Resisting the Revenge of the Romantic Hegel: a Reply to Werner Binder's Essay on *Power in Modernity: Agency Relations and the Creative Destruction of the King's Two Bodies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020)

Isaac Ariail Reed[1]

How does one thank a writer whose understanding of one's own book runs deep, whose perspicacity is undeniable, and whose disagreements are of such consequence? Only by engaging in debate, I think.

Werner Binder grasps what is at stake in *Power in Modernity: Agency Relations and the Creative Destruction of the King's Two Bodies,* and he has issued a challenge that rests on two pillars: a Hegelian political philosophy of recognition and reason in modernity, and a Durkheimian account of egalitarian (or proto-egalitarian) bonds of solidarity. Atop these two pillars Binder artfully entablatures, as both a counterpoint to and re-articulation of the theory of power I am developing, an account of impersonal egalitarianism as not simply a modern possibility, but rather modernity's essential dynamic or even telos.

Binder's careful reply operates in both an analytic and a normative register, and as such articulates in its criticisms one of the central enthusiastic pretensions of *Power in Modernity*. Throughout the book, and especially in its last chapter, I consider a set of intellectual problems and projects that are held in common by sociological theory and political philosophy—though not without tension and ambivalence. These complexities perhaps explain why his review can be both a sympathetic reconstruction of my book—notable in its hermeneutic charity—and yet also an outline for a social and political theory that is quite different from my own.

Binder accepts the theoretical terms of art developed in part I—*rector*, *actor*, *other*, and *project*. He also finds convincing my rendering of chains of power and their representation in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century North America, Britain, and France in terms of the "King's Two Bodies." He agrees, in other words, that the

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✉ Isaac Ariail Reed
    iar2c@virginia.edu

[1]   University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, USA

theory of chains of power and their representation provides an entrée into the study of transitions to modernity. And yet, in Binder's view, my book sidelines the impersonal and egalitarian dimensions of social life—within and without the civil sphere (Alexander, 2006). Furthermore, Binder thinks that this (supposed) sidelining puts me at odds with—or marks an incomplete engagement with—Hegel's philosophy.

Having explicated the Hegelian and Weberian backgrounds for the terms of art I deploy, and registered his objections, Binder turns to contemporary political culture in the USA and in Europe—specifically the rise of populism and conspiracy thinking. Though he may not have intended this, in so doing, Binder has contextualized my book in terms of the environs of its author, in a way that I myself could not. The research for the book had been ongoing for most of the second decade of this century, but its writing took its final form in the between 2017 and 2019 in Charlottesville, Virginia, immediately after the "Unite the Right" rallies and violence. Here, the subtlety and generosity with which Binder has reconstructed the theory in the book create a (perhaps rare) academic opportunity for significant and even sharp debate amidst a very high level of mutual understanding. Our theoretical differences having been laid bare, some differences in the diagnosis of the present can be articulated as well.

In what follows, I begin with Dr. Binder's perspicacious reading of the Weberian and Hegelian elements of *Power in Modernity,* expanding that account via reference to two other major influences on the book: Hannah Arendt and Orlando Patterson. I then position the book's arguments against Binder's own theoretical alternative, which I understand to be a romantic Hegelian account of recognition, buoyed by an interpretation of Durkheim's ontology of the social. I try to solidify my position somewhat by considering what, exactly, social and political theory should take from Hegel with regards to *Herrschaft* and modernity. I then show how these theoretical differences play out vis-à-vis commentary on the contemporary phenomena of populism and conspiracy thinking. In my conclusion, I counterpose the theoretical imagery or root metaphor for social life that animates *Power in Modernity* with the image that animated certain theories of modernity in a previous generation.

Weber and Hegel… and Patterson and Arendt?

Max Weber was *such* an important reference point for the text that his work suffuses the entire question of "power" as I understand it. Indeed, it might even be fair to call my position "heterodox Weberian." Binder correctly grasps the amendments or reforms to Weber's theory that I propose: first, an analytical addition of the discursive and performative dimensions of power (as well as the modified discussion of materiality that Binder reconstructs); second, a different account of modernity, one whose emphasis bends away from rationalization and disenchantment and towards the fragmentation—and *continuation, perhaps even proliferation*—of the sacred in the making and unmaking of power in modernity; third, a proposed synthesis between a political sociology of rule and logistics, and those accounts of power that understand alterity as constitutive of power relations. Binder is also correct that my understanding of

the English term "power" owes a great deal to Weber's *Herrschaft* (which I suppose I would translate as "rule") and to Hegel's dialectic of *Herr* and *Knecht*, in my pursuit of a cultural version of Weber's probabilistic approach to power.

However, I would like to note that my language of rector, actor, other, and project opens onto—though does not, as of yet, fully articulate—a theory of the variable intertwining of power and *authority.* That is to say that, because the theory is designed to account for struggles for recognition and redistribution as always already struggles over *authorship and the recognition of authorship,* the neologisms of the theory are intended to allow for the empirical study of this intertwining, while refusing to reduce authority to only the legitimation of power. In this sense, the theory presented in part I of *Power in Modernity* is a theory of power, grounded in a language game that opens onto a broader, more supple, and yet-to-be-developed theory of violence, power, and authority. Thus, my book asks its reader to carefully consider why and how "power" seems to mark out not only a point of focus for critical theory, but also, disturbingly, the limits of its thought; and so my text opens onto understandings of authority--including critiques of rectitude itself (Cavarero 2016)-- that exceed what is easily grasped in the sociology of power.[1]

In this regard, it seems worthwhile to note that while Weber wrote with great perspicacity about *legitime Herrschaft,* he rarely used the term *Autorität.* It is from grappling with this textual fact—and with the different English translations of Weber that have shaped American sociology for more than eighty years—that I arrived at the idea, expressed early in the book, that "somewhere between Arendt and Weber lies something quite interesting: the grasping of power in hierarchy that is not reducible to violence but creates more resistance to itself (and perhaps precipitates the reversibility of power relations) than does pure authority. This 'in-between space' is where relations that obtain between rector, actor, and other are subject to tremendous historical variation." (Reed, 2020: 71) I would venture that the mention of Hannah Arendt here is significant, and invites a slightly different reading of the book than Binder has pursued, particularly since, while Weber usually demurred from using the term *Autorität,* the same cannot be said for the hermeneutic tradition in social thought more broadly. "Authority" is central not only for Arendt, but also for Hans-Georg Gadamer. And so, the text is animated by Hannah Arendt's melancholy modernism (Benhabib, 2003),[2] which suggests, on the one hand, that the possibility of a balance of "power" and "authority" in the making of the polity has evaporated in the modern age, and yet maintains, on the other, that the very possibility of criticizing social and political arrangements in a clear and efficacious way, depends for its feasibility on an understanding of authority as analytically separable from power, even after the "rise of the social" (Arendt, 1956, 1961, 1979, 1998, 2006).

Binder also notes that, in theorizing power, I seek to replace a formal Simmelian dyad ("empowered" and "disempowered," or "principal" and "agent") with a Simmelian triad

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[1] I owe to Paul North this phrasing of how *Power in Modernity* both offers a theory of power and renders a criticism of theories of power. North's (2015) own understanding of these issues flourishes in his text *The Yield: Kafka's Atheological Reformation.*

[2] It is of interest that Benhabib's reconstruction of Arendt's political theory was published in Germany as *Hannah Arendt—Die melancholische Denkerin der Moderne.*

of rector, actor, and other. He explains that, in my theory, "enemy and slave constitute the poles of a spectrum of imaginations of the other" and, then, "we can also think of rector-actor relations located on a spectrum of partial recognition, where slavery occupies the pole of non-recognition." Yet, it is worth noting that the theorist I draw upon the most for this revision of Weber—Orlando Patterson—has issued a profound challenge to Hegelian dialectics. The tension between that challenge and the importance of Hegel's writings to my work animated the process of writing *Power in Modernity,* especially chapters one—where I set out in the most abstract way my conceptual model of power—and five—where I provide a sociohistory of the transformation of colonial Virginia into a slave society in the seventeenth century.

In his classic text *Slavery and Social Death* (1982)*,* Patterson challenges that aspect of Hegel's dialectic that focuses on the inauthenticity, for the *Herr,* of recognition that comes from the *Knecht*. This challenge has two parts. First, Patterson notes rather bluntly that, in actual slave societies, "the master could and usually did achieve the recognition he needed from other free persons, including other masters." (1982: 99) Second, he notes that among the "small and important minority" of slave societies in which there were only masters and slaves (e.g., in the "total slave systems of the Caribbean and the equally brutal though isolated instance of Dutch East Indian slavery in the Banda group of the Spice Islands"), the Hegelian "crisis of recognition" began to obtain, only to be jettisoned. In these societies, *either* masters "abandoned all claims to honor and any attempt to develop a timocratic culture," thereby accepting that slavery degraded both master and slave, *or* "the successful master, as soon as he made his fortune, would pack up and flee the degraded source of his wealth," seeking recognition in the free metropoles of Europe. And so, Patterson arrives at a triadic theory of how order and domination are articulated in those societies in which the radical alterity of slavery obtained.

By criticizing Hegel's dialectic, Patterson explains, "we arrive at an extremely important, if paradoxical, conclusion about the nature of slave-based timocratic cultures… slave culture, if it is to avoid the crisis of honor and recognition, must have a substantial free population…a society with only masters and slaves cannot sustain a slave culture." (1982: 100, emphasis added) Power thus articulates with cultural order via a triadic positioning, demanding a retheorization of the dyad of *Herr* and *Knecht* at the most fundamental, philosophical level. In slave societies, the durability of institutions and understandings depended upon on the existence of a category of person understood as neither master nor slave. This category becomes the vital middle term, or Simmelian third, whose recognition of the masters as rectors and the enslaved as others constitutes the relationship between domination and order in those societies.[3] (Hence rector, actor, other.) In my view, the abstract

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[3] An important criticism of my text, and in particular its method of theorizing from extremes for bringing together Weberian political sociology with the theorization of alterity in radical social theory, has emerged in conversations with various colleagues and interlocutors, and especially with Yingyao Wang and Feyza Akova, since the publication of the book. The criticism is that in considering radical formats of alterity, the theory does not examine sufficiently the complex way in which the 'other' of power relations may be other, and coded as such, without being radically profaned. In particular, in so far as the peasantry and its transformation come to be seen as central to the spiritual life of a society in transitions to modernity, there may be a way in which other is neither enemy, nor slave, nor scapegoat, nor invisible, but rather both within and without the polity simultaneously. I see this as commensurate

arguments that animate *Slavery and Social Death* offer significant insights about power in general, beyond the specific societies Patterson studies therein.[4]

The Revenge of the Romantic Hegel and the Collectivist Durkheim

I take the essence of Binder's critique to be contained in sentences like the following from his essay:

> Ultimately, Reed's theory of power is built around the conception of hierarchical rector-actor relations, which not only excludes forms of power inscribed in the subject, such as Foucault's disciplinary power, but also makes it difficult to grasp trans-subjective, collective or impersonal sources and orders of power.

> Although Reed frequently employs a Durkheimian terminology, speaking of 'enchantments' and the 'sacred', their use is strangely free-floating, cut off from the life of collectivities and not really integrated into his theoretical account.

> *Power in Modernity* exemplifies [the conception of culture as a symbolic environment], with actors and their projects navigating cultural landscapes, which provide a background for the chains of power they form. This individualistic, or better: relational, account of social life is much closer to Weber than to Durkheim, with his [Durkheim's] strong emphasis on collectivity and the autonomy of cultural forms. Indeed, Durkheim's characterization of the sacred as an attracting and repelling force suggests a kind of cultural agency that cannot be found in Reed's model, albeit in some of his thick descriptions and examples.

Binder thinks these exclusions from my theory of power are particularly consequential for thinking about the unfinished project of modernity. He then posits a very different way of pursuing that project. He embraces Hegel's Spirit-centered philosophy of history culminating in the "*I* that is *we* and the *we* that is *I*" and connects this to "collectivity in the strong sense as it is exemplified in the works of Émile Durkheim." Drawing on Terry Pinkard's reading of Hegel, according to which in modernity, "rational, self-conscious life" becomes sacred in the specific sense of what a "community…takes as authoritative for itself," he connects this to Durkheim's quite substantive-realist understanding of "the social."

Footnote 3 (continued)

with the arguments in *Power in Modernity,* because it affords an examination of the *production* of others in modernity, as well as a different way into the question of how something like a 'great chain of being' understanding of the link between cosmos and polity was disrupted by modern revolutions. (Walzer 1982)

[4] Patterson is not the only place where this departure from *Herr* and *Knecht* to something more triadic can be found. Simmel, too, works to theorize actor as different than other (see *Power in Modernity,* pp. 11–12, n. 4). More broadly, the Black radical tradition, in both its Caribbean- and US-centered variants, operates in such a triadic manner, for example in Du Bois' rearticulation of Marx's analysis of modernity into capitalist, white worker, and black worker (2007: 1–43, 195–266). From Patterson in particular, however, can be drawn both the idea of "social death" as an ideal–typical instance of profaned alterity, as well as his grounding of even the most radical formats of power relations in a social theory of projects, counter-projects, and public recognition (see *Power in Modernity,* pp. 24–25).

Though Binder admits that my analysis of the King's Two Bodies as a totemic representation of sacred centrality artfully combines insights from Weber and Durkheim, he wants to move not only towards a Durkheimian emergentist ontology of the social, but also towards an ontology whose very emergence is articulated *in the singular philosophical history of Spirit,* according to which the "often egalitarian, impersonal and value-laden character of modern power relations and legitimate social order" are the historical terminus of the elaboration of Spirit in the world. Indeed, to quote the review of Hegel by Robert Brandom upon which Binder leans, in this view, "only one big thing ever happened in the history of the world…. the characteristically modern insight…that norms are not, as traditional forms of life implicitly took them to be, independent of the subjective normative attitudes of concept users." (Brandom, 2008: 162)

For Binder, then, "reflexivity and reason-giving" compose the modern sacred. And yet he knows that this cannot be speculatively posited; the core insights of Hegel must somehow be translated into a language that can provide for historical sociology some kind of empirical purchase on the last 500 years of human existence. Binder's argument, then, is that *if* we include a strong notion of impersonal and horizontal power, we would find this purchase. Then, both the Foucauldian relations of discipline and subject formation that he (incorrectly) concludes my model does not have room for, and also the "horizontal forms of power" that are "constitutive for the civil sphere" come into view. Indeed, for him, Durkheim and Foucault appear as two sides of the same insight—one concerned with egalitarian solidarity, the other with the capillary making and unmaking of subjects absent any obvious rectors or hierarchical relations.[5] He then insists that both of these projects for theory are underwritten by his reading of Hegel's philosophy of Spirit, in which the iron cage of capitalist and bureaucratic rationality is but the fallen version of the "grand project of the world spirit," namely "freedom."

It is heady stuff, and Binder is quite right that my book specifically avoids certain formulations that would point in the direction he is urging. There are two reasons for this.

The Contradictions of Hegelian Modernity

The first reason is that I think Binder's position produces entanglements and contradictions of which he is only partially aware. On the one hand, Binder cites Robert Brandom approvingly, and thus articulates his position in terms of a broadly pragmatist Hegel, invested in the way in which a spirit of trust in modernity—or in a social formation that supersedes "alienated" modernity—can come from the reflexive recognition that binding norms are of human making. In Brandom's world, the alienation of modernity, associated with the triumph of subjectivity, must be overcome through a further process in the dialectic, wherein the very recognition of the contingency of norms (contingent in the sense that they are of human making rather that "naturally" *in the world*) leads to a

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[5] I do not think this reading of Foucault is correct. But this would lead to another debate that would require another essay

reassertion of our obligations to each other. It is worth noting that, in this world, the "free-floating" tendency of signification is in fact the *premise* for the kind of binding by norms that would produce a spirit of trust, because in this rendering the very ability of humans to operate on signs with freedom and reason is what produces the moral obligations that will take social life beyond the alienation of modern subjectivism (Brandom, 2019; Testa, 2020).

And yet, *at the same time,* Binder does not want these signifiers to float so free, and that is because he wants to have his pragmatic Hegel and yet also hold onto the romantic Hegel. He wants to insist that when signifiers float free, they lose their thick meaning, and in so doing, make community—and thereby something like a just society that can contain individualism, selfishness, and instrumentality—impossible. In other words, Binder wants to have Charles Taylor's Hegel too—he wants to have not only totemic signification, but also totemic signification that is binding because it comes from the collectivity, which acts with Durkheimian "force" on the individual mind. But Taylor's communitarian reading of Hegel requires precisely the maintenance of totemic signs that are both mysterious and *not* "free-floating." For Taylor (and for Binder, when he is in Taylorian mode), the advent of the impersonal world in modernity induces the loss of *Gemeinschaft* and *Sittlichkeit,* and only by creating strong national identities can mass societies hope to function democratically. As Taylor puts it in his critique of Brandom:

> Democratic republics require a very definite sense of identity: Americans, Canadians, Québécois, German, French, and so on. Why? Well, because the very nature of democracy, for several reasons, requires this strong commitment: it requires participation in voting, participation in paying taxes, participation in going to war, if there is conscription. If there is to be redistribution, there has to be a very profound solidarity to motivate these transfers from more to less fortunate. Democracy therefore requires a strong common identity. (Taylor, 2020: 205).

There is clearly a contradiction here. How to think about it? How to sublate it? I would point out to Binder that this dilemma—staged here as the choice between the more pragmatic Hegel, oriented towards Kant and recognizably Habermasian, on the one hand, and the communitarian and romantic Hegel, on the other hand—is itself dependent upon a theory of modernity that I attempt to dispute in the book. That is, it depends upon an account of modernity as a world stripped of "all the old illusions," and in particular, modernity as a world defined by the disenchanted contest between *Zweckrationalität* and *Wertrationalität.*

In this regard, there is great distance between Binder and myself. To be sure, in Weber's own writings, the struggle between *Zweckrationalität* and *Wertrationalität* is the central dynamic of modernity. This strand of Weber's work came to fruition, in the twentieth century, in Habermas' "unfinished project of modernity" (and in particular, his now-classic text *Between Facts and Norms*). For Habermas, the Weber question for social theory was: given the vast spread of rationalization, instrumentalized logics of action, and bureaucratic machinery, how can *value rationality* be extracted from modern regimes of truth, and enacted in public life?

Thus, *Zweckrationalität* versus *Wertrationalität* is the modern contradiction that "elaborates" itself in a Hegelian way (Habermas, 1984, 1996).

I understand the modern condition (and its contradictions) differently. Modernity involves the radical enhancement of both capacities for violence and the mobility of capital in the context of multiple overlapping meaning-systems. The plurality of meaning-systems means that *power* cannot be contained or held to account by a *single* sacred authority—but the loss of singularity ("Christendom") does not mean the loss of meaning or effectiveness of (various) sacred authorities. Rather, under modern conditions, the human search for meaning is *unleashed,* allowed to engage in an existential searching. This searching, whose basic ontological condition is what Arendt called *natality,* is—especially when living "in the torrent" of modernity (Calasso, 1983)—prone towards volatility, converting sacred into profane and vice-versa at a dizzying rate. In modernity, a plurality of sacred significations race through a networked globe. Under such conditions, the problem of *binding authority*—that is, what binds actor to rector, relative to a given project—becomes both urgent and vexing; modernity is a "world in which the renderings of what makes action right, what makes violence justified, and what provides the ultimate legitimation for power—renderings of sovereignty—have lost none of their sacred qualities, but much of their certainty." (Reed, 2020: 227)

Another way to put the difference between myself and Dr. Binder, then, is as follows. I want to use Arendt to ask how it is that one might be able to *judge* a delegation that is authorized, and thereby separate it from one that embodies domination; in so doing, I want to provide a frame for articulating *human judgment* with and within the relations that are the focus of Weber's political sociology. A core premise of my investigations in this regard is the proliferation of agency chains, and agency problems, all over the world as a feature of the political economy of the last 500 years (Adams 2011); the question then becomes how, via myth and enchantment, these agency relations are given stability or, alternately, disrupted, and to what effect?

In contrast, Dr. Binder wants to rescue Weber's bleak world of hierarchical relations with the warm coziness of horizontal Durkheimian solidarity. There are a variety of ways to pursue this project—one might say that Habermas' rationalist-pragmatic interpretation of Durkheim is one, and Alexander's culturalist interpretation of Durkheim another. I grant Binder that the theoretical world of *Power in Modernity* is Weberian in its bleak outlook; but I wish to defend the bleak Weberian world of hierarchy I have presented both in its empirical purchase *and* in its ability to generate critique, rather than insisting we must find elsewhere a radically different, and radically good, counterworld of egalitarian authority that finally (once we have discovered it?) can measure up to "power."

Thus, the socially distributed imagination of the good rector, in various ways, can indeed be important for the authoritative regulation of social relations; it is by articulating the distance between the totemic representation and the actual person or groups (e.g., between the office of the Presidency and the man who is president) that power (might) be held to account. But this is not really a matter of *conscience collective*, but rather a question of the sacralization of signs and their inflection of projects and counter-projects. Arendt's (1956, 1961) writings on authority—and

Kantorowicz's (1997 [1957]) work on the King's Two Bodies—provide the basis for thinking about this. Arendt and Kantorowicz provide, then, a way out (different from collectivist ontology), from Weber's relegation of the luminous sacred to the irruptions of charismatic authority. Their indebtedness to Weber is only equaled by their departure from his work.

The Proliferation of Myths and Projects, Among Which the Left Hegelian Project Is but One

In *Power in Modernity,* I arrive at the conclusion that modernity, or at least "modern political culture," should be thought of as a negative space created in the political imagination by the destruction of the King's Two Bodies as a way to seal together agency relations. Into this negative space rush multiple ways of signing and sealing together rector and actor, and excluding and/or exploiting other. Hence, modernity is the world of too many rectors, too many projects, and too many others.[6]

These multiple ways of signing and sealing include wildly different discursive formations, myths, world-images, and so on. In other words, the *agency problems* (how can rector get actor to act as rector's agent, in pursuit of a project?) and the *constitutive exclusions* (how are rector and actor bound together by their encoding of other as profane?) of *power* are addressed—shored up, reconstituted, re-rendered—via *culture* in multiple ways; it is the task of the historical-hermeneutic sciences to trace them and understand their inner workings and various consequences. This is my debt to cultural sociology as a way to understand politics in general and the specific capacities and tendencies of the modern state in particular, though the problems of politics as agency problems were developed not by cultural sociologists but by political economists.

I am certainly willing to admit that the intellectual and political project to which Binder refers—a project that we may name as "left Hegelian"—enters into the space of struggle vacated by the destruction of the King's Two Bodies as a way of "doing politics." I will also admit that the long history of left-Hegelian political articulations was not as much of a focus of chapter eight of *Power in Modernity* as it could have been.[7]

However, that which Binder identifies as *the* theorization of the sociohistory of modernity, namely, the transformation of the world spirit in a direction simultaneously egalitarian, solidaristic, and reflexive-rational, is but one of many regulative meta-projects in the pluralistic world of modernity. Presumably, in Binder's telling, it refers

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[6] That modernity produces "too many rectors" in the sense of "every citizen a rector" as the unattainable but regulative telos of democratic politics, is the a central point of discussion in chapters 5 through 8 of *Power in Modernity.* That modernity also produces "too many others" is an implication of the book, whose shadow bibliography surely includes Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* (2000) as well as Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993).

[7] We are all presumably aware of the knock-down, drag-out contests in academic discourse as to whether the left Hegelian project is fundamentally "rational" or fundamentally "mystical." (The same debates were had about "philosophy and myth in Karl Marx.") But, as is perhaps obvious by now, my point is different.

to something like the social democratic articulation of state and society that we might find in T.H. Marshall, or at least, to the opening of the cultural space from which one might criticize actually existing relations between state, economy, and society as insufficiently just or failing to embody the obligations entailed by a rational scheme of redistribution.

Intellectually, this project has a way of reading history, an understanding of social causality, and a set of normative commitments. The intellectuals who identify with this project can find instances where it can be credibly claimed that this project comes into the world, via "the sleight of mind" to which Binder refers in his essay. For example, one might claim that certain actual state projects (e.g., the project to end homelessness in Finland; the project to accept war refugees in Germany), draw their authorization from the intellectual space opened up by the left Hegelians' understanding of "modernity" and "human freedom." But *even if* we engage in this level of sympathetic reconstruction of what Binder is really claiming, and *even if* we grant that many of the movements and double movements of modern politics might be interpreted (capaciously) as within "the dialectic" in this way, we still cannot *identify* the left Hegelian project as the transition to modernity. And it appears that this is what Binder wishes to do—or at least, laments the lack of nerve that social theorists display in not trying.

But Binder's argument conflates the left Hegelian project with the conditions for its existence. (Perhaps this tendency towards conflation is common in dialectical thinkers?) To be sure, the negative symbolic space created by the destruction of the King *demands* to be filled, not least because the phenomenon of "power through" (sending an agent to act on behalf of a rector) and thus the tensions attendant to delegation and hierarchy do not evaporate in transitions to modernity. Solving these tensions requires, then, innovative signification. But this negative space affords a multiplicity of resignifications of relationships between rectors, actors, and others. The apotheosis of the modern German state, combined with the claim that just this apotheosis falls short of the normative binding found in the true version of Hegel's texts, is but one meta-project that offers to fill the space left by the King. The "spirit of trust" is but one way to remake the world and (perhaps unfortunately) it has a great deal of competition. To give just one example I discuss in the book, I understand both the left-Hegelian project and Carl Schmitt's claim that "Hegel is dead" and ensuing demand for "one delegation to rule them all" (from homogeneous demos to sacred leader) as *modern attempts to fill the space left by Kingly semiosis in politics.* Modernity is on endless trial (Kolakowski, 1997) because in the space left open by the King, we find all kinds of significations.

To be sure, Binder, in his essay, recognizes that the language of "projects" as articulated in the first part of *Power in Modernity* is designed specifically to allow "for more degrees of freedom on part of the actor and entails a more expansive notion of agency," than was available from Weber's focus on commands. This is a wonderful rendering of my efforts in *Power in Modernity*. However, in taking up his Hegelian position on modernity, Binder appears unwilling (analytically) to adopt the pluralistic implications of the cultural pragmatism that grounds my book, according to which the historical directions taken in transitions to political modernity are

explicable via the interpretive analysis of people with projects, not via reference to *Geist.*

The differences between my position and Binder's position are coming into view. Once we examine his own discussion of "with what should we replace Hegel's *Geist*," they should become even more clear.

Action Reconsidered (and Hegel on the French Revolution)

Binder grudgingly articulates his evaluation that a full-blooded Hegelianism of world spirit is beyond the grasp (or will!) of social theorists today. And, as he laments this, he launches into a remarkable critique and reframing of *Power in Modernity,* in which he sets out three options for replacing the Spirit. I would note that this passage in his essay outlines what would be, in my view, a fascinating book project.

First, he writes, we might take "prototypes" or "ideal" rectors to be the true source of action in the world, making social imaginaries constitutive of order in a very strong sense. That is, we could build a theoretical apparatus for identifying the implicit reference, in each figuration of rectorship that attends each agency relation, to a pure or ideal form. Then, this ideal referent would be interpreted by the social investigator or theorist *to be the cause of action.* This he calls the Platonic option. Neither Dr. Binder nor I am inclined to take this route, though I would point out that this is indeed one way to link together the world of normative validity with the world of facticity. It would be a kind of inverse reduction than what we are used to in modern social theory: power would be, via interpretation, reduced to authority (e.g., the authoritative notions of the ideal, rather than actual, King move and shake the world). Hegel can be read as attempting a modern, historical re-instantiation of this ancient idealist goal; we might also read Leo Strauss's criticisms of historicism as choosing this Platonic option (Strauss, 1971, but see Zerilli, 2016: 83–116).

Second, he says, we might take an Aristotelean route and understand rectors, actors, and others as engaged in struggles that are constantly taking place within and through variously shared projects. This is, in fact, precisely the route for social theory I take in the book. But it is here that we can see how unsatisfying this is to Binder. He cannot accept the core Aristotelean-Arendtian dynamic of the book, with its tragic understanding of action as never obtaining the organic unities that humans yearn for. And so, he is not very interested in the (admittedly heterodox but not unwarranted) reading of Aristotle that is implied in *Power and Modernity,* nor does he seem to share my reading of the French Revolution or my grounding of a sociological theory of performance in Arendt's writings on revolution and the founding of republics.

Rather, he skips right past the Arendtian architecture of Part I, and the Kantorowiczian response to Weber in Part II, and instead quotes me on modern Jacobinism, *but without full recognition of my ironic and tragic intent.* For Binder sees in my rendering of the Jacobins "a temporary departure" from my

"mechanical and hierarchical conception of power, where we can see the glimpse of a more organic and egalitarian form of social organization, based on the symmetrical as well as collective recognition of a common goal." He then writes that "it almost seems as if the shared project of the revolutionaries—the common cause as an 'unmoved mover' of sorts—becomes the rector in a chain of power, which binds the actors together, into a social body as collective agent."

But I have no such romantic view of the power-projects of the Committee of Public Safety or any of its vanguard inheritors. Dr. Binder and I are in full agreement that the myth of revolution (Arjomand, 2019) becomes a major feature of modern political culture; but we appear to be in rather fierce disagreement about whether Jacobin political movements managed to provide a "more organic and egalitarian form of organization." My point was rather the opposite, namely that the Jacobin projects of modernity, whose discourse is apocalyptic and whose political modality is gnostic, have produced certain notoriously pathological modern returns of the King's Two Bodies, attached to the apparatus of the modern state. Indeed, the most Jacobin, radically modern, project of all, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, is exemplary in this regard; it is not difficult to find Mao's second body circulating through the networks of power and patronage that constituted order and domination in the Chinese polity, 1966–1968 (MacFarquhar & Schoenhals, 2009; Xu, 2017).

Here, Hegel is instructive indeed concerning the descent of the French Revolution into Terror in its Jacobin period. In the passages from *Phenomenology of Spirit* titled "Absolute Freedom and Terror," Hegel is quite clear that the politics of the general will that animated the Jacobin pursuit of equality collapsed into the inability to recognize difference, and thus destroyed any "dialectical" movement towards (modern) freedom. First of all, the Jacobins refused to recognize either the differentiation of spheres of activity or differentiation of peoples: "What made the Notion into an existent object was its diremption into separate subsistent spheres, but when the object becomes a notion, there is no longer anything in it with a continuing existence; negativity has permeated all its moments. It comes into existence in such a way that each individual consciousness raises itself out of its allotted sphere, no longer finds its essence and its work in this particular sphere, but grasps itself as the *Notion* of will, grasps all spheres as the essence of this will, and therefore can only realize itself in a work which is a work of the whole…its purpose is the general purpose, its language universal law, its work the universal work." Lest we have any doubts about to what Hegel is referring when he insists that this pursuit of "absolute freedom" annihilates difference, he then explains that the pseudo-dialectic that emerges between individual and universal in the Jacobin moment has "only the semblance of an antithesis," for "the beyond of this its actual existence hovers over the corpse of the vanished independence of real being, or the being of faith, merely as the exhalation of a stale gas, of the vacuous *Être supreme*." (Hegel, 1977: 357–358).

Conscious freedom, for Hegel, features "otherness," that "moment of difference,"[8] which—as I show rather carefully (Reed, 2020: 205–219)—the Jacobins could not abide when they sought to replace the unity of Kingly sovereignty with the unity of the people's sovereignty in December of 1792. In this, the Jacobins were the mirror image of the monarchists in their ambitions for a "truly" unitary sovereign; it should thus not surprise us that Jacobinism would continue to create modern Kings with two bodies, out of the very project that appears to be the opposite of royalism in its embrace of equality, for the apocalyptic equality of the Jacobins is a project grounded in *sameness*. One can draw a line from Hegel's insistence that for Robespierre's revolution "there is left for it only *negative* action; it is merely the *fury* of destruction," to Arendt's (2006) own study of revolutions and those eventful moments in the history of republics that I theorize as "foundational performances." For Arendt, precisely when sameness becomes the prerequisite for, or *only* route to, equality, at that moment, human creativity and human plurality are quelled. One may have this argument on the terrain of readings of Hegel; one may have it by referencing Eisenstadt's (1999) sociology of modern fundamentalisms and gnostic movements. But the larger point is that the Jacobin impulse to total revolution is, again, *but one* of the metaprojects that rushes into the negative space left open by the King.[9]

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[8] The typical Jacobin critique (indeed that which one might find in *Jacobin* magazine) might at this point prosecute the case that in Hegel's reflection on the Terror in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the proximal *differences* that serve as a subject for reflection are the differences that constituted the different orders of the *ancien regime,* either in the sense of different guilds defined in relationship to different crafts, or in the sense of different *estates* as they constituted the polity (and were called in the Estates General by the soon-to-be-overthrown-and-executed Louis Capet). But it is clear that the very operation of the terms subject, desire, and difference that Hegel insists upon, over and against the Jacobin project for modernity, are precisely what is required to imagine the very possibility of emancipation for those subjects who were not included in any particular Jacobin project of equality as sameness. As Judith Butler writes, "the emergent subject of Hegel's *Phenomenology* is an ek-static one, a subject who constantly finds itself outside itself, and whose periodic expropriations do not lead to a return to a former self…the notion of 'difference' is similarly misunderstood, I would suggest, when it is understood as contained within or by the subject: the Hegelian subject's encounter with difference is not resolved into identity…Thus, it is neither precisely a new theory of the subject nor a definitive displacement of the subject that Hegel provides, but rather a definition in displacement, for which there is no final restoration." (Butler 2013: xxi) See also Bernstein (1996: 11–83). The contemporary exemplar of the Jacobin position is probably Slavoj Žižek, whose readings of Hegel in this regard are tracked in Sinnerbrink (2015: 107–111), and who has reacted viscerally to Brandom's project (Žižek 2015).

[9] One may reasonably ask whether "the King" is what always precedes—in the particular sense of being subject to Nietzschean creative destruction and eternal recurrence—the modern. Viewed from a certain angle, the political form of absolutism in Europe is a transitional moment between feudal (dis)order and the modern nation-state, a kind of "coming together" of proto-modern political power and Christendom as background landscape of meaning. In this transitional moment (approximately 200–300 years long!), the King's Two Bodies receives its concrete apotheosis before its destruction. The larger *theoretical* issue is, however, how (and even if) one should conceptualize traditional society in a new way, given the theorization of transitions to modernity set out in the book. Certainly, the understanding of tradition implied in the book is quite different than that available from Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck. A paper-in-progress, "What is a Traditional Society?" addresses this difficult matter, starting—as *Power in Modernity* does, re: the concept of modernity—from the necessity of recognizing that *in discourse* applying the moniker of "traditional" is itself often a kind of performance of power and domination, though one subject to reversability within the very torrent of the modern, as radical right revolutionaries have repeatedly made clear. Moving beyond this, however, one may recognize the very concept of "traditional power"

In contrast, Binder sees Durkheimian unity in the Jacobin project, and this (mis)interpretation is grounded in his rejection of the synthesis I offer between a reformed Weber and a reinterpreted, pragmatist Aristotle. He opts instead for a robust Durkheimian ontology of the social. But it is precisely this ontologization of a specific version of modernity that I wish to avoid—so as to provide the tools for a genealogy of the rise of the social itself as a source of variation in transitions to modernity. (Arendt, 1998)

Interpreting the Present

Chains of power occur via the delegations and dominations that link together rectors, actors, and others. In every moment of action and reaction that takes place between rectors, actors, and others in these chains, there is a *doubling.* For each chain of power features not only concrete individuals and groups, occupying the position of rector, actor, or other, playing that position for all it is worth, and mobilizing various agents and allies to shore up said position, but also totemic representations of said individuals and groups, whose very figuration of rectorship, of actor-turned-agent, or of alterity inflects the chain itself. Thus, relations of power invoke and tangle with invocations of rectitude, authority, and what Durkheim, in his writings on totemism, called "moral influence." When Durkheim wrote about "the native" in the unfortunate language of nineteenth-century anthropology, seeking to render a universal theory of human religion, he came across this doubling, and theorized it. I believe the following paragraph would apply quite precisely to the world traced by Kantorowicz and by *Power in Modernity,* wherein the social magic of the second body of the King comes to inhere in, and help glue together, the chains of power that make up a polity, and thus to articulate membership in said polity:

> Here, in reality, is what the totem amounts to: It is the tangible form in which that intangible substance is represented in the imagination; diffused through all sorts of disparate beings, that energy alone is the real object of the cult. We are now in a better position to comprehend what the native means when he affirms, for example, that the people of the Crow phratry are crows. He does not exactly mean that they are crows in the everyday empirical sense of the word, but that the same principle is found in all of them. That principle constitutes what they all most fundamentally are, is shared between people and animals of the same name, and is conceptualized as having the outward form of the crow. (Durkheim, 1995: 191).

Footnote 9 (continued)

as bound up with certain kinship- and household-centered fantasies of the state and of authority, which, when vacated (for a variety of reasons) becomes that which must be replaced by new imaginaries of the political, and especially new imaginaries of the relationship between gender and rule (Pateman 1988, Landes 1988, Hunt 1992, Adams 2005a, 2005b).

One may point to "God Save the Queen" and Princess Diana's funeral in response to this, I suppose.

But my larger theoretical point is as follows. Modernity is what happens—anywhere and anytime, but particularly in certain moments of political upheaval all over the globe during the last 500 years—when groups of humans decide to replace the totemic signifier of the King (or Queen, or Emperor) with some other language of politics, according to which certain actors-turned-agents may be trusted and others not so much, and according to which some projects make sense and others are beyond the pale. How should we think about the promise and peril of life after the King? Such a query invites preliminary commentary on the crises of the present day, premised on the insight, taken from cultural sociology, that totemic signification helps to make and unmake ties that bind. About the continuing relevance of totemic signification, Dr. Binder and I agree. And yet I would propose a political sociology of populism and conspiracy thinking, and the current crisis of democratic legitimacy in the USA, whose anatomy, and whose use of cultural sociology, is slightly different from Dr. Binder's.

The Bodies of the People

Binder notes that in *Power in Modernity* I track (for the early American republic, and for a certain stage in the French Revolution), how one format (or, really, meta-format, since it is encompasses many, often opposing, political projects) of signification that rushes into the negative space left open by the King's Two Bodies is talk and writing about "the people." Indeed, I try to show via a close reading of the sermons of a Christian Millenarian preacher from the late eighteenth-century USA, as well as a reading of the letters between those in different positions in the American (proto-)state apparatus when confronted with insurrection, how the imaginary of "the people" was used to construct new social imaginaries about how and when one could trust certain actual individuals and groups to rule, absent Kingship as an authorized delegation from God. What can this tell us about the present day, despite the fact that nothing like the Federal Government apparatus that was built in the twentieth century in the USA existed in 1794? The discourse of "the people" is still with us, of course, and one may reasonably offer commentary about how it is used, in the political struggles of the current moment.

Binder writes that "the democratic problem of the people's two bodies finds its clearest expression in contemporary populism." I agree that populism enacts a myth of the people, and that in populist discourse, the mythological dimensions of contemporary politics become rather clear (or at least they do for those of us not swept up by populism).[10] However, Binder argues that populism *opposes* the "first body" of the people—the empirical electorate—to the "second body"—which is mythical and homogenous, such that "empirical characteristics such as race or religion may enter the populist imagination of the people selectively, but it ultimately remains an

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[10] See also the discussions in Alexander, Kivisto and Sciortino (2020).

idealization for which numerical representativity is irrelevant." Then, Binder says this "uniform vision of the sacred second body of the people is projected back on its empirical body, resulting in the symbolic exclusion of many of its members." And so, he explains, "as in the case of the King's Two Bodies, the mythical body takes precedence over the empirical body in the populist discourse." This explains, for him, Trump and Orban. But I think this is only half right.

Binder presumes that for those of us not swept up by populism that there is an "empirical" body of the people (only one body), so that contemporary populism is a kind of "revenge of myth" from the days of the King's Two Bodies as reconstructed by Kantorowicz. Here, Binder makes a classic move, most evident in Ernst Cassirer's *Myth of the State* (1946): myth as the revenge of the irrational on the rational, with the understanding that for those not swept up by populist fantasy that there is "only" the first body of the electorate.

My analysis would suggest instead that in the sphere of politics, there is a constant doubling of the actual bodies of actual persons who rule (rector), who act on behalf of those who rule (actors turned agents), and who are excluded (other). Because of this, *all* renderings of "the people" in politics—including the liberal democratic one that articulates with legal rationality and the organized, fraud-free actual elections that took place in the USA—involve a symbolic doubling, a relationship of concrete bodies-as-signifiers to the sacred, and ineffable, "second body." That certain versions of this doubling are manifestly more tightly bound to the mechanism of casting ballots than others does not entail that one is "empirical" and the other is "mythical."

Rather, the question is whether the liberal democratic mode of rule can be projected at the mythological level, such that it, too, can provide both meaning and significance (Bottici, 2007) to political action, such that those political actions that retain a connection to truth can be sacralized. The problem of populism, then, is not a problem of empirical democracy fending off mythological nonsense, but rather a question of competing mythological registers, and the use and abuse of these different registers to bind together large groups of people pursuing different projects and meta-projects. In the USA, the "conservative project"—at least as it manifests in national politics—has become *unbound* from the sacred, authoritative requirements of the democratic meta-project ("the republic")—e.g., the acceptance of election losses, the peaceful transition of power, etc. To the degree that this is the case, the conservative project articulates other groundings for its actions, groundings that are often, though not always, recognizably autocratic and in some cases explicitly fascist.

If *all* discourses of the "people" engage in a totemic doubling, then the question is not one of the second body *against* the first body, but rather of competing projects and their mythological articulations of the *relationship* between the first and second bodies of the republic. In chapter eight of *Power in Modernity,* I argue that there is no human body that is not, in some sense, subject to the politics of sacred and profane, and thereby the politics of fantasy and even desire.

In the contemporary public politics of the USA, then, the *relation* between the concrete bodies of actual people and the imaginary of the people's sacred second body is at stake. In the ethnonationalist or white supremacist format, certain empirical bodies but not others are taken to be the first body that signifies the sacred second body of the

people. Those who do not fit this image of what signifies the sacred second body are not ignored ("numerically irrelevant") but rather actively profaned as a demonic threat to the body politic. One may recall here the extra motivation provided to some Trump supporters to storm the US Capitol when a Jewish man and a Black man won Senate seats in Georgia the night before. By doing so, John Ossoff and Raphael Warnock secured their authorized entry into the sacred house of American government. This provoked destructive rage from certain members of the American polity, particularly those who operate with the worldview and ethos taken from white Christian nationalism (Gorski, 2019; Whitehead & Perry, 2020).

That the mythological register—and in particular, the contested relation between the first and second body of the people—is relevant across the American political spectrum is evident from the way in which the question of how and *with which bodies* to represent "the people" is by no means a settled matter *outside* the authoritarian party in the USA that still goes by the name "Republican." For example, there is a discourse on the left in the USA (which I find myself aligned with more often than not), according to which the "body of the people" as sovereign is signified by all of the actual bodies in the physical space of the USA, not only the citizenry in the technical sense of the term. Instead, the bodies (and labor!) of the undocumented also make up the sacred body of the people (Butler & Spivak, 2011).

Finally, an analysis of populist politics framed by *Power in Modernity* would suggest that *if* the mythological register of liberal democracy in the USA is to sustain itself, it will also have to find and label its *others* and profane them as criminals (e.g., those who stormed the Capitol with impunity, and Mr. Trump, Mr. Cruz, Mr. Hawley, etc.). Undoubtedly, the moderate wing of the democratic party, and what used to exist as the "center-right" in the USA, find that their mythological renderings of the people share an elective affinity with the American legal system as an autonomous space of judgment and regulation. But, as the events of early January 2020 have made clear, it is fair to write about the current American crisis what Albert Camus (2012: 119) wrote about the King and the French Revolution: "we are not dealing with law, but with theology."

All of this is to say that Dr. Binder's understanding of rational-reflexive modernity leads him to underestimate how much the project of liberal democracy in the USA needs, not only the techne of science, so that actual votes can be actually counted in a society of more than 300 million people, but also the mythos of democracy-in-difference, in the specific sense that the plurality of different peoples with different bodies is sacralized—taken to be the concrete signifier of the sacred second body of the people. Can such a mythos, which found its most eloquent expression in the political theology of Martin Luther King, Jr., be sustained? We shall see.

Conspiracy Thinking

The cultural sociology of political myth, then, would indicate that the struggle over power in American politics is doubled by a struggle to make certain mythological frames for giving meaning and significance to political action (and policy-making) relevant over and against others. This struggle includes the advent of conspiracy

thinking, which Dr. Binder also addresses. Here, we are in greater agreement—I agree that R-A-O theory, because of its emphasis on fantasy and signification, allows us to conduct a careful hermeneutics of conspiracy thinking. In conspiracy theories, secret rectors, who are often members of a profaned group, direct various agents (or "double agents") who are not what they claim to be in public. I think Binder is correct that conspiracy theories "systematically underestimate the agency troubles in accruing long rector-actor chains," but I would go further to suggest that they emerge as a reaction to certain forms of complexity in the world, wherein the inscrutability of actual agency chains creates frustration and despair.

Conspiracy theories express not only longing for self-determination and control over one's own life but also—and perhaps this is more important—a longing for trust in those positioned above oneself in various hierarchies. In this regard, it is worth noting that a key aspect of the takeover of right-wing politics by conspiracy thinking in the USA is not only the fantasy of secret world-rectors pulling the strings (Soros, Gates, etc.), but perhaps more importantly, the fantasy that those in various positions of public power in the USA are secretly the agents of evil rectors. In the USA, this has gone quite far, and contributed to a manifest collapse in the civil sphere. In particular, not only are Hillary Clinton, and various other well-known Democratic and Republican politicians, maligned as double agents, but also an entire category of person has been so profaned: the civil servant has been re-interpreted as the agent of the deep state. Perhaps even more than the actions of Mr. Trump and his immediate coterie, this accounts for the transformation of American politics, as the authoritarian right has risen up on the backs of new mid-level agents and politicos who take as their primary mission the destruction of their enemies, namely those they characterize as "in on the steal" (e.g., election officials, no matter which party they belong to, etc.). This has happened, furthermore, at precisely the moment in American politics when the myth of the faithful civil servant as the heroic agent of social good was and is needed the most, namely, a large-scale public health emergency.

It is in this context that one can note that the very mechanism of election in a representative democracy is a delegation from constituency to legislator, and that in so far as the US election of November 2020 actually manages to produce something like an empirically legitimate government (in the realist Weber's sense of "legitimate"), it will have done so not only via the techne of counting, but also because those doing the counting found it their sacred duty to do so, in the face of severe threat. This is what I mean when I say that the governing mechanisms of liberal democracy require "mythological" support.

Delegation, Domination, and Democracy in Critical Theory

In concluding, I wish to address Dr. Binder's Hegelian-Durkheimian criticisms of my book in a different way. Although he received his Ph.D. five years after I received my own, I believe it is reasonable to hail him as of the same intellectual generation. We both "grew up" intellectually in milieux that were characterized by similar philosophical and sociological concerns. One such concern was the long arc of critical theory and its relationship to interpretive and cultural sociology.

We both take as the core requirement of any human science worthy of the name an understanding of signification; we both seek a critical theory whose premises are taken not only from Marxism but also from semiotics and hermeneutics. And we both wish reject the insistence, derived from Marx and others, that political economy always precedes culture.

In the 1990s and 2000s, those of us who did not wish to go the route of the Foucauldians and the Bourdieusians in seeking such a culturally inflected critical theory were educated in several options, including the deliberative democratic route (Bohman & Rehg, 1997; Benhabib, 1996), the multiculturalist route (Young, 2011 Gutman & Taylor, 1994), and the philosophical anthropology route (Honneth, 1995). It is perhaps only a slight overgeneralization to note that renewals of critique found their grounding in an image or root metaphor of social action as an intersubjective encounter in which the inherent equality of the subjects is the regulative premise of their understanding of each other, and the unstated telos of their self-organization in movement towards some sort of agreement. That is to say, the theoretical project of critical theory was given meaning and significance by what Binder, in his reading of my book, calls the "pole of full recognition" in the posited spectrum that runs from recognition to non-recognition. In contrast, I wish to retain for critical theory what Amy Allen calls the "sting of negativity" in our conceptualization of social life and our philosophy of consciousness.

Allen has just recently reconfigured the relationship between critical theory and psychoanalysis for this purpose. For her, "contemporary critical theory needs psychoanalysis for (at least) three reasons: to temper its tendencies toward normative idealism, to rethink its developmental modes of self and society, and to theorize the aims and methods of critique beyond utopianism and rationalism." She elaborates a new interpretation of Melanie Klein's theory to this end and arrives at the conclusion that "far from leaving critical theory mired in pessimistic despair, however, this realistic conception of the person also serves as a foundation for creativity, reparation, and productive individual and social transformation." (Allen, 2020: 23–24)

Though *Power in Modernity* does not address psychoanalysis directly, I hope the analogy to the differences between myself and Werner Binder is clear. I, too, wish to temper (Binder's romantic-Hegelian-Durkheimian) tendencies towards normative idealism, developmental understandings of society and history, and utopianism and rationalism. Theoretically, the problem is not that the romantic-Hegelian account of equality fails to describe the reality of organizational hierarchy—after all, it functions in theory as a regulative ideal, not a description of actual social organization. Rather, the problem is that, to render equality and understanding, the image of the dyadic encounter must posit equality as always already recognizable (if unactualized) in interchange (or turn-taking in conversation), and it must posit understanding as the arrival at provisional agreement—either about what ego and alter *are,* as a matter of their identities (multiculturalism), or about what is the case in the sense of validity, either empirical or normative (deliberation), or about their vulnerabilities (philosophical anthropology). What this writes out of the root

metaphor of human sociality is the intimate relationship between human projects-in-the-world and the act of delegation.

Delegation, which in the world of normative rightness would take the name authorization, is recognized by Binder as central to my book. But for the romantic Hegelians, "authorizing someone else to do something on your behalf" is shelved alongside other "reductive" accounts of the fallen world of power. It has nothing to say to the theorization of anything but *empirical* legitimacy. This relegation of delegation to the world of power, money, and empirical "influence" so as to retain an image of egalitarian encounter as the basis for authority that is legitimate in a normative sense creates and awkward gap in any claim by critical theory that its normative foundations articulate with a reconstructed sociohistory of democracy. For, precisely those bindings by normatively legitimate authority that, in the romantic-Hegelian account, are supposed to emerge into the world to counteract unjust hierarchy *are also themselves delegations.* This is, in fact, where egalitarian ideals meet the actual world of power, precisely in so far as the requirements of a society of equals are, to a certain degree, institutionalized through various formats of power, and these are moments of authorized delegation. We see this now: when the public relies upon scientific truth to guide political decision-making during a pandemic, the public (and its agents who have become rectors via election) delegate to scientific expertise certain articulations of plans for action; in turn, a mask mandate or stay-at-home order is not a vast intersubjective agreement arrived at horizontally but a *project* whose hierarchal execution is necessary for the common good.

Perhaps most fundamentally, representative democracy is itself an act of trust-full, authorized delegation from constituency to representative, and the very degree to which elected officials can be held to account is dependent upon the degree to which "the dual nature of the prince" becomes, in modern society, "the separation of the person and the office" (Cherniavsky, 1961: 48, see Alexander, 2006: 132–150). Even the ethically overloaded normative model of democracy descended from the republican tradition (Habermas, 1996) cannot excise delegation from its (idealized) workings. It is for this reason that non-horizontality is built into anything that might replace *Geist* in a normative analysis of the conditions of possibility for a better, rather than worse, replacement of realist Weberian *Herrschaft*. And so, in *Power in Modernity,* I counterposed to the root metaphor of intersubjective encounter the difficulties, tensions, and ambivalences that obtain in delegation.

If rector and actor both imagine that their actions are warranted in relationship to a project, then certain possibilities for the (indirect) actualization of equality inhere in their (unequal) encounter. First of all, the creation of certain kinds of egalitarian social relations can be central to the meaning of the project itself. Projects can be "democratic," more equality can result if a certain leader or party "has power," and any format of equality that seeks to become regulative must have some basis for institutional effectiveness, e.g., the "civil force of law" (Alexander, 2006: 151–192; see Reed (2019) for further discussion of "civil power" in relationship to Arendt and Weber).

But second—and here we really arrive at the normative register for R-A-O theory—*if* the ambivalent power relationship between rector and actor-turned-agent is grounded in the authoritative vision of the project offered by rector—that is, if rector's very rector-ness is derived, in part, from the specific moral vision and

interpretation offered in rector's rendering of the project--then the act of unequal delegation from rector to actor, because of its invocation of moral influence and totemic representation, opens up a space for the rearticulation of rector's and actor's relationship to the project, and thereby to each other. For example, actor can publicly argue that, *vis-à-vis* a project held in common, the distance between an actual rector and rector's totemic representation as steward of said project is too great for rector to continue as leader of said project. Or, actor might argue, via interpretation of the project itself, that certain others should in fact be recognized as actors within the project. Thus, it is precisely the "autonomy of the agent" that obtains in—and is usually seen as a problem of control for those at the top of—agency relations that creates the space for actor to rearticulate the project and rector's and actor's relationship to said project. Into these gaps—the gap between rector and actor, and the gap between persons and their totemic representations—can grow authoritative claims to reinterpret the project, and even for rector and actor to switch places.

This idea, implicit in the Aristotelian architecture of the first part of *Power in Modernity*, remains to be worked out and developed. In lieu of that work, I conclude here by advocating both an analytical account of tension and ambivalence in hierarchical social relations (Allen, 2020)as well as a tragic sensibility in the development of social and political theory. The creativity and normative possibility available to a more tragic outlook is articulated by Patchen Markell who, via his careful readings of Arendt, has made it clear how the philosophy of multiculturalism developed an account of recognition derived from an overly optimistic understanding of the young Hegel, in which the utopia of horizontal recognition hovered just off stage, ready to enter in the final scene of a heroic epic. He explains that

> on this view the distinctive injustice of misrecognition involves the failure to extend to people the respect or esteem they deserve in virtue of who they really are…And the reason misrecognition of this sort is thought to be unjust is that it damages the psychic integrity of those who are subject to it, interfering with the development of the forms of self-respect and self-esteem on which healthy human agency depends. Thus Taylor says that misrecognition can 'wound' and 'cripple' its victims; likewise Honneth uses the language of 'scars' and 'injuries' when speaking of the 'cultural denigration of forms of life.' (Markell, 2009: 18).

What this approach to recognition missed, according to Markell, is the way in which claims to recognition involve claims to individual sovereignty that are bound to fail; they affirm, implicitly, the individual aspiration to "the condition of being an independent, self-determining agent, characterized by what Hannah Arendt calls 'uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership.'" (Markell, 2009: 11) I would add that such accounts tend to merge this ambition for self-sufficiency with an ideal of intersubjective "being together" in solidarity. This derives from an understanding of Hegel as picturing a world of mutual recognition whereby confirmed and recognized identity is the source of action, and indeed makes possible "profound empowerment" and the ability to "face the future with a confident mastery." (Markell, 2009: 13).

That this kind of ego self-mastery through full recognition from alter is tragically impossible is the (political-philosophical) basis for the relational cultural

sociology of power presented in *Power in Modernity,* grounded as it is in Arendt's *The Human Condition.*[11] Because agency is not a metaphysical source located inside of individuals, but rather something produced by chains of power and their representation (inflected, possibly but not necessarily, by *authority*), the very possibility of human agency, and thus of new projects for a better world, requires the ambivalence and dour possibilities of rector-actor relationships. And so, I sought to start the theorization of action in *Power in Modernity* from the act of delegation, which implies, in its very structure, the ever-present (though by no means always actualized) possibility of domination.

Thus, the gambit of *Power in Modernity* is to respond to the reduction of culture to power (e.g., in Bourdieu or in Foucault) *not* by ontologically positing solidarity or horizontal intersubjectivity as a counterworld to the world of power, but rather by examining the nexus of delegation or "power through agents" in all of its dimensions, and thereby finding the routes to equality that the human idea of a project for the future (a *projection,* or "throwing forth") implies. I thus sought to draw out, as a fundamental problem for social and political theory, the question of how to judge some delegations to be more-or-less legitimate ("authoritative") and others to be more-or-less worthy of proscription ("domination"). R-A-O theory is designed to contain, within its vocabulary, both domination and morally valid delegation, and thus to set the stage for theoretical work on how to judge what distinguishes one from the other, concretely and abstractly, specifically and generally.

Thus, where Binder discusses "horizontal forms of power," he is correct to note that this is not my focus. I direct my analytic gaze at how certain delegations are justified by reference to equality among difference and distinctiveness, including distinctiveness in skill and judgment. I seek also to examine how certain acts of power are interpreted, by large groups of people, to *lack the rectitude* that certain other acts of power *do* possess. For, relations of power are rarely *replaced* with relations of solidarity in the ideal sense of the latter term. However, we might be able to better discern, by studying chains of power and their representation*,* how power relations are hemmed in and given limits by certain authoritative commitments, and thus how equality, qua meta-project, can be pursued without demanding sameness.

And so, while Binder is quite brilliant in identifying my theory as articulating an account of *power through* (I wish I had used this phrase in the book), he tends to read this effort as reverting, in the end, to an account of *power over*. In contrast, my hope was for a theory of power that might transcend, or at least entangle in a new way, the opposition between power to and power over. Even if we work out a clear conceptual account of how certain social relations are *not* domination, "power through" still obtains. For, neither representative democracy nor a non-pathological division of labor can avoid the tensions and ambivalences of delegation.

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[11] Markell explains that for Arendt, "because we do not act in isolation but interact with others, who we become through action is not up to us; instead, it is the outcome of many intersecting and unpredictable sequences of action and response…a…closely related consequence is that identity is only ever available to be recognized in retrospect, by the storyteller or historian who gives a narrative account of someone's activities, and therefore of who that person has shown himself or herself to be." (Markell 2009: 13)

It might even be the case that precisely these ambivalences, tensions, and gaps in the structure of rule are the route to the amelioration of these relations.

And so, the response to Weber is contained not only in Durkheim, but perhaps much more essentially, in Franz Kafka, who grasped that in so far as one was "much less than a perfect servant," subordinating oneself imperfectly and also subordinating one's own attraction to will and struggle via "yielding," one finds in this becoming an imperfect agent "something like…freedom" (North, 2015: 248). My book begins with parables from Kafka, so I will end here with one as well. Taken from the *Lost Writings* (2020: 27–28)*, it expresses perfectly the madness of power relations, the signification of Kingly centrality as a source of both order and its disruption, and the possibility that, in the gaps created by delegation, something like democratic freedom might find room to grow out of natality, so as to inflect or contain power via authority:

> The Count was eating lunch, it was a quiet summer's day. The door opened, but this time it wasn't the servant, it was his brother, Philotas. "Brother," said the Count, rising to his feet, "imagine seeing you again after years of not even seeing you in dreams." A pane in the French window that gave onto the terrace broke in pieces, and a bird, russet-brown like a pheasant, but larger and with a longer beak, flapped into the room. "Just a minute, I'll catch it first," said the brother, bunching up his robe in one hand and grabbing for the bird with the other. Just then the servant walked in with a splendid bowl of fruit, which the bird, flying in small circles, pecked at vigorously.
>
> Rigidly the servant held the bowl and stared with little semblance of surprise at the fruit, the bird, and the brother continuing to give chase. Another door opened, and some villagers entered with a petition, they were asking for free use of a forest road that they needed for better access to their fields. But they had come at an inopportune moment, because the Count was still a small child, sitting on a stool, doing his homework. The old Count had admittedly gone on, and the young one was to have been his heir, but that's not what happened, there was a lacuna in the history and so the delegation went knocking into a void. Where will they end? Will they return? Will they grasp in time how things stand? The schoolmaster who was one of their number stepped forward, taking over the tuition of the little Count. With a stick, he pushes everything off the table, which he sets on end like a blackboard, and on it with a piece of chalk writes down the number 1.

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