Wolin's entire corpus in order to present to the reader relevant quotes that demonstrate his anarchist sentiments. Furthermore, a sample of anarchist literature will be surveyed in order to provide concrete evidence of the kinship between Wolin's work and anarchism.

DEDICATION

For Nick Helentjaris.

οἱ θεοὶ ἡμῖν φθονοῦσιν. - Homer

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I want to thank my committee members, Judith Grant, Julie White, and DeLysa Burnier. These talented professors helped me in innumerable ways throughout my undergraduate and graduate years at Ohio University. Aside from their tremendously engaging lectures and seminars, these scholars aided my endeavors by recommending fascinating and pertinent texts, challenging me to sharpen my ideas during extracurricular conversations, and affording me the opportunity to teach Political Theory, for which I am forever grateful. My academic experience was enriched beyond expectation as a result of their continual willingness to carve time out of their incredibly busy schedules for my sake. Words cannot express my gratitude for their attention and my indebtedness to their influence.

I would also like to thank the Political Science faculty at Ohio University for their encouragement and countless, enlivening hallway chats. In particular I want to thank Professor Takaaki Suzuki for conducting one of the most brilliant and memorable graduate seminars I will ever have the pleasure to experience.

Finally, no Acknowledgements section of any Political Science thesis at Ohio University should fail to mention the tireless efforts of Deena Proffitt. Her relentless helpfulness should be the envy of all departmental associates.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

This thesis will argue that Sheldon Wolin's theory of democracy is conceptually similar to anarchist theory. Wolin is often cited[1] as the key figure who reignited democratic theory in the United States, and he is still regarded as a leading theorist of democracy within academia.[2] Given his esteemed reputation among political philosophers it is worth illustrating the affinities between his vision of democracy and anarchism, especially because his conception of democracy is oftentimes more 'anarchic' than anarchism.

Anarchism has been understudied in academia compared to other political philosophies. In popular culture the word 'anarchy' is typically used as a synonym for chaos[3]. At worst, anarchists are considered akin to terrorists.[4] At best, they are regarded

---

[1] William E. Connolly. "Politics and Vision." Democracy and Vision: Sheldon Wolin and the Vicissitudes of the Political (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 6.

[2] Cornel West has written that "Sheldon Wolin is the greatest political theorist of and for democracy in our time." See, Cornel West, "Afterword," Theory & Event, 10.1 (2007). Also see, Robert J. Lacey. "Sheldon Wolin and Melancholic Democracy" American Pragmatism and Democratic Faith, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008) 170.

[3] Bertrand Russell, a philosopher of logic who regarded anarchism as the most preferable political ideal and considered his own political philosophy cut from the anarchist's cloth, wrote that, "In the popular mind, an anarchist is a person who throws bombs and commits other outrages, either because he is more or less insane, or because he uses the pretense of extreme political opinions as a cloak for criminal proclivities. This view is, of course, in every way inadequate." See: Bertrand Russell, Proposed Roads to Freedom: Socialism, Anarchism & Syndicalism, Rockville: Arc Manor, 2008) 31.

[4] Emma Goldman, Anarchism and Other Essays, (New York: Dover) 49. Also see: Alexander Berkman, What is Anarchism? (Oakland: AK Press, 2003) xiv.

as jejune dreamers who fail to understand the necessity of state power. In the traditional

canon of political theory anarchism is associated with the treacherous state of nature,

which theorists such as Hobbes and Locke agreed[5] we must escape by forming pacts that

establish civil society. One could argue that anarchism is distinguished from other

political ideals in that people seldom consider anarchism as a legitimate political option;

or, put another way, monarchy, aristocracy, theocracy, socialism, libertarianism, and

republicanism all seem like workable models of government, whereas anarchism seems

to belong in a different category.

It is precisely because of anarchism's unfavorable reputation, along with its

tendency to be dismissed as an unviable political option, that its similarity to Wolin's

vision of democracy deserves attention. People commonly praise democracy[6] and

denounce anarchism.[7] However, a careful reading of Wolin reveals that both his

conception of democracy and anarchism might be conceptually symmetrical, or even

---

[5]Thomas Hobbes and John Locke were Enlightenment-era, English philosophers whose political theories took the form of thought experiments in which they imagined what life would be like without permanent, legitimated, governmental institutions. They both referred to such a state as the 'state of nature,' and both agreed that such a 'state' would be fraught with dangers. In Hobbes' famous formulation, life in the state of nature would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." (See Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Chapter XIII, Section 9.) In Locke's view, "*Want of a common Judge with Authority, puts all Men in a State of Nature: Force without Right, upon a Man's Person, makes a State of War*" (See John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter II, Section 19.)

[6] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy," Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy, eds. J. Peter Euben, John R. Wallach, and Josiah Ober (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1994) 39.

[7] Emma Goldman. Anarchism and Other Essays. Dover. New York. 49.

indistinguishable. There is much to be gained from identifying and elaborating these similarities: If the ideas that are usually associated with democracy - such as equality of political power, inclusion in decision-making, deliberative decision-making, freedom from arbitrary rule, skepticism toward authority, attention to the ordinary, opposition to hierarchy and centralization, the value of localism, and the celebration of diversity - are also mainstays of anarchism, then the struggle to achieve democracy could be identical to the struggle to achieve anarchy: Achieving one would mean achieving the other.

One fascinating aspect of this comparison is that democracy has mainstream appeal while anarchism is fringe. However, Wolin's account of democracy often strikes the reader as being more radical than anarchism. This suggests the possibility that anarchist sentiments are actually mainstream, even though the idea of anarchism seems wildly radical due to common misconceptions.

Democracy is commonly praised as the best form of government.[8] Its most avid supporters regard it as the organizational form that best guarantees liberty and equality, and its most ardent critics consider it a flawed form of government that unleashes mass irrationality upon society.[9] These various views on democracy all assume that democracy is a type of regime. In contrast to these views Wolin argues that democracy cannot be a

---

[8] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy," <u>Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy</u>, eds. J. Peter Euben, John R. Wallach, and Josiah Ober (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) 39.

[9] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution</u>, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 48.

Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition</u>, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 585.

form of government because the idea of 'government' implies the imposition and maintenance of rule/s, which is incompatible with democracy.[10] Accordingly, Wolin argues that whenever a government is formed, democracy is forsaken. In Wolin's view democracy occurs episodically and momentarily as an insurrectionary action that disrupts governmental regularity.[11]

In this respect Wolin represents a radical departure from the classic project of political theory, which has traditionally addressed the question of how to best organize society. The most widely-read figures in the canon of political theory, such as Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau partake in the grand project of providing the intellectual groundwork for systems of government. They engage in a discourse that is typically packaged as 'social contract theory' which concerns the act of founding and constituting a system of government based upon philosophic principles. These figures considered this foundational act - along with the state systems they created - as a precondition for political activity in civil society. Wolin on the other hand views that act and those systems as circumscribing or stunting political activity.[12] In this sense it would not be unfaithful to Wolin's words if we define the state as 'a structured lack of political possibilities.'[13] Democracy on the other hand exists solely within the realm of

---

[10] Ibid. 602-603.

[11] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," <u>Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,</u>ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 31.

[12] Ibid. 33.

[13] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition,</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 603.

political possibility and is chiefly defined by its indefinability; or to put it another way, democracy is inherently unconstrained. Whenever political experience is subjected to boundaries or pre-established rules, democracy is quashed. Democracy is therefore radically open-ended and unhampered by formal dictates. And so within the confines of a state, democracy appears as a rupture in a government's continuum rather than appearing as an emblem of a governmental tradition.

Democratic theorists are cued to discuss how people can form political institutions that maximize participation and egalitarian relationships of political power. That project is unavoidably architectural since it endeavors to construct social organizations that embody democratic principles. Wolin, in contrast, perceives this project as fundamentally misguided, for it assumes that democracy is something that is instituted, or something that is defined in advance and then permanently encoded in a civic body, rather than a fleeting action that suddenly bursts forth from the lifeworld,[14] aggregates to amplify its power, and then dissipates before it can harden into routines or structures that quell its essential spontaneity.

The first chapter of this thesis will involve some necessary stage-setting. Chapter one will briefly explicate Wolin's perception of the United States' political system from

---

[14] This use of the term "lifeworld" is compatible with the term *Lebenswelt* defined by Edmund Husserl, and elaborated by Martin Heidegger. However, the term is here being used to echo Jurgen Habermas' concept of 'lifeworld' as defined in his work, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Beacon Press, 1985). For Habermas, the lifeworld is a semi-autonomous realm of social and cultural meanings, understandings, and sensibilities that are rooted in ordinary, informal relationships within a community.

the Revolutionary Era to the present day, since that perception provides the backdrop

against which he develops his democratic vision. As Wolin will argue, from the modern

to the postmodern era the United States has undergone a transformation from a liberal

political order to a technocratic, surveillance-and-control state. Wolin conceptualizes the

contemporary United States as a Superpower which in the postwar period morphed into a

new kind of totalitarianism, which he calls "inverted totalitarianism."[15] An abbreviated

summary of inverted totalitarianism would go as follows: Inverted totalitarianism is

characterized by a corporatized state[16] in which the political realm[17] is routinely

subordinated to the economic realm[18] and institutions are governed according to an elitist

model[19] of managerial efficiency[20] in an expansionist system which thrives on

technological innovation[21] and mythological indoctrination.[22]

---

[15] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[16]Ibid. *xiii*.

[17] Here it is useful to note Wolin's particular use of the word "political." In his essay "Fugitive Democracy," Wolin writes: "I shall take the *political* to be an expression of the idea that a free society composed of diversities can nonetheless enjoy moments of commonality when, through public deliberations, collective power is used to promote or protect the well-being of the collectivity."

[18] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution</u>, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 42.

[19] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.</u>(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 160.

[20] Ibid. 132-134.

[21]Ibid. *xv*.

[22]Ibid. 14.

The second chapter will provide an exegesis of Wolin's democratic vision. This vision has substantially changed over the past few decades. In the 1980s Wolin defined his ideal vision of democracy as "archaic democracy,"[23] which can be succinctly described as a kind of grassroots, civil communitarianism that according to Wolin has a lineage tracing back to the philosophies of Tocqueville,[24] Montesquieu,[25] and the Anti-Federalists.[26] During the mid-1990s, as Wolin continued to meditate on the meaning of democracy he developed a new concept which he called 'fugitive democracy.' Chapter two will present fugitive democracy as the logical conclusion of Wolin's oeuvre. That is, if one begins with Wolin's analysis of modern and contemporary political systems, along with the antidemocratic structures which pervade those systems, one can then predict the political antidote to those systems. Fugitive democracy could thus be conceived as democracy inured to state suppression.

The third chapter will discuss Wolin's critique of bureaucracy and managerialism. This critique is crucial to understanding why Wolin rejects the state and advocates for a democracy that defies institutionalization. Though this chapter will be brief in exposition, its brevity should not be considered indicative of its importance; for throughout Wolin's texts one will find barbed critiques of bureaucracy, administration, organization, and

---

[23] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 80.

[24] Ibid. 66.

[25] Ibid. 73-74.

[26] Ibid. 87-88.

managerial approaches to political activity. It is arguably Wolin's most significant claim

that genuine democracy is opposed these modes of handling politics.

The fourth chapter will offer a comparison of Wolin's work to that of notable

anarchists, ranging from nineteenth century theories of anarchism to contemporary

anarchist thinkers. The main purpose of this comparison is to display the similarities

between anarchism and Wolin's vision of democracy. Insofar as Wolin is valued as a

venerable theorist of democracy, the comparison to anarchism is worthwhile because it

invites a complete revision of what democracy should mean and what it should look like.

Following the comparison to anarchism Wolin's concept of fugitive democracy

will be recast as an example of Nietzschean will-to-power that simultaneously strives to

maximize individual *and* collective power. Given that fugitive democracy is, according to

Wolin, inherently transgressive[27] and revolutionary,[28] seeking to transform society

through sheer vitality, and asserting its latent strength to gain social advantage, one can

compellingly matte it within the frame of the will-to-power.

The fifth and final chapter will conclude with an overall assessment of Wolin's

work. This chapter will first discuss Wolin's approach to the vocation of political theory.

Following that discussion this chapter will address a facet of Wolin's thought that seldom

---

[27] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," <u>Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,</u>ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 37. Also see, Sheldon S. Wolin, "Transgression, Equality, and Voice," <u>Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern</u>, eds. Josiah Ober and Charles Hedrick, Charles, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1996) 75.

[28] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," <u>Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,</u>ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 38.

receives attention; namely, his pessimistic attitude toward politics. Visiting that aspect of

his theory will also serve the purpose of providing a panoramic view of his theoretical

output. The chapter will conclude with a summary appraisal of Wolin's contribution to

democratic theory, giving special attention to the anarchist nature of that contribution. In

the end this thesis will demonstrate that both Wolin's anti-state democracy and anarchism

are at least fellow travelers, and at most identical twins.

But before proceeding it is worth mentioning something about the novelty of this

project. Custom dictates that the reader should be treated to a literary review before

launching into the thesis proper. However, the topic of this thesis does not afford such an

opportunity. The only thing more surprising than the fact that scholarly considerations of

Wolin are inexplicably scrimpy in number is the fact that nobody pegs him as an

anarchist. One author, Robert J. Lacey, aptly highlights the melancholic temper of

Wolin's work.[29] Another author, Steven Bilakovics, provides a fairly comprehensive

summary of Wolin's theoretical innovations in order to seize upon some interesting but

marginal tensions therein.[30] An entire book entitled *Democracy and Vision: Sheldon

Wolin and the Vicissitudes of the Political*[31] appeared in 2001 which sought to deepen the

understanding of Wolin's ideas in order to enrich contemporary discussions of political

---

[29] Robert J. Lacey, American Pragmatism and Democratic Faith, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois
Press, 2007) 171-197.

[30] Steven Bilakovics, Democracy Without Politics, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012)
175-218.

[31] Aryeh Botwinick and William E. Connolly eds., Democracy and Vision: Sheldon Wolin and
the Vicissitudes of the Political (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

life. Despite the notoriety of contributors to that book, which included Wendy Brown, Charles Taylor, George Kateb, and Fred Dallmayr, the essays are puzzling in their overall failure to discuss Wolin's ideas at all. Aside from occasional references to Wolin's work the contributors to that book are mostly concerned with their own ideas and projects, and thus betray the book's title, though the essays are substantial in their own right. At any rate, an expanded chronicle of these texts would neither inform the topic of this thesis nor enhance the reader's understanding of Wolin in a way that will not be afforded by the following chapters.

Whatever the merits of the curiously minimal scholarship on Wolin may be, none of that scholarship can be credited with noticing the anarchist timbre of his writings. One can only conjecture about the reason that scholars fail to mention this aspect of Wolin's thought. In all likelihood this oversight stems from the fact that anarchist theory is beyond most people's ken, and so they are incapable of recognizing anarchism's similarity to democracy. This oversight could also result from being unacquainted with Wolin's entire body of work, which causes commentators to partially rely upon secondary sources and hearsay. However, one cannot foreclose the possibility that scholars *have* noticed Wolin's anarchism and opted to ignore it due to a sense of propriety, for anarchism can seem an indecorous topic for professional conversation.

Regardless of the reason for this omission, it is abundantly clear that Wolin's work exhibits an unmistakably anarchist bent. Given that the affinity between Wolin's writings and anarchism has thus far gone unmentioned in academic scholarship, this thesis will endeavor to allay any skepticism that such an affinity exists by supplying an

ample amount of direct quotations from Wolin's texts. This will allow readers to examine

the evidence for themselves. Let us now proceed to study Wolin's view of the state.

CHAPTER ONE: WOLIN'S VIEW OF THE STATE

This chapter will trace the evolution of Wolin's understanding of state power in the United States. It will primarily focus on Wolin's assessment of three impactful changes in U.S. power: The Constitution's ratification, the New Deal, and the Cold War. As this history unfolds it becomes clear that Wolin perceives the trajectory of U.S. politics as carving an ever-widening gulf between state power and the populace. This view is contrary to accounts that depict U.S. history as a progressive march of democratic victories which include the abolition of slavery, the enfranchisement of women and blacks, the direct election of senators, and so on. While Wolin would admit that these victories were positive developments, he would also note that these victories merely permitted the inclusion of diversities into a system that has effectively inoculated itself against democratic influence. Indeed, such a system may welcome the inclusion of diversities in order to add a veneer of legitimacy to its antidemocratic core.

Anarchist literature typically features a critique of state power accompanied by alternative social visions. Wolin's work echoes that compositional scheme. Anarchists are wont to argue that state power cannot be transcended until it is accurately understood. In keeping with that belief this chapter will briefly sketch Wolin's understanding of state power in the United States. Ultimately Wolin claims that the United States has become an imperialistic, surveillance-and-control society in which financial interests dominate politics. That claim might seem platitudinous in the context of contemporary academic discourse. But what distinguishes Wolin's account is his conclusion that the convergence of these antidemocratic trends has produced a new form of totalitarianism in the United

States. What follows is an adumbrated summary of Wolin's perspective on key transformations in U.S. power in a historically chronological order. The aim here is not to recount Wolin's perspective on *all* of U.S. history in minute detail, but to display Wolin's persistent critique of state power throughout U.S. history and the anarchist character of that critique.

In Wolin's view, one of the main reasons all societies become antidemocratic results from an increase in political scale. In the ancient world the transformation from polis to megalopolis doomed democracy. Wolin writes that "there could be no blinking the fact that the city denoted an intensely political association while the leagues, monarchies, and empires that followed upon the decline of the *polis* were essentially apolitical organizations."[32] As this passage suggests, Wolin believes that large-scale political territories are in fact non-political territories because democracy is suited to small-scale localities, and only democracy can be political.[33] Insofar as democracy requires direct participation it cannot abide large geopolitical territories that house a widespread population. So as a state's boundaries expand, democracy does not expand along with them;[34] the effect is quite the contrary: When boundaries expand outward,

---

[32] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 69.

[33] See: Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[34] Wolin explicitly states that "Both democracy and the political become distorted when the scales are continually expanded." From: Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 61.

power becomes increasingly centralized. Prior to this expansion, when the political realm operated in more intimate settings political involvement was experienced as an immediate presence wherein participants could directly perceive the effects of their engagement. Wolin considers this a form of "visual politics" in which participants "could see and feel the forms of public action and make meaningful comparisons with their own experience".[35] But as city-states were absorbed into empires the extended scope of state power gave "way to 'abstract politics,' politics from a distance, where men were informed about public actions which bore little or no resemblance to the economy of the household or the affairs of the market-place."[36]

Due to the fact that state power became increasingly remote from most people's lives, the connection that citizens felt toward the official seat of power became increasingly tenuous. In order to bridge the growing gap between sovereign power and its subjects, state officials introduced a web of symbols and tokens that would remind subjects of the regime from which they were excluded as participants, but to which they were beholden as subjects. In a remark that could equally apply to the Macedonian or Roman empires, Wolin writes that "the methods of generating loyalties and a sense of personal identification were necessarily different from those associated with the Greek idea of citizenship. Where loyalty had earlier come from a sense of common involvement, it was now to be centered in a common reverence for power personified.

---

[35] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 70.

[36] Ibid. 70.

The person of the ruler served as the terminus of loyalties, the common center linking the scattered parts of the empire. This was accomplished by transforming monarchy into a cult and surrounding it with an elaborate system of signs, symbols, and worship."[37] But given that leadership changes over time, a collection of flags, statues, and coinage – often bearing the profile of a leader's face – were dispersed among the far-flung regions of an empire in order to function as signifiers that produced a sense of commonality amidst the scattered inhabitants of the state's expanding orbit.

One can easily trace a lineage that connects the Roman Empire to the budding American empire at the time of its founding. Both entities had to solve a similar problem: How to impose the concept of a unified state across a large geographical expanse that was rife with diversities. Wolin argues that the American state accomplished this by introducing a constitution. Rather than viewing the Constitution as a mechanism for preserving political liberty, Wolin perceives the Constitution as a device for hampering political liberty. Instead of guaranteeing democracy, constitutions restrain democracy in order to guarantee that social power is confined to the province of what Aristotle would call the few.[38] Wolin writes that

> It is no exaggeration to say that one of the, if not the, main projects of ancient constitutional theorists, such as Plato (The Laws), Aristotle, Polybius, and Cicero, as well as of modern constitutionalists, such as the authors of The Federalists and Tocqueville, was to dampen, frustrate, sublimate, and defeat the demotic passions.

---

[37]Ibid. 69.

[38] See Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Chapter X, and Aristotle's *Politics*, Book IV.

The main devices were: the rule of law and especially the idea of a sacrosanct 'fundamental law' or constitution safeguarded from the 'gusts of popular passions'; the idea of checks and balances; separation of powers with its attempt to quarantine the 'people' by confining its direct representation to one branch of the legislature; the 'refining' process of indirect elections; and suffrage restrictions. The aim was not simply to check democracy but to discourage it by making it difficult for those who, historically, had almost no leisure time for politics, to achieve political goals.[39]

In Wolin's view the constitution that emerged from the Philadelphia Convention was, like the Convention itself, fundamentally antidemocratic. Wolin offers an interpretation of the Constitution as a naked attempt to empower an aristocratic government while simultaneously devitalizing the political efficacy of townships where democracy flourished. Emphasizing the pivotal importance of the Philadelphia Convention, Wolin notes that "those who attended were authorized to revise the Articles of Confederation, not discard it for an entirely new political scheme that radically shifted the emphasis of the system from the periphery to the center, from the states to a new national government. Even conventional historians have on occasion referred to the Constitution as a 'coup.'"[40]

---

[39] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy: Electoral and Athenian," Political Science and Politics, 26.3 (1993): 476.

[40] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 3.

Given this depiction of events it would be incorrect to consider the Constitution as comprising a social contract of the kind that Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau conceived. For one thing, the Philadelphia Convention's proceedings were occluded, and so the masses who would later be bound by the terms of the contract were barred from contributing to defining the terms of that contract. Also, the situation lacked one key ingredient to the social contract narrative, namely a state of nature. In theory, social contracts are supposed to supplant the state of nature and thereby introduce civil society. But as Wolin writes, "when the Philadelphia Convention proposed a constitution and *The Federalist* furnished an exegesis of it, these were not solutions to a political vacuum but the superimposition of a new form of politics, national politics, on top of political life forms that, at the time, did not represent local politics because there was virtually no national politics to which they could be compared."[41]

Much like the Roman Empire, the incipient American system struggled to establish a bond with its subjects. Because the Constitution sought to centralize power within a faintly imperial regime it was also obliged to revise the concept of the citizen. The relationship between citizen and government was shrunk to the point where civic duty was formally confined to campaigning, voting in elections, and serving jury duty. A vigorous democracy was swept aside in favor of a vicarious democracy which, as Wolin would argue, is not a democracy at all. Alongside its efforts to stymie democratic participation the Constitution also needed to incite a degree of patriotic fervor among the populace in order to justify the extraction of their labor (taxes) that would generate

---

[41]Ibid. 87.

material support for the state. As Wolin notes, "because the project involved establishing a form of power which bore certain unfortunate resemblances to the kind of power which the colonists had rejected less than two decades earlier when they had rebelled against the authority of the British Crown and Parliament, the constitution had to reject the idea of the citizen which the colonists had themselves assumed when they had defended local participatory politics against the distant authority of the British Crown and Parliament."[42] The Constitution therefore had to strike a balance by forming a government in which citizens were included but not involved. From a constitutional perspective an ideal citizen would be ebullient about empowering the state without expecting to be politically empowered in return. Alexander Hamilton plainly stated that this scheme required "reducing popular influence and enhancing the power of the state."[43]

This dramatic shift in power was basically accomplished by fiat. It had the eventual effect of delegitimizing democracy as it was practiced in the constellation of townships that dotted the landscape. What was at stake during the Philadelphia Convention was the very idea of government. Reflecting on this sudden political transformation Wolin writes that "American thinkers conceived a constitution primarily in terms of legal limits and procedural requirements for a selected set of institutions which were then identified as 'government' and declared to be formally separated from

---

[42]Ibid. 189.

[43] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 12.

social institutions of class, status, religion, and economy."[44] Whereas government was

formerly a communal practice that was seamlessly woven into the fabric of everyday life,

after ratification government became the circumscribed ambit of professional office-

holders.

The representative system that ensued was "not about the demos as an actor but as

a voter, job-holder, taxpayer, and rule-observer."[45] Once that system took root a new

tempo settled into place that regularized politics. Government was fixed to a calendrical

cycle, and so the steady cadence of politics rendered it capable of being controlled.

According to Wolin, "a constitutional government is a system for directing stimuli which

will control human actions and outlooks and, by so doing, make them predictable."[46] This

was all a concerted attempt to curb democratic expression and then funnel political

energies through a filter that was put in place by elites and enforced by law. In effort to

encumber democracy, the Founding Fathers

> proceeded to configure and 'refine' elections so as to control their demotic
>
> potential and thus take the first step toward managing democracy. The
>
> Constitution of the Founders compressed the political role of the citizen into an
>
> act of 'choosing' and designed it to minimize the direct expression of a popular

---

[44] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 13.

[45] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy: Electoral and Athenian," Political Science and Politics, 26.3 (1993): 475.

[46] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 352.

will… [T]he citizen would not directly elect the president. Instead the citizen chose electors who would cast votes after deliberating in the Electoral College where, presumably, they were not necessarily bound by the wishes of voters. Similarly the citizen was not invited to vote for a senatorial candidate; senators would be selected by the legislatures of the states. As for the courts, the citizen had no part in the process: justices were initially nominated by a president chosen by the Electoral College and then confirmed by senators selected by state legislatures.[47]

As this description makes evident, while the Constitution designed three branches of government that would act as checks on one another, the ultimate check was upon democracy itself. But constitutions are not simply instruments for restraining power; they are equally instruments for producing power. Discussing *The Federalist*, Wolin writes that "In Hamilton's expansive view, a constitution represented a way of organizing and generating power for the pursuit of great national objectives. The Constitution was to be the means of assuring a continuous generation of power."[48] In sum, what emerges from the Constitution is a configuration that enables the government to extract labor from the citizenry in order to fund that government's ability to diminish the influence of citizen participation in government.

---

[47] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 257.

[48] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 11.

Here, however, one could argue that the state also uses public funds for the public's benefit. State welfare policies might be offered as an example. In theory, welfare states redistribute wealth in order to insure that people stay afloat financially and can therefore fulfill the duties of citizenship. In contrast, Wolin portrays the welfare state as a politically disempowering force. Wolin's critique of the welfare state supplies convincing evidence for his anarchist inclinations. It is first worth noting that his critique is not cut from the cloth of contemporary U.S. libertarianism: He is not disparaging of welfare recipients; he levels no accusations of shiftlessness or lack of entrepreneurial drive. Instead he critiques the welfare state because it expands, enhances, and deepens state power. In no uncertain terms he writes that "it is becoming plainer that the welfare state is not a synonym for the democratic state, not a complement to democracy but a threat."[49] Part of the threat presented by the welfare state is its attempt to legitimate state power while also feeding the illusion that, simply because the state dispenses life-sustaining resources to citizens, it is ipso facto democratic. In Wolin's eyes, "The evolution of the New Deal signified that a new synthesis of power was being consolidated, one that conjoined three distinct elements: regulation, welfare, and empire."[50] In the course of New Deal reforms, "vast numbers of Americans were tied into the system of state power, a system based on bureaucratic, military, and corporate institutions and operated by elites equally at home in any one of the components."[51]

---

[49]Ibid. 79.

[50]Ibid. 21.

[51]Ibid, 22.

While the New Deal marked a noticeable transformation in U.S. power, the decade immediately following the end of World War II witnessed a sharp escalation in efforts to expand the domain of U.S. power. Wolin writes that World War II "marked the beginning of the American bid for supremacy among world powers and within the international economy. Henceforth the society would be encouraged to think of itself as having a special mission of defending the free world and combating communism and, therefore, of having to incorporate into its identity the economic and technological imperatives demanded by world hegemony."[52] Predictably, the power that is thrust beyond the country's borders was also refracted *within* the country's borders in order to keep the domestic population pliant and supportive of imperial actions, or at least timorous about contesting those actions. The era of McCarthyism that emerged in the wake of World War II supports that prediction. An atmosphere of fear and suspicion pervaded the United States, and that atmosphere bore a resemblance to the fear and suspicion among the German population under Nazi rule.

Another consequence of the United States' ideological battle against communism was the change of attitude toward welfare state policies. With the rise of Soviet empire many of those policies were thought to socialize wealth while hamstringing capitalist enterprise. Any policy that weakened the free reign of capitalism was perceived as strengthening global communism, which U.S. officials had cast as the chief threat to human freedom. At this point American society was suffused with the assumption that U.S. power and capitalism were synonymous and so regulatory mechanisms and wealth

---

[52]Ibid. 21.

redistribution seemed to undermine U.S. power rather than moderate unbridled capitalism. Wolin writes that "The Cold War consolidated the power of capital and began the reaction against the welfare state *but* without abandoning the strong state. What was abandoned was all talk of participatory democracy."[53]

In order to combat the gargantuan Soviet state that was spreading its tentacles across the globe, U.S. planners mounted a counterforce of equal proportion. However, U.S. planners were not merely acting to curtail the Soviet Union's imperialist program, they were also acting to expand U.S. global influence. Even if the idea of 'containment' reflected legitimate concerns among U.S. officials, it also served as a guise under which U.S. officials initiated their own imperial program. As Wolin notes, the policy of containment

> served to cloud the main consequence of seeking American global dominance. The United States had adopted the same goals as the Soviets: global supremacy and a regime change by means of subversion. [In the words of NSC-68 (a top secret National Security Council report issued on April 14, 1950),] "We should take dynamic steps to reduce the power and influence of the Kremlin inside the Soviet Union and other areas under its control…. In other words, it would be the current Soviet cold war technique used against the Soviet Union." Thus a

---

[53] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.</u>(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 26.

fanatical, repressive, totalitarian regime sets the standard of power a free society must surpass if civilization is to be preserved.[54]

On the U.S. front the task of stifling Soviet expansionism was undertaken by government and corporate forces that were increasingly cooperative to the point of seamless fusion. This concerted effort would eventually march under the banner of 'neoliberalism.' The condominium of power that was coalescing prominently featured an executive office of heightened predominance, vast bureaucracies that operated according to principles of hierarchy and centralization, and a cohesive combination of corporate and government power in which neither could be portrayed as the handmaiden of the other. As Wolin observes, this schema of power operated at a level that was far removed from ordinary citizens. Given the high stakes of a global battle against communism, public participation was considered inexpedient. High stakes politics required high level decision-making. The epic proportions of the confrontation with Soviet communism, which had dramatically escalated due to the presence of atomic bombs, seemed to demand increased executive potency. But as Wolin notes, that potency had its counterpart in the economy. He concludes that the expansion of state power at home and abroad "depended upon the resources being generated by an anti-democratic type of economic organization – one driven by unequal rewards and administered according to hierarchical principles of authority supporting a cult of leadership that emphasized the mastery of

---

[54]Ibid. 30.

power by larger-than-life CEOs."[55] Without much hyperbole, one could argue that the

citizen's role in Cold War society was to work obediently, inform on fellow citizens who

espoused communist sympathies, and practice duck-and-cover drills.

From the viewpoint of democracy one of the most lugubrious facets of post-war

power in the United States was the collusive relationship between corporate and

government offices. Figures such as Robert McNamara[56] and Allen Dulles[57] exemplified

this tandem of power. Gradually this dynamic would yield an environment in which

the business executive became a familiar figure in the upper reaches of

government. For the CEO the transition was easy. He or (the exceptional) she was

accustomed to wielding power and increasing it, competing against rival

companies, adjusting swiftly to changing circumstances, controlling a large

bureaucratic structure – accustomed to hierarchy and obedience, and all the while

cultivating a charismatic public persona. The proof of their political qualifications

was the ease with which executives moved between boardroom and war rooms

without experiencing culture shock or learning block. The political and the

---

[55] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 521.

[56] Robert McNamara served as President of the Ford Motor Company (1960-61), United States Secretary of Defense (1961-68), and President of the World Bank (1968-81).

[57] Allen Dulles served as Director of Central Intelligence (1953-61), a corporate lawyer and partner at the international law firm Sullivan & Cromwell, director of the Council on Foreign Relations, and a member of the board of directors for the infamous United Fruit Company.

corporate were being melded together, signifying the emergence of a new political form – and the decline of an older one.[58]

Over the course of several decades Wolin would ascribe several different names to this new form of politics. The first name he assigns is "superpower democracy" in attempt to expose a contradiction at the heart of this new form of power.[59] Given Wolin's belief that democracy is inherently parochial, the concept of a "superpower democracy" suggests that the term 'democracy' now functions as a sobriquet that lends legitimacy to an aggrandizing force which suffocates genuine democracy as it flexes its muscle. By the dawn of the second millennia U.S. power had reached such a scale that everyday individuals were politically dwarfed. Wolin notes that Hobbes' book titles of *Leviathan* and *Behemoth* foreshadowed modern power's penchant for the huge and massive.[60] One senses that the potency of state power and the impotency of the citizenry form a corollary.

Another key feature of superpower democracy is its absolute reliance on advances in technology. Wolin claims that the "preconditions for Superpower are the availability of a totalizing technology of power and an accompanying ideology that encourages the

---

[58] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 551.

[59]Sheldon S. Wolin, "*A Kind of Fascism Is Replacing Our Democracy*," Newsday, July 18, 2003.

[60] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 399.

regime's aspirations to global domination".[61] Obviously, technology equips states with

military might and surveillance capabilities. In addition to those capabilities Wolin draws

attention to the technologies that states use to influence and register public opinion. He

frequently mentions the "quantification of public opinion" that serves as a substitute for

public participation.[62] Part and parcel of this phenomenon was also "campaigns

conducted through television ads and the Internet, the creation of focus groups, and the

like, [all of which] transformed the arts of political manipulation into a science."[63] This

style of politics treats the opinions of citizens as 'inputs' that can be databased and

schematized in graphs and pie charts and regarded by administrators as a simulacra of

public will, perhaps with a negligible margin of error.

The phenomenon of superpower intrigues Wolin because it is the antithesis of

democracy, though it emerges from a state that regards itself as the premier exponent of

democracy. In Wolin's view there is also a tension between superpower and

constitutional limits. There is a narrative about social contracts which depicts them as a

compact that establishes restraints on state power. These restraints are meant to bridle

power so it cannot be wielded arbitrarily. But such attempts at temperance are

outmatched by superpower's globe-girdling ambitions.[64] Wolin writes that superpower

---

[61] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 62.

[62] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 560.

[63] Ibid. 560.

[64]Sheldon S. Wolin, "*A Kind of Fascism Is Replacing Our Democracy*," Newsday, July 18, 2003.

"stands for sheer power, economic and military, that is measured by a global standard rather than the nation's constitution; freed not only from constitutional democracy but from any truly political character."[65] Superpower obeys or disregards legal limits and democratic influence at its own discretion, though it will pay homage to those forces whenever it is convenient;[66] for, while superpower routinely defies the rule of law, it nevertheless must uphold laws that restrict its subjects. Put aphoristically, projecting power outward requires law-breaking, projecting power inward requires law-enforcement.

If democracy is rooted in the local and the ordinary, then a hulking superpower can only thrive when democracy withers. Wolin writes that "the condition for the ascendance of Superpower is the weakening or irrelevance of democracy and constitutionalism – except as mystifications enabling Superpower to fake a lineage that gives it legitimacy."[67] In the context of social contract theory, superpower presents a vexatious species of government. Social contracts impose limits on the exercise of state power, but superpower defines its own limits, which effectively means it has no limits. In theory, when the sovereign surpasses the limits of a social contract, the contract is breached and voided, and power returns to the signatories (people). Superpower cannot

---

[65] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 61.

[66] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 36.

[67] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 101.

accommodate this narrative because its modus operandi involves a program of expansion. One could convincingly argue that the era of superpower has rendered the social contract paradigm an anachronism. In the modern era social contracts were posited as the guarantor of security, protecting the populace from the whims of sovereign power and shielding the sovereign from the gusts of popular passions. But in the era of superpower social contracts are more likely to be viewed by state officials as obstacles to insuring security – particularly when security is thought to necessitate preemptive defense/aggression. While social contracts are thought to stabilize systems of politics, apologists for superpower would argue that strictly obeying a social contract risks destabilization because the contract calms the hand that, like the terrorists it opposes, must be poised to strike anywhere at any time with decisive force.

Apologists for superpower will also claim that in times of emergency constitutions must be disobeyed precisely in order to preserve the sanctity of those constitutions.[68] Historically this paradox has been associated with the need to loosen restraints on military power. However, it equally applies to economic power, particularly in the postwar period. One distinguishing feature of superpower is the primacy of economic concerns. As a consequence of these concerns constitutional fidelity is subordinated to the 'necessities' of economic predominance. Even military affairs are arranged to serve the 'needs' of economic prerogatives. For Wolin, economy functions as the logos of superpower. He writes that "Political economy has emerged as the public

---

[68] For an extended study of this topic see: Giorgio Agamben, State of Exception, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

philosophy for the era of Superpower… [which features] the integration of corporation, state, and economics. Political economy accepts as the 'natural' side effects to 'the dynamics of growth' the totalizing developments represented by multinational corporations, the globalization of finance, the enveloping of culture by the domination of media conglomerates, and control over a world economy, especially of its 'underdeveloped' parts, by institutions staffed predominately by economists (World bank, International Monetary Fund)."[69] Economic dictates function as *the* Archimedean point from which all matters are to be evaluated: "Political economy's drive for totality is manifested in the primacy of economy and its representation as the 'real' constitution of society. Economy sets the norm for all practices concerned with significant stakes of power, wealth, or status."[70]

Economic relationships are no longer viewed as being embedded in a complex of social relationships and subordinate to political concerns. Instead they provide the criterion against which all social relationships are defined and judged. In this sense superpower has unwittingly fashioned a zeitgeist that directly accords with the worldview of Karl Marx. As Wolin notes,

> The primacy of economic relationships does not operate solely as an explanatory device but as a first principle of a comprehensive scheme of social hermeneutics. Economic relationships constitute an interpretive category of virtually universal

---

[69] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 564.

[70]Ibid. 564.

applicability. It is used to understand personal life and public life, to make judgments about them, and to define the nature of their problems. It supplies the categories of analysis and decision by which public policies are formulated, and it is applied to cultural domains such as education, the arts, and scientific research. It is, we might say, a conception striving for totalization.[71]

Whereas free market advocates tend to view the economy as a site of perfect freedom that is otherwise marred by the totalitarian tendencies of state intervention, Wolin detects totalitarian tendencies that are foisted upon society by the 'capitalist' economy. Totalitarianism is commonly thought to be a species of government; but Wolin argues that totalitarianism is a genus of government in which there are multiple species, one of which is state-centric, and one of which emerges from a viewpoint that privileges economic concerns above all others. The latter form of totalitarianism does not supplant the social order through revolution, but rather by exploiting loopholes in the system of politics. Wolin writes that "The porous character that freedom and democracy create in society… provides the conditions that enable the economic power generated in the market to easily penetrate and control politics. Freedom and democracy, far from posing a threat to 'free enterprise,' become its instrument and its justification."[72]

The confluence of forces that constitute superpower demand a framework for inquiry that forefronts the role of economics. When conceiving of the state, that concept

---

[71] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 147.

[72] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 92.

must acknowledge the fact that the state has been colonized by economic power and economic values. But contrary to free market theories that seek a minimalist state, superpower will feature an organization of power in which economic forces strengthen certain aspects of the state in order to fortify and enhance economic power. To clarify this point it is useful to envision the state as a weapon for wielding power. The demos could use the state to tame socially oppressive forces such as private business empires, or those private business empires could use the state to reduce public control over society. In the context of superpower private economic power and 'public' governmental power coalesce, "and the result is not a net reduction of state power but its articulation through different forms. The appropriation of public goals by private enterprise means that state power is being decentered without being decentralized."[73] Ideally, superpower aims to neutralize or eliminate public influence over decisions that affect public affairs. To that end superpower will embark on a program of privatization. In the realm of public discourse 'privatization' is thought to connote a step towards liberty because the oppressive grip of government regulation is being released, thereby enabling the free expression of individual wills. But in Wolin's view this assumption is grossly mistaken. He writes that "What in fact occurs through privatization is not the elimination of power but the elimination of politics, that is, the public discussion and argument over how power is to be used, for what ends, and who is responsible."[74]

---

[73] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 27.

[74] Ibid. 182.

Given this landscape of power, Wolin introduces the term 'Economic Polity' to more accurately capture the contemporary (anti?)social dynamic. In the Economic Polity power is not instantiated in the state or in the economy, but in "the system" which combines the most antidemocratic elements of both.[75] Wolin believes that the "union of corporate and state power means that, instead of the illusion of a leaner system of governance, we have the reality of a more extensive, more invasive system than ever before, one removed from democratic influences and hence better able to manage democracy."[76] As a natural outgrowth of the Economic Polity the public is transformed into a passive object that is administered and controlled.[77] The Economic Polity is marked by continual efforts to expand the domain of corporate power and to selectively abdicate governmental functions to profit-oriented institutions. Contrary to popular opinion the expansion of private power is not motivated by a desire to reduce control over the population. Instead, the expansion of those powers indicates an awareness by elites that control over the public is best accomplished through non-public institutions that are largely dissociated from public accountability and rarely scrutinized for their coercive abilities.[78] As Wolin observes,

---

[75]Ibid. 29.

[76] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 137.

[77] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 31.

[78] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 137.

This system is huge, for it not only includes the economy and large sectors of civil society (e.g., education) but sees itself as deeply involved in the competition for hegemony in the international economy. Stated differently, the hugeness of the system is not identical with the hugeness of the state. System, a term that is widely used and revealingly combines a technical bioengineering meaning with a technocratic/bureaucratic one, signifies the transmutation of the state into the Economic Polity… Now there is a system striving to become a totality in which the center is being transformed into a mechanism of management and control. Unlike the monocratic structure, in which dominance was the basic political and social fact, the basic fact about power under the regime of the technologically advanced Economic Polity is its pervasiveness.[79]

On the one hand, the Economic Polity appears to embody purely materialistic principles. Everything is rendered in terms of hard numbers and data sets. Decisions are weighed according to a cost/benefit analysis, and things are understood in terms of their cash value. The systematic translation of everything into the lingua franca of economics creates a vocabulary for comprehending all of life. This vocabulary lends itself to the world of bureaucracy wherein the bewildering complexity of life is categorized and reduced to numerical identification. The result is nothing less than an entire rationality that functions as an ideology which penetrates every aspect of social life and determines what 'counts.' Wolin writes that "The universality of bureaucracy, which exists more an

---

[79] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 173.

ideal than an actuality, signifies nonetheless the determination to reduce the play of

contingency and variability. By reducing the world to procedures, bureaucracy hopes to

render it calculable."[80] This bureaucratic will-to-power is engineered to maximize control

– not necessarily with nefarious intent, but usually for the purpose of administering the

well-being of subjects. But despite its plausibly beneficent aims, one indisputable effect

of bureaucratic systems is to minimize democratic control over institutions which manage

public affairs.

 Wolin is careful to note that this bureaucratic rationality did not egress wholesale

from contemporary systems, but had roots in early modernity: "The modern project was

not to renounce the commitment to increasing power but to find a saving formula

whereby it could be rendered ever more predictable, ever more obedient."[81] Modernity

thus harbored the germ of the Economic Polity and its bureaucratic orientation from its

inception. For Wolin, the modern period did not mark the rebirth of democracy, but the

birth of mechanisms for attenuating democracy: "Modern power emerges in renunciation

of civic culture while encouraging a technocratic culture of service to the state, *une*

noblesse des polytechniciennes."[82]

 That technocratic culture of control has come to full bloom in the era of

superpower. Wolin refers to this new brand of politics as "managed democracy." Simply

---

[80]Ibid. 172.

[81] Sheldon S. Wolin, Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and
Theoretical Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 18.

[82]Ibid. 29.

43

put, "Managed democracy is democracy systematized."[83] When democracy is redefined

as a management issue, governance becomes a strategy that exploits technology and

science (including psychology and the social sciences) to recast the citizenry as objects of

manipulation rather than autonomous actors.[84] Citizens are constituted as respondents

who are invited to 'voice' their opinion about public issues by replying to questionnaires

that are designed to limit potential answers. Once this polling is completed, the collected

data is aggregated, processed, and regarded as the vox populi – inspiring Wolin to use the

term "ventriloquous democracy".[85] Wolin encapsulates this situation in the following

passage:

> Expert tacticians and strategists, consultants, pollsters, speechwriters, experts
>
> representing foundations and think tanks are the operators of the ordinary political
>
> machinery that advises, manages, interprets, and create a predictable, manipulable
>
> realm of politics, the context conditioning the exercise of rights. The news media,
>
> dependent upon the governmental 'handout,' relays it to the consumer, who is
>
> dependent upon the media for 'information.' The citizen is shrunk to the voter:
>
> periodically courted, warned, and confused but otherwise kept at a distance from

---

[83] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 47.

[84]Ibid. 132.

[85] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Transgression, Equality, and Voice," Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern, eds. Josiah Ober and Charles Hedrick, Charles, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1996) 87.

actual decision-making and allowed to emerge only ephemerally in a cameo appearance according to a script composed by the opinion takers/makers.[86]

The current configuration of power that dominates the United States is the exemplar of how society can be manipulated and controlled while still maintaining the façade of democracy. One obvious example of this phenomenon is elections. In the United States elections are dominated by two major political parties and their financiers,[87] all of whom are committed to insuring that the Economic Polity remains intact. Elections thus function to add a patina of legitimacy to an extravaganza that is orchestrated to assure democracy does not encroach upon the supremacy of economic elitism. But elections also serve to control the tempo of politics. Hitching politics to a calendar produces a metronomic effect that, when regularized, makes politics all the more predictable and hence controllable. As a result the public is conditioned to being aroused for a brief spell and having its attention span controlled before elections culminate in a spread of winners and losers, after which the public is encouraged to sink back into an apolitical world of distraction and apathy.[88] The United States thus demonstrates how "democracy can be managed without appearing to be suppressed".[89]

---

[86] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 565.

[87] Ibid. 315.

[88] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 239.

[89]Ibid. 47.

But managed democracy, as a phenomenon, cannot be confined to any single aspect of government, such as electoral processes. Anticipating that the term 'managed democracy' could cause confusion Wolin further elucidates the concept: "By managed democracy I do not mean that people are puppets manipulated by Washington, Wall Street, or Nashville. It is more disturbing than that. Managed democracy is a created world of images, sounds, and scenarios that makes only occasional contact with the everyday reality of most people."[90] Managed democracy therefore involves the creation and control of useful illusions along with the discourse about those illusions. And according to Wolin, "That manufactured world of information about images is the one that governmental and corporate elites have constructed and shaped so as to maximize the modes of power which they command."[91]

If we widen our aperture and combine all these concepts – superpower democracy, the Economic Polity, managed democracy – a new form government comes into focus. Wolin's name for this combination of forces is "inverted totalitarianism." This is perhaps his most fecund and controversial conceptual innovation. Inverted totalitarianism exhibits Wolin's attempt to describe a novel system of politics which embodies totalizing powers that do not emanate from an iconic ruler or single party; that encourage political disengagement instead of mass mobilization; that rely on corporate

---

[90] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy in the Discourse of Postmodernism," Social Research, 57.1 (1990): 27.

[91] Ibid. 28.

media to disseminate propaganda instead of state-controlled media agencies.[92] The basic elements of inverted totalitarianism are antidemocracy, executive predominance (both corporate and governmental), and elite rule.[93]

Above all, inverted totalitarianism "represents the *political* coming of age of corporate power and the *political* demobilization of the citizenry."[94] The predominant ideology under inverted totalitarianism is capitalism, which "is virtually as undisputed as Nazi doctrine was in 1930s Germany."[95] Unlike classical forms of totalitarianism where economic interests were subordinate to politics, under inverted totalitarianism economic interests dominate politics, "and with that domination come different forms of ruthlessness."[96] Wolin writes that,

> While the versions of totalitarianism represented by Nazism and Fascism consolidated power by suppressing liberal political practices that had sunk only shallow cultural roots, Superpower represents a drive towards totality that draws from the setting where liberalism and democracy have been established for more than two centuries. It is Nazism turned upside-down, 'inverted totalitarianism.' While it is a system that aspires to totality, it is driven by an ideology of the cost-effective rather than of a 'master race' (*Herrenvolk*), by the material rather than

---

[92] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 44.

[93] Ibid. 239.

[94] Ibid. *x.*

[95] Ibid. 47.

[96] Ibid. 58.

the 'ideal.' It may, and will, exploit its workers without duplicating the Nazi system of inefficient slave labor.[97]

Inverted totalitarianism does not seek to abolish the state, but rather to exploit the state's authority and its ability to extract labor power (taxes) from the population in order to manage that population.[98] It perniciously blankets the state with its own designs and strives to extend its reach to engulf the entire globe. Wolin notes that "Our totalizing system… has evolved its own methods and strategies. Its genius lies in wielding total power without appearing to."[99]

In the term 'inverted totalitarianism' the qualifier 'inverted' does not exactly mean 'opposite,' 'backwards,' 'reversed,' or 'upside down.' In part it is meant to convey the means by which this form of totalitarianism arises. Inverted totalitarianism is not methodically imposed so much as it accumulates when seemingly disparate forces explore their affinities and cement their relationships, thus reinforcing each other's commonalities. An example of an 'inversion' that Wolin provides is when "A giant corporation includes prayer sessions for its executives, while evangelicals meet in 'franchised' congregations and millionaire preachers extol the virtues of capitalism."[100]

One of Wolin's most crucial claims about inverted totalitarianism is that it did not result from the execution of a grand scheme. Whereas previous totalitarian regimes

---

[97] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition</u>, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 591.

[98]Ibid.,*xiii.*

[99]Ibid. 57.

[100]Ibid. 46.

vocalized their plan to remap society into a premeditated totality, inverted totalitarianism

was never explicitly sketched or coherently crystallized as an ideology or goal: "It has no

Mein Kampf as an inspiration."[101] Instead it is propelled by power-elites and ordinary

citizens who are oblivious to the deeper, lasting consequences of their actions. Wolin

writes that "There is a certain heedlessness, an inability to take seriously the extent to

which a pattern of consequences may take shape without having been preconceived."[102]

There is a cumulative effect of trends, tendencies, norms, and incentives that converge

and meld into a system of Brobdingnagian proportions and overwhelming momentum.

And as Wolin wryly notes, "This is the achievement of a nation that gave pragmatism,

the philosophy of consequences, to the world."[103]

The unintentional character of inverted totalitarianism strengthens its permanence

simply because that which cannot be perceived cannot be resisted. And because its

growth occurred by incremental degrees it appears to have emerged in "unbroken

continuity with the nation's political traditions."[104] Wolin therefore concludes that

totalitarianism can evolve from a putatively "strong democracy" rather than a "failed"

one.[105] He writes that,

> Unlike the Bolsheviks, Nazis, and Italian Fascists, inverted totalitarianism does
>
> not require as the condition of its success the overthrow of the established system.

---

[101]Ibid*. 40.

[102]Ibid*. x.*

[103]Ibid.40.

[104]Ibid.46.

[105]Ibid.54.

It has no overt plan to suppress all opposition, impose ideological uniformity or racial purity, or seek the traditional form of empire. It allows free speech, venerates the Constitution, and operates within a two-party system that, theoretically, secures a role for an opposition party. Rather than revolting against an existing system, it claims to be defending it.[106]

As mentioned, a striking difference between classical totalitarianism and inverted totalitarianism is the latter's demobilization of the citizenry. Demobilization is partially a result of the difference in leadership between the older and newer type of totalitarianism. Under inverted totalitarianism "the leader is a product of the system, not its architect; it will survive him."[107] In the absence of a transformational leader, during elections citizens are left to choose among candidates who differ in personality but fundamentally agree in their allegiance to the system. Voters are left to decide between styles and attitudes rather than seismically divergent visions. The lack of transformational visions or possibilities fuels a sense of hopelessness among the populace, thus producing political apathy.[108]

An atmosphere of political apathy and powerlessness among the populace serves to buttress the power of inverted totalitarianism. According to Wolin, "Instead of collectivism, inverted totalitarianism thrives on disaggregation, on a citizenry who, ideally, are self-reliant, competitive, certified by standardized testing, but equally fearful of an economy subject to sudden downturns and of terrorists who strike without

---

[106]Ibid. 56.

[107]Ibid. 44.

[108]Sheldon S. Wolin, "*A Kind of Fascism Is Replacing Our Democracy*," Newsday, July 18, 2003.

warning."[109] The fragmentation of society fortifies the system against collective action, thereby insuring that it remains unchallenged. This marks one of the most important inversions of classical totalitarianism. Whereas the Nazis sought to uplift the populace with a sense of collective power - Kraft durch Freude (Strength through joy), inverted totalitarianism thrives when the populace is overcome by a sense of collective weakness and futility.[110]

Another facet of inverted totalitarianism that leads to public disaggregation is the fusion of economic forces that press upon workers. The intensified pace of the workday, the extension of the workday, and ubiquitous job insecurity demobilize and privatize the citizenry.[111] Aside from producing a mass of insecure workers, economic forces also atomize society by morphing citizens into self-absorbed consumers.[112] The widespread, permeating insecurity evokes images of Hobbes' state of nature.[113] And like Thomas Hobbes' brutal state of nature, the state of inverted totalitarianism is pervaded by fear: "fear of terrorists, loss of jobs, the uncertainties of pension plans, soaring health costs,

---

[109] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 196.

[110] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Inverted Totalitarianism: How the Bush Regime is Effecting the Transformation to a Fascist-like State." Nation, 19 May (2003): 14.

[111] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 239.

[112] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 520.

[113] Thomas Hobbes. Leviathan.(Indianapolis: Hackett. 1994) 76.

and rising educational expenses."[114] One could also add to that list the fear-inducing threat of budget cuts. In Wolin's view, "a nervous subject has displaced the citizen."[115]

Much like classical totalitarianism, with inverted totalitarianism the social mood is significantly influenced by mass media. In the Nazi and Soviet regimes the state-controlled mass media propagated the 'official story' in order to shape public opinion. But the concentration of private mass media that occurs under inverted totalitarianism has a similar effect in that it also disseminates 'official stories' while limiting the range of permissible opinions that are suitable for broadcast.[116] The merging and consolidation of media ownership in the United States has - whether consciously or unconsciously - effectively censored meaningful dissidence. The result is a homogenization of discourse, culture, and opinion that parallels the uniformity of state-owned media under classical totalitarian regimes.[117]

Another feature that separates classical totalitarianism from inverted totalitarianism is that traditional totalitarian regimes primarily projected power outward, whereas the new totalitarianism primarily projects power inward.[118] To be sure,

---

[114] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 239.

[115] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 593.

[116]Sheldon S. Wolin, "*A Kind of Fascism Is Replacing Our Democracy*," Newsday, July 18, 2003.

[117] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 594.

[118] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) *xiii.*

militaristic imperial adventures combined with neo-colonial corporate intrusions into foreign markets comprise the prerogative of inverted totalitarianism. Nevertheless these hubristically ambitious projects would incite domestic uproar if the public was not first rendered prostrate by means of indoctrination alongside surveillance and control mechanisms. Inverted totalitarianism will "try to manipulate the public rather than engage its members in deliberation. It will demand greater powers and broader discretion in their use ('state secrets'), a tighter control over society's resources, more summary methods of justice, and less patience for legalities, opposition, and clamors for socioeconomic reforms."[119]

Despite the fact that inverted totalitarianism is more kaleidoscopic than monolithic, its power is nonetheless unified, like a fasces. This portrayal could cause onlookers to conclude that the United States has fallen from a state of glory that peaked when the Founders crafted the Constitution. But Wolin would consider this conclusion as mistaken. In his view the Constitution was largely to blame for inciting the U.S.'s downhill slide. That view is somewhat captured by Wolin's assessment of *The Federalist Papers*' real objective: "Monarchy was thus reconceptualized – as thaumaturgy sublimated into administration."[120]Instead of a tyrannical king, a collection of tyrannical administrators whose decrees were every bit as binding as royal edicts, and whose policy positions typically flowed from executive fiat.

[119] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 247-248.

[120] Sheldon S. Wolin, Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 73.

Like those who espouse anarchist sentiments, Wolin wants to emphasis the continuity of authoritarian power throughout the existence of the United States. Wolin's position is uncolored by any sentimentality that pines for a return to a purified epoch when the U.S. government strictly obeyed a Constitution that rid America of arbitrary, authoritarian government. Evidence for Wolin's belief that the United States federal government has always contained the seeds of authoritarianism is supplied by Alexis de Tocqueville's account of the state power he saw forming as he traveled across America during the 1830s. Tocqueville described an insidious, ominous, inchoate form of state power that eerily presages Wolin's concept of inverted totalitarianism. In what cannot be dismissed as tripe soothsaying, Tocqueville wrote,

> I see an innumerable crowd of like and equal men who revolve on themselves without repose, procuring the small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each of them, withdrawn and apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all the others: his children and his particular friends form the whole human species for him; as for dwelling with his fellow citizens, he is beside them but he does not see them…
>
> Above these an immense tutelary power is elevated, which alone takes charge of assuring their enjoyments and watching over their fate. It is absolute, detailed, regular, far-seeing, and mild. It would resemble paternal power if, like that, it had for its object to prepare men for manhood; but on the contrary, it seeks only to keep them fixed irrevocably in childhood; it likes citizens to enjoy themselves provided that they think only of enjoying themselves… [I]t provides

for their security, foresees and secures their needs, facilitates their pleasures, conducts their principal affairs, directs their industry, regulates their estates, divides their inheritances; can it not take away from them entirely the trouble of thinking and the pain of living? […]

Thus after taking each individual by turns in its powerful hands and kneading him as it likes, the sovereign extends its arms over society as a whole; it covers its surface with a network of small, complicated, painstaking uniform rules through which the most original minds and the most vigorous souls cannot clear a way to surpass the crowd; it does not break wills, but it softens them, bends them, and directs them… it does not destroy, it prevents things from being born; it does not tyrannize, it hinders, compromises, enervates, extinguishes, dazes, and finally reduces each nation to nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd.[121]

Tocqueville's dystopian vision hints at the possibility that inverted totalitarianism was a likely outcome of the state that was created by the United States Constitution. In response to critics of the contemporary U.S. government who say it needs to return to its roots, Wolin might reply that those roots could lead right back to inverted totalitarianism. Again, that sort of reply would evince Wolin's anarchist disposition.

---

[121]This passage is from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Volume II, Part IV, Chapter VI, Translated by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Wolin's opposition to the state does not issue from a disappointment in the state's historical inability to achieve democracy; his opposition is a result of the historical fact that state's necessarily feature *arkhē*, or rulers, thereby making the state structurally averse to democracy. It is therefore accurate to conclude that Wolin favors a society that is *an- arkhē*, or without rulers; that is, anarchy. As many of Wolin's passages make clear, his critique of state power exhibits a thoroughgoing opposition to hierarchy, centralized power, professionalized power, bureaucratic power, systematization, elitism, militarism, imperialism, party politics, representative government, capitalism, and any other form of organization that clips the development of individual and collective empowerment, or that inhibits democracy. Like the anarchists, Wolin is opposed to the state *in principle* because states are necessarily apolitical and antidemocratic entities. The following chapter will discuss Wolin's various conceptions of democracy.

CHAPTER TWO: WOLIN'S VISION OF DEMOCRACY

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Wolin's critique of the state's historical development reads as a story of the ever-widening chasm between official power and the populace. To summarize that story in a sentence, Wolin could be paraphrased as arguing that the citizenry has been replaced by an electorate whose opinions and actions are managed by a complex yet unified corporate state.[122]

Wolin argues that the internal dynamics of a system that features 'free elections' (one person, one vote), equal rights of representation (which do not entail rights *to* representation), freedom to financially support candidates, and a 'free market' economy enables concentrated wealth to penetrate and infect the whole system. All together the state can be viewed as a field of opportunities for securing representation: A sewing circle has the same *opportunity* to influence legislation as the Business Roundtable, though the two groups do not have the same *ability* to influence legislation. And no matter which of the two groups gains predominant influence over state policy, the system as a whole is still called 'democratic.' It is due to this phenomenon that Wolin is able to claim that "Democracy, or rather democracy-in-bad-faith, is reshaped to serve as accessory to inequalities."[123]

---

[122] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 59.

[123] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Agitated Times," parallax, 11.4 (2005): 10.

In considering this milieu, Wolin concludes that democracy's fate was largely determined by the fact that its rebirth among people of European heritage coincided with the birth of capitalism:

The persisting conflict between democratic egalitarianism and an economic system that has rapidly evolved into another inegalitarian regime is a reminder that capitalism is not solely a matter of production, exchange, and reward. It is a regime in which culture, politics, and economy tend toward a seamless whole, a totality. Like the regimes it had displaced, the corporate regime manifests inequalities in every aspect of social life and defends them as essential. And like the old regimes, the structure of corporate organization follows the hierarchical principle of gradations of authority, prerogative, and reward. It is undemocratic in its structure and modus operandi and antidemocratic in its persistent efforts to destroy or weaken unions, discourage minimum wage legislation, resist environmental protections, and dominate the creation and dissemination of culture (media, foundations, education.).[124]

As this passage makes clear, Wolin perceives the U.S. system as the antithesis of democracy. Wolin would argue that part of the reason antidemocracy is embedded in the system's institutional structures is because democracy has been frequently disparaged throughout the history of political thought. Even though political theorists have traditionally regarded society as a 'whole,' they also argued that society is best ruled by a

---

[124] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 269.

select part of that whole.[125] As Wolin observes, "Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche: not a democrat among them."[126] Another obvious addition to that list would be federalists such as Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. Lionized figures such as these greatly influenced public opinion during their day. But despite the fact that illustrious political philosophers have tended to spurn democracy, in recent decades democracy has become a political model that is almost universally praised. However, Wolin would note that just because democracy is widely praised does not mean it is widely practiced. He writes that even though democracy is celebrated in rhetoric, it is "dismissed in practice as irrelevant or embarrassing to a meritocratic society."[127]

What is particularly intriguing about Wolin's conception of democracy is that it accords with the great critics of democracy. That is, if one reads authors from Plato to the Federalist, one will find that Wolin uses the same vocabulary to describe democracy as critics use to condemn it. Wolin often refers to democracy as anarchic, disorganized, parochial, out-of-control, messy, embarrassing, and so on.[128] He writes, "I propose accepting the familiar charges that democracy is inherently unstable, inclined toward

---

[125] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 8.

[126] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy in the Discourse of Postmodernism," Social Research, 57.1 (1990): 15.

[127] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution</u>, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 5.

[128] William E. Connolly. "Democracy and Vision."<u>Democracy and Vision: Sheldon Wolin and the Vicissitudes of the Political</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 30.

anarchy".[129] Wolin also accepts the identification of democracy with "revolution."[130] To many readers this description might disqualify democracy among political options. Words such as 'unstable' and 'anarchy' tend to strike the ear as pejorative adjectives when considering political goals. But when those words pour from Wolin's pen, they become democratic virtues. He advocates using those traits as the basis for an "*a*constitutional" conception of democracy. Wolin begins outlining that conception by writing that,

> Instead of assuming that the 'natural' direction, the telos, of the democratic encounter with the political is toward greater institutional organization and that the problem is to adapt democracy to the requirements of organization, we might think of democracy as resistant to the rationalizing conceptions of power and its organization which for centuries have dominated western thinking and have developed constitutionalism and their legitimating rationale. This democracy might be summed up as the idea and practice of rational disorganization.[131]

The term "rational disorganization" is meant to convey the idea that disorganization results from a choice rather than a lack of organizational skill. This suggests that participants in democracy are fully conscious of the informal, impromptu character of their political assembly. That lack of formal organization fosters an atmosphere of

---

[129] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy," <u>Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy</u>, eds. J. Peter Euben, John R. Wallach, and Josiah Ober (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1994) 37.

[130] Ibid. 37.

[131] Ibid. 37.

equality because it does not require mastery of procedural rules or legal protocols as a prerequisite for participation. From the perspective of managerialists like the Founders who were writing in the shadow of Newton and Descartes' orderly vision of the cosmos, a genuinely democratic political gathering would appear ungovernable and anarchic. Accordingly, the Founders sought to craft a government whose operations were "regular" and "efficient and well administered".[132] But the American backcountry was populated by an array of decentralized communities that displayed "democratic and egalitarian tendencies, rowdiness ('irregular'), local loyalties, a parochial suspicion toward a remote power claiming sovereignty over local life, and a destabilizing politics often 'turbulent' and 'tumultuous.'"[133] To put it succinctly, Wolin embraces the "disorderliness that has always been the hallmark of a vibrant democracy."[134] All this serves to illustrate the antagonism between democracy and institutionalized politics.[135] In Wolin's view democratic action is by nature uninstitutionalized and unincorporated.[136] It does not follow a calendar or hold regular sessions.[137]

---

[132] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 228.

[133]Ibid. 228.

[134]Ibid. 107.

[135] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy," Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy, eds. J. Peter Euben, John R. Wallach, and Josiah Ober (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1994) 38.

[136] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Agitated Times," parallax, 11.4 (2005): 2.

[137]Ibid. 2.

At this point the reader might complain that Wolin has only offered a description of what democracy is *not*, and has thus failed to satisfy the reader's expectation to find a definition of what democracy *is*. Given that Wolin is perhaps the most esteemed democratic theorist in America, one would expect him to offer a clear definition of democracy. But his texts do not offer a concrete definition of precisely what democracy *is* because any such definition would risk encumbering democracy, which Wolin wants to resist. He writes that "I am reluctant… to describe democracy as a 'form' of government or as a type of politics."[138] It is worth mentioning that anarchist thinkers commonly display a similar reticence toward defining anarchism, and for the same reason as Wolin resists defining democracy. From this perspective democracy is not something that can be mapped-out in advance of practice. And if democracy cannot be defined in advance of practice then it cannot be fixed within a constitution. But throughout the history of political thought people have referred to a 'constitutional democracy' as one of the ideal types of government. Without any sense of incompatibility people tend "to assume that democracy is the sort of political phenomenon whose teleological or even ideological destination is a constitutional form."[139] Wolin goes so far as to claim that "political theorists from antiquity to modern times have made a category mistake by treating democracy as a possible constitutional form for an entire society."[140]

---

[138] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," <u>Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,</u>ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 31.
[139]Ibid. 34.
[140] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition,</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 602.

A constitutional democracy implies that democracy is constituted; it is delimited, structured, and machinated. In other words, constitutional democracy is not democratized constitutionalism. In Wolin's view, constitutions, especially of the Madisonian sort, are purposefully designed to strew as many barriers to democracy as possible.[141] They legitimate certain civic activities while excluding others. In visual terms, a constitution functions as a release valve that regulates the amount of democracy that is permitted within government.[142] And as noted in the previous chapter's discussion of managed democracy, whatever degree of democracy is permitted to flow into government is easily controlled and manipulated. Wolin therefore concludes that if genuine democracy is to exist it will not occur within the system. He writes that "If a demos were to form, it would have to act from outside and against the system. Consequently demotic action tend[s] to be 'informal,' improvised, and spontaneous".[143]

In attempt to provide some definition of democracy Wolin believes "it is necessary to reject the classical and modern conception that ascribes to democracy 'a' proper or settled form [because that] kind of institutionalization has the effect of reducing democracy to a system while taming its politics by *process*."[144] When democracy is

---

[141] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 41.

[142]Ibid. 34.

[143] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 254. .

[144] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 601 (emphasis Wolin's).

settled into a stable form it undergoes a kind of sclerosis that renders it predictable and thus manipulable.[145] Therefore democracy needs to be reconceived so as to defy institutional strictures. To that end Wolin argues that democracy is not a continuous, rule-oriented process, but "a moment of experience, a crystallized response to deeply felt grievances or needs on the part of those whose main preoccupation – demanding of time and energy – is to scratch out a decent existence. Its moment is not just a measure of fleeting time but an action that protests actualities and reveals possibilities."[146]

Here it is important to note that Wolin's democracy appears to be born sporadically and of necessity instead of ticking along according to routine administrative dictates. It is not a ritualized display in the public sphere, but rather a sudden outburst in response to real grievances.[147] Within the context of a state, democracy emerges as a "protest against the material consequences of exclusionary politics."[148] Democracy cannot be stamped-out from a template or engraved in a constitutional form; it is instead an ephemeral phenomenon spurred by a felt sense of injustice: "We might think of it as protean and amorphous, embracing a wide range of possible forms and mutations that are responsive to grievances on the part of those who have no means of redress other than to

---

[145]Ibid. 602.

[146]Ibid. 603.

[147] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.</u>(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 255. .

[148] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 381.

risk collectivizing their small bits of power."[149] Democracy is not expressed in the handling of affairs by specialists or a senatorial priesthood; it is "the creation of those who must work, who cannot hire proxies to promote their interests, and for whom participation, as distinguished from voting, is necessarily a sacrifice."[150]

The images of democracy that spring to mind when considering the mobilization of grievances are perhaps of the National Organization for Women staging demonstrations or the United Steelworkers striking to improve their lot. But gazing through Wolin's lens those images exemplify organized politics rather than democracy. When Wolin speaks of democracy he imagines something far more radical than the quotidian activities of NOW or USW, which he would call 'agitation.' He writes that,

> Agitation suggests a politics of premeditated spontaneity and of varying but controlled tempos. That, however, represents an older understanding [of democratic action], one that is preciously close to the cooptation and normalization of agitation, agitation as the contrived outrage of orthodoxy. A contemporary conception might evade cooptation by adopting an understanding of agitation as inspired intervention, sudden, short-lived, dramatic, disruptive, uncooptable.[151]

It is impossible to overstate the importance of such a viewpoint for understanding Wolin's picture of democracy: It is not centered around an established organization that

---

[149] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition</u>, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 602.

[150]Ibid. 602.

[151] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Agitated Times," parallax, 11.4 (2005): 6.

mounts perennial efforts to win victories for its membership; it is more like a volcano that erupts without much warning and then vanishes before its energy can be harnessed by established interests.

Thus far it might appear as if Wolin is offering a *de*scriptive account of democracy without venturing a *pre*scriptive account; or, at least, neglecting to stake any definite claims and advocate the type of democracy he describes. But a closer inspection reveals Wolin's advocacy of anarchic democracy. He argues that "Democracy needs a non-cooptable politics… that renders useless the forms of power developed by the modern state and business corporation."[152] As mentioned before, this type of democracy is inherently episodic and improvisational.[153] And though this democracy is incited by deep-seated inequalities that demand redress, it is not merely the stirrings of the meek who expect institutionalized power to answer their plight. Instead, "[d]emocracy is a rebellious moment that may assume revolutionary, destructive proportions".[154] Not only is democracy antipathetic to institutional organization, it is actively subversive of such organization. Systems of power cannot be justified by democratic rule because democracy is revolutionary by nature and thus cannot brook systematization. Wolin

---

[152] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution</u>, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 150.

[153] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.</u>(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 227.

[154] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," <u>Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,</u>ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 43.

defines revolution as "the wholesale transgression of inherited forms"[155] and insists that

"Democracy was born in transgressive acts, for the demos could not participate in power

without shattering the class, status, and value systems by which it was excluded."[156]

If democracy bursts to life in revolutionary acts that seek to rectify a system of

perceived inequalities, then through a bit of reverse engineering we can identify some key

properties of democracy. First and foremost among those properties is an insistence on

equality: "equality of power and equality of sharing in the benefits and values made

possible by social cooperation."[157] States and the institutions they house are rife with

power differentials that are maintained through an enforced strata of inequalities.

Democracy on the other hand occurs 'outside' institutional structures in a 'space' without

official rules or rule-enforcers. It can therefore be described as an event that involves

transactions among equals; and any residue of inequality that follows participants into

that 'outside space' must be temporarily suspended in order to constitute one's self as

compeer to the rest. Wolin admits that this is "a formula that realists would dismiss as

magical while egalitarians would see it as magic realism, as a moment of possibility

when the powerless are empowered and experience independence."[158]

Equality in the context of a fleeting, democratic moment is therefore just as much

a political reality of that moment as it is a political choice among participants. Merely

---

[155]Ibid. 37.

[156]Ibid. 37.

[157] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted
Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 61.

[158]Ibid. 253.

including differences of race, gender, ethnicity, and religion within the democratic

moment is insufficient because inclusion itself does not guarantee equality between

participants. Conscious self-humbling is therefore a crucial ingredient to generating

democracy. As Wolin writes, democracy is more "about how we equalize politically in

acting together for shared purposes."[159] Democracy is less about who is involved and

where it takes place than how it is experienced.[160] It is also about the ability of ordinary

people to improve their lives by becoming political beings, contesting exclusionary

politics, inventing new forms and practices,[161] and creating a political environment in

which differences are legitimated and reconciled,[162] and in which power is responsive to

people's hopes and needs.[163] It is not ultimately about winning, but about deliberating

and acting together.[164] According to Wolin, "The ideal of a democratic political culture

was about cooperating in the care of the common arrangements, of practices in which,

---

[159] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy & Counterrevolution: Powerlessness is not an Unintended but a Calculated Consequence of the System," Nation, 22, Apr. (1996): 24.

[160] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 38.

[161] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 520.

[162] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 61.

[163]Ibid. 260.

[164] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy & Counterrevolution: Powerlessness is not an Unintended but a Calculated Consequence of the Syste," Nation, 22, Apr. (1996): 24.

potentially, all could share in deciding the uses of power while bearing responsibility for their consequences."[165]

  This cluster of descriptions suggests something about the scale of democracy. If participants must calibrate their behavior in order to insure equality among the group, then participants must be aware of their locality's social profile. Wolin's remarks indicate that democracy involves the negotiation of preferences among those who are familiar with each other, though perhaps not similar to each other. Yet, no 'veil of ignorance'[166] is needed when pondering political options because the least well-off are physically present to voice their opinions and therefore need not be imagined. All of this conjures an image of a 'visual' political context in which all participants act within the same sensory field.[167] Furthermore, a sporadic gathering will of course have spatial limits. Indeed, the

---

[165] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.</u>(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 138.

[166] The 'veil of ignorance' is a device in a thought experiment that was popularized by John Rawls in his book *A Theory of Justice*. In Rawls' theory, when an individual is pondering their moral attitude toward a matter of public policy they should engage in a thought experiment wherein they clothe themselves in a veil of ignorance that would erase all knowledge of their identity. In this thought experiment, individuals would be ignorant of attributes such as social rank, race, ethnicity, sex, gender, social class, mental abilities, physical abilities, religious affiliation, and the like. Rawls argues that subjecting one's self to this thought experiment would cause a person to prefer policies that benefit the least privileged or most oppressed members of society because if the veil of ignorance was lifted one might discover that they belong to those underprivileged, oppressed groups.

[167] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 215.

sporadic nature of the gathering will create both spatial and temporal limits, and both of those limits compel democracy to assume local dimensions.

In Wolin's mind the local is the antithesis of the remote, the centralized, and the abstract. Accordingly, the local is cleansed of the authoritarian elements detailed in Wolin's critique of the state. However, Wolin is quick to note the unremarkable complexion of local assemblies. Participatory politics are decidedly parochial and un-heroic:[168] "When judged against the heroic standard, the stakes were hardly such as to stir a skulking Achilles."[169] The local is a place where mundane – even petty matters are elevated and translated into an idiom in which the ordinary is rendered political, thereby generating a sense of empowerment among deliberators and breeding a sense of autonomy from the state.[170] Also, the immediacy of local issues attracts the strongest emotions and deepest loyalties of community members, thus cementing the bonds among community members and weakening their sentiments toward distant state power.[171]Above all, the local is where political powerlessness is most deeply felt and where the positive possibilities of participatory involvement are most evident.[172]

Local political engagement also features a starkly different tempo than state politics. Wolin pays particular attention to political tempos throughout his works. One of

---

[168] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Agitated Times," parallax, 11.4 (2005): 10.

[169] Sheldon S. Wolin, Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 6.

[170]Ibid. 213.

[171]Ibid. 213.

[172] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 291.

his main goals is to illustrate the "contrast between two ideal-types of politics and their

tempos." One type represents a "disruptive, energetic intervention whose results include a

large element of the unpredictable and perhaps some element of the anarchic; the other is

represented by an ideal of action as orderly, stylized, shaped and limited by prescribed

processes, procedures, even time-tables, that are designed to produce predictable (i.e.

consistent) decisions or results."[173] Official politics obey strict calendars and time

constraints. There is also a detectable mood among governmental institutions that values

expediency and applauds directors who make snap decisions that can be quickly

transmitted and absorbed throughout compartmentalized bureaucracies. Presidents,

Generals, and C.E.O.s are admired for their decisiveness. In Wolin's view the politics of

state institutions are defined by "Compressed time, instantaneous communication, rapid

response: the tyranny of efficiency and the subversion of democracy's requirement that

time be defined by the requirements for deliberation, discussion, reconciliation of

opposing viewpoints, all of which suddenly seem 'time-consuming.'"[174] In contrast to

state politics, democracy exhibits a meditative attitude toward decision-making in which

"the tempo of politics is slower, the opportunities to stop and think more numerous, and

the possibilities for meaningful participation greater. Participation takes time because,

---

[173] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Agitated Times,"parallax, 11.4 (2005): 6.

[174] Sheldon S. Wolin, Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 233.

unlike bureaucratic decisions, democratic decisions are 'arrived at' rather than 'made'."[175]

Democracy of the kind that Wolin describes is so rarely encountered that his descriptions strike the reader as purely theoretical. But Wolin's portrayal of democracy is not some far-fetched daydream, but rather an inductive generalization culled from numerous moments when regular people collectively activated. One of the most copious resources Wolin utilizes for sketching his vision of democracy is Alexis de Tocqueville's journey across the landscape of American townships. Wolin's masterful exegesis of Tocqueville[176] draws attention to the author of *Democracy in America*'s ability to blend a subjective, journalistic account with a laudably objective, theoretical analysis of New World democracy. One could argue that Tocqueville's greatest achievement was to provide an estimable record of democracy *in* action combined with a theoretical insight that construed democracy *as* action. One could also argue that whereas Tocqueville sees the township as the refuge of democracy, Wolin sees democracy as a refugee from state power, hence the term 'fugitive democracy.' For both thinkers democracy was characterized by an unrestricted (by state power) way of life that featured a myriad of ad hoc associations whose spontaneity and creativity energized public individuals.[177] Both thinkers also viewed democracy as a condition in which equality is a value that is

---

[175] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Agitated Times," parallax, 11.4 (2005): 10.

[176] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[177]Ibid. 208 and 238.

operative, not merely 'held.'[178] And for Wolin, Tocqueville's most crucial contribution was offering historical evidence that a disorganized, unpremeditated, spontaneous collectivism composed of ordinary individuals exploring their political potential could animate an entire people's civic behavior with a palpable vitality.

Reflecting on Tocqueville, Wolin writes that

> The main thrust of his writing was to see the American spectacle as a collective action, not of a corporate general will but of a huge aggregate of scattered individuals. The epical character of collective action is massive movement rather than a movement by the masses-as-actor. It is the 'march' of equality, or the movement of opinion, or the social tendency imparted by millions of uncoordinated individuals each bent on his or her own affairs. In America individuals seem 'powerless,' while society seems to proceed by 'free and spontaneous cooperation.' It is not that individual actors are without influence, only that it is far smaller than in aristocracies and hence difficult to discern. Direction without a Director(y).[179]

Though Tocqueville was no anarchist, it is fair to say that Wolin's use of his text was to serve anarchist purposes. Tocqueville's texts also serve as a focal point... even a high-water mark against which today's drying river bed of democracy can be measured. Tocqueville's work stands as a monumental refutation of critics who reject democracy for being impracticable. Despite the flaws of localized, deliberative democracy, that mode of

---

[178]Ibid. 125.

[179]Ibid. 161.

civic engagement nurtured the political development and maturation of ordinary people, unlike "other types of politics – bureaucratic, charismatic, or even representative government – [which] arrest that development."[180] In contrast to the vibrant democracy that blossomed in the American townships of Tocqueville's day, "The political has become specialized, regularized, and administrative in character and quality. Institutionalization marks the attenuation of democracy; leaders begin to appear, hierarchies develop, experts of one kind or another cluster around the centers of decision; order, procedure, and precedent displace a more spontaneous politics".[181]

It is due to this consequence of institutionalization that Wolin believes "Democracy in the late modern world cannot be a complete political system".[182] But Wolin does not lament the fact that democracy cannot be institutionalized or instantiated in the state. In fact, he thinks that project should be rejected: "given the awesome potentialities of modern forms of power and what they exact of the social and natural world, it ought not to be hoped or striven for."[183] Anyone who is unconvinced that Wolin's arguments are essentially anarchist must contend with passages such as this:

> For those who care about creating a democratic political life, a strong state must
> be rejected because the idea of a democratic state is a contradiction in terms. By

---

[180] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Transgression, Equality, and Voice," Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern, eds. Josiah Ober and Charles Hedrick, Charles, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1996) 66.

[181] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 39.

[182]Ibid. 42.

[183] Ibid. 42-43.

its very nature the state must proceed mainly by bureaucratic means; it must

concentrate power at the center; it must promote elitism or government by the

few; it must elevate the esoteric knowledge of experts over the experience of

ordinary citizens; and it must prefer order and stability to experiment and

spontaneity.[184]

The anarchist hue of Wolin's democracy is unmistakable. A synoptic view of

Wolin's remarks about democracy makes his anarchist propensities protrude in high

relief. First of all, he advocates a localism which affirms geographical limits to power

while also insuring that political affairs remain rooted in the ordinary, thus forming a

centrifugal force that pulls power away from the abstract state. Plus, the tempo of local

democracy is relatively adagio and therefore allows ample time for critical reflection and

due consideration of pertinent issues. Secondly, the democracy Wolin describes is

unorganized and unconsolidated. As a result, it cannot suffer a constitution. Democracy is

therefore anti-form and absent mediating conventions such as codified laws and *official*

routines, traditions, and norms. Thirdly, Wolin construes democracy as a moment of

rupture in which conventions are subverted. Democracy is not continual, but rather a

punctuated staccato of discrete political actions that disrupt the continuity of systematized

politics. It would not be inaccurate to describe 'fugitive democracy' as a kind of guerilla

political activity that erupts as a fiery surge in response to felt grievances. As such, it

reflects a transgression of official boundaries and closures that define official politics.

---

[184] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 149.

Those transgressions emerge in spikes of spontaneity that are charged with primal authenticity and a vital intensity. Importantly, Wolin construes the evanescent nature of democracy as praxis rather than an accident of circumstance. That is, democracy's fleeting character results from a purposeful decision to dissolve the political assembly before its momentum can be captured by the powers it is challenging. Though it might seem counterintuitive, this momentary quality allows democracy to thrive precisely because it lacks institutional continuity: It generates steam without having a *telos* or committing itself to path-dependency.

The genius of democracy is that it fortifies itself against institutional venality by resisting rule-bounding regulation, enshrined authority, and ossification that renders it calculable. In short, it repels co-optation. But despite this elaboration of Wolin's theory, in order to demonstrate the anarchist texture of his democracy one could simply note that his vision rejects ranks, offices, hierarchy, and centralization; for that is the unflagging demand of anarchism.

Though one does not find the words 'anarchy' or 'anarchism' riddling Wolin's work, anarchist sentiments drip from every page. One possible reason for the omission of those words is that they are divisive, generally misunderstood, appalling in the common parlance, and thus dismissed before they can gain a hearing. It is therefore possible that Wolin simply made a strategic choice not to employ terms that typically arouse contempt, and chose instead to use the term 'democracy' because it is unifying rather than divisive. Either way, anyone familiar with anarchist literature cannot mistake the anarchist tone that pervades Wolin's critique of the state and his vision of democracy.

CHAPTER THREE: WOLIN'S CRITIQUE OF BUREAUCRACY, ORGANIZATION,

AND MANAGERIALISM

Before proceeding to discuss the relationship between Wolin's ideas and

anarchism in closer detail, it is necessary to briefly visit a topic which fills many pages

throughout Wolin's corpus; namely, the incompatibility of bureaucracy with democracy.

The foray into this topic is here included to accentuate an issue at the core of Wolin's

work. Thus far this thesis has composed an overview of Wolin's take on the state and

democracy. This chapter will discuss a topic that links Wolin's treatment of these

subjects, which is his objection to organization. At first, readers might be confused by

that objection because organization is typically thought to be integral to democracy.

However, Wolin is deeply suspicious of the fetish for organization that molds nearly all

political movements. Again, this suspicion puts him in league with the most radical of

anarchists.

Wolin's opposition to organizational modes of cooperation lead him into a

critique of bureaucracy. It is not uncommon to find advocates of democracy who harbor a

warm attitude toward bureaucracy. These advocates view bureaucracy as providing a

palisade against the ravages of corporate rapacity while also redistributing resources to

needful individuals. While Wolin would admit that there is a measure of truth in that

position, he would also note that bureaucracies, like corporate structures, are thoroughly

antidemocratic. Furthermore he would question the political effects of any institution that

defines people as 'needy' and then treats them as beings who require administration.

But the welfare bureaucracy is just one of many bureaucracies. Wolin's critique applies to all bureaucracies, whether they are welfare, military, education, corporate, medical, legislative, or the like. This is partially because all such bureaucracies are supervised by people with technical expertise that is only possessed by a select few individuals. Consequentially, bureaucracy implies a hierarchy of authority, inequality of power, and non-participatory operation.

Bureaucracy is a ubiquitous feature of modern society. It is no exaggeration to claim that bureaucracy is the main form of social organization given that it applies to almost all institutions. Bureaucracy only makes sense in the context of larger organizations: The larger the state, educational institution, corporation, military apparatus, etc., the larger the bureaucracy. During the era of modernity in which nation states rose to global prominence, society underwent increased bureaucratization. Indeed, Wolin views bureaucracy as a symptom of the beliefs, values, and attitudes that characterize modernity. Wolin associates modernity and the accompanying 'modernization' of society with the idea that the state's main purpose is to systematically promote and exploit scientific research along with technological innovations that advance the development of cost-effective production, and to encourage the 'rational' organization of society, with 'rationality' defined to serve economic and managerial criteria.[185]

---

[185] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 58.

In a sense the rise of bureaucracy is an outcome of modernity's faith that 'rationality' provides an irrefutable and largely infallible means for organizing society. In Wolin's opinion, Max Weber was the great prophet of this era.[186] Weber's famous concept of modern society as an 'iron cage' illustrates the interlocking effects of rationality, organization, and bureaucracy that allow few means of escape. Wolin writes that "The cage is iron because the main forces of modern life, science, capitalism, and bureaucratic organization are triumphs of rationality and so the mind has no purchase point to attack them.[187] These forces present themselves as embodiments of pure rationality; or as

> mind incarnated into legal codes and administrative organizations that promise order, predictable decisions, regularity of procedures, and responsible, objective, and qualified officials; into economies that operate according to principles of calculated advantage, efficiency, and means-ends strategies; and into technologies that promote standardization, mechanical behavior, and uniform tastes. The advantages of rationalization in terms of power and material satisfaction are so overwhelming that the historical process which has brought that system is 'irreversible.'[188]

---

[186] For an extended discussion, see: Sheldon S. Wolin, "Max Weber: Legitimation, Method, and the Politics of Theory," Political Theory, 9.3 (1981): 401-424.

[187] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Max Weber: Legitimation, Method, and the Politics of Theory," Political Theory, 9.3 (1981): 415.

[188] Ibid.

At first glance the rationalization of existence appears as a positive evolution in social policy because it eliminates caprice and handles society with objective – and therefore unbiased – principles. But upon closer examination it becomes evident that a certain definition of rationality is adopted in order to tilt the control of dominant social institutions in favor of certain individuals. Wolin's primary complaint about bureaucratic rationality is that it privileges certain skill sets and thereby becomes a mechanism by which people are excluded from participation. In short, bureaucracy is antidemocratic because it bars the majority of people from staffing its offices since those people lack the requisite talents. In Wolin's words,

> from its beginnings the modern state was indelibly shaped by those who claimed to possess systematic forms of knowledge that would advance the power of the state and place it on firmer foundations. Lawyers, financiers, administrators, and then economists shaped state bureaucracies; but as the skills became more systematic, even scientific, they too assumed a universalist character.[189]

It is often noted that many Enlightenment thinkers prided themselves on the universal applicability of their theories. Those thinkers exhibited an optimistic confidence in their belief than any institution could be brought to accord with the dictates of rationality. From one angle that confidence can be viewed as a kind of arrogance which

---

[189] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 36.

Wolin calls "epistemological presumptuousness".[190] It was assumed that the human mind could comprehend the totality of the world around it and therefore determine ways to improve that world. In a passage that resembles Edmund Burke's critique of liberalism Wolin casts doubt upon "the claim… that the human intellect can understand all of the complex interrelationships of a political order".[191] The alleged universal applicability of 'rationality' conceals its political dimension. Much like the absolutism that Enlightenment liberals opposed when it emanated from a monarch, the rationality that those liberals championed also had an absolutist character, for its truths were deemed universal. If one wanted to press the point, an argument could be made that demonstrates the totalitarian character of any idea that claims universal applicability: "In some ways this claim is even more assertive than that of the natural scientist [because modern theorists seek] not only to analyze and explain certain phenomena, but to prescribe more satisfactory patterns."[192]

Thinkers who celebrated rationality assumed that they were bringing their ideas into harmony with the natural world by understanding its operations. But it would be more accurate to say that those thinkers were reconceiving the natural world so it would conform to their ideas. To give a more contemporary example, Wolin writes that "If economics was the knowledge of society, nothing save humility could prevent the economist from assuming that society's relationships… could be summarized through

---

[190] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Politics and Religion: Luther's Simplistic Imperative," The American Political Science Review, 50.1 (1956): 24.

[191] Ibid.

[192] Ibid.

various economic categories. The economist could, for example, formulate a concept like the annual product and treat it as a shorthand symbol for the activities of society's members during a given year."[193]

What fascinates Wolin is the widespread nature of this phenomenon. Social theorists of all stripes adopted this outlook. This "reign of positivism" influenced a variety of thinkers such as Saint-Simon, Fourier, Proudhon, Comte, Marx, the English Fabians, Durkheim, Freud, and Weber.[194] Each of these figures assimilated themselves to the methods utilized in the more 'exact' sciences. Even revolutionary movements succumbed to the allure of organization and hierarchical leadership. Movements that sought to topple the state or capitalism could not resist the impulse to rationalize and bureaucratize themselves, and thereby recapitulate the structure of the forces they sought to overthrow.[195]

An obvious example of this scenario is found in Leninism. Wolin believes that Leninism resembled Fascism and Nazism in its belief that "the masses represented the pliable stuff of revolutionary opportunity."[196] Lenin's bureaucratic and antidemocratic tendencies did not arise by accident, but according to a preconceived plan. As Lenin wrote, "My idea… is 'bureaucratic' in the sense that the Party is built from the top

---

[193] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 269.

[194] Ibid. 320 & 371.

[195] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Agitated Times," parallax, 11.4 (2005): 7.

[196] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 377.

downwards."[197] Much like the capitalist he opposed, Lenin wholeheartedly embraced an

elitist view of society that placed a vanguard atop the social hierarchy. He wrote that "we

want the Socialist revolution with human nature as it is now, with human nature that

cannot dispense with subordination, control, and 'managers.'"[198] Again, in words that

resound with tyrannical overtones, Lenin asserted that "The proletariat needs state power,

the centralized organization of force, the organization of violence…"[199]

Though Wolin never explicitly admits it, one of his motivations for admonishing

Lenin is likely identical to the anarchist warning about Lenin-types: Leaders who promise

to empower the underclass might regard their cause as so noble that they 'temporarily'

subordinate that underclass from directly participating in power for the purpose of later

insuring the underclass' access to power. For both Wolin and the anarchists, Leninism

serves as a cautionary tale about bureaucracy and managerialism. But aside from that

specific historical curiosity, every major movement that rose to prominence during the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries was blemished by the organizational viewpoint. No

movement was entirely immune to the anti-political complex that favored solid

organization. Even some prominent anarchists of the time embraced organization. The

famous anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon wrote that "The social solution to the problem

---

[197]Ibid. (quoted in, *Politics and Vision*) 381.

[198] Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, <u>Essential Works of Lenin: What Is to Be Done? and Other Writings</u>, (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc. 1978) 307.

[199] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition</u>, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 382.

of authority was to be found in submitting to the true principles of social organization."[200]

The universalist undercurrent is unmistakable in such phrasing. To further push the point,

Proudhon once wrote that he "looked forward to a time when politics would be reduced

to an impersonal body of principles and men would be governed by scientific truths."[201]

One suspects that the only factor preventing Proudhon from reaching Leninist

heights/depths was that his mood was tempered by a pronounced revile of human

authority.

Case studies of Lenin and Proudhon reveal the extensiveness of the organizational

mentality. The Lenin case in particular shows how that mentality was not only a

'rational' choice but also a political choice because it mandates that power be situated in

a defined manner within the confines of an organization. As Wolin observes, "the

organization is the dominant and ubiquitous phenomenon of society, and whether it

carries the adjective 'business,' 'government,' 'military,' or 'educational' is largely

irrelevant. All organizations are inevitably 'political' in character, or, conversely, what is

most politically significant in the modern world is contained in organizational life."[202]

'Organization' was a systemization of power that enabled people to exploit nature

in a systemic fashion and thus elevate society to an unprecedented plateau of material

prosperity.[203] A Taylorist mentality spurred managers to arrange tasks according to

functional requirements, subordinating some labors to others, and directing expert

---

[200]Ibid. 344.

[201]Ibid. 323.

[202]Ibid. 376.

[203]Ibid. 337.

functionaries to guide certain operations within the industrial process.[204] The insistence on efficiency sullied the value of participatory input. If standards of efficiency were to prevail, the chain of command and order of operations needed to be streamlined and brassbound. Given its impetus toward solidifying ranks and operations, Wolin cannot help but conclude that "Organization also signifies a method of social control, a means for imparting order, structure, and regularity to society."[205]

When reading Wolin's remarks about organization it becomes clear that 'organization' is not a neutral term. Upon first approach there is nothing about the word 'organization' that is immediately offensive. In political discourse it often carries a positive connotation. If scholars reviewed the canon of Western political thought they would strain to find derogatory comments about organization. In the realm of politics organization is primary; it appears as the necessary public platform upon which politics can occur; it enables politics to emerge; it provides the foundation of civic society. However, Wolin wants to challenge the assumption that organization is a politically positive development.

The Enlightenment era fervor for subduing nature and bending it to human desires quickly crept into social policy as well. If nature's power could be harnessed for human ends, then society itself could be engineered to increase productivity. In reference to a large portion of nineteenth century political thought Wolin writes that "What was needed, so the century reasoned, was not only organized power over nature, but organized power

---

[204]Ibid. 337.

[205]Ibid. 326.

over society and, ultimately, over man."[206] Aside from the fact that such ambitions ride roughshod over ethical maxims that prohibit using people as a means to an end, the ambitions of organization are flagrantly antidemocratic given that they implicate individuals in designs to which they have not consented.

Despite the ominous shade of grand schemes to organize society, the maestros of organization regarded their ambitions as benevolent. This is because their organizational schemata were allegedly in harmony with the principles of rationality. Whereas the imposition of organizational blueprints that spring whole cloth from a single mind tend to evoke images of a sinister puppet master, the managerial elites acted under the pretense that they were simply fulfilling the duties of science that were rooted in the true nature of things and were thus independent of any singular human will. This pretence allowed elites to evade accusations that they were despots plotting to subject society to their private visions. If implemented, the social order would be governed by purely rational principles with technocratic elites acting as vectors for those principles.[207] This narrative served the dual purpose of absolving elites from charges of orchestrating an elaborate intrigue while also constituting those who refused to conform to the dictates of organization as 'irrational.' Thus constituted, the existence of such irrational people would justify the need for orderly organization, and consequently the need for expert organizers.

---

[206]Ibid. 356.

[207]Ibid. 338-339.

Crafting an organization and enforcing its patterns required the exaltation of some people and the subservience of others; in short, bureaucracy. From a democratic or anarchist perspective bureaucracy is not just an impartial byproduct of the need for administration that is suited to any and every regime: it is itself a form of governance.

In the contemporary world the rise of corporate power has been accompanied by the rapid proliferation of bureaucracy, both private (corporate bureaucracy) and public (regulatory and welfare bureaucracy). Wolin writes that the United States' "power is uniquely dependent on the economies of large scale, on the efficient organization of hierarchical structures of domination and control, and on the widespread dissemination of bureaucratic attitudes and values."[208] Those attitudes and values lend themselves to a discussion of 'governability.'

The term 'governability' can be considered from two angles: First, the ability of certain people to govern the masses, and secondly, the ability of the masses to be rendered governable. Both definitions suggest that governability is foremost conceived as a managerial issue. Wolin observes that "Governability underscored the massive anti-political shift taking place. The yearning for a pliable population –'those who work hard and live by the rules' – reflected the primacy of managerial imperatives over civic ideology… [I]t signifies, simultaneously, the transformation of government from an instrument to serve human needs and alleviate human distress into a system increasingly

---

[208]Sheldon S. Wolin, "Whose Utopia?" <u>The Universitas Project: Solutions for a Post-Technological Society</u>, Emilio Ambasz, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art. 1972) 294.

geared towards punishment and control".[209] With this passage one can detect a change in Wolin's tone as he accents the dystopian modality of managerial governability. Bureaucracy was therefore not the harmless assignment of tasks, regularization of activity, pushing of papers, rubber stamping, and so forth; it was the entrenchment of apolitical formulas that slot people into preformed roles - - a kind of weapons-free militarization of society.

In sum, the "modern state spelled the displacement of local politics by bureaucratic politics."[210] Continuing to summarize, Wolin claims that,

> As the locus of 'policy' and its formulation and implementation, administration signified one more momentous development in the separation of the citizenry from power. That development was registered in the emergence of a new political vocabulary that was striking in its contrast with the usages being invoked to characterize demotic action. Where the people were depicted as 'turbulent' and 'tumultuous,' as irregular, modern government was portrayed by its champions as 'regular,' 'efficient,' and 'orderly.'[211]

While bureaucracies supposedly embody principles of rational organization and function according to concrete information, they are nevertheless abstract in the sense

---

[209] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition</u>, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 577.

[210] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 199.

[211] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition</u>, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 402.

that they remain beyond the direct control of people who are subject to their

administration. The policy-makers and overseers who staff the high offices of a

bureaucracy endeavor to diminish participatory involvement that could confuse or slow

the pace of administrative activity. Bureaucracies are also abstract in their need for

generalization and in their tendency to prefer one-size-fits-all solutions. Given that

bureaucratic governance is practiced at a distance, it can easily become insensitive to the

beings it administers. Wolin supplies the following portrait: "bureaucracy: it must

depersonalize and dehumanize and, in so doing, exert pressure toward homogeneity,

equalize the incoming units, encourage uniformities, and discourage diversity and

deviance."[212]

Anarchism has long been noted for celebrating diversity… even insisting upon it.

This insistence is echoed in Wolin's claim that "The problem of the political is… to

ground power in commonality while reverencing diversity – not simply respecting

difference."[213] And further reflecting anarchist critiques Wolin asserts that "Diversity

cannot be reverenced by bureaucratic modes of decision-making. Diversity is the

nightmare of bureaucracy. The bureaucrat's response to it is either to invent another

classification or, in the corporate world, to manufacture fifty-seven varieties. The mode

---

[212] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Whose Utopia?" The Universitas Project: Solutions for a Post-Technological Society, Emilio Ambasz, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art. 1972) 293.

[213] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Hannah Arendt: Democracy and the Political," Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, 304.

of action that is consonant with equality and diversity is deliberation."[214] Here it is worth noting that in Wolin's view 'organization' has a political antonym, but it is not 'disorganization;' rather, it is 'equality': "Organization and equality were antithetical ideas in that the former demanded hierarchy, subordination, and authority, while the latter denied all three."[215]

In order to remove all doubt that Wolin's vision of democracy is diametrically opposed to governing, bureaucracy, managerialism, and administration, the following lines can be referenced: "Governing means manning and accommodating to bureaucratized institutions that, *ipso facto*, are hierarchical in structure and elitist, permanent rather than fugitive – in short, anti-democratic."[216] It would be logically fallacious to conclude that if governing is anti-democratic, and anarchism rejects governing, then democracy and anarchy are therefore identical. However, given that both democracy and anarchism reject the authority of governors, managers, and bureaucrats, it would be equally fallacious to dismiss their similitude. But the argument being presented in this thesis endeavors to make a stronger claim than merely establishing the similarities between Wolin's democracy and anarchism. This thesis aims to demonstrate that both visions are selfsame, and their only difference rests in their designation. The next chapter will discuss the connection between these two visions in closer detail, with specific reference to notable anarchist thinkers.

---

[214] Ibid.

[215] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 338.

[216] Ibid. 602-603.

CHAPTER FOUR: WOLIN'S ANARCHIST AFFINITIES

This chapter will seek to achieve a few separate but related goals. First it will

display a host of direct quotes from anarchist theorists, anthologists, scholars, writers, and

activists in order to buttress the claim that Wolin's ideas are anarchist. Second, this

chapter will revisit key aspects of Wolin's work in order to highlight the anarchist temper

of his ideas. In particular, this chapter will forefront Wolin's claim that the state is a

thoroughly antidemocratic entity that has begun to embody prison-like qualities as a

result of its need to bind society within a constitutional framework which maintains state

power, and furthermore, that the state is ultimately beyond reform. Finally, this chapter

will venture a tantalizing connection between Wolin's vision of 'fugitive democracy' and

Nietzsche's concept of the will-to-power. It will be argued that Nietzsche's idea can be

pressed into the service of democratic action, even though Nietzsche is often portrayed as

an avowed enemy of the lowly.

One does not need to search deeply through the annals of anarchism to discover

that Wolin is of that ilk. The themes that underlie his texts ditto those of anarchist prose.

Not only do Wolin's works partake of the anarchist 'tradition' but his theoretical

motivations directly reflect those that have animated anarchist philosophy for over a

century. In his attempt to outline the hallmarks of anarchists theory, Prince Peter

Kropotkin, one of the most beloved and grandfatherly figures in the history of anarchism

concluded that, "When we look into the origin of the anarchist conception of society, we

see that it has had a double origin: the criticism, on the one side, of the hierarchical

organizations and the authoritarian conceptions of society; and on the other side, the

analysis of the tendencies that are seen in the progressive movements of mankind, both in the past, and still more so at the present time."[217] Kropotkin's remarks could equally serve to describe Wolin's oeuvre. A scrutiny of Wolin's writings would lead any reader to agree that most of his efforts involve an attempt to understand the way in which the state arranges power, as well as trying to grasp progressive movements in conceptual form.

Given its celebration of diversity, it is no surprise that anarchist theory varies widely. But despite that variation there are some persistent motifs throughout. According to the anarchist scholar L. Susan Brown, what unites the versatile conceptions of anarchism "is a universal condemnation of hierarchy and domination."[218] As the previous chapters show, Wolin is a relentless critic of hierarchy and domination. According to Brown's claim, that fact alone would earn Wolin anarchist credentials.

Stuart Christie, a current anarchist writer, summarizes anarchism in a way that Wolin might summarize democracy: "Anarchism… is concrete, democratic and egalitarian… Anarchism began – and remains – a direct challenge by the underprivileged to their oppression and exploitation. It opposes both the insidious growth of state power and the pernicious ethos of possessive individualism, which, together or separately, ultimately serve only the interests of the few at the expense of the rest."[219] Rather than

---

[217] Peter Kropotkin, Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings, (Mineola: Dover Publishing, Inc., 2002) 158.

[218] L. Susan Brown, The Politics of Individualism, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2002) 108.

[219] Stuart Christie, Granny Made Me An Anarchist: General Franco, The Angry Brigade and Me, (Oakland: AK Press, 2007) 162.

being a naively idealized vision of a future society, anarchism is more a disposition

among those who lack privilege that urges them to challenge anti-democratic forms of

power. Even though anarchists oppose state power in principle, they very rarely demand

the immediate abolition of the state. Instead they aim to stymie and reverse the growth of

state power, as well as to curb social tendencies that trend against egalitarianism.

Wolin's unstated hints about the kinship between democracy and anarchy are

made explicit by other scholars. In the words of the contemporary philosopher, Jacques

Ranciere, "Democracy first of all means this: anarchic 'government', one based on

nothing other than the absence of every title to govern."[220] That statement perfectly

encapsulates Wolin's overall impression of democracy; for any democracy deserving of

the name would completely lack offices, ranks, and stations that entitle certain people to

exercise political power over others merely because of a title.

The renowned literary figure, Edward Abbey (whose Master's thesis focused on

anarchism) concluded that "Anarchy is democracy taken seriously… Anarchy is

democracy taken all the way, in every major sector of social life."[221] Abbey's conclusion

reflects Wolin's judgment that democracy is not simply a political mode reserved solely

for those aspects of society that are typically associated with government, but rather a

mode of being that should pervade all social interaction. In Abbey's view anarchy is

democracy pushed to its logical conclusion. Wolin also advocates expanding democratic

---

[220] Jacques Ranciere, Hatred of Democracy, (New York: Verso, 2009) 41.

[221] Edward Abbey, One Life at a Time, Please, (New York, Holt Publishing, 1988) 26.

engagement to very edges of life, though he never feels the need to describe that expansion as 'anarchy.'

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, a nineteenth century philosopher who is frequently called the 'father of anarchism,' also shared the belief that democracy was essentially anarchist, and vice versa. Like Wolin, Proudhon was strident in his opposition to representative government, and claimed that politicians acted "as if democracy could be achieved other than by distribution of authority and as if the true meaning of the word 'democracy' was not dismissal of government."[222] Proudhon argued that "the authentic form of government is anarchy"[223] and that anarchism meant "the absence of a master, of a sovereign."[224] Mikhail Bakunin, an illustrious anarchist and coeval of Proudhon wrote that anarchists "reject all legislation, all authority, and all privileged, licensed, official, and legal influence, even though arising from universal suffrage"[225]. Though Wolin rarely expresses his thoughts in such a stark and searing manner, one can easily spot the similarity to the claims of Proudhon and Bakunin's.

In regard to the economic system, Noam Chomsky, an esteemed philosopher and popularizer of anarchist ideas, said that "democracy is largely a sham when the industrial system is controlled by any form of autocratic elite, whether it's owners, managers,

---

[222] Daniel Guerin, <u>No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism</u>, (Oakland: AK Press, 2005) 57.

[223] Ibid. 46.

[224] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, <u>What is Property?</u>, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 264.

[225] Mikhail Bakunin, <u>God and the State</u>, (Mineola, Dover Publications, Inc., 1970) 35.

technocrats, a vanguard party, a state bureaucracy, or whatever."[226] As the previous

chapter makes clear, Wolin considers managerialism, scientific administration,

technocratic governance, and the like as incompatible with democracy. From the

perspective of a democrat like Wolin or an anarchist like Chomsky, all notions of

'rationalized administration' or 'efficiency' should be subordinated to participatory

decision-making, whether in government or economic institutions.

The consistent link between the anarchists and Wolin is a principled rejection of

authority and coercive power. Benjamin Tucker, an individualist anarchist of the early

twentieth century observed that anarchy means "not necessarily absence of order [i.e.

chaos], as is generally supposed, but an absence of rule."[227] For anarchists like Tucker as

well as for Wolin, whatever order emerges in society should result from voluntary

associations based upon egalitarian collaboration. All this testimony from prominent

anarchist thinkers reads like a bullet-point summary of Wolin's depiction of democracy,

only exchanging the word 'anarchy' for 'democracy.'

In his recent work, *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, the acclaimed Yale political

scientist James C. Scott described what he calls "infrapolitics" which are "practiced

outside the visible spectrum of what usually passes for political activity."[228]The term

'infrapolitics' could be used to describe Wolin's concept of fugitive democracy, which

---

[226] Noam Chomsky, Government in the Future, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005) 28.

[227] Benjamin Tucker, Instead of a Book by a Man Too Busy to Write One: A Fragmentary
Exposition of Philosophical Anarchism, (Chestnut Hill: Adamant Media Corporation, 2000) 13.

[228] James C. Scott, Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and
Meaningful Work and Play, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) xx.

also occurs outside the official channels of politics. This type of political activity tends to be egalitarian, or non-hierarchical in character. Describing a similar phenomenon the anarchist writer Colin Ward claimed that "far from being a speculative vision of a future society, it is a description of a mode of human experience of everyday life, which operates side-by-side with, and in spite of, the dominant authoritarian trends of our society."[229]

Wolin's idea that democratic action arises from felt grievances also has forerunners in anarchism. Proudhon declared that anarchism "is not a system: it is, quite simply, a protest."[230] Daniel Guerin, a well-read anthologizer and historian of anarchist thought also sensed that democratic action was inspired by discontent, writing that "Anarchism can be described first and foremost as a visceral revolt."[231] Another idea that unites Wolin's work with the anarchists' is that progressive political action is borne by the efforts of regular people who learn to transform themselves into political beings due to a sense of iniquity. As Kropotkin notes, "Not out of the universities does anarchism come… [It] was born *among the people*; and it will continue to be full of life and creative power only as long as it remains a thing of the people."[232]

---

[229] Colin Ward, Anarchy in Action (London: Freedom Press, 1988) 14.

[230] Daniel Guerin, No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism, (Oakland: AK Press, 2005) 72.

[231] Daniel Guerin, Anarchism: From Theory to Practice, (New York: Monthly Review Press. 1970) 13.

[232] Peter Kropotkin, Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings, (Mineola: Dover Publishing, Inc., 2002) 146.

An important parallel between Wolin's vision and the anarchist vision is the 'fugitive' character of democratic revolt. In attempt to emphasize a key feature of the political, Proudhon writes that "The important thing to grasp about popular movements is their utter spontaneity."[233] As Wolin argued, democracy is sudden, momentary, and unrestrained by institutional rules. In a passage reflecting Wolin's claim that democracy cannot abide organizational boundaries, James C. Scott writes "So far as system-threatening protests are concerned, formal organizations are more an impediment than a facilitator."[234] Or in the laconic words of the anarchist group The Invisible Committee, "Organizations are obstacles to organizing ourselves."[235] Though that quote might sound cryptic, in the parlance of anarchism it is perfectly comprehensible. To clarify the idea we can turn to the work of Max Stirner, who is one of the most profound, insightful, and radical of thinkers in the history of anarchism.

Stirner favors the term 'association' instead of 'organization.' But Stirner is careful to offer a nuanced description of what 'association' entails: "Once an association has crystallized in society, it has ceased to be an association, since association is an ongoing act of re-association."[236] This belief registers the same misgivings Wolin has about creating permanent organizations that eventually rigidify and thus become

---

[233] Daniel Guerin, <u>No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism</u>, (Oakland: AK Press, 2005) 125.

[234] James C. Scott, <u>Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play</u>, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) xvii.

[235] The Invisible Committee, <u>The Coming Insurrection</u>, (Los Angeles: semiotext(e), 2009) 15.

[236] Daniel Guerin, <u>No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism</u>, (Oakland: AK Press, 2005) 22.

antidemocratic. The mercurial nature of fugitive democracy insures that political

assembly is temporary and only lasts so long as participants voluntarily assemble. And

when participants disband, the association disappears. When it comes to describing

political activity, no other theorist resembles Wolin's idea of fugitive democracy as much

as Stirner, who argues that,

> The fight of the world to-day is, as it is said, directed against the 'established.'
> Yet people are wont to misunderstand this as if it were only that what is now
> established was to be exchanged for another, a better, established system. But war
> might rather be declared against establishment itself, the *State*, not a particular
> State, not any such thing as the mere condition of the State at the time; it is not
> another State (such as a 'people's State') that men aim at, but their *union*, uniting,
> this ever-fluid uniting of everything standing.[237]

And much like Wolin's critique of Leninism, Fascism, and Nazism, Stirner's

rejection of ossified organizations reflects the anarchist suspicion of revolutionary

movements that seek a New Order. The anarchists anticipated the antidemocratic

tendencies that perfuse large-scale revolutionary movements, and often tried to warn

against these tendencies. Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, well before any of the

above-named revolutions, Proudhon noted that "the most liberating revolutions and all of

freedom's stirrings have repeatedly culminated in a pledge of loyalty and submission to

---

[237] Max Stirner, <u>The Ego and His Own: The Case of the Individual Against Authority</u>, (Mineola, Dover Publications, Inc., 2005) 223-224.

authority [and this is] why all revolutions have served only to reconstitute tyranny."[238]

Writing over half a century before the Bolshevik revolution Mikhail Bakunin wagered the

following prediction: "Take the most radical of revolutionaries and place him on the

throne of all the Russias or give him dictatorial powers… and before the year is out he

will be worse than the Czar himself."[239] In the same vein James C. Scott observed that

"virtually every major successful revolution ended by creating a state more powerful than

the one it overthrew, a state that in turn was able to extract more resources from and

exercise more control over the very populations it was designed to serve."[240]

This is why anarchists are always leery about plunging themselves

wholeheartedly into revolutionary movements in which parties or organizations lead the

march. As Wolin argued, organizations all have a kind of logic. That logic might not be

inherent or essential, but it nevertheless reveals itself wherever organizations exist. This

is why Wolin advocates for a democracy that repels organizational structures. Wolin

would have reiterated Michel Foucault's claim that "If you wish to replace an official

institution by another institution that fulfils the same function – better and differently –

then you are already being reabsorbed by the dominant structure."[241] Here, Foucault

---

[238] Daniel Guerin, <u>No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism</u>, (Oakland: AK Press, 2005) 82.

[239] Daniel Guerin, <u>Anarchism: From Theory to Practice</u>, (New York: Monthly Review Press. 1970) 26.

[240] James C. Scott, <u>Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play</u>, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) x.

[241] Michel Foucault, <u>Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews</u>. Ed. Donald F. Bourchard.(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) 232.

could be taken to mean that institutionalization is the chief ill that plagues political

thought, and that the unraveling of authoritarianism requires resistance to the structuring

of power. If this interpretation reflects Foucault's intent, then 'fugitive democracy' is of

apiece with Foucault's view. The rapturous, splintering, disorganized zip of fugitive

democracy inoculates it against being reestablished as another planted power structure.

Following this train of thought, James C. Scott concludes his book *Two Cheers for

Anarchism* with a subtle endorsement of what Wolin would call 'fugitive democracy':

> The condensation of history, our desire for clean narratives, and the need for elites
>
> and organizations to project an image of control and purpose all conspire to
>
> convey a false image of historical causation. They blind us to the fact that most
>
> revolutions are not the work of revolutionary parties but the precipitate of
>
> spontaneous and improvised action, [and] that organized social movements are
>
> usually the product, not the cause, of uncoordinated protests and demonstrations,
>
> and that the great emancipatory gains for human freedom have not been the result
>
> of orderly, institutional procedures but of disorderly, unpredictable, spontaneous
>
> action cracking open the social order from below.[242]

Anarchists repugn organization because the prerogative of organizations is to gain

repute within a system of official politics that thrives on inequality. Instead of

organization anarchists prefer defiance, resistance, transgression, and the like, because

those acts are less capable of being co-opted. Discussing the rationale of this preference

---

[242] James C. Scott, Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) 141.

James C. Scott maintained that "Mass defiance, precisely because it threatens the institutional order, gives rise to organizations that try to channel that defiance into the flow of normal politics, where it can be contained."[243] And so a seasoned social movement would skirt organizational strictures in order to elude the forces that would compel it to reckon with the dominant authority. Again reflecting on strategies for successful political movements, James C. Scott notes that a scattershot, centrifugal approach proves more fruitful because, from the perspective of state power, "The menace was directly proportional to its lack of institutionalization."[244]

From a democratic/anarchist standpoint the goal is not a New Order; it is no Order. Wolin would agree with Stirner's assertion that while "The Revolution aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to *let* ourselves be arranged."[245] It is evident from this array of quotes that Wolin's rejection of both state power and organizational propensities puts him in company with the anarchists. Not only is Wolin's critique of state power akin to the anarchists', but his conception of what the state *is* also mirrors the anarchist view. According to Kropotkin, "the State and capitalism are, in our opinion, inseparable concepts."[246] That same view underpins Wolin's concept of inverted totalitarianism in which capitalism seamlessly melds with the state. From its inception

---

[243] Ibid. xviii.

[244] Ibid. 18.

[245] Max Stirner, The Ego and His Own: The Case of the Individual Against Authority, (Mineola, Dover Publications, Inc., 2005) 316.

[246] Peter Kropotkin, Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings, (Mineola: Dover Publishing, Inc., 2002) 181.

anarchism has opposed both capitalism and the state because they both feature

hierarchical structures of power and non-participatory decision-making. And while those

two qualities alone are enough to arouse opposition, there is a litany of reasons anarchists

reject the state/capital complex. In the immortal and hyperbolic words of Proudhon,

> To be governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied upon, directed, legislated
>
> for, regulated, penned up, indoctrinated, preached at, monitored, assessed,
>
> censured… noted, registered, inventoried, priced, stamped, rated, appraised,
>
> levied, patented, licensed, authorized, annotated, admonished, thwarted, reformed,
>
> overhauled… taxed, exercised, ransomed, exploited, monopolized, brow-beaten,
>
> pressured, bamboozled and robbed: then, at the slightest sign of resistance, at the
>
> first murmur of complaint, repressed, fined, vilified, irritated, hounded,
>
> reprimanded, knocked senseless, disarmed, garroted, imprisoned, shot, mown
>
> down, tried, convicted, deported… [and so on.][247]

When packaged in this way, the state appears as a micromanaging, prying,

engulfing force. This description bears some resemblance to Foucault's notion of

biopower, which he describes as "a power whose task is to take charge of life [and

which] needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms… Such a power has to

quantify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize"[248]. Biopower is also "a power that exerts a

positive [i.e. productive] influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and

---

[247] Daniel Guerin, No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism, (Oakland: AK Press, 2005) 97.

[248] Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction: Volume 1, (New York: Vintage Books 1990) 144.

multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations"[249]. The more

this power is amplified, expanded, and deepened, the more it sets the pulse of society.

According to The Invisible Committee, this form of power "is not an enemy that

confronts us head-on. It is a rhythm that imposes itself, a way of dispensing and

dispersing reality."[250] Here we find a description that directly echoes Wolin's idea that

inverted totalitarianism aims to control the tempo of society while also becoming

increasingly extensive and invasive.[251]

Anarchists have long demonstrated a keen ability to detect the coercive power of

these "pneumatic machines called governments", as Bakunin calls them.[252] But whereas

Foucault portrays a power that is transmitted more horizontally and exchanged *between*

bodies, the anarchists are more concerned with hierarchical power that is exercised

vertically *over* bodies. Those concerns are evident in the following account of state power

offered by Murray Bookchin, one of the most well-respected anarchists:

> Minimally, the State is a professional system of social coercion – not merely a
>
> system of social administration as it is still naively regarded by the public and by
>
> many political theorists. The word 'professional' should be emphasized as much
>
> as the word 'coercion,' …It is only when coercion is institutionalized into a

---

[249] Ibid.

[250] The Invisible Committee, <u>The Coming Insurrection</u>, (Los Angeles: semiotext(e), 2009) 13.

[251] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism.</u>(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 137.

[252] G. P. Maximoff, <u>Bakunin, The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism,</u> (Glencoe: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964) 212.

professional, systematic and organized form of social control – that is, when people are plucked out of the their everyday lives in a community and expected not only to 'administer' it but to do so with the backing of a monopoly of violence – that we can properly speak of a State.[253]

Overall, the clearest relationship between Wolin's work and anarchism is a conviction that the state is incompatible with democracy because it features organized power, hierarchy, professional politicians, and official social authorities. One can find many statements in which Wolin unequivocally casts the state as an antidemocratic force. To add to prior examples, Wolin writes that "any conception of democracy grounded in the citizen-as-actor and politics-as-episodic is incompatible with the modern choice of the state as the fixed center of political life and the corollary conception of politics as continuous activity organized around a single dominating objective, control of or influence over the state apparatus."[254]

Perhaps the greatest difference between Wolin and self-identified anarchist theorists is his style of presentation. Whereas anarchists are prone to use barbed and venomous phrasing in their condemnation of state power, Wolin's verbiage is much more restrained. To give an example, Wolin provides a subdued approximation of state power when he writes that official politics involves

---

[253]Murray Bookchin, Remaking Society, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1998) 66.

[254] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 42.

the management of collective desires, resentments, anger, fantasies, fears, and hopes [along with] the curatorship of the simulacra of democracy. The political is focused upon an organization of power that guarantees domestic peace and security, including the security of the state, that promotes, guards, oversees, and interlocks with the corporate powers upon which the citizenry is dependent for their material well-being; that adjudicates social conflicts, punishes lawbreakers, and keeps the whole of society under a watchful eye; and that is continually trying to reconcile or conceal the contradiction between the state as the symbol of justice, impartiality, and the guardian of the general welfare – the steady state – with a dynamic politics that registers the intense competition that pervades not only the economy but cultural formations as well. To contain that contradiction, the state cultivates the political education of its citizens to instill the virtues of loyalty, obedience, law-abidingness, patriotism, and sacrifice in wartime. Through the practice of those virtues, the state encourages identification of the self with the power of the state, the surrogate of participation and the sublimate of self-interests.[255]

While passages such as this do demonstrate the measured, even-handed phrasing that Wolin prefers, despite his subtlety, his descriptions are nonetheless damning; for as this passage makes clear, Wolin views the state as a conflux of antidemocratic forces – one of which seeks to insure that the population is sufficiently indoctrinated and thus to implicate people in their own disempowerment by generating popular enthusiasm for a

---

[255]Ibid. 33.

system which increasingly excludes those people. At its core the state is a sinister force because it "represents not only the greatest concentration of coercive power in history, and it not only demands obedience, but it asks for loyalty, even affection, from its subjects."[256]

Indoctrination is also necessary to insure that state power congeals because people do not naturally clamor to be ensnared in a net of antidemocratic power. Contrary to the notion that Americans blithely embraced a unified state, Wolin argues that "the evolution of the modern state is a story of an internal form of imperialism" which has witnessed "steady destruction of local power"[257]. As a result of this internal colonialism, "Civil society now presents itself as a structure of control and discipline rather than as a paradigm of freedom and spontaneity."[258] In another essay Wolin opines that "the disciplinary requirements of the Economic Polity are blurring the traditional distinction between prison and society."[259]

This likening of society to a prison might initially seem overinflated; nevertheless, it echoes Weber's claim that the bureaucratization of society has created an atmosphere akin to an iron cage, as well as Foucault's conclusion that modern societies exhibit a

---

[256] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Hannah Arendt: Democracy and the Political," Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. 296.

[257] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 156-157.

[258]Ibid. 27.

[259]Ibid. 175.

carceral character.[260] Wolin's comparison of society to a prison marks a crescendo in a

story that began with the Philadelphia Convention. One could contend that the carceral

character of society is a predictable outcome of *constituting* civil society - that is, of

imposing a constitution upon society. The prison represents a mechanism of enclosure

wherein life is tamed and caged. For Wolin, constitutions achieve the same result by

bounding politics. He writes that "Boundaries are the outlines of a context; or, more

precisely, boundaries signify the will to contextualize. Politically, contextualization

signifies the domestication of politics"[261]. Wolin does not choose this vocabulary for

dramatic effect; he chooses it for its literal accuracy: "the domestication of politics also

corresponds to one dictionary definition of domestication, 'to tame, bring under

control."[262] And so "a constitution in setting limits to politics sets limits as well to

democracy, constituting it in ways compatible with and legitimating of the dominant

power groups in the society."[263]

Bounding and constituting also define an entire people. A constitution represents

an attempt to forge *unuum* from *pluris*. This occurs through a process of inclusion and

exclusion that awards official recognition to certain people: "Both as a container and as

excluder, boundaries work to foster the impression of a circumscribed space in which

---

[260] See, Michel Foucault, <u>Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison</u>, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

[261] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," <u>Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,</u>ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 33.

[262]Ibid.

[263]Ibid. 34.

likeness dwells, the likeness of natives, of autochthonous people, or of a nationality, or of

citizens with equal rights."[264] The sameness that establishes unity also establishes the

'difference' that discerns members from nonmembers. Throughout a state's history,

nonmembers will periodically demand official recognition. One of the state's roles is

therefore to act as an official recognizer. This is one lineament that distinguishes the state

from democracy. In Wolin's view, "Democracy appears to stand for inclusiveness that

implies that every person qua person is recognized and no one is 'the recognizer.'"[265]

But as previously noted, even though recognition grants members access to some

of society's guarantees it also traps members into a disciplinary web of coercive power.

James Madison was being candid when he declared that "national government was to

operate within the extent of its powers directly and coercively on individuals."[266] In light

of Madison's admission, Wolin is justified in claiming that "political society was founded

on the people rather than *by* them."[267] In the language of social contract theory, people

surrender their natural rights in favor of civil rights that bestow benefits upon contractees.

And while certain benefits do accrue to signatories of the contract, the contract also gives

state authorities the ability to consume the individual's labor through taxation, and also to

---

[264]Ibid. 32.

[265] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy, Difference, and Re-Cognition," Political Theory, 21.3 (1993): 468.

[266] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 98.

[267] Sheldon S. Wolin, Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 177.

conscript individuals or otherwise use their bodies.[268] State power thus arises from the materialization of the people's activity, as well as their (coerced) consent to permit the state to seize a portion of their material productivity.[269] As a result, the state creates a context in which "the labor, wealth, and psyches of the citizenry are simultaneously defended and exploited, protected and extracted, nurtured and fleeced, rewarded and commanded, flattered and threatened."[270]

And though the state has access to the individual's resources, the individual's ability to influence state policy is vanishingly small. Anarchist discourse is abundant with diatribes condemning the state's suffocation of individual power. Even Alexis de Tocqueville felt obliged to describe "how the state successively seizes everything, putting itself from all directions in place of the individual or placing the individual in tutelage, governing, regulating, *uniformizing* everything and everybody."[271] In his chef-d'oeuvre on Tocqueville, Wolin quotes the French traveler as writing that "One of the happiest consequences of the absence of government… is the development of individual powers"[272]. But in the midst of contemporary states, Wolin believes that

---

[268] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 86.

[269] Ibid. 12.

[270] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 36.

[271] Alexis de Tocqueville, Oeuvres completes, ed. J. P. Mayer (Paris: Gallimard, 1951) 311-312.

[272] Sheldon S. Wolin, Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 166.

the individual moves in a world dominated by large and complex organizations. The citizen faces 'big government'; the laborer, a large trade union; the white-collar worker, a giant corporation; the student, an impersonal university. Everywhere there is organization, everywhere bureaucratization; like the world of feudalism, the modern world is broken up into areas dominated by castles, but not the castles of *les chansons de geste*, but the castles of Kafka.[273]

Given that contemporary society is so plethoric with weighty institutions that clip individual power and offer few means of escape, Wolin can confidently claim that the United States is totally antidemocratic. Writing in the journal *democracy*, which Wolin founded and edited, he opened the first issue by declaring that

the most significant political fact about contemporary American life [is] the steady transformation of America into an antidemocratic society. Every one of the county's primary institutions – the business corporation, the government bureaucracy, the trade union, the research and education industries, the mass propaganda and entertainment media, and the health and welfare system – are antidemocratic in spirit, design, and operation. Each is hierarchical in structure, authority oriented, opposed in principle to equal participation, unaccountable to the citizenry, elitist and managerial, and disposed to concentrate increasing power in the hands of the few and to reduce political life to administration.[274]

---

[273] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 317.

[274] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Why *democracy*?" democracy, 1.1 (January 1981): 3.

The reasons for this antidemocratic transformation are myriad, ranging from the continual expansion and pervasive presence of the state, the entwined fusion of corporate and state power, the rise of bureaucratization and technocratic elitism, the waning of egalitarianism as a public value, and the prevalence of meritocracy as a counter-value.[275] All these trends leave Wolin convinced that "The conditions which the modern state requires – enormous revenues, a managed economy and labor force, a huge military establishment, ever-more lethal instruments of violence, a vast bureaucracy, and a complaint citizenry that will produce legitimation upon demand – make it increasingly plain that the 'democratic state' has become a contradiction in terms."[276]

As if these sentiments alone would not convince the reader of Wolin's anarchism, he also argues, as do the anarchists, that the state is beyond reform. He writes that "it is naïve to expect the initiative for reform of the state to issue from the political process that serves the interests of political capitalism."[277] The state is now engineered such that an attempt to achieve legislative reforms which would usher-in a democratic rebirth at the state level is anachronous. In a terse expression Wolin writes that "The System is so

---

[275] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 81.

[276] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Hannah Arendt: Democracy and the Political," Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. 296.

[277] Sheldon S. Wolin, "What Revolutionary Action Means Today," Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community, Chantal Mouffe, (London: Verso. 1992) 251.

totally corrupt as to be unsalvageable"[278] and the system is so "immovable and so interconnected as to be unreformable as a totality."[279] However, Wolin rejects the 'reform or revolution?' binary and instead advocates for a withdrawal of energies that were previously directed for use by the state, coupled with the exploration of new life forms that involve egalitarian cooperation. In order to approach those goals "our whole mode of thinking must be turned upside-down. Instead of imitating most other political theories and adopting the state as the primary structure and then adapting the activity of the citizen to the state, democratic thinking should renounce the state paradigm and, along with it, the liberal-legal corruption of the citizen."[280]

Achieving a democratic society means retrieving lost notions of the political. As mentioned, what was lost is a notion of democracy that is unmoored from the state. The type of democracy Wolin wants to regain exists as a mode of experience instead of an all-encompassing entity like the state. Crucial to this project is a rediscovery of people's politicalness, by which Wolin means the capacity to develop into beings who value participating in and being responsible for the care and improvement of common life. Wolin does not identify 'politicalness' with being part of governing institutions or

---

[278]Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy & Counterrevolution: Powerlessness is not an Unintended but a Calculated Consequence of the System,"Nation, 22, Apr. (1996): 23.

[279] Sheldon s. Wolin, "Revolutionary Action Today, in John Rjachman and Cornell West, eds., Post-Analytic Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 254-55.

[280] Sheldon S. Wolin, "What Revolutionary Action Means Today," Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community, Chantal Mouffe, (London: Verso. 1992) 251.

political parties because those are "structured roles" that are "highly bureaucratized."[281]

Politicalness involves

> the cooperation and reciprocity that human beings develop in order to survive, meet their needs, and begin to explore their capacities… The political emerges as the shared concerns of human beings to take care of themselves and the part of their world that they claim as their lot. The political emerges, in the literal sense, as a 'culture,' that is, a cultivating, a tending, a taking care of beings and things.[282]

In contrast to liberal political theory which portrays political beings as abstract bearers of rights who are disconnected from any circumstance, Wolin wants to depict political beings as those who exist in a particular place/space and draw their power from family, friends, neighborhood, workplace, local organizations, and the like.[283]

This discussion of a local life that is populated by the meek and baseborn who attain and retain their politicalness by "taking care of beings and things" and cultivating a shared political life might seem a peculiar place to interject an excursion into Nietzsche's philosophy, but sprinkled throughout Wolin's work are morsels that suggest an affinity between Wolin's view of democracy and the will-to-power. Nietzsche's distaste for 'the

---

[281] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution</u>, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 139.

[282] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Hannah Arendt: Democracy and the Political," <u>Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays</u>. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. 303.

[283] Sheldon S. Wolin, "What Revolutionary Action Means Today," <u>Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community</u>, Chantal Mouffe, (London: Verso. 1992) 251-252.

common' emblazons many of his writings, and given his elitist persuasion, pairing him

with Wolin appears as an exercise in gross futility. However, there is much in Wolin's

conception of democracy that gels with Nietzsche's concept of the will-to-power; and as

we shall see, Wolin himself calls attention to this similarity.

In discussing the possibility of a democratic revival, Wolin notes that "The

possibility of renewal draws on a simple fact: that ordinary individuals are capable of

creating new cultural patterns of commonality at any moment."[284] There is thus an

element of creativity within democratic groups that longs to be vented and that strives to

refashion society to accord with their ambitions. But after reflecting on the Biblical

Tower of Babel sequence, Wolin concludes that, "Like the men of Shinar, democracy

knows that the weak can gain power only by discovering a commonality that is artificial,

iso-nomia rather than *physis*."[285]

In Nietzsche's work, the idea of the Übermensch conjures images of a valiant,

heroic persona that pits its power against all social structures that conspire to suppress it.

This image perpetuates the belief that heroism is confined to the realm of the individual.

However, Wolin wants to challenge this belief: "Because the heroic has been claimed as

an individualistic category, the idea of an agonistic demos seems not only unfamiliar but

oxymoronic. Why should it seem intuitively absurd that an agonistic demos, like an

agonistic Alcibiades, might be driven by the needs of its nature to strain at constitutional

---

[284] Sheldon S. Wolin.. "Fugitive Democracy," <u>Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,</u>ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 43.

[285] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy, Difference, and Re-Cognition," Political Theory, 21.3 (1993): 476.

restraints?"[286] That a demos would refuse to accept its oppression and act to disrupt the established order indicates that the same will-to-power which would motivate the Übermensch could also incite the demos to take action. Wolin traces how such action might ripen: First the demos must construct itself from scattered experiences and merge them into a self-consciousness about the political powerlessness they have in common as well as the causes of that powerlessness. From this would emerge an awareness that their powerlessness results from being barred from the councils of power where authority finds sanctum. The demos would slowly become political as it strove to sculpt the political system in order that it could sit at the same tables and stand upon the same stage as its superiors.[287]

Part of this requires envisaging the demos as an autonomous agent; however political theory is not accustomed to conceiving of the demos as a new actor that is collective in nature. As Wolin notes,

> Dramaturgical categories, even those that haven't been 'philosophized,' have trouble dealing with a power that does not 'act' as a discrete subject, that lacks an identifying genealogy such as birth or wealth or wisdom and the claims to power that accompany them. And it lacks the celebratory voice of the poet, philosopher, or historian that can lend dignity and awe to the bearers of those genealogies. The genealogy of lesser folk presents an exact contrast to genealogies of power: it is a

---

[286] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Transgression, Equality, and Voice," <u>Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern</u>, eds. Josiah Ober and Charles Hedrick, Charles, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1996) 64.

[287]Ibid.

tale of abuse and exploitation, not of great deeds; of powerlessness, not power; of inarticulateness, not voice. A fragment from Antiphanes preserves their protest: 'not democratic' = 'unfair'. When they manage to exert power, it is only by inventing forms that pool individual weakness… But for the demos to occupy a stage hitherto reserved for heroes, kings, and nobles, it had to overcome or destroy barriers of class, status, wealth, and expertise.[288]

Nietzsche constructed a binary that split vigorous, explosive individuals from the weak herd. In his provocative polemic, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche distinguishes between "slave morality" and "master morality." Slave morality is internalized by the mild and spiritless masses who seek petty comforts and step timidly. In contrast, master morality is expressed by those who bravely take risks, who overflow with vitality, and who constantly transgress the leveling forces foisted upon them by those who resent their superiority. But when considering Ancient Greek democracy, Wolin offers the following thought: "If, in the context of Athenian politics of the fifth century, we were to turn the perspectivist trick against Nietzsche and reverse his account of the two moralities, a case might be made that transgression was crucial to the making of a democratic actor."[289] Wolin's concept of fugitive democracy can be viewed as a moment in which strength can surge forth from a legion of weaklings who link their tiny atoms of power into a force that transgresses conventions and thus issues a challenge to official authorities whose leveling forces aim to muzzle the demos.

---

[288]Ibid. 67.

[289]Ibid. 75.

Nietzsche's antipathy toward the unwashed plebs is far from unique. One might even say that it was 'common' among philosophers up until his time. Wolin ventures that it is possible to compile a picture of an autonomous-yet-collective political actor by surveying the degrading accusals that philosophers have leveled against the hoi polloi throughout history: "The signs of a presence, transgressive but anonymous, have to be sought in those who were its foes, in those who looked on the demos as the embodiment of the antipolitical and the antitheoretical."[290] Continuing, Wolin writes that "In such hostile representations of democracy as the embodiment of a barely civilized, almost raw force – the demos as Id and crude Superego – there was the suggestion of a new political presence that had succeeded in developing its own political culture. The strength of that achievement can be measured by the nature of its threat."[291] As mentioned in previous chapters, the authors of the Federalist looked upon the demos as a disorderly mob that lacked the proper finesse for handling political affairs. That contempt harks back to Plato's distaste for the unruly Many who he describes as "a multitude of stunted natures, whose souls a life of drudgery has warped and maimed no less surely than their sedentary crafts has disfigured their bodies".[292]

One method of restraining the demos' latent power is to entangle it within a mesh of laws that restrict its expression to formal procedures. Society's managers and officials need not fear the demos if its political power can be hamstrung by confining it within a

---

[290]Ibid. 75.

[291]Ibid. 76.

[292] Francis MacDonald Cornford, The Republic of Plato (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) 203 [*Rep*. 495-e].

poll booth. If Wolin's analysis is correct, then in the contemporary United States the demos' will-to-power is not expressed, but rather sublimated; its multitude of vernacular voices are not heard, but rather translated into Pew results; its actions are not untamed, but rather frozen by bureaucratic protocols; its fate is determined not by its choice, but by elections that are overdetermined by capital. As a result, "What remain[s] stillborn [is] the possibility of popular sovereignty as a will to power on the part of an actor struggling to be both collective and autonomous."[293]

This foray into Nietzsche's philosophy showcases the way in which fugitive democracy and anarchism share a commitment to empowering people by equalizing political power. Both Wolin and the anarchists argue that the state is inherently antidemocratic and coercive. Both also argue that the state cannot be reformed. Both oppose capitalism because of its authoritarian structures of power and its production of inequalities. Both offer the same breed of solutions: spontaneous, transgressive, collective action that deliberately resists organizational, bureaucratic, administrative structures while also rejecting schemes of constitutional, representative government. Anarchism and democracy also dispute the idea that individualism and collectivity are mutually-exclusive, viewing them instead as mutually-supportive. The next chapter will conclude this thesis with some final thoughts regarding Wolin's anarchism and his overall contribution to democratic theory.

---

[293] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Transgression, Equality, and Voice," <u>Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern</u>, eds. Josiah Ober and Charles Hedrick, Charles, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1996) 86.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

After reading Wolin it is easy to conclude that he is more an activist than a

theorist. In all likelihood Wolin would question that distinction given his claim that

"Political theory… is primarily a civic and secondarily an academic activity."[294] One can

glean an important insight into Wolin's perspective on his own work by considering his

belief that

> philosophy does not become 'political' simply because it treats politics in a
>
> philosophical way; it becomes political when it gives evidence of grasping what is
>
> happening to the political world. Specifically, it would mean that the starting
>
> point for even a minimalist democrat should be the recognition that, considered
>
> broadly as a political project, democracy is out of synch with or opposed by
>
> virtually every dominant tendency in the American economy, cultural life, and
>
> politics.[295]

Even though Wolin pleads the case "for that precious element of detachment"[296]

in political philosophy, he is wary of notions such as 'neutrality' and 'objectivity.' He

once excoriated "the alleged neutrality of a methodist's training" since it overlooks

philosophical assumptions that tend "to reinforce an uncritical view of existing political

---

[294] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 1.

[295] Sheldon S. Wolin, "The Liberal/Democratic Divide," Theories of Democracy: A Reader, Ronald J. Terchek and Thomas C. Conte, (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2001) 249.

[296] Sheldon S. Wolin, and John H. Schaar. "Review Essay: Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics: A Critique," American Political Science Review, 57.1 (1963): 150.

structures"[297]. This criticism follows from his opposition to the institutionalization of politics, which Wolin believes also infects political science. Despite the fact that "American political scientists have laboriously erected 'incrementalism' into a dogma and extolled its merits as a style of decision-making that is 'realistic'," it is clear that the grave maladies afflicting society "call for the most precedent-shattering and radical measures."[298] This belief leads him to conclude that the project with which today's theorist should be concerned is to "undertake the task of retrieving a receding democratic present in order to counteract even more novel forms of despotism."[299] A more specific part of that project is glimpsed in this confession: "My contention is that a principal task of democratic theory in America today is to establish a democratic critique of the welfare state."[300] That contention reflects Wolin's concern about the welfare state's lulling effect upon the mind of democratic theorists. His fear is that merely dispensing care to subjects will be regarded as sufficient to sate the need for political empowerment among the downtrodden. As we have seen, Wolin's vision of democracy is far more robust than the welfare state's clinic/outpatient dynamic. He writes that "Power is not merely something to be shared, but something to be used collaboratively in order to initiate, to invent, to bring about. A democratic critique of the welfare state is a critique of a political

---

[297] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation" The American Political Science Review, 63.4 (1969): 1064.

[298] Ibid. 1082.

[299] Sheldon S. Wolin, Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 9.

[300] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 153.

arrangement that denies this conception of democracy as political action in the most fundamental sense of using power to constitute a collaborative world."[301] This latter conception is at odds with a state which promulgates a version of democracy that is "perpetuated as philanthropic gesture, contemptuously institutionalized as welfare, and denigrated as populism."[302]

Wolin observes that for centuries the balk of political theory "assumed that for political life to exist it had to inhabit a structure of governance, a 'form' or constitution that embodied certain principles which determined its nature."[303] It is clear that Wolin's writings rebel against this assumption. His vision of fugitive democracy imagines a political mode that defies settled forms and constitutions. From these remarks readers can conclude that Wolin's approach to the vocation of theory also radiates an anarchist luster.

Though Wolin's vision of democracy is crystalline, and his critique of state power sincere, his works do not contain a bugle call that incites rebellion among those who are ostracized from official power. Judging by his writings alone, one could only conclude that Wolin believes the prospects for democracy are dim. The political theorist Robert J. Lacey detected a thread of melancholy weaving through Wolin's reflections on

---

[301]Ibid. 154.

[302] Sheldon S. Wolin, Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 571-572.

[303] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 557.

democracy.[304] Although Wolin's writings vibrate with a zest that can only come from an earnest devotion to one's topic, readers of Wolin cannot overlook his pessimistic attitude toward the likeliness of democratic revival.

To be sure, the word 'democracy' is frequently flung about in contemporary societies, and state officials often deploy the word in a tone of ringing endorsement. But in Wolin's view the frequency with which the term 'democracy' is used is not evidence of its actual presence and vibrancy, but rather of its rhetorical utility in legitimating the forms of power that have enfeebled democracy.[305] Wolin believes that those forms of power aim to inaugurate a kind of "Pavlovian democracy" that treats citizens as respondents who are conditioned to reply to "stupefying questions" that produce results such as "public opinion polls show that 60 percent of the voters believe that the president is doing a good job."[306] It is also Pavlovian in the sense that it relies on trained behavior in order to construct a "continuous managed plebiscite" whose attention is fixed around elections that operate as political extravaganzas, or in Wolin's words, a "Circus Maximus" or "political Superbowl"[307] in which the public is treated like an audience rather than participants. The ostentatious character of such displays reinforces the public's view of itself as being too unenlightened to govern.

---

[304] Robert J. Lacey, <u>American Pragmatism and Democratic Faith</u>, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2007) 171-197.

[305] Sheldon S. Wolin, <u>Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition</u>, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 601.

[306]Ibid. 590.

[307]Ibid. 554.

This view is especially inculcated when the public meets political issues with a fiscal dimension. The abstruse nature of those issues engenders a mood of resignation among the general populace. Wolin writes that the demos has been hammered "into fearful acceptance of the economy as the basic reality of its existence" – an economy so ramifying and intricate that no officials dare alter its fundamental structure - - an economy managed by mavens who posses esoteric powers far beyond the scope of ordinary people: "The pinnacle in today's drama of statecraft is the Federal Reserve Bank, where *acanae imperii* flourish: while a nation of shareholders holds its collective breath, the bank's aged oracle totters out to announce whether interest rates will be raised by 0.05 percent, lowered by 0.02 percent, or left unchanged."[308]

The drama and celebrity that is showcased in both the Chairman's proclamation and political elections serves to embed a reverence for authority among the populace. But despite the posturing of officials who wish to exude an air fit for the likes of a Seneca or Cicero, Wolin, like the anarchists, wants to show that the halo those officials don is little more than tinsel and wire. He writes that

> the ideology of authority seems little more than a defensive maneuver, a smoke-screen thrown up to conceal what no amount of Cold War triumphalism or puerile fantasies about the 'end of history' can disprove: that American political elites of the postwar era are a sorry excuse for a political class. From JFK to George Bush they have left a tawdry trail of corruption, constitutional violations, incalculable death and destruction visited upon hapless populations abroad, steadily worsening

---

[308]Ibid. 578.

racial relations, deepening class division, discreditation of the idea of public service (except for convicted felons) and, not least, a political system that large numbers of Americans wish to disown. That system desperately needs a countermyth to cover a shameful reality of a society in which politics, culture, and economy are merely mechanisms for exploiting resources, people, and values.[309]

Such an appraisal begs for a remedy, but as mentioned Wolin does not sketch a program of political transformation, nor does he trumpet a rallying cry. However, though Wolin is often melancholic, the solemnity of his remarks does not amount to a dirge. If one believes, as Wolin does, that democratic moments spring forth from deep-seated grievances, then one could expect those moments to happen more frequently as grievances become more pronounced and unallayed. Without a doubt, Wolin does perceive the current situation as becoming increasingly grievous, writing that "American society has grown more inegalitarian, more divided by extremes of wealth and poverty and of education and ignorance, more openly ruled by elites, more systematically dominated by corporate power, more retarded by a mass media that ensures political and cultural immaturity, and, in its politics, more systematically corrupted by money."[310] Wolin would also add to that list "the horrendously harsh system of criminal justice, the persistent racism, the hostility toward the aspirations of women, …the reluctance of

---

[309] Sheldon S. Wolin,"The Destructive Sixties and Postmodern Conservatism," Reassessing the Sixties: Debating the Political and Cultural Legacy, Stephen Macedo, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company. 1997) 154.

[310] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 207.

political and corporate leaders to confront ecological dangers except by proposing a

system whereby industrialists who pollute less than their assigned quota may sell that

differential to those who pollute more"[311] – and all this within a system that features "a

steady increase in mass control and surveillance."[312]

But again, despite this harsh estimation of current trends, Wolin is diffident about

encouraging full-scale revolution. One possible reason that Wolin refrains from spouting

rallying cries is because he is tepid about revolutions. Reflecting on the traditional

conception of revolution as overthrow he writes that "such a revolution, while politically

and morally justified by democratic standards for legitimate authority, is neither possible

nor prudent – if by revolution we mean launching a campaign of violent insurrection or

civil war. Revolutions of that nature are plainly pathological under contemporary

conditions of interdependence."[313] It might seem paradoxical to regard revolution as

"morally justified" and also "plainly pathological", but Wolin's point is that a full-blown

revolution would materially harm and further disempower those who sought refuge in the

revolution's promises. So instead of revolution Wolin advocates for transformation. As a

political project it is more constructive and less destructive. But even though that project

is constructive it is not necessarily harmonious. Wolin argues that "The central challenge

[311] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Political Theory: From Vocation to Invocation," Vocations of Political Theory, Frank, Jason A. and Tambonino, John. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2000) 17.

[312] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 99.

[313] Sheldon S. Wolin, "What Revolutionary Action Means Today," Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community, Chantal Mouffe, (London: Verso. 1992) 249.

at this moment is not about reconciliation but about dissonance, not about democracy's supplying legitimacy to totality but about nurturing a discordant democracy"[314]. On first pass the term 'discordant democracy' seems to bristle with a rebellious energy – the kind that might assuage the will-to-flashy self-gratification and playfulness of Nietzschean revivalists. However, the term 'discordant democracy' is not meant to suggest a shelter for, say, the 'strong poet' that Richard Rorty praises,[315] but rather a hardnosed assessment of a political landscape that courses with unpoetic hostilities. Wolin provides an unvarnished portrait of that landscape when he argues that

> Democratic possibilities depend upon combining traditional localism and postmodern centrifugalism. That task is formidable, primarily because localism is typically the site of the 'anti-modern centrifugals.' These go uncelebrated in most of the postmodern discourse about difference: the Klan, militiamen and –women, neo-Nazis, Protestant fundamentalists, would-be censors of public school libraries, champions of an 'original Constitution.' The political value of such champions of the archaic is not as bearers of truth but as provocateurs whose passionate commitments can arouse self-consciousness in the public, stimulating the latter to become aware of what they believe and of the mixed legacies that

---

[314] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 605-606.

[315] For a discussion of the ways in which Rorty borrows Harold Bloom's idea of the "strong poet", see: Richard Rorty, Contingency, irony, and solidarity, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 40-41.

compose a collective inheritance. The resulting controversies are crucial to the cause of anti-totality and its vitality.[316]

Here one finds elements of trepidation and assurance braided together in a vision of a society that is amalgamated yet perforated. Wolin would be remiss to avoid admitting the pitfalls of a democratic resurgence: it would neither behoove a scholar nor a fellow of the demos to do so. But at the same time his willingness to volunteer this monition, whether due to professional duty or political solidarity, suggests the unstated confidence of a thinker who has convinced himself that despite all its many flaws, democracy deserves the support of every fair-minded person. And since Wolin's democracy is akin to anarchism, it would follow that anarchism is equally deserving of support.

Though passages like that above do demonstrate Wolin's unwillingness to offer a playbook for political action, it is slightly disingenuous to claim that Wolin has never supplied anything like a road map. In an excerpt that deserves to be quoted at length, Wolin chalks a kind of strategy for achieving a context in which democracy can thrive:

> To be genuine, a contemporary alternative must be radical. Its radicalism consists in breaking with the dynamics of future-oriented growth. The goal is not to re-create a preindustrial arcadia, or, more crucially, not to settle for a no-growth society. Rather, the goal is a society in which growth is measured by intensity and by the proliferation of smaller forms. The conception of growth may be described

---

[316] Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004) 604.

by saying that it presupposes that growth consists in the enhancement of human experience through activity; that it exists in inverse proportion to the scale of the structures in which it occurs; and that, for the immediate future, it will be experienced mainly in the forms of divesting human life of its dependency on large and impersonal structures. At this time in history, social and political blueprints are doomed to failure. The weight and immobility of existing structures render blueprints futile. Fortunately, these structures have their vulnerabilities. Accordingly, I should like to offer not a blueprint but a strategy: the general strategy can be described as the strategy of de-structuring. Its overall purpose is to encourage individuals and groups to undertake a new form of experience, the experience of extricating themselves from dependence upon large-scale, rule-bound, bureaucratized structures and from the tempo of life that these future-oriented, exploitive organizations impose upon us. This strategy is intended as an alternative form of utopianism, but its emphasis falls upon experience rather than upon a premeditated theory, the experience of exploring and inventing new social, political, and economic forms of common endeavor while divesting oneself of the old ones. It requires a vow of hostility toward the major forms of concentrated power – political, economic, educational, and cultural – and a commitment to seeking new forms of decentralized, localized autonomy. What is at stake is a post-bureaucratic future.[317]

---

[317] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Whose Utopia?" The Universitas Project: Solutions for a Post-Technological Society, Emilio Ambasz, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art. 1972) 295.

This quote along with numerous others manifests the anarchist spirit of Wolin's output. The anarchist tinge of his work does not emerge from an esoteric reading or a hermeneutic revision, nor does it ensue from cherry-picked quotes taken out of context; rather, it is an immanent presence that explicitly exposes itself on the surface of his writings. At any rate, it is much more difficult to miss than to perceive Wolin's anarchism. Wolin's primary concern is achieving individual empowerment through collaborative activity. His vision of democracy has several, non-negotiable features which include: equality of power during political activity; collective autonomy; self-government exercised within voluntary associations that celebrate diversity and encourage dissent; a praxis of non-incorporation into bounded or stratified institutions; a defense of vernacular practices against totalizing forces; the cultivation of polymorphic social arrangements; a community of fractious and fracture-ous solidarity; fugitive mobility that aids dissimilation and thus prevents co-optation; an acephalous condition that fosters an atmosphere of egalitarianism in which individuality is celebrated; a democracy that occurs in spasms and exists more as a verb than a noun.

Any way you slice it, Wolin's work agrees with the principles of anarchism. This conclusion is not an attempt to score points for anarchism by including a venerable political theorist in its camp, but rather to reveal the striking similarities between democracy and anarchism. Such an understanding of democracy helps to clarify its meaning and lift democratic theory from the bog of state-centric thinking. At bottom Wolin is contesting the common definition of democracy because that definition is rigged to favor the state. If you start with the question of how to best organize society, or what

kind of regime best promotes democratic well-being, then you arbitrarily impose parameters that exclude a huge variety of political possibilities.

Critics might argue that Wolin is merely appropriating the word 'democracy' in order to pin a respectable moniker upon his radical vision of political life. However, it would be easier to make the case that the current system is guilty of misapplying the term 'democracy' *to itself.* After all, the Federalist Papers forthrightly condemn democracy and prescribe a Republic as an antidote to its tempestuous nature. That Republic has since misappropriated the term 'democracy' in order to adorn itself with an aura of legitimacy. As Wolin makes clear, the current system masquerades as a democracy while methodically reducing democratic input to meager paraphernalia such as voting, getting votes, polling, and getting polled. And given the fact that elections and polls are manipulated by managerial experts, they exist more as vestiges of democracy rather than a democratic presence.

This conclusion belies the fact that America was once democratic and anarchist. In his meditations on Tocqueville's work Wolin notes that democracy once flowered in America precisely because America lacked a viable state: "One looked in vain for an administrative apparatus, a large professional army, a horde of officials, mountains of records, and a society whose members were conditioned to look toward the center. America was a land where there was little evidence of the state's existence."[318] In those days "Tocqueville remarked that he could not imagine America becoming an

---

[318] Sheldon S. Wolin, The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 80.

unequalitarian society; [whereas] today it would be difficult to imagine it becoming

equalitarian."[319] In Wolin's view, American democracy was the strongest when the U.S.

government was at its weakest. Nowadays, American democracy is at its weakest while

the nexus of U.S. state and corporate power is at its strongest – a nexus that quells

democracy with a combination of meritocracy and managerialism, surveillance and

control, and the "redefinition of national interest to include outer space" which entails

"the claim that violence in interstellar regions is justifiable in defending and advancing

that interest."[320]

The United States' ambitions have grown to epic proportions, blending a military

program of "full-spectrum dominance"[321] with aspirations of galactic imperialism[322] - not

to mention recent revelations exposing the National Security Agency's secret alliance

with telecommunications corporations to monitor their customers,[323] which one can fairly

suspect is the risen phoenix of the now defunct 'Total Information Awareness'

---

[319] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy, Difference, and Re-Cognition," Political Theory, 21.3 (1993): 466.

[320] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Violence and the Western Political Tradition," The Future of Peace in the Twenty-First Century, Dr. Nicholas N. Kittrie, KStJ, H. E. Rodrigo Carazo, H. E. James R. Mancham, KBE. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press. 2003) 142.

[321] A discussion of "full-spectrum dominance" is contained within the United States Department of Defense's *Joint Vision 2020,* which can be viewed here: 06 Jun. 2013.http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/doctrine/genesis_and_evolution/source_materials/joint_vision_2020.pdf

[322] For a discussion of this topic, see the United States Space Command Vision for 2020: 06 Jun. 2013 http://www.fas.org/spp/military/docops/usspac/visbook.pdf

[323] Glenn Greenwald, "NSA Collecting Phone Records of Millions of Verizon Customers Daily," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 05 June 2013. Web. 10 June 2013.

program.[324] Atop this system sits a President who was propelled to power by a billion-dollar election campaign.[325] Taken together these trends amass to shape a system of power in which democratic possibilities seem bleak. When faced with such a vast power, fugitive democracy marks an advantageous mutation in the evolution of democratic theory, for it develops a conception of democracy that enables collaborative activity to occur without relying upon or being co-opted by institutional power. In the context of inverted totalitarianism, fugitive democracy's virtue is its fleetness – its ability to escape the antidemocratic forces that strive to arrest it. Like anarchism, fugitive democracy is fully conscious of the need to continually repel forces that would smother it. And fugitive democracy, like anarchism, is not intended as a 'workable model' of government, but rather a strategy of collaboration that defies the imposition of governmental models.

In response to political scientists who claim that democracy makes "excessive demands" upon the "real world" which cannot function without mass subordination to technocratic expertise, and who argue that the current system is the best of all possible systems for maximizing democratic input, Wolin asks, "Is it possible that in this genial, Panglossian twilight Minerva's owl is beginning to falter as it speeds over a real world" that aches with inequality, where the unprivileged are "increasingly discordant" and are "beginning to voice demands and hopes that are 'unreasonably high'? Perhaps it is

---

[324] Jeffrey Rosen. "Total Information Awareness."*New York Times Magazine*. New York Times, 15 Dec. 2002.

[325]Nicholas Confessore and Joe Craven McGinty, "Obama, Romney and Their Parties on Track to Raise $2 Billion," New York Times, October 25, 2012.

possible, especially if we remember that according to Greek statuary, Minerva's pet was

a screech-owl, for a screech is the noise both of warning and of pain."[326]

---

[326] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation" The American Political Science Review, 63.4 (1969): 1082.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbey, Edward. *One Life at a Time Please*. New York: Holt Publishing. 1988.

Arac, Jonathan, ed. *After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges*.

New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 1988.

Aristotle. *Politics*. Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc. 2000.

Bakunin, Mikhail. *God and the State*. Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc. 1970.

Berkman, Alexander. *What is Anarchism?* Oakland: AK Press. 2003.

Bilakovics, Steven. *Democracy Without Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

2012.

Bookchin, Murray. *Remaking Society*. Montreal: Black Rose Books. 1998.

Brown, L. Susan. *The Politics of Individualism*. Montreal: Black Rose Books. 2002.

Christie, Stuart. *Granny Made Me an Anarchist: General Franco, The Angry Brigade
and Me*. Oakland: AK Press. 2007.

Chomsky, Noam. *Government in the Future*. New York: Seven Stories Press. 2005.

Confessore, Nicholas, and Joe Craven McGinty.“Obama, Romney and Their Parties on

Track to Raise $2 Billion.”*New York Times* [New York] 25 Oct 2012, n. pag.

Web. 12 Jun. 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/26/us/politics/obama-and-

romney-raise-1-billion-each.html?_r=0

Cornford, Francis MacDonald. *The Republic of Plato*. New York: Oxford University

Press. 1964.

Estes III, Howell M., Edward G. Anderson III, David L. Vesely, and K. A.

Laughton.“United States Space Command Vision for 2020.” Federation of

American Scientists, 06 Jun 2013. Web. 12 Jun 2013.

http://www.fas.org/spp/military/docops/usspac/visbook.pdf

Foucault, Michel. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*.

Ed. Donald F. Bourchard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1977.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction: Volume 1*. New York:

Vintage Books. 1990.

Goldman, Emma. *Anarchism and Other Essays*. Mineola: Dover. 1969.

Greenwald, Glenn. "NSA Collecting Phone Records of Millions of Verizon Customers

Daily."*The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 05 Jun 2013. Web. 12 Jun

2013. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jun/06/nsa-phone-records-verizon-

court-order

Guerin, Daniel. *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

1970.

Guerin, Daniel. *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism*. Oakland: AK Press.

2005.

Habermas, Jurgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2: Lifeworld and

System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston: Beacon Press. 1985.

Hamilton, Alexander, Madison, James and Jay, John.*The Federalist Papers*. New York:

Mentor. 1961.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Indianapolis: Hackett. 1994.

Kropotkin, Peter. *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*. Mineola: Dover

Publishing, Inc. 2002.

Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Vision 2020." United States Department of Defense, 30 May 2000. Web. 12 Jun 2013.

http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/doctrine/genesis_and_evolution/source_materials/joint_vision_2020.pdf

Lacey, Robert J. *American Pragmatism and Democratic Faith*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press. 2008.

Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich. *Essential Works of Lenin: What is to Be Done? And Other Writings*. Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc. 1978.

Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*. New York: Mentor. 1960.

Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich.*The Marx-Engels Reader*.2nd Edition. Robert C. Tucker. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. 1978.

Maximoff, G. P. *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*. Glencoe: Free Press of Glencoe. 1964.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. New York: The Modern Library. 1992.

Proudhon, Pierre-Joseph.*What is Property?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1994.

Ranciere, Jacques. *Hatred of Democracy*. New York: Verso. 2009.

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 1971.

Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1989.

Rosen, Jeffrey. "Total Information Awareness."*New York Times Magazine*. 15 Dec 2002:

    n. page. Web. 12 Jun. 2013.

    http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/15/magazine/15TOTA.html

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques.*The Basic Political Writings*. Indianapolis: Hackett. 1988.

Russell, Bertrand. *Proposed Roads to Freedom: Socialism, Anarchism & Syndicalism*.

    Rockville: Arc Manor. 2008.

Scott, James C. *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and*

    Meaningful Work and Play. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2012.

Sheldon S., Wolin. "A Kind of Fascism Is Replacing our Democracy ."*Newsday* [Long

    Island] 18 07 2003.

Stirner, Max. *The Ego and His Own: The Case of the Individual Against Authority*.

    Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc. 2005.

The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates: The Clashes and

    Compromises that Gave Birth to Our Form of Government. Ralph Ketcham. New

    York: Signet. 1986.

The Invisible Committee. *The Coming Insurrection*. Los Angeles: semiotext(e). 2009.

de Tocqueville, Alexis. *Oevures completes*. Ed. J. P. Mayer. Paris: Gallimard. 1951.

Tucker, Benjamin .*Instead of a Book by a Man Too Busy to Write One: A Fragmentary*

    Exposition of Philosophical Anarchism. Chestnut Hill: Adamant Media

    Corporation. 2000.

Ward, Colin. *Anarchy in Action*. London: Freedom Press. 1988.

West, Cornel. "Afterword."Theory & Event. 10.1. (2007).

Wolin, Sheldon S. *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Wolin, Sheldon S. *The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and Constitution*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1989.

Wolin, Sheldon S. *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Expanded Edition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2004.

Wolin, Sheldon S. *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2001.

Wolin, Sheldon S. *Hobbes and the Epic Tradition of Political Theory*. Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library. 1970.

Wolin, Sheldon S..“Fugitive Democracy.”*Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* . Seyla Benhabib. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. 31-45.

Wolin, Sheldon S..“On the Theory and Practice of Power.”

Wolin, Sheldon S. “Agitated Times.” *parallax*. 11.4 (2005): 2-11.

Wolin, Sheldon S. “Beyond Marxism and Monetarism.” *Nation*. 19 1990: 372-.

Wolin, Sheldon S. “Democracy & Counterrevolution: Powerlessness is not an Unintended but a Calculated Consequence of the System.” *Nation*. 22, Apr., 1996: 22-24.

Wolin, Sheldon S. “Democracy: Electoral and Athenian.” *Political Science and Politics*. 26.3 (1993): 475-477.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Democracy in the Discourse of Postmodernism." *Social Research*.

    57.1 (1990): 5-30.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Democracy, Difference, and Re-Cognition." *Political Theory*. 21.3

    (1993): 464-483.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Hannah Arendt: Democracy and the Political." *Hannah Arendt:*

    Critical Essays. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman. Albany: State

    University of New York Press, 1994.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Inverted Totalitarianism: How the Bush Regime is Effecting the

    Transformation to a Fascist-like State." *Nation*. 19, May, 2003: 13-14.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Book Review: Lord Acton: A Study in Conscience and Politics by

    Gertrude Himmelfarb." *The Western Political Quarterly*. 8.4 (1955): pp. 636-637.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Max Weber: Legitimation, Method, and the Politics of Theory."

    Political Theory. 9.3. (1981): 401-424.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Book Review: Political Thought in England: Tyndale to Hooker by

    Christopher Morris." *The Western Political Quarterly*. 7.2 (1954): 305-306.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Television: The Ideas That Led To the Events of 1968." *New York*

    Times [New York] 26 07 1998.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "The Destructive Sixties and Postmodern Conservatism."*Reassessing*

    the Sixties: Debating the Political and Cultural Legacy. Stephen Macedo. New

    York: W.W. Norton & Company. 1997.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Book Review: The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History by Isaiah Berlin." *The Western Political Quarterly*. 7.3 (1954): 485-486.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "The Liberal/Democratic Divide." *Theories of Democracy: A Reader*. Ronald J. Terchek and Thomas C. Conte. Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2001.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Violence and the Western Political Tradition." *The Future of Peace in the Twenty-First Century*. Dr. Nicholas N. Kittrie, KStJ, H. E. Rodrigo Carazo, H. E. James R. Mancham, KBE. Durham: Carolina Academic Press. 2003.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Book Review: Voltaire and the State by Constance Rowe." *The American Political Science Review*. 50.3. (1956): 870-872.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "What Revolutionary Action Means Today." *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community*. Chantal Mouffe. London: Verso. 1992.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Whose Utopia?" *The Universitas Project: Solutions for a Post-Technological Society*. Emilio Ambasz. New York: The Museum of Modern Art. 1972.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Book Review: Why Dictators?: The Cuases and Forms of Tyrannical Rule since 600 B.C. George W. F. Hallgarten.*The Western Political Science Quarterly*. 8.2 (1955): 312-313.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Richard Hooker and English Conservatism." *Political Research Quarterly*. 6.28 (1953): 28-47.

Botwinick, Aryeh, and William E. Connolly.*Democracy and Vision: Sheldon Wolin and the Vicissitudes of the Political*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Wolin, Sheldon S., and John H. Schaar. "Review Essay: Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics: A Critique." *American Political Science Review*. 57.1 (1963): 125-150.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Politics and Religion: Luther's Simplistic Imperative" *The American Political Science Review*. 50.1 (1956): 24-42.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Political Theory as a Vocation" *The American Political Science Review*. 63.4 (1969): 1062-1082.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Hume and Conservatism." *The American Political Science Review*. 48.4 (1954): 999-1016.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "The Politics of Self-Disclosure." *Political Theory*. 4.3 (1976): 321-334.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "The Politics of the Study of Revolution." *Comparative Politics*. 5.3 (1973): 343-358.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Political Theory: From Vocation to Invocation" *Vocations of Political Theory*. Frank, Jason A. and Tambonino, John. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2000.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Transgression, Equality, and Voice." *Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern*. Ober, Josiah and Hedrick, Charles. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1996.

Thesis and Dissertation Services