2021

# A Democratic Turn Within Democratic Socialism? State-Centric and Anti-Statist Visions of Socialism and the Challenge of Democratic Mirroring

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## Citation

Aslam, Ali, David McIvor, and Joel Schlosser, "A Democratic Turn Within Democratic Socialism? State-Centric and Anti-Statist Visions of Socialism and the Challenge of Democratic Mirroring," *New Political Science* 43 (2021): 451-468.

**A Democratic Turn Within Democratic Socialism?**

**State-Centric and Anti-Statist Visions of Socialism and the Challenge of Democratic Mirroring.**


Abstract

In this paper we emphasize a key, but undertheorized, *democratic* aspect of democratic socialism by tracing the idea of democratic socialism across some of its recent, theoretical articulations and several of its historical, fugitive appearances. These moments position democratic insurgency against projects of state enclosure, in ways that might inform the political aspirations of democratic socialism in its present form. To set up how a study of these radical movements can illustrate a potential *democratic turn* within democratic socialism, we situate these fugitive moments by highlighting how they reflect a paradox of democratic spirit: namely, the necessity of cultivating collective consciousness of popular power, while also acknowledging the limits of this power through a lingering attachment to the liberal democratic state as the means of achieving or supporting a democratic socialist vision. This is what we refer to as the idea of democratic mirroring, which exceeds a concept of representation centered on the constitutional state. Although we argue that the state can and should be an important site of struggle, we maintain that the broader consciousness or spirit of democratic socialism is animated by quotidian struggles for a decent existence and that those struggles must be mirrored in a way that supports the political education, political psychology, and the political self-respect of the "demos" implied within democratic socialism.



Keywords: democratic socialism, fugitive democracy, Cedric Robinson, black radicalism, the state

**Introduction**

Democratic socialism—its principles and its praxis—has arisen seemingly from the dead in recent years, spurred by intensifying inequality within and between existing nation-states, accelerating ecological crises, and generational turnover. In political theory, democratic socialism has once again become an object of conceptualization and inquiry. Theorists such as Axel Honneth and Martin Hägglund have joined this conversation by raising questions about the relationship between democracy and socialism, the role of the state and/or representative institutions in the pursuit of democratic socialism, the means of popular organization and action, and socialism's underlying consciousness or spirit—the source of the struggle, or the animating force of its aspirations. Yet, if "to be a socialist today," in *Jacobin* founder Bhaskar Sunkara's words, "is to believe that more, not less, democracy will help solve social ills" (Sunkara, 3), what role does *democracy* have to play in "democratic socialism" and how and where are those democratic practices positioned in relation—inside, outside, or both— to the state? In this paper we emphasize the *democratic* aspect of democratic socialism by tracing the idea of democratic socialism across some of its recent, theoretical articulations and several of its historical, fugitive appearances. Our exploration is purposefully wide-ranging, and we do not offer here a tight genealogy that identifies the essence of democratic socialism or that smoothes out the tensions within different moments of its articulation. Rather, we survey these moments to illustrate the positioning of democratic insurgency against projects of state enclosure, viz. efforts to either repress or to capture, institutionalize, and contain

the unruly energy of democratic spirit within the state. To set up how a study of these radical movements can illustrate a *democratic* democratic socialism, we highlight how these fugitive moments reflect a paradox of democratic spirit: namely, the necessity of cultivating collective consciousness of popular power, while also acknowledging the limits of this power through a lingering attachment—and perhaps even a sacrifice—to the liberal democratic state as the means of achieving or supporting a democratic socialist vision. We maintain that the broader consciousness or spirit of socialism is animated by quotidian struggles for a decent existence and that those struggles have to be mirrored in a way that supports the political education, political psychology, and the political self-respect of the "demos" implied within democratic socialism. "Mirroring" describes how members of the demos come to see themselves as public actors with the capacity, self-confidence, and imagination to address conditions to which they had previously resigned themselves.[1] We identify these mirrors in discontinuous traditions of democratic movements that were repressed by the state, but that nonetheless transformed it—or still might. The state, by this light, is a necessary but insufficient mirror for reflecting democratic spirit; it operates, at best, as a functional "limit" for democratic movements—a reminder of these movements' finitude and fragility—and a potential carrier of their memory. But the vitality of democratic spirit within democratic socialism rests upon other sources that are primarily "anti-statist" and even "anti-political." We suggest several aspects of this mirroring and discuss potential avenues for further investigation or theorization.

## 1. The *Demos* Problem in Democratic Socialism: Hägglund and Honneth

[1] We acknowledge the work of Romand Coles (2016), which bridges research on mirror neurons with grassroots democratic organizing. Yet we focus here not on the intersubjective or neurological dimensions of mirroring and instead on specific practices that enable ordinary citizens to see themselves as democratic actors. Our work aligns more closely with the recently published study of grassroots organizing by Han et al. (2021), which uses the metaphor of a "prism" to capture the idea that democratic organizing both reflects and refracts popular power.

At the same time that democratic socialism has become a more significant presence in cultural and institutional politics, it has increasingly been a subject of theoretical reflection and refinement. Martin Hägglund has offered perhaps the most forceful—and widely discussed—articulation and defense of democratic socialism in the American academy. For Hägglund, democratic socialism rests on three basic principles: the measure of wealth or value in a society should be the amount of socially available free time (rather than profit or production for production's sake), the means of production should be collectively or socially owned, and labor should be pursued according to Marx's dictum, "from each according to her abilities, to each according to her needs." [2] Although this list of principles is not particularly novel, Hägglund's theoretical foundations establish these ideals on new territory.

Hägglund rests his case for democratic socialism on the concept of "secular faith" and its corresponding ideal of freedom. Secular faith, for Hägglund, is animated by the sense of human finitude and inter-dependency, along with a strong notion of responsibility, whereby our individual and collective life projects are seen as resting solely in our hands. All social or normative practices—"upbringing, education, labor, political governance, and so on"—are practices "for which we are responsible and that have to be sustained or questioned or revised by *us*, rather than by nature or supernatural decree."[3] Freedom is an essential correlate of this vision, and freedom for Hägglund is both *radical*—in the Sartrean or Nietzschean sense—and also, importantly, *social*. As he puts it, "the exercise of freedom requires a practical identity that cannot be invented out of nothing…but is formed by social institutions…there can be no freedom that does not have an institutional form."[4] Freedom is *spiritual* as well, in at least two particular ways. First, freedom as a praxis or activity is

[2] Martin Hägglund, *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (New York, Pantheon, 2019, 347.
[3] Ibid., 11.
[4] Ibid., 274

bound by and oriented toward the horizon of finitude. Hägglund, following Hegel, argues that spiritual life "is only in and through its relation to death," or, as Hegel puts it, "spirit wins its truth only by finding itself in absolute dismemberment." [5] Freedom is also spiritual in the sense Hegel ascribed to "objective spirit," i.e. it is rooted in actual, existing practices such as democratic deliberation and "the commitment to freedom and equality that we already avow."[6]. In other words, spirit finds its orientation through an awareness of its finitude, but it builds its vitality through concrete practices and relationships.

For Hägglund, once again, the spirit of secular freedom is immanent to a form of life of which we already have glimpses, even if that vision is distorted or distracted by the workings of capitalism and its self-contradictory understanding of value as production for production's sake. For Hägglund, democratic socialism is merely the means of pursuing and realizing a practical identity to which we are *already* (spiritually) committed; it aims to provide "the material and spiritual conditions for each one of us to lead a free life, in mutual recognition of our dependence on one another" (26). In order to see ourselves as free, Hägglund argues, we must participate in a socio-political form of life through which we are "granted the material, social, and institutional resources to exercise our spiritual freedom." [7] By contrast, as Hägglund puts it, "under capitalism we are all in practice committed to a purpose in which we cannot recognize ourselves, which inevitably leads to alienated forms of social life."[8] By contrast, to be emancipated "we must be able to see ourselves—to recognize our own commitment to social freedom," i.e. to recognize ourselves as the agents responsible for our individual and collective life-projects.[9] Hence the ultimate value of democratic

[5] Ibid., 360.
[6] Ibid., 26.
[7] Ibid., 309
[8] Ibid., 300
[9] Ibid., 371

institutions and practices for Hägglund rests on their representing the "profound secular recognition" that "we are responsible for organizing and legislating the form of our life together." [10]

This collective creation of a form of life describes what we call democratic mirroring, a process in which citizens can see themselves reflected in the institutional, political, and cultural arenas of their collective life, and in which those arenas are themselves subject to the "continued engagement" of citizens as an expression of secular/spiritual freedom. Hägglund, however, says all too little about the means or mechanism of such democratic self-recognition. His reference to legislation in the above quote, however, hints that his approach is indebted to a left-Hegelian trajectory whereby democratic socialism is best—and perhaps only—embodied in the state. In one of the few passages where he talks about specific forms of self-recognition, he argues that democratic socialism is necessary for the construction of "an actual democratic state," which would enable everyone to see themselves in the institutions on which they depend and to which they contribute. As he puts it, "such a state…is a necessary condition for mutual recognition of our ability to lead free lives." [11] Moreover, participation "in a state" is "not optional," and in fact it is only through "some form of collective self-legislation" that individual freedom is "possible," something that Hägglund refers to as the "institutional formation of freedom." [12] As he puts it elsewhere in the text, "there can be no freedom that does not have an institutional form." [13]

For Hägglund, the democratic socialist state and its subsidiary institutions —"including educational institutions and forms of political deliberation"— must become the means by which we recognize our radical freedom and realize our spiritual lives. [14] However, his normative

[10] Ibid., 270
[11] Ibid., 237
[12] Ibid., 232
[13] Ibid., 234
[14] Ibid., 309

reconstruction of democratic socialism does not tarry with troublesome counter trends, evidenced by, for example, a political public sphere that appears to be intensifying feelings of popular alienation, distrust, and rejection of the state altogether. More importantly, his normative account does not analyze how state has directed violence or repression toward precisely the kinds of democratic subjects envisioned by his theory. For example, Hägglund ends his argument with a brief account of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Poor People's Campaign organized by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1967-1968, including a planned general strike for the spring of 1968. At a march preceding the planned strike in late March, the FBI planted several participants who smashed windows and provided a pretext for a police crackdown. In the ensuing violence, several hundred people were injured and an unarmed, sixteen year old protester—Larry Payne—was killed. While such violence only underscores, for Hägglund, the importance of the democratic socialist project, a fuller account of state violence is necessary for democratic socialism. Hägglund's retelling of the Poor People's Campaign, and his emphasis on King's call for a "revaluation of values" overlooks the means and mechanisms by which individuals and groups who are subject to violent state repression nevertheless build the public skills, confidence, and self-conception necessary to pursue—or even to imagine—their spiritual freedom. Without an account of this, Hägglund under-theorizes the "objective" part of objective spirit—the concrete relationships, practices, and narratives that give individuals and groups a means of seeing themselves as free. The prospects of democratic socialism rise or fall on the development of collective actors and hence of collective consciousness. As Erik Olin Wright argued, the identification and cultivation of these actors is "the most vexing problem" attending the program of democratic socialism. Collective actors—the "demos" within democratic socialism—must have both a high level of "coherence and capacity for struggle to sustain the project of challenging capitalism" (Wright, 119). Such capacity is built in the face of counter-forces such as "privatized lives," "fragmented class

structures," and "diverse, competing, non-class based forms of identity," not to mention state repression or violence.[15] Left untheorized by Wright—similar to Hägglund—is how individuals that presently see themselves through such lenses can come to realize this "pervasive fragmentation" for what it is and re-shape their lives accordingly.[16] What's missing, in short, is what Sheldon Wolin has called a democratic "paideia"—a means of democratic practice and political education through which ordinary people can cultivate political skills and come to see themselves as political subjects.[17] For Wolin, such paideia can best—and perhaps only—be realized through self-inventing collective action, reinforced through "numerous institutions in which [the demos] takes an active part."[18] Yet this paideia can be weakened—and even corrupted—by diluting the power of the demos, as in elections and rhetorical invocations of popular sovereignty that abstract from the actual potency of democratic action. The state, then, is an inadequate source of mirroring, because it removes power from the varied, local sites in which it must be regularly exercised if the practice and paideia of democracy is to sustain collective coherence and capacity. The emerging picture of democratic socialism in contemporary political theory is incomplete without more attention to the means of generating and sustaining democratic consciousness, as opposed to blueprints for its supposed form of completion.[19]

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[15] Erik Olin Wright, *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-first Century* (London, Verso: 2019), 119.
[16] To be fair, Wright says much more about the means of what we're calling democratic paideia in his other work, including *Envisioning Real Utopias* (2010).
[17] Ibid., 119
[18] Ibid., 64
[19] This also highlights a shortcoming of the account of recognition that is largely implicit within Hägglund's writings—namely, the idea of a coherent collective subject implied within his idea of a "form of life." To these assumptions we bring a radical democratic edge that shows not merely the contested nature of collective subjecthood (a well-known argument), but the ways in which contestation takes place, ideally, through repeated attempts of the demos to express itself, which implies a need for mirroring that the state cannot provide. The state can "recognize" the demands of social movements only through a sacrifice of the latter's source of genesis: the desire and demand for democratic self-expression. Hence the state is a dangerous—if perhaps necessary—mirror.

A similar tension exists within the recent articulation of democratic socialism by Axel Honneth, a critical theorist whose normative reconstruction of socialist freedom is more attuned than Hägglund to the pathologies of contemporary societies. Similar to Hägglund, Honneth roots his defense of democratic socialism in a concept of "social freedom," which he identifies as the "vital spark" within early socialist movements that can be rescued from the "intellectual context of early industrialism." [20] Social freedom implies what Honneth refers to as "holistic individualism," in which individual freedom can only be realized through "the existence of social communities and thus holistic entities." [21] In this respect, social freedom aims to reconcile liberal notions of individual freedom with solidarity or fraternity,[22] while overcoming both early socialist assumptions about the agent of social transformation (i.e. the proletariat) and the historical inevitability of such transformation. Both of these moves against the socialist tradition set up Honneth to better speak to the "demos" problem within democratic socialism.

Social freedom both reflects and calls for institutions and practices of democratic socialism that can protect the conditions under which individuals can reciprocally recognize and respect each other. For Honneth, patterns of reciprocal recognition occur in three distinct yet related spheres: the interpersonal, the market, and the political. However, it is the political sphere that serves as "*primus inter pares*, because it is the only place in which problems from every corner of social life can be articulated for all ears and be presented as a task to be solved in cooperation." [23] Honneth argues that the congenital defect of earlier accounts of socialism was an economistic orientation that "ascribed no independent role to political democracy" and hence failed to "grasp the emancipatory

[20] Axel Honneth, *The Idea of Socialism: Towards a Renewal* (London: Polity, 2017), viii.
[21] Ibid., 28
[22] Ibid, 12.
[23] Ibid., 93. For instance, although the interpersonal sphere cannot be legislated into existence, patterns of misrecognition—such as domestic violence—within the interpersonal sphere can become political issues through democratic processes of will-formation and publicization.

potential" of the "sphere of democratic popular rule." [24] In this respect, Honneth follows the same line as Hägglund in seeing the public, political sphere as a vital space of self-recognition for free citizens.

In exploring the emancipatory potential of the political realm, Honneth turns to the work of John Dewey, who offers a vision of politics as "situational experimentation with various possibilities of social organization."[25] Dewey, as Honneth reads him, understands the "normative guideline" in social experimentation to be "the removal of barriers to free communication among the members of a society so that problems can be solved in the most intelligent fashion." [26] The "sphere of democratic politics" is one where "participants must be able to view their individual opinions as mutually complementary contributions to the shared project of general will-formation." [27] In other words, Deweyan democratic experiments have an underlying telos in "public opinion," which is the fuel of legitimacy for "all acts of government."[28] Honneth's account of democratic "mirroring" thereby rests in large part on a deliberative account of legitimacy, where citizens see themselves in the circulating opinions of a democratic public sphere, culminating in public legislation. For Honneth, the "public sphere" provides the "institutional framework for democratic will-formation" and the means by which free citizens might recognize each other and themselves.

Like Hägglund's, Honneth's invocation of an abstract "public sphere" risks over-valuing the constitutional state and undervaluing the concrete practices and relationships from which democratic spirit is generated. Honneth appears to recognize this danger. As he argues in *Freedom's Right*, advances in social freedom "have usually been the result of struggles that have transformed

[24] Ibid, 20 & 26.
[25] Ibid., 47
[26] Ibid., 60
[27] Ibid., 61
[28] Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right* (New York, Columbia, 2015), 256.

collective perception" and hence "the fact that contemporary theories of justice are guided almost exclusively by the legal paradigm is a theoretical folly." [29] Honneth even suggests that public self-legislation is a "normative learning process in which we recall and redeem antecedent freedoms located elsewhere." [30] This tantalizing passage, however, does not indicate the conditions or locations of these antecedent freedoms, nor their relationship—perhaps fraught, perhaps uneven—with the processes of democratic will-formation that seemingly represent their completed form. Honneth once again notes this problem, arguing that "we run into significant difficulties" if we take the relationship between democratic will formation and the state "all too seriously and derive from it the creative power of the democratic process." [31] For Honneth, on the other hand, this power derives from "customs, mores and styles of behavior, . . . the web of interaction that democratic will-formation requires."[32] Honneth remains sensitive to the "perversion(s) of [the state] apparatus" and the various pathologies attendant to institutionalization. Nevertheless, his discursive account of democratic legitimacy tends to elevate the constitutional state as the "social organ charged with guaranteeing" that citizens can "feel that the products of their will-formation are effective enough to be practiced in social reality."[33] Honneth says too little about the intricacies of the "web of interaction" from which democratic forms of life arise, leaving readers with a theory of democratic socialism that reluctantly yet undeniably imagines the state as the telos of struggle and the redemption point for social freedom.

The spirit of socialism for both Hägglund and Honneth requires institutionalization and hence they are oriented towards formal institutions and the public sphere as the space for

[29] Ibid., 329
[30] Ibid., 330
[31] Ibid., 329
[32] Ibid, 334.
[33] Ibid., 304

safeguarding socialist spirit, yet this overlooks the historical tendency that institutionalization can mark the attenuation or the forceful confinement of democratic consciousness,[34] and it draws attention away from the means of political education that might expand and strengthen such consciousness. Democratic citizens need what Lawrence Goodwyn has called a "new way of looking at things"—and at themselves.[35] For this to occur, democratic practices have to be mirrored in their everyday lives and practices. Because Hägglund's and Honneth's accounts of democratic socialism end in a theory of the constitutional state, they also miss an opportunity to expand the democratic imagination of socialism by looking to moments and movements opposed or repressed by the state, a subject to which we turn next.

**2. Socialism Without the State**

In contrast to Axel Honneth's and Martin Hägglund's state-centered theories of democratic socialism, Cedric Robinson offers a vision of socialism without the state. What sets Robinson's anti-state socialism apart from other parts of the socialist tradition that also eschew state forms, such as the democratic confederalism in Rojava articulated by Abdullah Ocalan, as well as the Democratic Socialist of America's decentralized vision of socialism in cooperative ownership, is in its origins in the concept of racial capitalism, which describes the inextricable intertwining of racism and capitalism.[36] Racial capitalism names the failure of Marxism to account for the racial character of

[34] See Sheldon Wolin. "Transgression, Equality, Voice," in Josiah Ober and Charles Hedrick, editors, *Dêmokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
[35] Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
[36] As H. L. T. Quan notes in the introduction to a posthumous collection of Robinson's essays ("On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance"), the republication of *The Terms of Order* (2016, University of North Carolina Press) as well as *An Anthropology of Marxism* (2019, University of North Carolina Press) has come alongside special journal issues of *African Identities* (Vol. 11, No. 2, 2013) and the edited collection of essays, *Futures of Black Radicalism* (2017, Verso).

capitalism, specifically Marx's classification of enslaved labor as "so-called primitive accumulation," part of a historical period predating industrialism.[37] Like feminists, who argue that domestic labor was not separate from, but rather part of capitalist exploitation,[38] Robinson demonstrates how enslaved labor became the target of state-enclosure efforts to protect legalized slavery that made the expansion of capitalism possible. Robinson emphasizes how capitalism and racism evolved from previous forms of racialized subjugation, creating a longer frame for comprehending the processes of differentiation and oppression that began long before the advent of capitalism and continue into capitalism's present manifestations.

Alongside its development of the concept of "racial capitalism," Robinson's *Black Marxism* also recovers the distinct socialist vision of the Black radical tradition born in opposition to regimes of racial capitalism. Unlike the theories of socialism developed by Marx and Marxists, the socialism of the Black radical tradition emerged not from mercantile, bureaucratic, and technical classes in Europe but from slaves and freedman in the West Indies and North America; the universalism of Marxism appealed to the progenitors of this tradition, but the Marxist focus on the metropole and the proletariat ignored the worst parts of the Black experience – the racialized oppression and domination suffered by peasants and farmers, sharecroppers and peons, and forced laborers on colonial plantations. The Black radical tradition began with these ordinary people as they created common cause and consciousness to resist the regimes of domination to which they were subject.

Race was, in Robinson's words, the "epistemology," and the "ordering principle" of the forms of domination experienced by Blacks (*Black Marxism*, xxxi); this order also created the

[37] For a critical overview of Marx's treatment of "so-called primitive accumulation" see Nikhil Pal Singh, "On Race, Violence, and So-Called Primitive Accumulation," *Social Text 128*, Vol 34, No. 3, September 2016.
[38] See Sylvia Federici. *Caliban and the Witch.* Autonomedia. Brooklyn, NY, 2004.

conditions for socialist experimentation without the state. [39] A rejection of European slavery and racism surrounded and shaped these movements, but "the more fundamental impulse of Black resistance," Robinson writes, "was the preservation of a particular social and historical consciousness." [40] This preservation took the form of marronage as well as practices of resistance such as arson, the destruction of tools, and even voodoo. As the eighteenth century succeeded the seventeenth, marronage became more difficult and the plotting of rebellions as well as the construction of familial and communal relations in the slave quarters became more predominant. The formal ending of slave systems of production in the nineteenth century profoundly reorganized global capitalism, yet Black resistance continued to develop insurgent social forms: "people's wars" against imperial control in Africa and women's clubs and the Black church against Jim Crow regimes in the United States. [41] Across these centuries and disparate places, the Black radical tradition "was an accretion . . . of collective intelligence gathered from struggle." [42]

For Robinson, racial capitalism and the state go together like tongue and groove. But Robinson's work also uncovers a deeper history. The epistemology and ordering principle of racialized domination have an antecedent in the ordering principle of the political itself. Robinson's first book, *The Terms of Order*, deploys this language as part of its sweeping critique of "the political," its name for the paradigm invented by political science to structure rationalized state power and, with it, circumscribe visions of social order itself in terms of power, authority, order, and law.[43] By pointing out how political science discourse has created these "terms of order," Robinson

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[39] Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). xxxi.
[40] Ibid., 310
[41] Ibid., 312; Cedric Robinson, *Black Movements in America* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 101-102.
[42] Robinson, *Black Marxism*, xxx
[43] Cedric Robinson, *The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 7.

deconstructs and denaturalizes what he calls "politicality as ideology" while excavating "an antipolitical tradition" against it. [44] Robinson's "antipolitical tradition" names a tradition antithetical to the state tradition of North Africa, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome, a tradition that resisted (and still resists) attempts by states to routinize and institutionalize power. Echoing the young Marx's distinction between political emancipation – which comes with the guarantee of rights by the state – and human emancipation – which requires overcoming the state and its division of subjects into rights-holding citizens and alienated human beings – Robinson's antipolitical tradition secured and protected a liberationist tradition against the dominant forms of Western social thought.[45] By insisting on the people's capacity to respond to his or her environment creatively, this tradition preserved practices and visions of nonpolitical community, stateless societies, and social flourishing unstructured by differentiated hierarchies.

Like the Black radical tradition, Robinson's antipolitical tradition holds a consistent promise of collective freedom unshadowed by the state and its oppressive and exclusive terms of order. *The Terms of Order* does not employ the language of race and racism while developing its critique of the political and the state, yet its conceptual architecture prefigures that of *Black Marxism*; *Terms* also provides the broader context for theorizing the "culture of liberation" that Robinson discerns in the Black radical tradition: seen in diachronic perspective, the Black radical tradition adds a distinctive thread to the antipolitical tradition Robinson reclaims and repairs against its disavowal by a political science limited by its state-centered terms of order.[46]

The Black radical tradition figures a socialism without the state; studying its history, however, suggests the power of the state to co-opt, incorporate, and suppress its radical

[44] Ibid., 23, 1
[45] Ibid., 2-3
[46] Robinson, *Black Marxism*, xxxiv

manifestations. Yet Robinson's work on the history of socialism provides a counternarrative to the story of socialism's inevitable appropriation by a state-centric politics. *An Anthropology of Marxism* details a history of socialism that preceded the invention of the state, as well as the forms of oblivion to which these social experiments were relegated. Robinson's "historical verification of our collective *socialist impulse*," as H.L.T. Quan phrases it, speaks truth against the power to absorb, silence and suppress insurgent movements by the Catholic Church, the imperial capitalist state, and hegemonic social science. It announces a socialism without the state and one with democratic potential. [47]

The socialist tradition Robinson uncovers in *Anthropology of Marxism* promises what he calls, in *Terms*, "alternative models of authority": "economic," "kinship," and "religion and communalism." [48] In *Terms*, Robinson focuses on the kinship authority of the Il-Tonga, which identifies authority or order "in terms of the indivisibility of things." [49] His many examples in *Anthropology of Marxism*, however, locate authority in what Jacques Rancière would call "the part without a part" – the uncounted, excluded, forgotten, and disappeared – that Robinson names "the renegade peasantry": "peasant communal movement" in northern Italy toward the end of the eleventh century; the peasant uprisings in the second half of that century; peasant republics established in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; and the Cathari and Waldensian sects of the thirteenth century. [50] These movements shared an opposition to materialism, which manifested as resistance to the hegemony of the propertied and moneyed classes, which in turn crushed these heretical and revolutionary threats. Still, the movement participants' claims for authority and struggles to affect the conditions of their lives hold seeds of a democratic socialism prior to the

[47] Cedric Robinson, *An Anthropology of Marxism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), ix
[48] Ibid., 158
[49] Robinson, *Terms of Order,* 197-8
[50] Robinson, *Anthropology of Marxism,* 28, 39, 40, 47.

state. Robinson concludes: "Democracy, too, fueled by centuries of popular resistances, had acquired its better champions among medieval socialists." [51]

Although Robinson gestured toward democracy at moments in his work, intellectual descendants of his such as Fred Moten[52] and Saidiya Hartman[53] have turned to the language of refusal to name how Black sociality can preserve itself against racial capitalism and the anti-Black state. In the final chapter of *Black Marxism*, Robinson himself acknowledges this impulse of Black resistance, an impulse toward "the preservation of a particular social and historical consciousness rather than the revolutionary transformation" of capitalist Europe.[54] Fred Moten and Stefano Harney pick up on this language in *The Undercommons*, insisting on the need for "militant preservation" of "the solidity, the continuity, and the rest of this social self-sufficiency" that policy and politics array themselves against. Policy seeks to help, correct, fix – all in the name of good governance or democratic freedom. It thus aims to "smash all forms of militant preservation, to break from the movement of social rest." While some may call their rejection of state-focused action as "an abdication of political responsibility," Harney and Moten embrace "being anti-politically romantic about actually existing social life." [55]

Hartman's work also sidesteps the conventional boundaries of the political to extend a Robinsonian imagination about demotic sociality. In dirty streets between tenements, on the scuffed

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[51] Ibid., 116

[52] Moten is explicit about his debts to Robinson, to whom he refers repeatedly across all of his works. *In the Break*, his first book, alludes to Robinson with its subtitle, "The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition." Writing in *The Universal Machine* that "consent not to be a single being" – the title of his trilogy of which *The Universal Machine* is third – "turns the history of racial capitalism . . . inside out."

[53] Hartman is less explicit about her connection to Robinson, but her observation that ""I too live in a time of slavery, because I am living in the future created by it" (*Lose Your Mother*, 133), suggests a continuity made evident with deeper engagement of her texts.

[54] Robinson, *Black Marxism,* 310

[55] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2017), 20.

floors of rented rooms, and in the humid air of dance halls, freedom takes fugitive form. Hartman names these spaces and their inhabitants "the chorus," echoing Harney and Moten's description of "displacing the centrality of the soloist." [56] "What better articulates," Hartman asks, "the long history of struggle, the ceaseless practice of black radicalism and refusal, the tumult and upheaval of open rebellion than the acts of collaboration and improvisation that unfold within the space of enclosure?" For Hartman, the chorus girl embodies the freedom dreams of young Black women migrating from the South to cities like New York and Philadelphia at the turn of the 20th century. Their individual, uncoordinated experiments with sexual freedom, new patterns of kinship and households, and employment outside of domestic work, represent efforts to live differently. Together, they constituted a social uprising that changed the context for political action. "The chorus propels transformation. It is an incubator of possibility…" Hartman summarizes.[57] From this perspective, the state and agents, because they had classified and treated Black people as disorderly and deficient, social problems to be managed via state policy, were antithetical to social freedom.[58] The state was another site of enclosure, itself metonymic for the continuing hold of the slave ship. Yet within this space vitality still throbs and pulses, if we attune to the rhythms of the chorus. Each dance is a rehearsal for escape. "*How can I live? I want to be free. Hold on.*"[59]

The anti-statist and anti-political articulations of socialist spirit by Robinson, Moten, Harney, and Hartman provide a valuable corrective to the contemporary left Hegelianism of Hägglund and Honneth. They also provide a fuller picture of democratic spirit, which extends Hägglund's account of finitude while simultaneously testifying to the means of spiritual vivification or vitality. In particular, by beginning from a political imaginary that emphasizes the fugitive spaces identified by

[56] Ibid., 139
[57] Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 2019, 349.
[58] Ibid, 20-21.
[59] Ibid, 349.

Robinson, Moten, Harney, and Hartman outside of the state's reach, these theorists show how direct experiences of collective collaboration and improvisation are the wellspring of spiritual vitality. Moreover, the tragic orientation towards a living history of violence illustrates how finitude has been *forced* upon certain subjects rather than freely accepted. The history of forced finitude then requires accounts of resistance, refusal, and failure, as seeds for consciousness and collective self-fashioning yet to come.

To more fully mirror the spirit of democratic socialism implies an account of both finitude and vitality. The democratic state has been a vehicle of both forced finitude and social freedom, and this apparent contradiction can only be appreciated through a nuanced approach to democratic socialism reducible neither to a left Hegelian account of the liberal *Rechstaat* nor to an anti-political romanticism that leaves us with too few resources for pressing collective action problems. To further elaborate such an account of democratic socialism, we turn to specific examples of democratic mirroring that speak to the intertwinement between democratic vitality and death. What sets democratic mirroring apart from prefigurative and/or counterhegemonic movements and practices is the emphasis on generating vitality and self-confidence among democratic actors, amplifying their ability to appear and act on their own terms.

### 3. Fashioning Democratic Mirrors: Robinson's *Black Movements in America*

Democratic mirroring provides a broad framework that can hold experimental radical politics, prefigurative politics, and other counterhegemonic movements while elaborating the democratic potential in these politics that are often otherwise unarticulated.[60] Cedric Robinson's brief history

[60] Raekstad and Gradin (2020) provide a recent and useful guide to prefigurative politics while also exemplifying the disconnect between radical, experimental politics and democratic theory. They argue that social movement organizations should "prefigure participatory democratic decision-making structures" (157) but say little about the democratic institutions that are being worked

*Black Movements in America* offers a swath of examples to fill out this framework of democratic mirroring. Alongside the anti-political and -statist socialism that inspire Moten and Hartman's updated reflections on refusal and flight, *Black Movements* traces the creative, collaborative, and persistent resistance of Blacks in America from their arrival on slave ships through the aftermath of the Freedom Struggle in the 1970s. Across his narrative, Robinson emphasizes the frequency and intensity of this resistance, from fugitive marronage communities to uprisings during slavery, from the Underground Railroad to slave conspiracies in Louisiana or Virginia or Georgia, from Black insurrectionists during the Civil War to slaves enlisting to fight for emancipation, from early mass movements and the formation of the Black church to the anti-lynching movement, and from democratic militancy in the twentieth century to Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Implicitly for Robinson, all of these moments testify to continuous aspirations for demotic vitality, how Black people preserved dynamic and popular energy despite the oppressive and violent enclosure of state-sponsored slavery and lynching, a preservation that held effective power in the face of forces that would intimidate and obliterate them.

Along these lines and contrary to the conventional narrative that views the Civil Rights Movement as a culmination of Black political action, we argue that *Black Movements* offers a story of sustained struggles against the state that harbored revolutionary desires to remake the state, its laws, and institutions. At the heart of these struggles, Robinson argues, lies a conflict between elites and the masses; we view this conflict as concerning the possibility of democratic mirroring contingent upon political and economic equality for the masses instead of an elite-led, accommodationist acquisition of a larger share of the pie.[61]

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towards or anticipated. Compare Polletta (2002) on how prefigurative organizations focus on process rather than institutions.

[61] This anticipates one of Cedric Robinson's central concerns, namely how this kind of accomodationism drained Black movements of their radicalism and left undisturbed the underlying

In this section, we focus on how the abolition, anti-lynching, and Civil Rights movements exemplify democratic mirroring and its commitment to transforming the state in the image of the people. Mirroring names the process of Black Americans' coming to see themselves as collective political subjects, subjects whose human equality and dignity must be legally recognized, through the constitutional protection of their rights as citizens. Abolitionist and anti-lynching societies, their newspapers and travelling lecturers, the fundraising in Black churches and among free Black merchants and professionals to support those activities, protection in Black homes, constituted a democratic *paideia*, where not just claims to political and economic equality took shape, but also self-confidence, fellow-feeling, and solidarity. As historians of the Civil Rights movement have recently argued, that movement and other Black movements sought emancipation that involved but was not limited to state recognition. Erin Pineda describes the scholarship of the "long" Civil Rights movement as shifting "the narrative arc from a romantic, victorious legal battle for rights into the tragedy of a capacious, unfinished project for liberation and racial justice."[62] This rereading of the Civil Rights movement shows the necessity of a concept like democratic mirroring for illuminating the deeper aspirations for being and being seen as democratic actors. Through participation in these movements, Black Americans overcame the internalized resignation that made them acquiesce to white supremacy and racial capitalism. Democratic mirroring generated the political and economic authority that made them believe that, as common people, they could change circumstances that they previously believed were beyond their control.

Robinson categorizes abolition into three, chronologically overlapping phases: elitist, militant-populist, and revolutionary.[63] The first phase originated in abolitionist societies that

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systems of oppression and exploitation. See, for example, the progression Robinson traces from DuBois to Richard Wright in *Black Marxism*.

[62] Erin Pineda, *Seeing Like an Activist*. New York: Oxford, 2020, 12; cf. Theoharis 2018.

[63] Robinson, *Black Movements*, 47

appeared in Philadelphia in 1775, New York ten years later, with five societies forming together, in 1794, the American Convention for the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race. Led by wealthy and educated elites from the ranks of white merchants, these initial abolitionists were moderate, arguing that a reckoning with Christian morality would result in the gradual elimination of slavery. The second phase began as abolition societies spread to smaller, rural communities and free Blacks in the North made in-roads into the leadership of these societies. During this period abolitionist activities became more insurgent across discursive spaces, private homes, and public assemblies that emboldened and memorialized direct action. What legal codes in several Southern states designated "slave stealing"—liberating slaves and ferrying them to freedom in the North or Canada—became not just more common, but also ideologically more acceptable. Both successful and thwarted liberations and the abolitionists who risked their lives to guide enslaved people to freedom were covered extensively in abolitionist newspapers,[64] whose anti-slave editors gathered material support from subscribers and patrons. The launch of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* was financially backed by two successful free Black businessmen, James Vashon and James Forten, and Black readers made up three-quarters of the paper's monthly subscribers. Garrison's 1833 travels to England were paid for by funds raised in the Black community. Preachers, travelling lecturers, as well as so-called conductors on the Underground Railroad ferrying passengers to the North, received refuge in Free Black homes, churches, and businesses.[65]

The third, revolutionary phase reflected "the contradictions of being free and Black" according to Robinson, pitting reformists against both emigrationists desiring "Black sovereignty" and a small number of radicals planning and plotting slave insurrections. The cause of Black self-governance and emigration took shape as it circulated in and mirrored across Black newspapers,

[64] Ibid, 49.
[65] Ibid, 51.

pamphlets, editorials, speeches, conventions, and in delegations dispatched to the West Indies, Canada, and later Liberia, to investigate the possibilities of buying land. Emigration was argued for as early as 1838 in two letters published by "Augustine" in *The Colored American*, which also published a plan developed by Cleveland's Young Men's Union Society the following year. These examples suggest how the relay between print and reading publics fashioned a democratic will around the idea of emigration and self-rule, just as they had shifted support from gradualist approaches to more open anti-slavery actions.

John Brown had been circulating his idea for an armed rebellion on Harper's Ferry among a small circle of confidants and supporters in the free Black and former slave communities of the North and Canada for at least a dozen years before 1859, hoping to recruit free Blacks to join the armed attack and financial support for the group's training and mission. Brown shared the plan for the raid along with his Provisional Constitution with a group of almost fifty gathered in May 1858 in Chatham, Canada, who elected Brown "commander-in-chief and Osborn Anderson as a member of Congress in the Revolutionary State. The conferees also agreed that their objective was not to dissolve the United States but to submit it to 'Amendment and Repeal."[66] Though much smaller, the insurrection wing of the abolitionist movement was the product of the same mirroring bodies that generated the democratic will to support the end of slavery; indeed those same congregational bodies and newspapers later memorialized Brown's martyrdom and the lives of the other participants in the attack. Brown's Provisional Constitution represents a never-realized democratic socialism that aimed to overtake and transform the American state into a democracy worthy of its ideals.

[66] Ibid, 61.

The anti-lynching movement initiated by former schoolteacher, publisher, and investigative journalist, Ida B. Wells, extends these examples of democratic mirroring and paideia. The federal government's refusal to enforce the equal protection provisions of the 13th Amendment and its unwillingness to collect data on lynching prompted Wells' efforts to document lynchings and refute the stereotype of Black male sexual aggressors for readers across the U.S., addressing the fear and silence that state-sponsored or -sanctioned lynchings by white vigilantes engendered in the Black community. Those who could not emigrate, felt the "awful dread" that followed these brutal murders. Robinson quotes a local Mississippi newspaper from 1919 that reported "a noticeable absence" of Black citizens on city streets after a man was set on fire in Vicksburg. A 1930 news report observes that white mobs terrorized local Black homes after a lynching without encountering any resistance.[67] This violence and intimidation invigorated anti-lynching societies, Black newspapers that carried Wells' reporting and opinion essays, and Wells' speeches to groups on both sides of the Atlantic, which fashioned democratic mirrors to bring a movement into being. Wells' 1893-1894 reporting and lecturing to audiences in England brought the brutality of lynching to the attention of white American readers, puncturing whatever illusions they wished to maintain about the supposed criminality of the victims.[68] Wells illustrated democratic paideia by using education as a means to mobilization. The goal of the anti-lynching movement was the passage and enforcement of legislation outlawing lynching; Robinson notes that Wells' activism drew upon an existing network of local Black women's benevolence societies and self-help clubs to advance these aims. She spoke to these groups, recruited staff from among their ranks, and raised money for her work from their members.[69] Democratic mirroring emerges through this focusing of the resources and attention of

[67] Ibid, 106.
[68] Ibid, 108.
[69] Ibid, 108.

elements already in place that previously did not see themselves as a collective agent. Mirroring reflects the vitality and purpose behind people's desire for action, helping the demos to overcome the inertia of inaction and resignation.

Robinson's reading of the Civil Rights movement emphasizes the upswell of radical politics that resulted from the return of Black soldiers from the Second World War and the migration of Black workers from the rural South to the factory floors and unions of the industrial North. Returning Black veterans, who were disillusioned with the domestic stasis on racial justice, experienced a "revolution of consciousness and faith." These veterans rejected the "Afro-Christian tradition that had for generations assured them that their lives were the same value as whites. . . . For the alternative Black culture, the one largely pinioned by a nonsecular moral tapestry, the advent of such a change was remote and perhaps sacreligious." [70] They also saw through claims that the war had transformed domestic race relations. Their experiences returning to the U.S. overlapped with and joined them to the radicalization of the union movement resulting from the Great Migration. The rapid growth in the number of Black workers in domestic factories during the Second World War transformed the existing union movement as these new workers flooded their ranks. Engaged in mass action, Robinson writes that "Black workers created a militant civil rights agenda around racial discrimination in jobs, job assignments, job rights, public housing, and law enforcement, and mounted huge campaigns to register Black voters."[71]

Again, we can see the factory floor, union hall, local union organizers, but also segregated streets of Northern and Southern cities, such as Detroit and Winston-Salem, as sites where mirroring empowers Black veterans, workers, and masses to reject the settled hierarchies of U.S. society and the accommodationist leadership of Black elites, as embodied, according to Robinson,

[70] Ibid, 134.
[71] Ibid, 128.

by the NAACP, which was focused on bring and winning lawsuits in the Courts, during this period.[72] The celebrated mass transit strikes in Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama, were not started out by a working-class Black woman, Rosa Parks, working alone. They can be traced back to "daily, unorganized, evasive, seemingly spontaneous actions" by Black workers during the early years of the war, especially Black women who outnumber Black men in the arrest records.[73]

Robinson credits the growth and success of the movement not to King, whose rhetorical and style were tailored to the media, or even the organizational efforts of Ella Baker, Ralph Abernathy, or Septima Clark, who shaped "practical planning and realistic goals to King's paradigmatic talk" but to the masses of ordinary Black people. He writes, "In King they saw their own *reflection*, not their master, their own ambitions, not his dictates. Through sacrifice foretold by their legends, they would build an alternative moral order."[74] Robinson's language of reflection to describe the relationship between King and the movement that surrounded him suggests the democratic mirroring at work. At its most profound, democratic mirroring generates a political culture that enables participants to see themselves in their collective activities, and to grasp their numbers and powers. Solidarity with striking union workers, the experiences of shared struggle, and training in the movement's Freedom Schools, offered members of the movement a democratic paideia to support this mirroring.

This democratic paideia was the source of the movement's ability to refuse and challenge the received culture, which alternatively tried to distort, co-opt, and/or assimilate their demands to the imperatives of the state and its own ongoing investment in its own stability. Despite this paideia, however, the state succeeded in draining the movement of its radicalism, as Robinson writes: "The

[72] Ibid, 139.
[73] Ibid, 140.
[74] Ibid, 144; my emphasis.

killings, assassinations, Vietnam War, race riots in New York, New Jersey, Chicago, and Philadelphia in 1964, and Watts in 1965; the FBI's hostility to the movement and indifference to official and civilian segregationist violence; the Democratic Party's rejection of the MFDP (Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party); and ultimately the choice to employ white student shock troops constituted soul murder: the America King had dreamed of was impossible."[75] The promise of democratic mirroring illustrated and embodied by the abolitionists, anti-lynching movement, and Black freedom struggle was left unfilled.

**4. The Promise of Democratic Mirroring**

In the spirit of Robinson's late comments on the possibility of a "democratic America,"[76] here we attempt a modest reconstruction of democratic theory as it approaches the question of the viability of democratic socialism within or beyond the state, touching upon the related questions of the genesis of collective consciousness, the importance and essence of direct political experience, and the paradox if not the contradiction of democratic institutions or institutionalization. Such a reconstruction centers the work of democratic transformation to find good enough democratic mirrors, viz. mirrors of demotic vitality and finitude, and seeks to hold together the tensions between liberal-democratic and anarchist visions of socialist freedom surveyed above while speaking to the examples of democratic organizing represented by Abolitionist, Anti-Lynching, and Civil

[75] Ibd, 150. Televised news, which beamed the dramatic events of Little Rock, bus boycotts, sit ins, the March on Washington, into American homes, played a role, too. It set ideological divisions and leaders within the movement against one another, focused on its male leaders and their opposing personalities (King vs Malcolm X), pushed into the shadows the efforts of Black women (Septima Clark, Ella Baker, Rosa Parks) and communists like Bayard Rustin, and simplified the movement's demands down to fit within the terms of the American nation-state (145).

[76] Cedric Robinson, "Race, Capitalism, and Anti-democracy," in Quan, H. L. T., ed. *Cedric Robinson: On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance*, 331 – 339 (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 337.

Rights movements. These democratic moments and these visions of freedom differed in important ways, but a reconstructed democratic socialism that centers democratic mirroring can hold the tensions among different moments of democracy up to one another and thus expand and deepen the work of democracy within socialism.

Democratic mirroring at its simplest is the work of seeing oneself, seeing others, and being seen by those others by the light of democracy, i.e. by the light of the power (*kratos*) of the people (*demos*). First and foremost, the idea responds to Olin Wright's claim that the cultivation of collective actors is the "most vexing problem" attending the democratic socialist project. As Robinson's *Black Movements in America* illustrates, the animating force of such collective actors—what we call their democratic spirit—subsists only when mirrored in local practices of collaboration, improvisation, and self-fashioning.[77] At a minimum, this requires each participant see herself as a democratic agent, or as a locus of initiative with others. Voting is an insufficient and even dangerous form of mirroring because it restricts participation to an abstract, disembodied force ("public will") and distracts and detracts from direct forms of seeing oneself democratically. Moreover, emphasizing the state as the vehicle for social freedom does nothing to counteract growing alienation from formal political spheres. To have one's democratic actions mirrored by others is the foundation of a democratic culture. The mirror of collective action establishes political self-regard—the *sine qua non* of a collective actor "coherent and capable" enough, to borrow Wright's words, to challenge anti-democratic cultures and forms of life.[78] Democratic mirroring thus runs on a spectrum from the minimalist collaborative actions of individuals to a maximalist democratic paideia in which equality suffuses everyday life as if it were a part of the atmosphere. All attempts to recognize democratic

[77] On fugitive democracy, see Ali Aslam, David McIvor, and Joel Alden Schlosser, "Democratic Theory When Democracy is Fugitive."
[78] Wright, *How to Be an Anticapitalist*, 119.

vitality can be adjudicated on the basis of their contribution to, blithe disregard of, or hostility to, this spectrum. Theorists of democratic socialism like Honneth and Hägglund who focus on recognition through the institutions of the state run the risk of disavowing both the ways that state agents have suppressed practices of democratic mirroring (what we call forced finitude) and that even "successful" forms of recognition run the danger of sapping the sources of democratic vitality. Because democratic mirroring prioritizes the demos' self-recognition of its own powers rather than state recognition, mirroring reorients democratic socialism towards supporting the conditions of democratic participation in, around, and beyond the state. Accordingly, socialism becomes the means for promoting this goal rather than being measured according to its platform or how well its agenda is translated into state policies of distribution or recognition, a goal concerned with what Nancy Fraser has called "participatory parity."[79]

The concept of democratic mirroring, however, does not reject engagement with the state *tout court*, only the prioritization of state institutions as the necessary site where democratic will can be realized or expressed. Democratic mirroring seeks to draw together state-centric visions of politics with anti-political or anti-statist traditions or forms of resistance, along with prefigurative accounts of politics, by showing the common kernel in the aspiration for democratic vitality or spirit, which we argue can only be cultivated by an iterative process of action and mirroring. Democratic mirroring inserts a gap between socialism and the state that helps explain how anti-statist movements like modern prison-abolition contribute to a socialist agenda that is not identical to the state, again prioritizing the democratic aspect of democratic socialism.

Second, democratic mirroring brings collective movements and organizing into a relationship with finitude and death. As Hägglund argues, spirit only comes to itself through

[79] Fraser, Nancy and Axel Honneth. *Redistribution or Recognition?* New York: Verso, 2003.

recognition of its finitude. Finitude, for Hägglund, clarifies one's responsibilities, but it has another democratic virtue when it attends to the *limits* of one's power. Abolitionists, Anti-Lynching activists, and Civil Rights movement workers embraced plentitude by shaping a democratic consciousness, yet they recognized finitude when they realized that only federal action or institutions could adequately address the problems encountered by their members. The state is akin to death for the demos, which lives only through action and its corresponding paideia. Yet even death can bear fruit for democracy. If the death of democratic movements leaves a testament to their original genesis and cultivation, such a death can act like seeds for eventual regeneration.

This approach to finitude risks overlooking the history and present of *forced,* rather than freely chosen, finitude. The anti-political theory of Robinson and others corrects for this, with its tragic account of state persecutions and violence. The fugitive moments of collaboration and self-fashioning collected by Robinson and Hartman, and given theoretical articulation by Moten and Harney, testify to the ways that democratic consciousness can be preserved amongst its ruins. Finitude not only speaks to the limits of democratic spirit but to the work of remembrance that must attend the moments when these limits are approached—or violently imposed—on the demos.

Democratic mirroring accepts the undeniable history of forced finitude while orienting self-directing people toward collective flourishing. It illustrates the necessity of seeing both ourselves and others by the light of democracy, asserting that despite its demonstrated inadequacy, democracy remains the best way of going on together. Mirrored in this way, participants develop political, individual self-confidence along with strategies for resisting anti-democratic cultures and building more democratic forms of life. Democratic spirit builds through experiences of plentitude and reminders of finitude. Plentitude is reflected in the experience of Black veterans and union members who developed a democratic consciousness as they saw themselves reflected in King's vision of

what America could be. Such forms of seeing are the seedbed of democratic consciousness and confidence. Power begets power.

Yet plentitude is always shadowed by finitude, something that hegemonic political visions and institutions actively conceal. By confronting dismemberment and finitude, democratic practitioners and theorists can envision fruitful deaths and see their efforts as fertilizer for regeneration. Again, power *begets* power – death, both freely chosen or forced, can make room for more life, animated by the remembrance of democratic moments lost or (nearly) buried.

Future research on the concept of democratic mirroring could explore the limits—historically and normatively—of specific social movements and radical politics and their relationship to finitude, both forced and freely chosen. Are there moments in the life of a movement when a turn towards state recognition represents a kind of generative sacrifice, as opposed to the typical ways of interpreting it as elite co-optation or a dulling of its radical edge? Moreover, mirroring can serve as an umbrella concept for exploring "mainstream" political movements alongside prefigurative or utopian projects of escape, flight, or resistance.[80] By rooting analyses of the range of political aspirations in a common denominator of democratic spirit and its (re)generation, scholars of democratic socialism, anarchism, and the anti-political tradition can identify similarities across hypostatized differences.

In summation, democratic socialism holds the promise of a freer and more just political community, "a humanistic, utopic worldview" much needed at this moment of fear, anxiety, and helplessness.[81] Yet democratic socialism must double-down on the *democratic* to redeem this promise.

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[80] Looking at the history of the Cooperation Jackson movement, for example, one could fruitfully explore the possible arc from its Black nationalist origins to its embrace of political power (including success in city-wide elections in Jackson, MS). Institutions such as People's Assemblies as well as cooperatively-owned structures could provide examples of democratic mirroring put into practice.
[81] Nathan J. Robinson, *Why You Should Be a Socialist (*New York: All Points Book, 2019), 18-19.

A truly democratic socialism mirrors the spirit of the *demos* in its everyday struggles for power that are the greatest source of its generation, in its plentitude and finitude. The multi-faceted concept of democratic mirroring that we have developed here pluralizes the struggle for democratic socialism while holding fast to its central ideals.

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