

Lenin, Unfinished

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Abstract: A century after Lenin's body was preserved in Moscow's Red Square, his theoretical and political legacy continues to shape contemporary geopolitics unexpectedly. This article examines the paradoxical nature of Lenin's preserved corpse as both a scientific achievement and a symbol of revolutionary aspirations, arguing that it is a material metaphor for Leninism's unfinished project. Through analysis of Lenin's theoretical innovations—particularly his approach to nationalism, state power, and revolutionary consciousness—its argument demonstrates how his ideas remain relevant to current political challenges. Special attention is paid to Lenin's conception of socialist consciousness as an external force and his dialectical approach to technological progress, exemplified in his strategic appropriation of Taylorism. The article engages with theoretical perspectives from Luxemburg, Schmitt, and Guattari to illuminate Lenin's distinctive contribution to revolutionary theory, particularly his understanding of the complex relationship between centralized organization and mass movements. These insights are particularly relevant for understanding contemporary developments, from Putin's complicated relationship with Lenin's legacy to China's fusion of central control with market efficiency. The article concludes that Lenin's theoretical framework, while historically bounded, offers crucial insights for conceptualizing resistance to capitalism's intensifying global logic.

Keywords: Leninism, communism, cosmism, socialist consciousness, democratic centralism

January 27, 2024, marks a century since Lenin's body was embalmed and preserved permanently. Housed in a granite mausoleum in Moscow's Red Square, Lenin's remains have stood as both a scientific marvel and an enduring emblem of Soviet legacy. The techniques of preservation, developed by scientists Vladimir Vorobiov and Boris Zbarsky, pushed the boundaries of biochemistry and would later inspire similar efforts across the communist world, from Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh and China's Mao Zedong to North Korea's Kim Il Sung. Lenin's preserved corpse stands as a paradoxical monument: through modern technology's preservative power, his remains have become both a relic and a ruin of the Russian Revolution's failed universal aspirations.

This technological immortality strikes an uncanny note even against Western religious traditions, where mortal flesh is meant to return to dust while the soul transcends earthward bonds. The carefully maintained corpse in its Red Square mausoleum thus becomes doubly strange – neither genuinely dead nor alive, neither sacred relic nor mere historical artifact. This unsettling immortality emerges not from a rejection of reason but from reason's own extremes—a rationality that, pushed to its limits, transforms into something altogether alien. Like a mathematical function

that breaks down at infinity, this rationalized preservation transcends ordinary logic to become its peculiar form of excess. Lenin's preserved body stands as a complex testament to history: to some, a macabre monument to the totalitarian cult; to others, a crystallized emblem of Soviet aspirations and lost grandeur.

Lenin exists at a paradoxical intersection of presence and absence, embodying what Slavoj Žižek calls the parallax view. At this point, seemingly incompatible perspectives converge to reveal a more profound truth. His physical presence in the mausoleum represents an uncanny materiality: simultaneously present and absent, dead yet undying. The mausoleum functions much like Pascal's wager about God's existence—not as proof but as a space of enacted belief. When visitors file past Lenin's preserved body, they participate in a ritual transforming faith into material reality. The very act of viewing creates the thing being viewed. This performative aspect of belief echoes the circular logic of revolutionary temporality: Lenin's historical existence is inseparable from the revolution he led, yet the revolution itself cannot be conceived without Lenin.

This mutual dependence creates a kind of ontological knot. The revolution validates Lenin's historical materiality, while Lenin's body—preserved through Soviet science—validates the revolution's permanence. Here, two strands of Russian thought intertwine the materialist science of communism, which preserved his physical form, and the mysticism of Russian Cosmism, which dreamed of humanity's eternal existence. The preservation of Lenin's body thus represents both scientific achievement and metaphysical aspiration—a perfect synthesis of communist materialism and cosmic eternalism. In this way, Lenin transcends simple physical existence to become what could be called a “material idea”—an embodied concept that gains its reality precisely through the intersection of revolutionary history, scientific preservation, and collective belief. His perpetual presence in the mausoleum serves as both proof and performance of this paradox. This ambiguity of Lenin's, which exists because he is gone, still affects Russia today.

In justifying the invasion of Ukraine, Putin cast Lenin as the destroyer of historical Russian unity. He claimed that before the Bolshevik revolution, Russia existed as an organic whole and that Lenin's policies—particularly regarding national self-determination—had fractured this unity. This was not a new position for Putin; in 2016, he had characterized Lenin's nationality policies as a “time bomb” beneath the Russian state. He pointed to the Donbas region, where pro-Russian separatists had launched a rebellion shortly after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, as evidence of this supposed fragmentation. However, Putin's interpretation of Lenin's legacy deliberately distorts history to serve his expansionist agenda against Ukraine.

Lenin's influence on the modern world extends far beyond Putin's selective criticisms. Putin's denunciation of Lenin ironically

affirms that Lenin is “one of the creators of the 20th century.”¹ Far from diminishing Lenin’s historical significance, Putin’s attacks underscore how profoundly Lenin’s ideas about nationalism, self-determination, and state power continue to shape our political reality. For better or worse, the contemporary global order bears Lenin’s imprint—particularly in how we understand class and nationhood. This legacy begins with Lenin’s development of Marx’s unfinished class analysis in *Capital*, where Lenin expanded Marx’s work into his theory of imperialism. At its core, Leninism offers a concrete answer to Marx’s abstract question: “What makes a class?” Putin inadvertently highlighted this enduring relevance in repudiating Lenin’s policies on Ukraine. The key to understanding this lies in Lenin’s famous debate with Rosa Luxemburg over national self-determination. Luxemburg’s critique of Lenin’s position on Ukrainian independence revealed the fundamental tension between class solidarity and national sovereignty, which continues to shape geopolitics today.

Luxemburg exposed a crucial contradiction: while socialism aimed for international revolution, workers primarily understood it through their national identities.² The workers’ immediate concerns remained rooted in their local contexts, even as socialist theory called for global solidarity. The nation-state represented more than just an administrative framework for governing populations—it created what Luxemburg saw as a kind of phantom objectivity, a shared imaginary that shaped political consciousness. This transformation of sovereignty from divine right to national will paralleled the broader processes of secularization and rationalization in modern society. Luxemburg traced how national movements historically aligned with bourgeois political victories, seeing nationalism as fundamentally tied to capitalist development. This analysis led to her sharp disagreement with Lenin. While Lenin viewed the national question as a strategic tool—using promises of self-determination to unite oppressed nationalities under socialist leadership—Luxemburg saw an inherent contradiction between nationalism and socialist internationalism. She argued that Lenin’s support for national self-determination was merely tactical, driven by the immediate pressures of anti-imperial resistance rather than socialist principles.

Yet what Luxemburg criticized as Lenin’s opportunistic compromise with nationalism proved to be his strategic genius. While both theorists recognized the nation-state as a product of bourgeois victory, Lenin’s approach was more sophisticated. He argued that supporting the right to national self-determination, including secession, did not necessarily promote separatism—a position he considered both practical and principled. Lenin envisioned nationalism as a transitional force that would naturally weaken as socialism took root. He believed he could harness national sentiment to advance socialist internationalism, using immediate demands for national liberation to build toward a broader revolutionary movement. History, however, has repeatedly challenged Lenin’s optimistic

synthesis of nationalism and socialism. Time and again, nationalist movements—particularly when fused with populism—have overwhelmed socialist internationalism rather than serving as its catalyst. This pattern, visible from the twentieth century to the present, suggests that Lenin may have underestimated nationalism’s resilient appeal and its capacity to overshadow class-based politics.

The State and Socialist Consciousness

Far from fading, nationalism resurfaces whenever domestic priorities eclipse international aspirations. After World War II, Stalin’s policy toward Korea offers a telling example of this dynamic. Following Lenin’s theoretical framework, Stalin directed the Korean Communist Party to reinvent itself as Workers’ Party of Korea—a strategic shift that acknowledged nationalism’s role in post-colonial state-building. Stalin calculated that Korean decolonization would follow the classical Marxist sequence: a nationalist-driven bourgeois revolution would precede socialist transformation. Workers’ Party of Korea—which became North Korea’s ruling party—embraced this logic but with a distinctive twist. Its central mission became the artificial creation of a working class through the policy of “proletarianization” (*working-classizing*), making this manufactured class consciousness a cornerstone of North Korean state ideology.

The irony of North Korea’s invocation of national self-determination to justify its nuclear program vividly illustrates the unresolved tensions in Lenin’s approach to nationalism. While Lenin viewed nationalism as a temporary phase in the march toward socialism, North Korea’s trajectory suggests he misjudged the nation-state’s enduring material power and psychological appeal. Yet this challenge extends beyond Lenin’s specific theoretical framework to the broader project of internationalism itself. Any movement seeking to transcend national boundaries inevitably confronts the stubborn reality of national identity and sovereignty. Lenin’s pragmatic engagement with this dilemma—particularly regarding Ukraine—had far-reaching consequences. His support for national self-determination influenced Woodrow Wilson’s liberal internationalism and inspired anti-colonial movements worldwide.

Indeed, our contemporary geopolitical landscape remains fundamentally shaped by the dialectic between imperialism and anti-imperialism that Lenin helped theorize. The global order that emerged from this conflict—with its complex web of national sovereignties, international institutions, and persistent power struggles—bears Lenin’s unmistakable imprint. In this sense, Leninism’s true legacy lies not in its vision of a post-national future but in how it transformed our understanding of the relationship between nationalism and international order. This tension crystallized Lenin’s thought into the intertwined strands of cosmism and communism, where his vision remains suspended. Like a dialectical

image in Benjamin's conception, Lenin stands frozen in time—a figure caught between cosmic transcendence and earthly revolution. The idea of Leninism is eaten into this paradox: simultaneously reaching for the stars while attempting to transform the material conditions of human existence.

In contrast to Luxemburg's critique, Lenin's approach to nationalism was not a mere compromise but rather a calculated strategy for state-directed containment. His vision was not accommodation but orchestrated absorption—a distinction he meticulously outlined in *What Is To Be Done?* Rather than yielding to nationalist sentiment, Lenin envisioned a state apparatus that would harness and ultimately transcend these forces through careful institutional management and ideological guidance. This conception of state power as an instrument to cultivate democracy echoes back to Spinoza's political philosophy, where sovereign authority serves as a constraining force and an active agent in democratic development. Like Spinoza's understanding of the state as a vehicle for collective liberation, Lenin envisioned institutional power as a means to shepherd rather than suppress political transformation.

From Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* to Lenin's state theory, this genealogy of thought reveals a persistent tension between institutional authority and democratic emergence. Spinoza clarified that "the state can pursue no safer course than to regard piety and religion as consisting solely in the exercise of charity and just dealing, and that the right of the sovereign, both in religious and secular spheres, should be restricted to men's actions, which everyone being allowed to think that he will and to say what he thinks"³ When state power falters in its role as a catalyst for liberation, a critical inversion occurs: freedom itself becomes captive to the very apparatus meant to secure it. This dialectical reversal transforms the state from an instrument of emancipation into a mechanism of containment, where bureaucratic imperatives eclipse the original promise of freedom. What begins as a temporary scaffolding for liberation calcifies into a permanent structure of constraint, echoing Hegel's warning about the paradoxical nature of institutional power. The revolutionary potential of the state apparatus thus becomes its opposite—a force that subordinates the very freedom it was designed to nurture.

Lenin's crucial insight was that the nation-state left to its own devices, does not naturally progress toward democratic forms. Rather, he understood that the relationship between state power and democratic development requires conscious direction and theoretical understanding. This perspective challenged both anarchist assumptions about the withering away of the state and liberal beliefs in the natural progression of democratic institutions. For Lenin, the transformation of state power into an instrument of democratic development demanded deliberate intervention by an organized revolutionary force—a dialectical process where institutional power must be actively reconstructed rather than simply seized or dismantled.

Lenin's discovery was that "socialist consciousness" serves as the catalyzing force that propels both peoples and nations toward deeper democratization. This idea inverted the conventional belief that democratic institutions naturally give rise to socialist awareness. Instead, Lenin argued that it was the development of revolutionary consciousness—through organized political education and strategic action—that drives workers to demand and construct more substantive forms of democracy. This dialectical relationship between socialist consciousness and democratic transformation helped explain why formal democratic structures alone often failed to produce genuine popular empowerment. For Lenin, socialist consciousness is nothing less than the essential mediating force between abstract democratic ideals and concrete political struggle.

Lenin's decisive intervention on consciousness hinges on a crucial paradox: "Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside of the economic struggle, from outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers."⁴ This externality signifies not merely a spatial relationship but a theoretical rupture with spontaneous forms of resistance. For Lenin, revolutionary consciousness emerges at the intersection where immediate experience encounters systematic theory—an uncanny space where scientific socialism transforms raw class antagonism into a coherent political strategy. This process demands the deliberate intervention of organized revolutionaries who can mediate between abstract theoretical understanding and concrete struggles.

The "external" character of this consciousness points to its irreducibility to purely economic conflicts or spontaneous uprisings, requiring instead a systematic theoretical framework that can elevate particular struggles to universal political significance. Against both populist romanticism and economic determinism, Lenin argued that revolutionary consciousness requires the deliberate fusion of theoretical knowledge with mass struggle. The seemingly paradoxical notion that emancipatory consciousness comes "from without" points to the necessary role of organized revolutionary intellectuals who can synthesize disparate struggles into a coherent political project. This dialectic between internal experience and external theory remains one of Lenin's most controversial yet influential contributions to revolutionary strategy.

For Lenin, communism represented not a spontaneous eruption from within existing conditions but rather an intervention made possible through external theoretical consciousness. This externality radically reconfigured the relationship between theory and practice: revolutionary practice became a matter of implementing theoretical insights, while theory served as the systematic formulation of revolutionary strategy. By positioning communism as fundamentally external to the normal functioning of society, Lenin subverted traditional conceptions of

revolution that relied on the natural evolution of economic contradictions. He explicitly rejected the notion that quantitative accumulation of economic struggles would automatically generate qualitative political transformation. Instead, Lenin insisted on the necessity of a new political subject: the professional revolutionary, whose entire existence was dedicated to revolutionary activity. This figure would serve as the crucial mediating force, accelerating the qualitative leap from economic to political struggle through conscious theoretical intervention.

A crucial insight into Lenin's theoretical architecture lies in his implicit split consciousness. This division reveals that communism operates on a fundamentally different register from everyday consciousness—one that aligns with what psychoanalysis would term the real rather than the symbolic order. From this perspective, the idea of communism inhabits the domain of the unconscious, resistant to simple articulation within existing symbolic structures. This locus in the unconscious explains why communism cannot emerge spontaneously from economic struggles but requires external intervention. The professional revolutionary, in Lenin's schema, functions as a figure who can traverse this gap between conscious and unconscious dimensions, between symbolic reality and the Real of communist potential. These revolutionaries must operate according to a logic that appears "unrealistic" from the perspective of conventional economic rationality precisely because they follow the different logic of communist consciousness. Their role is to actualize what appears impossible within the existing symbolic order—to materialize what psychoanalysis would call the "real movement" that exists beneath conscious political reality.

The "outside" emerges from the "pure" idea of communism itself—a theoretical rupture that generates its own exteriority. This is not merely a spatial or temporal outside but rather a structural break in the fabric of existing consciousness. The idea of communism functions as both the force that creates this rupture and the framework that makes it intelligible. In this dialectical movement, theoretical engagement with the idea of communism generates its own epistemological conditions through a unique form of self-reflexive rupture. By positing communism as an idea, this theoretical work simultaneously creates the external dimension necessary for systemic critique and the conceptual framework that makes such critique intelligible. This is not merely a matter of finding an Archimedean point outside the system but rather of producing, through theoretical practice itself, a new mode of thinking that transcends existing categories.

The "pure" idea of communism thus functions as both the catalyst for this epistemic break and the horizon that orients subsequent critical analysis. This self-constituting externality represents a crucial feature of communist theory: its capacity to generate, through its own theoretical operations, the perspective from which the totality of social relations becomes visible and transformable. This self-generating exteriority

distinguishes Lenin's conception from both reformist gradualism and spontaneous revolt: the outside is neither a pre-existing vantage point nor a natural development but rather an active theoretical construction that enables revolutionary consciousness to emerge. The paradox here is productive: the idea of communism must presuppose the very externality it creates, operating simultaneously as the cause and effect of revolutionary consciousness.

The Great Leninian Rupture

On this theoretical foundation, Lenin envisioned Bolshevism. Félix Guattari recognized in Lenin's theory of the vanguard party what he termed the "great Leninian rupture"—a fundamental innovation in revolutionary organization that transcended traditional models of political activism. This rupture represented not merely an organizational principle but a radical reconceptualization of political subjectivity itself. What Guattari identified in Lenin's invention was a new way of thinking about revolutionary consciousness that broke decisively with both spontaneist and reformist traditions. The vanguard, in this theoretical breakthrough, functioned not simply as a leadership structure but as a novel form of collective political practice that generated its own conditions of possibility. This rupture marked a decisive theoretical moment where the relationship between revolutionary consciousness and mass movement was fundamentally reconceived.

Guattari characterized Lenin's revolutionary breakthrough as a form of "group castration"—a provocative formulation that captured the complex dialectic between the Party and the masses.⁵ This psychoanalytic reading of Lenin's rupture suggests not a hierarchical severing but rather a productive tension: the "castration" functions as the very condition that makes revolutionary politics possible. For Guattari, this framework did not signify the Party's privileged authority over the masses but instead established the fundamental structural dynamic through which revolutionary consciousness could emerge. The "castration" operates as a generative limit that simultaneously separates and connects, creating the necessary distance through which both the Party and the masses could develop their distinct but interrelated political capacities.

While Lenin's formulation of Bolshevism and its organizational expression in democratic centralism have been widely criticized for fostering bureaucratic hierarchy, such critiques often miss the subtle complexity of his original theoretical position. Lenin's conception did not envision the total subordination of all political movements to a single center; rather, he theorized a dynamic relationship between centralized organization and diverse forms of mass activity. As he explicitly stated, the centralization of organizational functions was distinct from the broader movement's activities. This crucial distinction reveals that Lenin's model

aimed not at monolithic control but at creating a dialectical tension between directed revolutionary practice and spontaneous mass initiatives. The subsequent historical ossification of this model into rigid bureaucratic hierarchies represents not the fulfillment but rather the deformation of Lenin's original theoretical breakthrough.

Lenin envisioned a dialectical process wherein the masses themselves would generate an increasing demand for professional revolutionaries, actively participating in their formation and training. This organic development is crystallized in his crucial distinction: "To concentrate all secret functions in the hands of as small a number of professional revolutionaries as possible does not mean that the latter will 'do the thinking for all' and that the crowd will not take an active part in the *movement*."⁶ This formulation reveals Lenin's sophisticated understanding of revolutionary dynamics—the centralized party apparatus serves specific organizational functions while the broader movement maintains its autonomy and creative potential. The asterisked emphasis on *organization* versus *movement* underscores a fundamental theoretical insight: revolutionary politics operates simultaneously on two distinct but interrelated registers, each with its own logic and rhythm.

The party's centralized functions exist not to subsume the movement but to catalyze and amplify its revolutionary potential. The centralization of organizational secrecy represents not a constraint on mass participation but rather its enabling condition. Lenin's dialectical insight reveals that professional revolutionaries, by absorbing the technical demands of underground work, actually expand rather than restrict the scope for mass engagement. As he argues, when a "dozen" trained revolutionaries centralize the secret functions of the movement, mass participation in illegal press activities increases "tenfold" rather than diminishes. This multiplication effect emerges precisely because centralized secrecy makes broader participation less dangerous and more effective.

The strategy contains a subtle irony: by concentrating conspiratorial functions among professionals, these activities begin to lose their purely secret character. The police apparatus, confronted with thousands of distributed publications, finds its repressive mechanisms overwhelmed and increasingly futile. This principle extends beyond publishing to all aspects of revolutionary work, including demonstrations. The professional cadre—"trained professionally no less than the police"—takes responsibility for the movement's covert aspects: leaflet production, strategic planning, and the appointment of district leadership across urban, industrial, and educational sectors.⁷ What emerges is a sophisticated dialectic between centralization and mass participation: the more effectively the professionals manage secret work, the more freely the masses can engage in revolutionary activity. Rather than contradicting each other, professional conspiracy and mass participation enter into a productive tension that enhances both dimensions of revolutionary practice.

In this passage, Lenin reconceptualizes centralization not as bureaucratic control but as a technical apparatus for managing revolutionary secrets. The professional revolutionaries function as encrypted channels through which forbidden knowledge circulates—knowledge that fundamentally transgresses the governing logic of the existing order. What is crucial here is that these “secrets” are not merely information to be hidden from the police but rather represent a form of knowledge that violates the very epistemological framework of established reality. The professional revolutionary thus serves as both a technical operator of underground networks and a bearer of knowledge that is “illegal” in a deeper sense: it challenges not just specific laws but the entire system of social and political reality that gives those laws their coherence. This dual function—technical secrecy and epistemological rupture—reveals why centralization in Lenin’s theory is not simply an organizational principle but a necessary condition for revolutionary knowledge to circulate without being neutralized by the existing order. The professional revolutionaries become the material infrastructure through which an alternative reality can begin to emerge and propagate itself within, yet against, the dominant system.

It is at this precise theoretical juncture that we can identify professional revolutionaries as embodiments of revolutionary *jouissance*—figures whose very existence is structured by their captivation with communist ideology in fundamental violation of the paternal law. These subjects materialize a particular form of excess: their dedication to revolution exceeds rational self-interest, marking them as bearers of a transgressive enjoyment that defies the symbolic order’s normative constraints. The professional revolutionary thus emerges not merely as an organizational function but as a specific subjective position defined by its relationship to prohibited knowledge and illicit pleasure. Their *jouissance*, bound to communist ideology, represents a radical break with the law of the father—not simply in terms of explicit political opposition, but as a deeper libidinal investment in what the existing order must necessarily exclude or repress.

The “castration” that produces the generative separation between the Party and the masses is fundamentally theoretical in nature. This insight finds its most sophisticated elaboration in Louis Althusser’s reading of Lenin’s philosophical intervention. For Althusser, Lenin operates as the name of a father who performs a decisive theoretical castration on academic philosophy itself—not to diminish it but to make it productive. This castration introduces a cut that separates philosophy from its idealist self-sufficiency, forcing it to confront its relationship to scientific and political practice. Althusser emphasized:

If such is really Lenin’s greatest merit with respect to our present concern, we can perhaps begin by quickly settling an old, open

dispute between academic philosophy, including French academic philosophy, and Lenin. As I, too am an academic and teach philosophy. I am among those who should wear Lenin's 'cap,' if it fits.⁸

This formulation returns us to the central problematic of Lenin's question, "What is to be done?": how to break the depoliticizing effects of economism. The alliance between liberalism and the nation-state functions to neutralize genuine political antagonism by enforcing an artificial separation between political and economic spheres. Carl Schmitt's crucial insight about the bourgeois state's fundamental neutrality helps illuminate Lenin's concern. Schmitt's critique reveals liberalism's foundational mechanism: a system of neutralizations that performs two key ideological functions. First, it projects a fiction of universal equality among individuals and viewpoints. Second, it transforms fundamental political antagonisms into procedural debates supposedly governed by rational rules and open to unlimited deliberation. For Schmitt, the essence of the political lies in the friend-enemy distinction—a fundamental antagonism that cannot be reduced to economic, moral, or aesthetic differences. The liberal state attempts to neutralize this antagonism through a process of progressive depoliticization, transforming political questions into technical-administrative problems. According to him, "its neutralization and depoliticizations (of education, the economy, etc.) are, to be sure, of political significance."⁹

This neutralization follows a historical sequence—from theological to metaphysical, to humanitarian-moral, to economic, and finally to technical spheres—each stage representing an attempt to find neutral ground that would prevent conflict. The state's supposed neutrality, far from being passive, actively works to maintain workers within the horizon of economism—constraining their struggles to questions of wages and conditions while foreclosing genuinely political confrontations. This separation between economics and politics represents not a natural division but a specific historical achievement of bourgeois hegemony. Despite their opposing political orientations, Schmitt's analysis aligns with Lenin's critique in several crucial ways. Both see liberalism as masking real antagonisms, both identify the separation of politics from economics as artificial, and both criticize the reduction of political questions to technical management.

Leninism as an Unfinished Project

The bourgeois state's neutrality actively depoliticizes social conflicts, manages antagonisms through legal-economic frameworks, and prevents the emergence of genuine political alternatives. This helps explain why economic struggles tend to remain within system parameters and why political alternatives become increasingly difficult to imagine. This

framework reveals why Lenin insisted on the necessity of external political intervention and theoretical work. The containment of struggle within economic parameters is not simply a matter of false consciousness but is structurally enforced by the very form of the liberal state. Breaking this containment requires not just economic struggle but a theoretical and practical intervention that can reveal and challenge the artificial separation between economics and politics that bourgeois neutrality maintains. Revolutionary politics can emerge from the neutralized space of purely economic demands only through such intervention.

Lenin and Schmitt, while sharing a penetrating critique of a neutral state, represent radically antithetical positions regarding power's purpose and exercise. While both unmask economism's depoliticizing mechanisms, they move in fundamentally opposed directions: Lenin toward the revolutionary empowerment of the masses, Schmitt toward the authorization of sovereign dictatorship. Their theoretical convergence on liberalism's contradictions thus leads to drastically divergent political projects—one aimed at collective emancipation through class struggle, the other at an authoritarian decision through leader-mass identification. This antagonism is not incidental but reflects their opposing positions on the fundamental question of political power: whether it should serve popular liberation or sovereign authority.

Interestingly, Schmitt identifies technology as the terminal point of liberal neutralization—yet paradoxically, also as the force that will ultimately undermine it. For Schmitt, the technical age represents the culmination of liberalism's neutralizing mechanism, where political decisions are supposedly reduced to technical problems awaiting expert solutions. However, he argues that technology itself cannot remain neutral; it ultimately reveals itself as an instrument of unprecedented power that exceeds liberal containment. He maintains:

Technology is no longer neutral ground in the sense of process of neutralization; every strong politics will make use of it. For this reason, the present century can only be understood provisionally as the century of technology. How ultimately it should be understood will be revealed only when it is known which type of politics is strong enough to master the new technology and which type of genuine friend-enemy groupings can develop on this new ground.¹⁰

The industrial masses remain captivated by what Schmitt terms a “religion of technicity”—a faith in technology's capacity to achieve the absolute depoliticization that liberalism has pursued for four centuries. This technological faith promises the ultimate fulfillment of liberal neutralization: universal peace through technical rationality. However, Schmitt exposes this as a fundamental illusion. Technology, he argues, possesses no inherent political orientation; it merely intensifies existing

antagonisms, serving equally as an instrument of peace or war. The invocation of “peace” as a magical formula cannot mask this essential neutrality of technology. Modern consciousness has begun to penetrate the fog of psycho-technical manipulation and mass suggestion, revealing that technology cannot escape the friend-enemy distinction at the heart of the political. The technical sphere, in attempting to achieve perfect neutrality, generates its own forms of intensity and decision that shatter the very framework of liberal depoliticization. This dialectical reversal, where the supreme instrument of neutralization becomes the agent of its undoing, marks a crucial moment in Schmitt’s analysis of modernity’s political trajectory.

Meanwhile, Lenin’s dialectical approach to technology is powerfully illustrated in his analysis of Taylorism. While recognizing Taylorism as an instrument of bourgeois exploitation, Lenin simultaneously identified its revolutionary potential as a weapon for political mobilization. In a characteristic 1918 formulation, he described Taylorism as embodying “a combination of the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements” in labor organization and efficiency.¹¹ However, Lenin’s crucial insight lay in his understanding that technological systems like Taylorism could be repurposed for socialist ends through conscious political intervention. For Lenin, technology was never neutral but always already political—yet its political valence could be transformed through revolutionary practice. He argued that during the transition from capitalism to socialism, the technological organization must serve two seemingly contradictory functions: laying “the foundations of socialist organization of competition” while simultaneously enabling “the use of compulsion” through a proletarian dictatorship.

This dialectical understanding stands in sharp contrast to both liberal faith in technological neutrality and conservative critiques of technology’s dehumanizing effects. Lenin’s position reveals that technology’s political potential lies precisely in its capacity to reorganize social relations and consciousness. Rather than seeing technology as inherently liberating or oppressive, Lenin understood it as a battlefield where class struggles are fought. The task was not to reject or embrace technology wholesale but to seize and transform it into an instrument for political consciousness and revolutionary transformation.

He added to this argument that

In working to raise the productivity of labor, we must take into account the specific features of the transition period from capitalism to socialism, which, on the one hand, require that the foundations be laid of the socialist organization of the competition, and, on the other hand, require the use of compulsion, so that the practice of a lily-livered proletarian government shall not desecrate the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹²

In this way, Lenin's embrace of Taylorism has yielded unexpected historical ironies. He envisioned scientific management as a temporary tool in the withering away of the state. Yet paradoxically, his conception of the proletarian state as a transitional mechanism has found its most vigorous expression not in socialist systems but in neoliberal governance, which simultaneously strengthens state power while claiming to minimize it.

Contemporary China's adaptation of Taylorist principles presents a crucial test case for Lenin's theory. The Chinese state has merged central control with market efficiency in ways that both echo and distort Lenin's original vision. Rather than diminishing, the nation-state has become more centralized and technologically sophisticated in its management of labor and society. This persistence of state power suggests we must move beyond simple narratives of Lenin's failure. Instead, we might learn from his strategic flexibility while avoiding his theoretical blind spots. As Lenin himself might argue, the task is not to abandon the revolutionary project but to "fail better"—to learn from previous shortcomings while maintaining the courage to envision radical alternatives to the present order.

Lenin's preserved body serves as the reification of the Leninist project itself. This unsettling reality materializes communism's fundamental Real—its raw, unassimilable core. Leninism crucially revealed the inherently asymmetrical structure of revolutionary transformation: Change does not proceed in neat, symmetrical stages but through radical disjunctures. The idea of communism thus remains essential as a force capable of rupturing capitalism's totalizing economic logic—a system now operating at unprecedented intensity, dismantling the symbolic order and even eliminating the unconscious. This resistance operates not merely on a global scale but on a planetary level, transcending traditional geographical and political boundaries. The figure of Lenin, far from being singular or historically bound, multiplies across our contemporary landscape, emerging in new forms and contexts.

- 1 Therborn2023, p. 129.
- 2 Luxemburg 1976, pp. 159-160.
- 3 Spinoza 2002, p. 572.
- 4 Lenin 1973, p. 98.
- 5 Guattari 2015, p. 270.
- 6 Lenin, *ibid.*, p. 154.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- 8 Althusser 1971, p. 27.
- 9 Schmitt 1996, p. 69.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 11 Lenin 1918, p. 259.
- 12 *Ibid.*

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