POWER, ETHICS, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF NONVIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

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In this project I focus on the question, What makes nonviolence an ethical form of political action? The shift to an instrumental understanding of nonviolence in the civil resistance literature has made it difficult to conceptualize nonviolence using a moral framework.

I look first at classical explanations for the moral character of nonviolence that come from Gandhi, Clarence Case and Richard Gregg before moving to the strategic conceptualization that gets developed by Gene Sharp and is underdeveloped today by authors in the civil resistance literature like Erica Chenoweth and Kurt Schock. In discussing Sharp’s theory of power, I rely on the philosophical literature on power, specifically, Foucault and Steven Lukes. In developing my own conception of nonviolence I draw heavily on Arendt and Habermas. I also carry out a historical analysis of Poland’s nonviolent Solidarity movement (1980-89).

My method has been to investigate what is incomplete about what I call the moral and the strategic paradigms of nonviolence in order to highlight what a more complete theory of nonviolence must do. In my analysis I argue that the moral paradigm, which understands nonviolence through the idea of conversion, lacks a conceptualization of the power inherent to nonviolent acts and is, itself, inconsistent about whether nonviolence operates coercively (Ch 2). Gene Sharp’s strategic reconceptualization argues that nonviolence is a more effective technique for political change than violence and that it actually forces the opposition to change. His theory of nonviolent power, however, relies on a voluntarist notion of consent that is inadequate in the face of contemporary social theory. The civil resistance literature in general focuses on the
disruptive acts like strikes and boycotts, but does not have a category for nonviolent action that is not disruptive (Ch 3).

Thus, the dissertation argues that nonviolence involves both disruptive acts (between the movement and its opposition) and communicative action (within the movement itself). In order to generate the disruptive capability that is recognized as nonviolent power by the civil resistance literature, I argue that participants within a movement must take a communicative stance toward each other, develop a public sphere, and must participate in developing shared political understandings. The voluntary, collective nature of nonviolent disruptive acts, like strikes, requires public will formation. My analysis of Solidarity shows that disruptive acts both originate in communicative action and are used to protect or expand the space for communicative action against attempts at suppression. For this reason I argue that disruptive acts and communicative action have what I call, a co-generative relationship in nonviolence. (Ch 4)

I use Arendt and Habermas’s political theory to argue that nonviolence is a form of communicative power that gets developed outside of constitutionally democratic frameworks. It is ethical because it involves the effective and rational exercise of agency, through discourse alternating with action. Nonviolence makes private and public autonomy possible for movement participants in contexts of irresolvable conflict because it is powerful and can disrupt or replace existing institutions and legislation. (Ch 5)

My ethical conception of nonviolence attempts to address the issues that arise from conceptualizing nonviolence in a universalistic moral framework (which fails to incorporate power) and in a purely instrumentalist framework (which fails to distinguish violence from nonviolence).
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CHAPTER 1:
Introduction

There is a curious feature about the way a political commitment to nonviolence is understood today. Whereas, in the past, nonviolence was often understood as following from a pacifist moral commitment, today those who study and promote nonviolent techniques often are quick to distinguish between nonviolence and a morally or religiously based pacifism. Taking their cue from George Lakey, who claims that "most pacifists do not practice nonviolent resistance, and most people who do practice nonviolent resistance are not pacifists," recent theorists writing about nonviolence insist that it is a major misconception of nonviolence to think that it is a form of pacifism. They presume pacifism to be an objection to politically motivated violence based on moral issues about the nature of violence itself.

Traditional pacifism views violence negatively and sees nonviolence positively. The pacifist position holds that political nonviolence is morally preferable to political violence because it operates by “converting” the moral opinion of the opposition rather than by coercing/forcing a particular behavior through violence. Contemporary theorists, proponents and educators of nonviolence, however, have distanced themselves from pacifist moral commitments.

This eschewing of pacifism is understandable since there have been a number of criticisms of pacifism that argue it is philosophically inconsistent and even a dangerous and damaging approach to politics. Furthermore, modern nonviolent theorists believe that pacifism is viewed publicly as a form of “passiveness” or “weakness,” and is thus politically ineffective. The goals

of the contemporary literature on nonviolence, (which begins with Gene Sharp), is to argue that nonviolence is effective and to debunk the idea that political violence is the only effective means of last resort. The literature claims there is a mythology and valorization of violence worldwide that leads to its preeminence in historical texts and a general belief that to be serious about political change one must be willing to commit violence. The current literature on strategic nonviolence presents nonviolence as a more effective, yet still militaristic alternative to violence.

Kurt Schock, in his article “Nonviolent Action and Its Misconceptions” systematically provides a list of misconceptions about nonviolence. Leading off the list (indicating its pervasiveness) is the idea that nonviolence is inaction and passivity. Schock says “Nonviolent action is not inaction, it is not submissiveness, it is not the avoidance of conflict, and it is not passive resistance. In fact, nonviolent action is a direct means for prosecuting conflicts with opponents and an explicit rejection of inaction, submission, and passivity.”

Erica Chenoweth, currently the foremost scholar on empirical studies of the outcomes of nonviolent movements and co-author of Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict explains that she is not presenting a pacifist position when she presents her research about the effectiveness of nonviolence. Her blog post, “Just to Clarify, I’m Not a Pacifist” captures the general theoretical mood about strategic nonviolence:

I say it’s unfortunate because it distracts people from the overall point I’m making, which is that historically, nonviolent resistance has been a more effective strategic choice than armed insurrection against authoritarian regimes. People think I’m saying that using violence is immoral, whereas nonviolent resistance is moral. The question I took on in the Think Again piece wasn’t whether using violence against Qaddafi’s thugs was moral or immoral. In fact, I don’t know if using nonviolent resistance is always the moral thing to do, and I am not very interested in that question in the first place.

Because of the tagline, I am afraid that I come across as a pacifist who looked for evidence


that nonviolent resistance worked where it actually didn’t. It’s the exact reverse. I’m a utilitarian who spent four years developing a research design so that I could scientifically test the hypothesis that nonviolent resistance is more effective than violence. I was a skeptic. And I was surprised by what I found. Hence the “Think Again” part of the title.

I will go on record here as saying that I am not a pacifist. I am interested in what works. At times, I think that violence is both necessary and justified. However, based on my own research, these times seem to be extremely rare, very complex, and highly contingent.5

Her position, echoed throughout the literature, focuses on arguing for the effectiveness of nonviolence at generating political change when compared to the effectiveness of violence. It specifically refrains from moral discussions of nonviolence. Gene Sharp, author of the most important work on strategic nonviolence, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973), maintains a similar stance. His work initiated the break of nonviolence from pacifism and holds the position that nonviolence is morally neutral; it is a political instrument, a technique.

I arrived at this project by wondering about the ethical ambiguity surrounding nonviolent action and movements. On one hand, nonviolent movement are almost universally praised by third parties to the conflict and by historians for their decision to avoid violence. This moral praise tends to be based in the values of a pacifist position. On the other hand, it turns out that most participants in nonviolent movements are not pacifists, and chose to use nonviolent techniques for strategic rather than moral reasons. While observers interpret nonviolent movements using a moral framework, participants choose nonviolence because it is more effective at generating power over the opposition than violence would be.

What is really interesting is that the kinds of political activities categorized as nonviolent today have been morally suspect since at least the turn of the century. The strike (perhaps witnessed in the context of the growing power of masses of laborers in the early 20th century) was characterized as violent (because of its violation of law) by George Sorel in *Reflections on*

Violence 6. In *Non-Violent Coercion: A Study in Methods of Social Pressure*, Clarence Case asks whether “coercive” activities such as strikes and boycotts can even rightfully be called “nonviolent.” 7 Thus, there has been and continues to be a profound moral ambiguity about nonviolent activities that continues today.

In the literature this ambiguity has manifested itself through a terminological split in describing different kinds of commitments to nonviolence. 8 A *principled* commitment to nonviolence is morally pacifist and commitment stems from the moral impermissibility of violence. Most political theorists writing about nonviolence today (such as Sharp, Chenoweth or Kurt Schock), on the other hand, understand (or present) themselves as pragmatic proponents of nonviolence. They make no claims about the ethical status of nonviolence (in fact they explicitly eschew such claims to distinguish themselves from pacifists), but they strongly believe nonviolence is more effective as a technique of political change than violence. The fact that to be a theorist of nonviolence today means absolving oneself of ethical commitments about the techniques, whereas in the early and mid 20th century nonviolence was understood largely through a religious lens as the moral alternative to violence, I think, indicates that nonviolence continues to have an ambiguous status. Contemporary theorists have largely avoided this discussion, tabling it by simply claiming that nonviolent political action possesses no special status and that they are in fact not pacifists (despite arguing for the superiority of nonviolent techniques over violent techniques in almost all contexts/circumstances). They specifically present themselves as positivists and instrumentalists about methods of political change. Political

philosophers from the 20th century, especially Arendt and critical theorists would cringe at this characterization, since instrumental notions of politics justified much of the barbarism and totalitarianism of the 20th century.

The current position of the literature on strategic nonviolence raises a number of philosophical issues. First and foremost, how can one recommend and promote particular political techniques without being committed to them in some normative sense? The current literature on strategic nonviolence maintains a problematically inconsistent position for the sake of avoiding a complex ethical issue (and for other strategic reasons related to the goal of promoting nonviolence globally—i.e. pacifism has a bad rap). Post King and Gandhi, understandings of nonviolence have fallen into a positivist political science that raises a major contradiction. Gene Sharp claims nonviolence is morally neutral yet, he recommends it for pragmatic reasons. Erica Chenoweth studies nonviolence with the goal of generative evidence of its effectiveness, yet maintains a similar “value-free” stance. This positivist stance recommends nonviolence at the same time as it claims that nonviolence is ethically neutral, or that ethical characterizations of nonviolence are not of concern. Their position claims nonviolence is simply the more effective political means or instrument.

I believe the split of principled and pragmatic understandings of nonviolence is an inconsistent position—it faces a problem similar to the one that faced logical positivists: being philosophically committed to a belief that only empirically verifiable statements have meaning. In other words, these theorists hold normative commitments without grounding or even acknowledging them. Contemporary nonviolent theory maintains a particular kind of normative commitment to nonviolence, while being vague about what is normatively desirable about
nonviolence, and while formally disavowing any ethical position. While intending to avoid the historically popular association of pacifism with “ineffectiveness” and “passiveness” the current theoretical work on nonviolence is inconsistent with respect to ethical understandings of nonviolence. At the base of the promotion of nonviolence by the civil resistance literature through empirical research and educational efforts there seems to lay an assumption that nonviolence is better than violence (for a number of reasons) and hence an unexamined and unarticulated ethical position.

Furthermore, there are two important problems at stake that motivate this situation as an issue. Given the contemporary prevalence of nonviolent action in politics, conceptualizing nonviolence instrumentally rather than as an ethical form of politics creates significant vulnerabilities for nonviolent movements. First, although governments will not be convinced by a philosophical position, the instrumental conception of nonviolence allows governments to argue that nonviolent action is equivalent to violent action against them. This grants them the rhetorical space to claim that violent responses to nonviolent action are legitimate. This is a major problem because one of the key advantages of nonviolence, according to the strategic nonviolent literature, is that it does not make violent responses effective. Sharp claims that a violent government response to nonviolence will often generate more support for the nonviolent movement from those who see such a reaction as unjustified. Sharp calls this phenomenon the paradox of [violent] repression. However, such a public reaction is based on the popularly held conception that nonviolence is moral; a viewpoint that will be lost if the current, strategic, conception of nonviolence gets popularized.
Already, for instance, Gene Sharp’s work has been attacked by Iran and other authoritarian states as being funded by the U.S government, making it, according to their position, a form of covert military action and a tool of “imperialism.” 9 Both Sharp’s work and his Albert Einstein Institution (which publishes and publicizes his work globally) have also come under attack by critics who argue that it reflects this interests of “imperial elites” rather than simply being in the interest of progressive democracy.10 While these claims and criticisms are untrue, the militaristic language and the instrumental conception of nonviolence as a “tool of overthrow” that is presented by Sharp leaves nonviolence open to being misrepresented.

Another serious issue created by the strategic conception of nonviolence is that nonviolence action can then be held responsible for political regressions that occur after nonviolent movements. I’ve recently listened to political commentators on NPR blaming the nonviolent Arab Spring for destabilizing the Middle East and causing the subsequent civil war in Syria. Chabot and Sharifi have recently argued that nonviolent movements which have successfully used the techniques that Sharp advocates have resulted in an uncritical acceptance of globalization that unjustly disenfranchises vulnerable economic groups.11 As long as the idea that nonviolence is primarily an instrumental form of politics remains the dominant paradigm, nonviolence will remain open to accusations that it can lead to increases in political domination.

Without an ethical conception of nonviolent action, nonviolent movements remain


vulnerable to rhetorical counter attacks (and the subsequently “justified” violent repression”) from the institutions they are opposing, as well as criticisms from other progressives who may attempt to link the movement to subsequent bad outcomes. These vulnerabilities are avoidable given the reconceptualization of nonviolence this dissertation argues for. Although it may not make sense to claim that nonviolence cannot be implicated in such undesirable outcomes (i.e. partially successful movements or movements that focus only on disruption may contribute to destabilization), this project will attempt to show why effective nonviolence results in the development of, rather than regression from, democratic political organization and participation.

A binary and fragmented understanding of nonviolence has developed: moral vs. instrumental. This is false dichotomy that I think results in a number of problems. It is an incorrect abstraction that obscures the fundamental character of nonviolence, which is effective because it is ethical. To explain how nonviolence can be effective at generating social change, one must also describe what gives nonviolence its ethical character. Given the importance of nonviolence in recent examples of political change and the growing efforts to educate people globally about nonviolent methods of resistance, it is crucial that nonviolence be understood and grounded ethically as well as pragmatically.

The goal of this project is to start from current strategic understandings of nonviolence and show that effective nonviolence has an ethical dimension once a more complete description of it is developed. I will argue that the distinction between principled and pragmatic commitments to nonviolence is actually a false distinction and inconsistent to hold. My main claim is that the ethical character of the nonviolent political action is what makes it effective: Purely strategic understanding of nonviolence are incomplete. While the nonviolent literature has focused on
techniques of disruption, the ability to be disruptive depends on generating nonviolent power, which I argue is constituted by participation and the process of consensus generation within the movement. Generating participation and consensus requires a commitment to democratic activities (speech, discussion, publication and other communicative activities). Thus, the strategic and ethical elements of nonviolent action are the same and the strategic effectiveness occurs as a result of ethical behavior.

My conception of nonviolent power will be developed in an ethical framework based on the communicative and democratic political theory of Hannah Arendt and Jurgen Habermas. I will argue that in order carry out effective nonviolent action (disruptive action) a movement necessarily commits itself to certain kinds of communicative behaviors that help develop political power in Arendt’s non-instrumental sense, and in Habermas’s sense of communicative power.

To make this argument I will develop a description of what I call the positive or communicative elements of nonviolent political action. The current literature on nonviolence focuses on what it calls “disruptive techniques” and tends to subscribe, uncritically, to a theory of power developed by Sharp in the 1970s. Sharp's consent theory of power claims that all power is based on the consent of those governed, and that the power of existing institutions can be disrupted by withdrawing that consent. His work focuses on how groups can withdraw consent (by staying at home, boycotting or striking, for instance) in order to disrupt the opposition. This “disruptive” view of nonviolent political actions dominates the current civil resistance literature. I will argue that in order to make effective disruption possible a movement must establish relationships of communication that look like what Arendt and Habermas have described as
communicative power. What makes nonviolence ethical is that it commits its participants to the development of these forms of power. I will argue that there is a complicated, co-generative (or co-dependent) relationship between disruptive forms of nonviolent action and communicative forms of nonviolent action.

Another way to articulate the goal of this project is that it attempts to develop a new paradigm through which nonviolence can be understood. Conceptually, I claim there are three distinct understandings of nonviolence: the **moral paradigm** (epitomized by Gandhi), the **strategic paradigm** (popularized by Sharp) and an ethical conception, which I am putting forth.

The key tenets of the moral paradigm are (1) Participants will not commit physical violence against the opposition (thus avoiding personal moral corruption or corruption of the soul). (2) The opposition’s opinion will be “converted” by the injustices that activists elicited by their nonviolent political actions (getting beaten, arrested, and suffering in general).

The strategic paradigm on the other hand describes nonviolence as a technique for disrupting opposing institutions. Sharp lists accommodation, coercion, and disintegration as the mechanisms by which nonviolence most often succeeds. Chenoweth and Stephan use language that describes nonviolence as the process of “removing pillars of support” in the opposition.

One question is whether these the moral and strategic paradigms each covertly contain elements of the other. Gandhi, after all, was certainly was a shrewd theorist of political power. I disagree, however that “conversion” as it has been strictly conceived works as an explanation for the effectiveness of nonviolence. Conversion has been replaced in the strategic paradigm with an emphasis on forcefulness. While it might appear that the British were converted by Gandhi or that the white population of the United States came to accept African Americans as equal
citizens, it was in fact the ongoing disruptive activities of those activists that coerced those governments into conceding power. Institutional power in both those cases was being severely disrupted by boycotts, alternative material production (of salt for instance), etc. So while refraining to engage in violence may have made the acquiescence to Indian Nationalist or Black American power possible, it was not suffering and conversion (primarily) that resulted in the political gains for those groups. It was the disruption they were generating through acts of nonviolence. Although conversion may occur (those movements certainly turned many British and American citizens against their governments), Sharp says that it almost never result in actual concession of power without accompanying acts of disruption.

On the other hand, however, the strategic paradigm does appear to conceal a moral dimension. Sharp emphasizes nonviolent discipline in order to avoid violent repression and to generate more participation. I argue that a movement will be more effective if it commits itself to nonviolence because only then can communicative activity be used to increase participation. My ethical conception presents nonviolence as both effective (because it creates the possibility for massive disruption of the opposition's power) and ethical. It is ethical because it generates participation communicatively. This requires that the movement refrain from violence as violence severely restricts possibilities for participation.12

The problem of the moral paradigm of nonviolence is that it is incompatible with fact that nonviolent movements have power. That paradigm supposes that the effectiveness of nonviolence comes from its ability to convert the opposition, which does not accurately describe historically successful nonviolent movements. On the other hand, the strategic paradigm of

12See the conclusion of Chenoweth and Stephan, , Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict.
nonviolence fails to explain how nonviolent power gets developed. It claims that nonviolence is merely instrumental explicitly dropping any moral or ethical claims about it.

So, what remains from the earlier conceptions of nonviolence in my ethical conception is (1) a commitment to refraining from violence to make participation possible (from the moral) and (2) the ability to massively disrupt the oppositions political power (from the strategic). What gets dropped is the focus on conversion (from the moral) and the idea that it disruptive in a purely instrumental sense (from the strategic conception). Looking at nonviolence on a movement by movement basis, one could argue that movements that have been historically portrayed as moral (India’s Independence Movement or the U.S. Civil Rights Movement) because of a pacifist commitment were actually deeply strategic, and that conversely, many apparently strategic movements (like Poland’s Solidarity movement or Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Revolution) also possessed politically transformative elements that made them ethical. My position is that the strategic and ethical elements go hand-in-hand, and that both (at least to some degree) are present simultaneously in all nonviolent movements.

However, I disagree with emphasizing the pacifist commitments to the opposition/enemy. Contemporary movements maintain nonviolent discipline for sake of communicatively generating participation rather than for the sake of a principled moral commitment against violence. Although it remains a possible for a movement to emphasize its pacifist commitments, my position is that the important transformative character of nonviolent action occurs because members of the movement *relate to themselves* through new forms of politics that are communicative and democratic. Conversely, while some movements may display what appears to be a purely strategic and disruptive character, the extent to which this disruption can be
effective and sustained depends directly on how well the movement generates participation through communicative politics. My position is that the strategic effectiveness and the ethical character of a nonviolent movement are co-dependent on each other.

My work will be of use to a number of scholars and activists. First, nonviolence is being deployed strategically at an increasing rate in the 21st century, so an accurate description of how nonviolence functions is crucial for those who wish to carry out resistance movements. I hope that by expanding the description of what occurs during nonviolent political action to include communicative action, my work will help develop nonviolent strategy practically as well as clarifying it ethically. Second, strategic nonviolence is currently being criticized for its lack of ethical theory by intellectuals. Chabot and Sharifi, for instance, argue that the Sharpian, “instrumental” approach to nonviolence has resulted in uncritical and problematic “globalization” (acceptance of global markets and capitalist forces) in the aftermath of both successful and unsuccessful nonviolent movements. My project develops a more complete description of nonviolence and will contribute to the discussion about the outcomes of nonviolent movements. Once I have articulated the democratic practices inherent to nonviolent strategies, my description of nonviolence could then be used to argue against the criticism that strategic nonviolence often results in problematic political changes put forth by Chabot and Sharifi.

In order to achieve these aims I have organized the dissertation into four main chapters following this introduction. The first (ch. 2) begins by reviewing the literature of the pacifist, principled, or morally committed theorists of nonviolence from the 20th century. After an examination of the transition to the contemporary “strategic” conception of nonviolence in Gene
Sharp’s work, I describe how the theoretical understanding of what constituted nonviolence and the mechanisms by which it works was expanded. The change to a strategic description of nonviolence was a rejection of the idea that “conversion of the opponent” was the only mechanism by which nonviolence succeeds. Since this change generated the current ethical ambiguity of nonviolence, I identify signs that this ambiguity about nonviolence has actually been present throughout the 20th century literature about nonviolent action.

My position in the chapter is that the move away from the moral paradigm was theoretically well justified and reflected a more accurate understanding of what nonviolent political action did. I agree with the arguments about the problems of the earlier moral conceptions of nonviolence and with objections to the individual pacifist morality that was used to characterize nonviolence in the 20th century. This chapter serves to show what the contemporary theoretical understanding of nonviolence is, and how strategic nonviolence came to divorce itself from the moral positions of principled nonviolence, leading to the current problematic description of nonviolence in instrumental terms.

Chapter 3 begins the project of the remainder of the dissertation: to discuss the political and ethical implications of nonviolent political power. Later, in chapters 4 and 5, I develop my own framework for describing the relationship between the effectiveness (power) and the ethical character of nonviolence. In this chapter I begin by providing a close reading of the literature on Sharp’s conception of political power, the “consent theory of power.” I describe how Sharp develops this theory from Ettiene La Boetie and review the secondary literature critical of it.

Sharp, like Boetie, posits that all political power depends on the continued consent of the governed. If the governed withdraw their consent by refusing to carry out the orders of the
leadership, that leadership will become powerless. Sharp’s *Politics of Nonviolent Action* claims that nonviolent action only becomes possible when a citizenry is disabused of the idea that power somehow emanates from the rulers, a persistently popular mentality that Sharp calls the “monolithic theory of power.” Sharp argues that the power of the authoritarian only exists so long as other carry out his or her wishes. Consequently, (and this is the main premise of Sharp’s argument for why nonviolence is an effective method of political change), if a citizenry withdraws their consent disruptively, by striking or refusing to come in to work for example, then the power of the existing political institutions simply disintegrates. Without citizens to carry out the wishes of the leadership by participating in the day to day business that keeps that society running, that leadership becomes powerless. Thus nonviolence, argues Sharp, can effectively destroy political power through disruptive actions.

The position I take after my close reading and exposition of Sharp’s consent theory of power is that although the consent theory of power is not wrong, it is a crucially incomplete explanation for why nonviolence is effective. I specifically consider the focus and emphasis in Sharp (and the strategic paradigm of nonviolence generally) on disruption. For Sharp, consent withdrawal is carried out predominantly through disruptive nonviolent techniques like the strike, boycott or sit in; actions that prevent normal day to day functioning from occurring.

Examining some of the techniques of political nonviolence that Sharp has categorized as disruptive, I argue that they are more accurately described as “constructive” in terms of their relationship building potential among the those comprising the resistance. The notion that nonviolence operates mainly in the disruptive mode, as a form of consent withdrawal, is shown to be false by looking at techniques like “parallel government,” which Sharp categorizes as
disruptive, but which are clearly more substantial political developments than acts like strikes and boycotts. I show that positively constructive techniques have been wrongly described as disruptive and that the idea of nonviolent power being solely based on disruptive consent withdrawal is incomplete.

The last two chapters, 4 and 5, show that the effectiveness of nonviolence is due to its communicative and democratic character. Nonviolent disruption only becomes possible after participation and consensus is generated through communicative practices and deliberative politics. Nonviolent movements only sustain their ability to be disruptive if they continually maintain levels of participation through further communicative and deliberative action within their membership.

Answering the question about why nonviolence can be effective leads to my conclusion that carrying out effective nonviolence (or developing nonviolent power) is necessarily ethical, because it commits participants to communicative action. Political science research is beginning to show that nonviolence is more effective than political violence because it generates more participation in the movement. The argument that the dissertation will advance is that this participation (and thus nonviolent power) can only be generated by resistance groups arriving at consensus through mass discursive activities. They must create a space for politics in Arendt’s and Habermas’s communicative sense to occur. Nonviolent power, I argue, uses the disruptive techniques that Sharp and the subsequent literature on strategic nonviolence study to help develop itself and to degrade the power of the opposition. The possibility of nonviolent disruption, however, gets developed and maintained communicatively. The strategic literature

13Ibid.
has focused on the disruptions, but has failed to explain how such power (in the form of participation) arises in the first place.

Chapter 4 analyzes the Polish Solidarity Movement (1980-89) and argues that the massively disruptive nonviolent techniques that it employed (the occupational and general strike) only occurred because of the establishment of space where discursive politics took place. This space initially took the form of underground publishing networks and then developed into networks of resistance groups, massive strikes, and an island of civil society in the totalitarian communism of the Soviet Bloc. Disruptive techniques were first used to expand participation in this political space to the majority of the population (Summer 1980) and then later to protect it against the totalitarian backlash of the communist government (Fall 1980, Spring 1981).

Although the movement was forced underground by the declaration of martial law and the intense repressions that followed (December 1981), the activists recreated the massive strikes a few years later (1987) and replaced the Communists as Poland’s first democratic government in 1989. Solidarity shows that effective nonviolent disruptive techniques can only be deployed when massive participation gets generated through the existence of genuinely communicative space that establishes shared political values and trust between various members of the resistance.

My view that this is the ethical basis of nonviolence is unique because it focuses on the intergroup dynamic of the movement rather than the relationship of the movement to its opposition. I locate the ethical character of nonviolence in the way that the movement constitutes itself and develops its own power rather than how it deals with the opposition. Solidarity repeatedly deployed or threatened to deploy disruptive techniques, first to publicly establish a
civil society that had up until then only existed underground, and then to protect this civil society’s existence.

Chapter 5 develops my Arendtian and Habermassian ethical framework by reconstructing their communicative and non-instrumental notion of political power. I take Habermas’s argument for how will formation in “weak” publics must influence “strong public” (government and law) in order for personal autonomy to be possible (from Between Facts and Norms) and argue this actually describes what happens during a nonviolent movement. I also look at Arendt’s description of the “Space of Appearances,” from The Human Condition, as the location where politics actually occurs. My argument in this chapter is that both Habermas’s and Arendt’s communicative conceptions of power describe the kind of discursive politics that successful nonviolent movements have actually fostered in order to generate participation.

I argue that practicing effective nonviolent politics commits a group to communicative action to in order to generative the participation necessary to make disruptive action possible. Nonviolently developed political power is ethical because it forces participants to communicatively generate consensus and resolve disputes. This activity is prefigurative for democracy in that it develops knowledge and skills among the participants necessary for establishing and maintaining democratic institutions in the aftermath of the conflict. In an important sense nonviolence functions as a kind of “democratic learning.”
CHAPTER 2:
Issues With the Moral Paradigm of Nonviolence and the Shift to the Strategic Paradigm

Popular revolt against materially strong rulers, on the other hand, may engender an almost irresistible power even if it foregoes the use of violence in the face of materially vastly superior forces. To call this “passive resistance” is certainly an ironic idea; it is one of the most active and efficient ways of action ever devised, because it cannot be countered by fighting, where there may be defeat or victory, but only by mass slaughter in which even the victor is defeated, cheated of his prize, since nobody can rule over dead men.

Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, 200-201

Introduction

The most widespread view of nonviolence today closely matches the moral paradigm. Most people encounter nonviolence through their education in the history of India’s Independence Movement and the U.S. Civil Right’s movement, the most well known historical examples of nonviolence. The leaders of these movements are globally recognized heroes, and because of Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi’s writings, these two movements are identified as embodying a moral commitment against violence. In contrast to this, contemporary understandings of nonviolence among theorists, academics and activists are based mainly on the work of Gene Sharp, who has developed the strategic view of nonviolence. Thus, there is a rift between popular and theoretical conceptions of the phenomenon. Studying under Gandhi, Gene Sharp’s theoretical work came to focus on the disruptive capability of nonviolence and its power
to depose authoritarian rulers and governments. In contrast with Gandhi’s moral conception of
nonviolence, Sharp and his contemporaries view nonviolence as an instrumental form politics. In
their view, Gandhi did not convince the British to relinquish India as a colony so much as he lead
a movement which made India ungovernable by the British. This new, strategic, understanding
raises some important philosophical questions about nonviolence: 1) Can it still be distinguished
from violence if both are considered to be instrumental forms of politics? and 2) Can it still be
put forth as the ethical (or more ethical) method of radical political change in comparison with
violence?

In this chapter I will distinguish between two paradigmatic ways that nonviolent action has
been understood historically. These two ways are, in historical order, 1) the moral conception of
nonviolence and 2) the strategic conception of nonviolence. These approaches to nonviolence are
also referred to as the principled and the pragmatic approaches to nonviolence in the
contemporary literature, a nomenclature introduced by L.K. Bharadwaj.\textsuperscript{14} The moral or
principled paradigm of nonviolence understands that nonviolence is the most preferable method
of political change because of a moral commitment to pacifism. The strategic or pragmatic
paradigm, on the other hand, understands that nonviolence is the most preferable because of “…
the pragmatic superiority and instrumental success of nonviolence, …”\textsuperscript{15}

The main goal of the chapter is to understand why the strategic paradigm came to replace
the moral paradigm of nonviolence among theorists. To do this I will first discuss some of the
classic historical understanding of nonviolence, as the moral form of political change. I will trace

\textsuperscript{14}Bharadwaj, ”Principled Versus Pragmatic Nonviolence”.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 79.
some of the significant descriptions of nonviolence as a form of passive resistance that is effective only as a form of moral communication which *persuades* political opponents.

The critical position that I will develop is that a pacifist, or moral description of nonviolent action is conceptually inconsistent. Struggle involves the development of power, which occurs even if the goal is nonviolent “persuasion.” This is indicated by an ambivalence about the moral status of effective nonviolence that Clarence Case and other thinkers bring up in their writing about nonviolence. Additionally, while Gandhi does fit the description of a principled, moral advocate of nonviolence, he is not only principled in his approach. Gandhi was also a shrewd political theorists for whom nonviolence made practical sense in terms of developing Indian political power.

Contemporary theorists argue that conversion is not the only, or even the main mechanism by which the Indian Independence movement succeeded. Others argue that even uses of nonviolent action that appear to be aimed conversion of the opponent are in fact coercive because they force a dilemma upon the opponent between committing violence against the activists (delegitimizing their power) or conceding power to them by not repressing them. These arguments, I claim, are why the conceptualization of nonviolence has shifted to focus on describing why nonviolence is effective, while at the same time dropping the moral framework.

The chapter is broken up into four sections. The first explores Gandhi’s conception of *Satyagraha*, the archetypal example in the moral paradigm of nonviolence, and Richard Gregg’s description of nonviolence as *moral jui-jitsu*. While Gandhi provides the moral basis for the

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pacifist position, Gregg explains how nonviolence functions as a form of moral persuasion. My second section then reviews some of the issues that have been raised about this description of nonviolence as moral persuasion, the central tenet of the moral paradigm. I make the case that the moral paradigm of nonviolence is conceptually inconsistent. The consistency of the pacifist commitment to persuasion rather than coercion breaks down once nonviolent action is considered from the perspective of those who are disrupted by it. Taking that perspective shows that nonviolence is more forceful than persuasive.

If nonviolence is described as an effective form of power, the moral basis of persuasion becomes incoherent. This creates a difficulty in distinguishing violence from nonviolence. Without the moral paradigm, we are left, conceptually, with both violence and nonviolence being simply instrumental approaches to politics. This is a major issue for a number of reasons, but especially in light of the widespread view that nonviolence is the preferable, moral approach to dealing with political conflict.

In the third section of the chapter I present Sharp’s strategic approach to nonviolence. His approach includes the mechanism of conversion from the moral paradigm, but treats it one as the extreme end of a spectrum of increasingly coercive ways that nonviolent action can create political change. Pacifist moral commitments and any moral claims about nonviolence get dropped in favor of an argument for the strategic superiority of nonviolent techniques. Finally, in the fourth section, I introduce the philosophical problem of distinguishing effective nonviolence from political violence.
Part 1 Pacifism and the Moral Paradigm of Nonviolence

The origins of moral nonviolence can be traced to the spiritual proscriptions of many religious figures. Clarence Case talks about Confucius, Lao Tse, Buddha, Zoroaster, the Stoics and Jesus of Nazareth as all being primary religious sources of nonviolence. When Jesus said, that when struck turn the other cheek, and to love the other, even your enemy as you do yourself he made a strong claim about the moral value of passive resistance and established the idea that to resist nonviolently is to resist passively. This message was taken up and put into practice by many nonviolent religious groups in United States-- Quakers, mennonites, etc (see Clarence Case’s Nonviolent Coercion: A Study in Methods of Social Pressure for a full study of these).

Buddhism is also one of the primary religious proscriptions for nonviolent reactions in situations of conflict. Buddha said: “If a man foolishly does me wrong, I will return to him the protection of my ungrudging love, the more evil comes from him, the more good shall go from me; the fragrance of goodness always comes to me, and the harmful air of evil, goes to him.”

For Buddha to practice violence meant to defile oneself. On the other hand by resisting violence without accepting violence oneself, that is to take the suffering inflicted by violence without inflicting such suffering in return kept the true harm of violence with the attacker. After being attacked and abused, and not retaliating Buddha questioned his abuser:

My son, you have railed against me, but I decline to accept your abuse, and request you keep it yourself. Will it not be a source of misery to you? As the echo belongs to the sound, and the shadow to the substance, so misery will overtake the evildoer without fail. A wicked man who reproaches a virtuous one is like one who looks up and spits at heaven; the spittle soils not the heavens, but comes back and defiles his own person.

18Case, Non-Violent Coercion: A Study in Methods of Social Pressure.


20Quoted in Ibid., 4.
After being shamed this attacker eventually returned to Buddha to take refuge in the Dharma and Sangha. This story highlights a central aspect of the ideology of nonviolence: the idea that passive resistance can incur a change in the mind of the violent through moral shame. Buddha’s analogies turn the attacker into the defiled and the beaten into the virtuous.

These positions of nonviolence are largely pacifist. They attempt to make a moral argument for refusing to use violence from an individual perspective. Violence corrupts the user, whereas passive resistance has the ability to change the character of an opponent who uses violence. Since Satyagraha is the central contemporary case for the common understanding of nonviolence, and it reflects the argument of the pacifist position, I will present Gandhi’s argument for it.

Joan Bondurant, in her classic work, *Conquest of Violence* (1958), provides a description of Satyagraha by laying out the three foundational principles of Gandhi’s philosophy of political action: Truth, Nonviolence, and Self-suffering. Gandhi said that “Satyagraha is literally holding on to Truth, and it means therefore Truth-force.” 21 He claimed that his personal philosophy was a dedication to Truth, saying that “Devotion to this Truth is the sole justification for our existence. All our activities should be centered in Truth.” For him “Truth” was a way of expressing the holy or divine (he called it the only “correct and fully significant name for God”).”22 Since no human beings have absolute access to truth, none of us are in a position to punish the other for their political actions. Instead we are only in a position to try to persuade the other of our view of the truth.


Nonviolence is, thus, the only way to arrive at social truths. According to Bondurant, Gandhi’s notion of Truth was a relative one based on human needs. Because Truth is oriented around human needs, these needs could not be frustrated or otherwise hindered by any actions used as political means. This is the basic reason why nonviolence must become the central means of political change. Violence frustrates human needs and hence prevents a movement towards truth.\textsuperscript{23} Hence, for Gandhi, the principle necessarily accompanying political action committed to Truth is Ahimsa, or nonviolence.

Although “himsa” means “a wish to kill,” Gandhi’s meaning of “a-himsa” is more than the mere negative of this. The goal of action must always be a striving for Truth, and Truth can only be arrived at through nonviolence. Violence obscurers or hinders the realization of truth, both in the resistor and the opponent. Helping to manifest truth in the opponent is the central reason for taking the approach of ahimsa. “Ahimsa and truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disk. …Nevertheless ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end.”\textsuperscript{24}

According to Bondurant, ahimsa or nonviolence becomes the supreme principle, “For Truth, judged in terms of human needs, would be destroyed, on whichever side it lay, by the use of violence.”\textsuperscript{25} There is simply no way to Truth in situations of conflict through the means of violence. Violent methods are incompatible with Gandhi’s metaphysical and epistemological goals. The following passage from Gandhi on Satyagraha captures this intent well:

We punish thieves, because we think they harass us. They may leave us alone; but they will only transfer

\textsuperscript{23}Bondurant, Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict 31.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 42.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 25.
their attention to another victim. This other victim however is also a human being, ourselves in a different form, and so we are caught in a vicious circle. The trouble from thieves continues to increase, as they think it is their business to steal. In the end we see that it is better to endure the thieves than to punish them. The forbearance may even bring them to their senses. By enduring them we realize that thieves are not different from ourselves, they are our brethren, our friends, and may not be punished. But whilst we may bear with the thieves, we may not endure the infliction. That would only induce cowardice. So we may realize a further duty. Since we may regard the thieves as our kith and kin, they must be made to realize the kinship. And so we must take pains to devise ways and means of winning them over. This is the path of *ahimsa*. It may entail continuous suffering and the cultivating of endless patience. Given these two conditions, the thief is bound in the end to turn from his evil ways. Thus step by step we learn how to make friends with all the world; we realize the greatness of *God* — of Truth.²⁶

Bondurant notes that “If there is dogma in the Gandhian philosophy, it centers here: that the only test of truth is action based on the refusal to do harm.”²⁷ It is the only method of discovering social truths. *Ahimsa*, also is also equated with love in Gandhi’s writings, forming a link to Bondurant’s third main pillar of Gandhi’s philosophy. Gandhi said, “I accept the interpretation of Ahimsa namely that it is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer.”²⁸ According to Bondurant, this idea of love is proximate to the Christian notion of *charity* and the Greek notion of *agape*. Love and a commitment to nonviolence lead to the third central tenet of Gandhiism: Self Suffering.

One of Gandhi’s central observations is that being committed to nonviolence in situations of conflict for the principled reason of arriving at Truth and instilling Truth in the opponent will tend to expose the practitioner of nonviolence to violent opposition and hence suffering. While this suffering may appear to be just a consequence of participating in political conflict, for *Satyagraha*, it has a much more important function. Although self suffering (or *Tapasya*) does result in the least loss of life, and the sacrifice involved is, for Gandhi, the highest expression of


²⁸ Gandhi quoted in Ibid., 24.
the dignity of the individual, its primary role is to serve as the method of moral communication during a conflict. The self suffering of the satyagrahi is aimed at the moral persuasion of those for whom the Satyagraha is undertaken.

Because of their moral commitments to nonviolence based on the sanctity of one’s self, or soul, and corruption of the self or soul that results from violence, these arguments for the use of nonviolence rather than violence fall under the category of pacifism and are examples of what I call the moral paradigm of nonviolence. Although such approaches are very active according to their advocates, and function based on the mechanism of moral persuasion (which will be described in the next section), their primary commitment is to a metaphysical purity of the self that only occurs through abstaining from physical violence.

**Other accounts of the Moral Paradigm of Nonviolence**

The conflation of nonviolence with passive resistance signals that the motivation for choosing nonviolence is a primarily a religious or moral conviction rather than a belief that it is an effective means of political change. If the popular explanation is that people resist nonviolently for principled rather than pragmatic reasons, a common sense, though unfounded inference from this is that nonviolence is not a particularly effective method of political change. As they see it, principled practitioners use nonviolence because it is what’s morally called for and not because it’s particularly effective.29 On the other hand, while Gandhi maintained that the important reason for choosing Satyagraha was because of commitment to Truth, he was

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completely aware of how politically effective it could be.\textsuperscript{30} Effectiveness, rather than being the primary concern, is a fortunate by-product of the morally correct choice of resistance.

It is for these reasons that Gandhi wished to preserve the purity of means and ends at all costs, and asserted the unity and integrality of means and ends, treating truth and nonviolence as convertible terms. He would rather that one use violence or even “kill rather than be a coward” than accept nonviolence merely on pragmatic grounds or for reasons of expediency.\textsuperscript{31}

Gandhi understood that activists not committed to pacifism for personal moral reasons might employ nonviolent tactics. He called this \textit{Duragraha}, the tactical decision to use coercive nonviolence. In contrast, \textit{Satyagraha} was a positive commitment to persuade the other, to generate conversion based on justice, and required a moral belief in the opposition.\textsuperscript{32}

Another characteristic that gets associated with passive nonviolent resistance is a kind of dependency on the moral character of the enemy. When an individual is confronted violently in private, and no violent resistance is put forth, the de facto strategy one is adopting is that the goodness, compassion, or moral conscience of the confronter will be affected by the atypical response to the attack. For instance, in illustrating this phenomenon Clarence Case in \textit{Nonviolent Coercion: A study in methods social pressure} (originally published in 1923) brings up the story of Archbishop Sharpe, published by the American Peace Society. This Archbishop of York was traveling on secluded section of road when he was mugged by a young man. Rather than responding with fear or anger, Sharpe calmly and sternly told the mugger to put down his weapon and to tell him who he was and why he needed the money. Invariably there were debtors at home and the man had fallen on recent economic misfortune—Sharpe gave him the fifty

\textsuperscript{30}Bharadwaj, "Principled Versus Pragmatic Nonviolence", 80.

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 80.

\textsuperscript{32}April Carter, \textit{Direct Action and Democracy Today} (Polity, 2005), 40.
pounds that he needed and went on his way. Two years later the man returned with the money and filled in the details of his misfortunes and subsequent recovery claiming: “By your astonishing goodness, I am at once the most penitent, most grateful, and happiest of my species.”  

Case goes on to describe three other stories like this one, where the attacked person responded with discussion and moral reproach, because in the religious peace literature such examples are given numerously.

What this shows, Case theorizes, is that passive resistance is “a battle of ideas—an attempt at mental conversion.” For Case “… The supreme interest for this study lies in the uniform ways of mental interaction which take place when passive resistance is practiced.” Although Case’s example of passive resistance is not the same phenomenon as nonviolent political action, Case implies that the same mechanism that makes passive resistance effective can also function to make nonviolence effective. To further expostulate on the message of the religious peace literature Case claims that to practice passive resistance requires one to first resist the impulse/instinct of self defense and then to engage the assailant in an “attack upon the higher self.” He thinks that this requires someone of particular character strengths, someone who is at a higher spiritual or moral level than their assailant. As a reaction it is “…a moral flanking movement” that is “…perhaps possible only to a real spiritual general.”

The other classic account of how nonviolent resistance works in the moral tradition is Richard Gregg’s The Power of Nonviolence (1966). His book is an extended discussion of how

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33Case, Non-Violent Coercion: A Study in Methods of Social Pressure 221.

34Ibid., 216.

35Ibid., 2.
nonviolent persuasion occurs, how it can be utilized in lieu of violence, and how to train to be effective at it. In this work Gregg introduces the idea of “moral jiu-jitsu.” Jiu-jitsu is a form of martial arts that specializes in taking the kinetic energy of an attacker and using it against him through the use of throws, trips and other forms of unbalancing. Moral Jiu-Jitsu is Gregg’s analogy for explaining what occurs when a resistor attempts a moral conversion of a violent attacker rather than responding violently themselves. At the heart of this method are moves that the nonviolent resistor makes which cause the violent attacker to become aware of (1) his aggressiveness in the situation, (2) his resort to morally questionable means, (3) the lack of agreement about which means are appropriate for resolving conflict, and (4) the lack of fear and resentment on the part of the resistor.

Gregg argues that if the victim/resistor had responded to the violence with violence themselves, they would validate the means for the resolving conflict that the attacker had chosen. Whereas, by choosing nonviolent means of resisting, they conscientiously and explicitly display their condemnation of the method of violence. These atypical (as in, non-self-defensive) moves and the subsequent thoughts elicited in the attacker are intended to make the attacker lose confidence in his method of conflict resolution. His perception of his own actions becomes questioning, and he realizes his prestige among onlookers has begun to falter. Although he may be physically courageous in his attack, the fearlessness and courage of the nonviolent resister indicates an even higher level of confidence and commitment.36

Thus the nonviolent resistance acts as a sort of moral jiu-jitsu. The nonviolence and good will of the victim act in the same way that the lack of physical opposition by the user of physical jiu-jitsu, does causing the attacker to lose his moral balance. He suddenly and unexpectedly loses the moral support which the usual

violent resistance of most victims would render him. He plunges forward, as it were, into a new world of values.\textsuperscript{37}

Because drawing ones sword or raising ones fists in the face of violence is a tacit approval of the means employed in resolving that conflict—when a resistor conscientiously (and in non-fearful manner) declines to do this he tends make the attacker start questioning himself. He explicitly recognizes the attacker’s methods as invalid, and this has a profound psychological effect. “Hence part of the superior power of the nonviolent resistor seems to lie in the nature of his character. He must have primarily that disposition best known as love—an interest in people so deep, and determined, and last as to be creative; a profound knowledge of or faith in the ultimate possibilities of human nature.” \textsuperscript{38}

When the resistor fails to reciprocate the violence they indicate a general moral commitment as well as a kind of commitment to the other. Their response is not angry, hateful or destructive.

The aim of the nonviolent resister is not to injure, or to crush and humiliate his opponent, or “to break his will,” as in a violent fight. The aim is to convert the opponent, to change his understanding and his sense of values so that he will join wholeheartedly with the resister in seeking a settlement truly amicable and truly satisfying to both sides. … The nonviolent resister seeks to help the violent attacker to reestablish his moral balance on a level higher and more secure than that from which he first launched his violent attack.\textsuperscript{39}

So, once again, as was the case with Gandhi’s \textit{Satyagraha}, the ultimate practical aim of nonviolent resistance is to change the mind of the opponent. Gregg’s theory of \textit{moral jiu-jitsu} is one way of explaining how someone’s mind can be changed in the middle of a conflict by an explicit nonviolent response.

Gandhiism is the most thoroughly developed example of the moral paradigm of nonviolent action. From a metaphysical commitment to Truth arises a pacifist ethic of political action. This

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., 49.

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., 51.
paradigm holds that political change occurs through *transformations* in those who witness individuals suffering from violent reactions to their nonviolent tactics. Although Gandhi consistently preached that *Satyagraha* and the suffering it involved was not a method of the weak, but rather a method of the strong and well trained (and a method used by those who did have recourse to violent methods)—it’s clear that he was battling a public perspective that viewed *Satyagraha* as passive and the method of those with no other recourse. For instance, Gandhi insisted that one could not be cowardly in self suffering, and instead must maintain his or her dignity. For the cowardly Gandhi advised violence as a more effective method. This seemingly extreme position makes sense with respect to the persuasive role that self suffering was supposed to play. A person that suffered because they had no other way of resisting without suffering was less morally convincing than a person who suffered conscientiously by an active choice. Activists who choose nonviolence over violence are more convincing than those who are victims without choice. Rather than being just passive resistance (which implies an inability to take up arms) *Satyagraha* achieved its persuasive power because those who practice it do have the ability to become violent, but choose not to do so.

Because this method relies primarily on mechanism of persuasion based on self suffering, it has come to be viewed as a form of passive resistance and weapon of the weak. For the reasons mentioned above, Gandhi thought this a false characterizations, and indeed many theorists have come to view it as a “myth” about Gandhiism. Mark Shepherd notes in regard to idea that nonviolence is passive resistance, “Gandhi himself helped create this confusion by referring to his method at first as “passive resistance,” because it was in some ways like the techniques
bearing that label. But he soon changed his mind and rejected the term."\(^{40}\) Shepherd also explains that Gandhi’s strategy was not evasive, but rather, designed to elicit violence from the opposition and to land satyagrahis in jail. Running away was the worst possible response to oppression or injustice (worse than violence in Gandhi’s perspective), while nonviolence was the best strategy. Nonetheless, it is a widespread view, stemming from the principle of self suffering, that Satyagraha and nonviolence generally are forms of passive resistance.

In conclusion, the main points of a principled approach to nonviolence are as follows: 1) It is based on metaphysical view of the purity of self or soul and the resulting impurity or corruption caused by physical violence (moral pacifism)  2) that it involves changing the minds of the other (moral persuasion) 3) it is a courageous moral conviction and action (not passive resistance) 4) Nonviolence is the right method of conflict resolution regardless of whether it works better than violence (pacifist commitment)

\(^{40}\)Mark Shepard, "Mahatma Gandhi and His Myths"
Part 2 Criticism and Issues with the Moral Paradigm of Nonviolence: Ambiguity about Nonviolence as a Form of Power

While Gandhi’s philosophy of *ahimsa* shared with Christ and Buddha the idea that love, truth, and self-suffering for the other were of the highest moral value, he recast them into a concept of nonviolence as active struggle involving courage. Rather than passive resistance *ahimsa* was a method of conflict with the other seeking to change the other’s mind. Gandhi’s project is therefore more accurately characterized as a bridge between between earlier religious notions of nonviolence as passive resistance and 20th century notions of nonviolence as a method of political change. His theory of nonviolence, while first a principled or moral theory, also developed the pragmatic uses of nonviolence. Gandhi knew that witnessing self-suffering for the sins of others was particularly guilt inducing in the opponent (or at least third party observers). Because of his active use of this effect, there has been subsequent scholarly discussion asking whether *Satyagraha* is coercive, and whether it fits within the moral framework of converting ones opponent to a new viewpoint.41 This section explores some of the criticisms of the moral paradigm of nonviolence and discusses why that paradigm fell out of popularity among theorists of nonviolence. Two particular criticisms are explored in detail: 1) the argument that conversion of the opposition was not the actually mechanism through which nonviolent movements have been politically successful, and 2) the argument that nonviolent movements actually posses coercive political power, a characteristic that the moral paradigm cannot conceptually accommodate without contradiction. I argue that, theoretically, many of moral commitments to nonviolence are rendered inconsistent once nonviolence is reconceptualized as an effective form

41See Bharadwaj 1998, Klitgaard 1971, Case 1972, and Gregg 1960
of political struggle/resistance.

Once nonviolence becomes viewed as a forceful form of struggle, it becomes difficult to distinguish nonviolence and political violence from the individual moral perspective.

The ambiguity we have noted in nonviolence leads to an ambivalence in attitude and in action. The advocate of nonviolence is torn between the conviction that nonviolence is "right" come what may and the thesis that it is in fact the most effective instrument for achieving some desired results.  

This ambiguity between conceptualizing nonviolence primarily morally or primarily strategically has been noted by a number of theorists at least since Case’s work. One of the first activists to change from being a symbol of pacifism (or at least to be reinterpreted through the strategic paradigm of nonviolence) is, in fact, Gandhi. Case and Gregg both classified Gandhi’s approach as coercive and a form of power, in contrast to the prevailing western view of Gandhi as a passive resistor.

Case identifies what I consider to be the central issues regarding theoretical conceptualizations of nonviolence. Case begins by cataloging and discussing the general history of Christian nonviolence in the United States, including Anabaptist, Mennonite, Quaker, and German peace sects and other groups up to and including religious and secular conscientious objectors to the first World War. These groups are characterized generally by a principled pacifism, a notion of absolute nonresistance.  

Halfway through the book, however, he switches away from the negative, non-retaliatory aspect of nonviolence and finds that there are often nonviolent practices that might be questionable under a principle of pacifism. This leads him to note:

…passive resistance has shown a tendency to pass beyond the meek endurance of injustice, extending first


to its abolishment by the use of educational and political methods, as in the history of the Quakers, and more recently to the employment of economic power, especially the strike and boycott, as a method of social constraint, and even control of government policy.  

This raises the question for Case, “Is nonviolent resistance that actively controls government policy still a form of pacifism, and is it still justifiable under the same moral and religious arguments?” Case continues:

Now there will doubtless be those ready to say that in so doing [boycotting or striking] it has ceased to be passive resistance, but that is precisely the point in question. Earlier chapters have abundantly demonstrated, by appeal to history, that passive resistance never was mere submission. That would be non-resistance, about which we are not now speaking. … Although it moves on the impersonal and nonviolent level it is conflict just the same, and, being conflict, it naturally merges into constraint and coercion.

This gets at the heart of the issue with the moral paradigm of nonviolent resistance. The resistance is not passive, but rather active and manifests itself as the power to socially coerce the opposition. Case highlights this, speaking of those who espouse the conscientious objector attitude:

They further argue that passive resisters who indorse the strike method are undertaking to carry out social purposes by means of coercion rather than by persuasion. In the process … passive resistance is “developing into a weapon of violence used in the spirit and to the ends of war.

At this point in the book Case transitions from nonviolence in the forms of individuals who “endured personal abuse without retaliation” and the “conscript who refused to bear arms at the command of the state” (passive forms) to the strike and boycott (active forms). The significance is that in using these new methods, we move from persuasive forms of social change, which are ideal and uncontroversial according to Case, to coercive, though still nonviolent, forms of social change. The important question, Case claims, is “whether passive resistance and direct action do

44Ibid., 283.
45Ibid., 283.
46Ibid., 301.
not possess some sort of logical and ethical affinity.” 47 Thus, even as early as 1923, there is a tension between the moral and a strategic understandings of nonviolence.

The idea that nonviolence works primarily by changing the minds of opposition has been criticized as a kind of moralized white washing of actual political power. For instance Mark Shepherd holds the belief that:

It was naive. The belief that civil disobedience succeeded by converting the opponent happened to be a myth held by Gandhi himself. And it’s shared by most of his admirers, who take his word for it without bothering to check it out. As far as I can tell, no civil disobedience campaign of Gandhi’s ever succeeded chiefly through a change of heart in his opponents. 48

If one considers the actions of pacifists like Gandhi, committed to persuading his opponents, the effect of forcefully raising the question of the legitimacy of the laws he is opposed can be understood as a form of coercion. If we consider some of the classic examples in the American historical memory such as the restaurant counter sit-ins, the store boycotts, or Rosa Parks’s refusal to sit at the back of the bus and ask whether they were disruptive in a forceful way, it’s clear that they were. The restaurant and its staff were first subject to having paying customers displaced by customers they could not serve according standards of segregation. If they had them removed by law enforcement, the spectacle of physically dragging out of their bodies caused a major disruption. A similar effect occurred when hecklers and abusers were brought in to oust those doing the sit in. If they let the activists remain they lost revenue from being unable to sell food. From one perspective forcing those who upheld the segregation to personally commit the violent act of removing people who simply wanted to eat at the counter (or to witness this) is intended to reveal to the racists the injustice of the act by experiencing a

47Ibid., 30.
48Shepard, "Mahatma Gandhi and His Myths", 10.
kind of moral shame. However, from another perspective, these acts were intended to be disruptive until the South accepted the desegregationist politics of the movement.

Consider what’s involved in removing a Rosa Parks from the bus. The driver himself can’t physically remove her. He lacks the authority which would make physical action on his part assault. A police officer must be brought in (while the bus waits) and then he must speak to her before removing her. Even carried out as expediently as possible, the bus, its participants were delayed and disrupted. Removing an elderly woman from a bus may elicit moral questioning from the witnesses, but it necessarily disrupts the procession of their day. Nonviolent acts do not simply ask moral questions or reveal political injustice. These acts prevent the normal day-to-day functioning of a social system until the political perspective of the movement is satisfied or the movement gives up. So, to describe nonviolence as form of convincing or persuasion, as the moral paradigm does, fails to fully describe the effect of those acts.

Harry Prosch presents the case from the perspective of the opponent of the nonviolent movement, arguing that in effect, the dilemma posed to them is an example of “forcing:

The tactic you are using appears, on this view, to a be a striking and very effective mode of moral persuasion. However, since the employment of arguments—rational, emotional, or some combination—is not involved at its point of action, your opponents are not likely to identify your effort as an attempt at moral persuasion. They must rather tend to regard it as a power move on your part. Therefore, even though your action is nonviolent, its first consequence must be to place you and your opponents in a state of war. For your opponents now have only the same sort of choice that an army has: that of allowing you to continue occupying the heights you have moved on to, or, of applying force—dynamic, active, violent force—to throw you back off them.….. You have therefore literally forced them out of the possibility of contending with you in the nonviolent arenas of moral persuasion (of the argumentative type) and of political maneuvering.

In terms of its practical impact, therefore, your tactic is basically a military one rather than a morally persuasive one—or even a political one. It is a contest of force, even though the only force you may be resorting to is the inertia of your own body.49

Although I disagree that it puts the groups into a “state of war,” since there is no threat of physical harm by activists, what Prosch does highlight is that nonviolence is a technique for

49Prosch, "Limits to the Moral Claim in Civil Disobedience", 52-3.
dealing with _conflict that is irresolvable_ through ordinary means. This is something that the principled approach does not adequately address. In fact, the main premise of the moral paradigm is that the opponent _can be convinced_ of the validity of the political position of the resistance. The self suffering of the nonviolent activist is intended to force the opposition to confront the injustice they are perpetrating, resulting in a moral reassessment. Thus the moral paradigm sees nonviolence as effective and non-coercive.

But in fact, if one considers India’s Independence Movement or the U.S. Civil Rights movement, it is clear that many, if not most, British and American citizens were not converted. Although some minds changed, most retained a racist and colonial ideology. The legal changes that were successfully brought about occurred because of the massive disruptions that these movements generated (strikes, boycotts, sit-ins, etc, etc…). Without those coercive disruptions, the Civil Rights Act would never have passed at that time. From the perspective of the moral paradigm, those disruptions were attempts to communicate the injustice to the oppressive majority. However, even though they did that, there was still an irresolvable conflict between political desires of African Americans and racist privileges of power that white Americans enjoyed. At the time, conversion away from racist ideology was just beginning (and has continued to occur over the past half century), rather than being the primary mechanism by which the political change occurred. The need to resolve the disruptiveness of the nonviolent action, to allow the normal, day-to-day activity to return was the main reason the movements were successful at creating political change.

It is primarily third party witnesses, who are exposed to the violent suppression of the activists through mass media, that are successfully “converted” through moral persuasion, not
those who are directly disrupted. Conversion, in this sense, simply generates greater participation and support for the disruptive activities through mass media. Even if a particular restaurant owner or server is morally converted and decides to serve African Americans at their lunch counter, the goal of the movement is not to desegregate a particular restaurant while leaving the legality of segregation intact. The goal is to make racial segregation illegal. People may join the movement because of the moral persuasiveness of activists’ suffering, but those people were not the target or goal of the movement. It targets and attempts to change legal institutions.

Participation in the movement may increase through moral conversion, strengthening it, but it is the fact of the disruptiveness of the movement's actions to the police, to the government, to the smooth operation of society that results in change to the legal institution.

Gene Sharp begins to develop a criticism of the idea that moral conversion the a necessary result through which successful nonviolence occurs in his book review of Bondurant’s, *Conquest of Violence*. There he begins to question whether moral persuasion (rather than simply political victory over the opposition) is even possible in many cases:

First in the discussion of the Gandhian dialectic she emphasizes that the conclusion of a conflict in which one side relies upon Satyagraha is a "synthesis"—not a blatant triumph of one side over the other. This analysis is very worthwhile (although it is possible to overemphasize the likelihood of satyagrahis becoming convinced that at least parts of the opponent's case are superior to their own). It seems, however, to the reviewer that the author weakens this analysis, and at this point misrepresents Satyagraha, when she says: "The satyagrahi must recognize that elementary to his technique is the first step of a full realization that his immediate goal is not the triumph of his substantial side of the struggle—but, rather, the synthesis of the two opposing claims" (p. 196) (italics mine). The use of "claims" here is out of keeping with the earlier analysis of the value of Satyagraha in conflict situations in which there is no ethical middle ground between the goals of the respective groups. Are we now to suppose that the use of Satyagraha by South African opponents of color oppression will produce a synthesis between apartheid and equality? In the reviewer's view, the author states the satyagrahi's aim more correctly when she writes on the same page that "he seeks a victory, not over the opponent, but over the situation in the best (in the sense of the total human needs of the situation) synthesis possible" (p. 196). 50

Nonviolent action is about methods of struggle in situations of irresolvable conflict, where there may be “no ethical middle ground.” It may turn out that the opposing groups cannot persuade each and convert the opposition to the other’s perspective during the conflict itself (only perhaps afterward). Historically, many political conflicts that were resolved nonviolently did not result from the immediate conversion of opposing side. Gandhi indicated his awareness of the issue of reconciling the practical effectiveness of nonviolence with a principled pacifism in the distinction between Duragraha and Satyagraha. Consequently, Sharp’s strategic conception of nonviolence places much less importance on the mechanism of conversion. Sharp's explanation for how nonviolence works expands beyond persuasion, to include coercion and the disintegration of the opposition’s political apparatus.

Nonviolent political action was originally understood as a method of moral persuasion by pacifists. The principled approach to it is essentially pacifist. However, many thinkers have questioned whether the coercive use of nonviolence really fits under this definition, since it generated political power and was not aimed at persuasion. This called into question the moral paradigm of nonviolence. In the next sections I first describe the current strategic/pragmatic approach to nonviolence epitomized by the work of Gene Sharp. It argues that while persuasion is one way that nonviolence can generate social/political change, it is the mechanism that least often occurs. In fact most instances of nonviolent political action do not attempt to or result in the changing the minds of the opposition. Instead, they aim at destroying the base of power of the opponent and generating their own political power. I then finish the chapter by discussing the philosophical problem of distinguishing effective nonviolence and violence.
Part 3 The Strategic Paradigm of Nonviolence: Gene Sharp

The contemporary understanding of nonviolence borrows heavily from and expands on Gandhi’s ideas of persuasion and Gregg’s moral jui-jitsu, however it abandon’s the metaphysical moral arguments for the use of nonviolence and the pacifist commitment. Gene Sharp (among others) points out that most activists employing nonviolent techniques are not moral pacifists. He goes to great lengths to argue that nonviolence is an active and militaristic struggle, with the goal of attacking the common perception that nonviolence is passive and ineffective. Sharp’s approach conscientiously avoids moral principles in favor of discussing the method and techniques of politically effective nonviolence. He is the central thinker in the strategic paradigm of nonviolence.

This view of nonviolent action as a technique of active combat is diametrically opposed to the popular assumption that, at its strongest, nonviolent action relies on the rational persuasion of the opponent, and that more commonly it consists simply of passive submission. Nonviolent action is just what it says: action which is nonviolent, not inaction. This technique consists, not simply of words, but of active protest, noncooperation and intervention.  

In 1973 Gene Sharp published the work from his doctoral thesis as a 3 volume work called the *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. This work explored a particular theory of political power (the consent theory of power) which Sharp argued makes political change through nonviolence not only possible but effective. Sharp claimed and continues to claim that since the political power of government regimes depends on the consent and participation of the governed, if those people can somehow organize withdrawals of that consent among significant portions of the population, they can nonviolently reduce the power of those political institutions. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (PNVA) discusses the theory of this form of power, looks at historical

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examples of nonviolent movements, and explains the mechanisms by which social groups can pursue nonviolent political change, as well as the kinds of outcomes they can produce.\textsuperscript{52}

Sharp frames nonviolence \textit{pragmatically}, as a way to run asymmetrical resistance movements against institutions that possess much greater access to the means of violence. “By placing confidence in violent means, one has chosen the very type of struggle with which the oppressors nearly always have superiority.” \textsuperscript{53} Sharp argues that since government tends to be able to mobilize violence much more effectively than resistance groups, any violent opposition that legitimizes the use of violence by a government tends to have a negative effect on a movement. Additionally, the use of violence also alienates support and restricts who among the population can participate in the movement. \textsuperscript{54}

Sharp’s categorization of nonviolence is distinguished from \textit{principled} categorizations because he indicates that the reasons for choosing nonviolence are entirely pragmatic. He considers choice of nonviolence to be a strategic consideration, and that it functions as a normatively neutral method. “There is nothing in nonviolent action to prevent it from being used

\textsuperscript{52} The ideas of PNVA have been rewritten into a number of shorter works (\textit{From Dictatorship to Democracy} 1993, \textit{Waging Nonviolent Struggle} 2005) that are intended to be practical manuals for resistance movements. These have been translated into a number of languages. For example, \textit{From Dictatorship to Democracy} was originally written as a manual for Burmese dissidents in Myanmar and was presented to them at secret workshops there in 1994. It has since been translated into 30 languages, including all three languages used in Burma, and is available online for free (http://www.aeinstein.org/english/). Sharp’s works have been directly credited by a number of nonviolent movements (especially the Otpor movement in Serbia that deposed Slobodan Milosevic 1996-2000) and seems to have been influential either directly or indirectly in many nonviolent movements since the 80’s. The Muslim Brotherhood, for instance, posted an arabic translation of it on their website during the Arab Spring of 2011. Although some dissidents have criticized attributing any of the success of their nonviolent movements to a Western, white, male intellectual who was not a participant in nonviolent movements there is significant evidence that the way Sharp has framed nonviolent strategy has been influential and effective at shaping nonviolent action in the last 30 years. Sharp, himself, tends to humbly downplay his influence in interviews: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/world/middleeast/17sharp.html, as well as the documentary \textit{How to Start a Revolution}, 2012)

\textsuperscript{53}G Sharp and CRDB (Organization), \textit{From Dictatorship to Democracy} (Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma [distributor], 1994), 4.

\textsuperscript{54}Sharp, \textit{The Politics of Nonviolent Action: Power and Struggle} 587-608.
for both “good” and “bad” causes. However, the social consequences of its use for a “bad” cause differ considerably from the consequences of violence used for the same “bad” cause.”  

The moral distinguishability of nonviolence from violence does not concern him, nor does it appear to concern most of the participants of nonviolent movements—who overwhelmingly do not identify as pacifists.  

Although there is a strong general consensus with earlier theorists that nonviolence is not a method of passive resistance resorted to by submissive people or cowards, the way that nonviolence functions as a technique according to Sharp differs significantly from the moral paradigm’s descriptions of nonviolence that Gandhi, Case and Gregg represented. Those focused on the moral conversion of the opposition (through reasoned appeals, and witnessed self suffering) as the only mechanism by which nonviolence can generate political change. In Sharp’s theory, the mechanism of conversion is one of four mechanisms by which nonviolence can create political change. However, it’s the mechanism that occurs least often and the success of nonviolence is not predicated on conversion of the opposition to a shared point of view:

Success with nonviolent action does not require (though it may be helped by) shared standards and principles, or a high degree of shared interests or feelings of psychological closeness between contending sides. If the opponents are unmoved by nonviolent resistance in the face of violent repression, and therefore unwilling to agree to the objectives of the nonviolent struggle group, the resisters may apply coercive nonviolent measures. Difficult enforcement problems, economic losses, and political paralysis do not require the opponents’ agreement to be felt.  

55Ibid., 71.  


In Sharp’s categorization, moral or psychological persuasion that results in changing the hearts and minds often the opposition is one kind of nonviolent action, but is not in any way a fundamental or primary modus of nonviolence.

The methods (means) of nonviolence in Sharp’s typology the include (1) nonviolent protest and persuasion, (2) nonviolent noncooperation, and (3) nonviolent intervention. Actions falls into the various categories depending on how directly they challenge the opponent. Nonviolent protests are “symbolic in their effect and produce an awareness of the existence of dissent,” which can be very powerful is situations of extreme repression. Actions such as marches, picketing and producing protest literature are forms of protest. Noncooperation increases the level of conflict with the opponent by creating “difficulties in maintaining the normal efficiency and operation of the system.” Examples include economic boycotts, strikes, administrative noncooperation, and civil disobedience. Finally, nonviolent intervention represents the most direct level of conflict with the opponent. “Methods of nonviolent intervention include sit-ins, fasts, reverse strikes, nonviolent obstructions, nonviolent invasion, and parallel government.” 58 Much of Sharp doctoral thesis and much of the space in his subsequent works is devoted to detailed descriptions of specific techniques that exist under these larger categories. For instance in the Politics of Nonviolent Action, over 1/3 of the work is dedicated to describing 198 different methods that range from “Humorous Skits and Pranks” (Protest and Persuasion) to “Farm Workers’ Strike” (Economic Noncooperation) to “Dual Sovereignty and Parallel Government” (Nonviolent Intervention). Sharp continues, as of 2015, to gather and publish more methods by which nonviolent action can be taken.

These methods of nonviolent actions can result in four mechanisms (effects) of change.\textsuperscript{59}

Under the first mechanism, \textit{conversion}, change occurs because the opponent’s will has changed to the point where they agree with, and work towards the ends of the nonviolent activists. Conversion is most often generated by suffering of the activists, whose positions gain legitimacy through the suffering they are willing to endure without retaliating and injuring other people. It can also occur through the reason or argument that is effectively communicated or amplified by the actions of the nonviolent activists. Edward Ross writes in his introduction to Case’s \textit{Nonviolent Coercion}:

\begin{quote}
Disobedience without violence wins, \textit{if it wins}, not so much by touching the conscience of the masters as by exciting the sympathy of disinterested onlookers. The spectacle of men suffering for a principle \textit{and not hitting back} is a moving one. It obliges the power holders to condescend to explain, to justify themselves. The weak get a change of venue from the will of the stronger to the court of public opinion, perhaps of world opinion.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

\textit{Conversion} describes outcomes in which the opponents mind has been change with regards to the demands and political positions of protestors. The converted opponent now desires to fulfill the demands of the protestors. This outcome is rather rare however, because most conflicts are not the result of misunderstanding or ignorance, but because of irreconcilable differences in political views. Hence the more common outcomes, as categorized by Sharp, are \textit{accommodation}, \textit{nonviolent coercion} and \textit{disintegration}.\textsuperscript{61}

On the other end of the spectrum of outcomes from conversion is \textit{nonviolent coercion and disintegration}. “Nonviolent coercion becomes possible when those applying nonviolent action succeeds in withholding, directly or indirectly, the necessary sources of the ruler’s political

\textsuperscript{59}Sharp and (Organization), \textit{From Dictatorship to Democracy} 35-37.

\textsuperscript{60}Case, \textit{Non-Violent Coercion: A Study in Methods of Social Pressure}.

\textsuperscript{61}Sharp, \textit{The Politics of Nonviolent Action: Power and Struggle} 33.
power. His power then disintegrates, and he is no longer able to control the situation, even though he still wishes to do so.”  

In between lies the mechanism of accommodation, which characterizes the situation where a ruler has not lost all control, but is compelled, either by the force of the protesters moral position, or by their actual political force to make certain changes that they desire. Any of the outcomes other than conversion involve some degree of coercion of the opponent. Accommodation occurs when the opponent’s “mind” is only partially changed, but they are forced to grant concessions to the nonviolent activists. Nonviolent coercion refers to the outcome where no conversion of the opponents will occurs, but the opponent is, none-the-less forced to grant concessions because of the power of the nonviolent movement. Disintegration is the destruction of the opposing institution through the forces of the nonviolent political movement. It is these latter three types of outcomes that I am interested in because they problematize the widespread perception that nonviolent movements possess an “automatic-legitimacy” in a way that conversion does not.

The strategic paradigm of nonviolence has become more widespread since the 1970’s. For instance, the introduction to the Nonviolent Social Movements Anthology (1999) accepts a typology of nonviolence that is expanded compared to the moral paradigm.

[Nonviolent movements] also distinguish themselves from more conventional political movements in that their tactics are primarily outside the normal political process, such as electioneering and lobbying. Tactics may include strikes, boycotts, mass demonstrations and popular contestation of public space, tax refusal, destruction of symbols of the government authority (such as official identification cards), refusal to obey official orders (such as curfew restrictions), and the creation of alternative institutions for political legitimacy and social organization. Its power is based in noncooperation.  

Ibid., 34.

Part 4 Defining Nonviolence: The dilemma of defining effective nonviolence

Hannah Arendt, in her introduction to On Violence, noted that Sorel’s Reflections On Violence concluded by advocating something only as violent as the general strike, something now considered to be a tactic of nonviolence. That he would be called a fascist for this indicates the kind of ambiguity that exists in conceptualizing violence.\(^{64}\) One of the basic tasks of discussing nonviolence as a political activity is to arrive at a working definition of it. However, this gets to the heart of task of distinguishing violence from nonviolence and justifying the power of nonviolence.

There are many examples of activities that tend to be understood as nonviolent. These are some examples from from Gene Sharp’s pamphlet From Dictatorship to Democracy: In the category of protest and persuasion there are parades, marches and vigils. In the category of noncooperation there are boycotts and strikes. Finally in the category of intervention there is nonviolent occupation, and parallel government.\(^{65}\) All these match up well with the accepted understandings of what constitutes nonviolence. Sociologist Kurt Schock describes an abstract notion of nonviolence that reflects the popular understanding:

What is nonviolent action? As the name implies, nonviolent action is active, it involves activity in the collective pursuit of social or political objectives and it is non-violent it does not involve physical force or the threat of physical force against human beings.\(^{66}\)

Now, this definition is satisfyingly narrow and corresponds with a particular way of defining violence. For instance, Norman Geras provides us with a narrow definition of violence that reflects Schock’s


\(^{65}\)Sharp and (Organization), From Dictatorship to Democracy.

definition of nonviolence when he says that violence is “the exercise of physical force so as to kill or injure, inflict direct harm or pain on, human beings.” 67 Both Geras and Schock, think of violence/nonviolence in terms of refraining from/intentionally causing physical harm. The category of definitions of violence that focus on deliberate physical force aimed at killing or injuring forms what Vittorio Bufacchi calls the “minimalist conception of violence.” 68 In the peace studies literature this is also referred to as the “narrow” or “direct” conception of violence. If we accept this notion of violence, then defining nonviolence (and distinguishing it from violence) is not very difficult.

A problem arises, however, when one finds the “minimalist conceptions of violence” to be inadequate. While harmful physical force used against a person is the paradigmatic example of violence, the notion of “physical force against human beings” fails to capture what many, upon some reflection, would consider to be an adequate notion of violence. Consider the use of threat during a mugging. Even if a mugger was bluffing about his ability to cause harm (say he was only brandishing pointed fingers under his shirt), the psychological trauma and loss of property would lead most to call such an act violent. So, while intentionally causing physical harm remains the most common notion of violence, the causing of psychological harm should not be excluded from a notion of violence. Richard Audi provides a wider definition of violence:

Violence is the physical attack upon, or the vigorous physical abuse of, or vigorous physical struggle against, a person or animal; or the highly vigorous psychological abuse of, or the sharp, caustic psychological attack upon, a person or animal; or the highly vigorous, or incendiary, or malicious and vigorous, destruction or damaging or property or potential property.69


This definition has the advantage of including intentionally caused psychological trauma which has now been accepted in many areas of research as just as harmful and hence, violent, as physical harms. The research on domestic violence, for instance, supports the idea of non-physical violence.  

Guiliano Pontara also proposes a wider definition of violence, but replaces the notion of physical and psychological attack, with a notion of suffering and harm. Violence is:

An action, a, performed by an agent P (person or group) as part of a method of struggle M in a situation of conflict S, is an act of violence [if] 1) there is at least one human being, Q, such that (i), P's performance of a, in S as part of M, causes that Q dies, suffers or is injured, and (ii), it is in S against Q's will to be killed or made to suffer; and 2) P, in S, believes 1) to be the case.

This analytical definition includes criteria such as intention, direct harm, and suffering which, includes a notion of psychological violence. Johan Galtung, similarly, calls violence somatic incapacitation. These are all representative examples of the notion of “direct violence.”

The issue of defining nonviolence becomes problematic at this point because if our definition of direct violence is expanded beyond inflicted physical harm to included a broader notion of suffering or psychological violence, then it becomes difficult to distinguish nonviolent action from violent action of the basis of its effects. This leads some theorists take the position that nonviolence is not actually non-violent, but is rather a less violent or the least-violent form of extra-legal political change.

To go back to Pontara, the converse of his definition of violence then becomes the

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definition of nonviolence:

An action, a, performed by an agent P (person or group) as part of a method of struggle M, in a situation of conflict S, is an act of nonviolence [if] 1) there is no human being, Q, such that P’s performance of a, as part of M in S, causes Q to die or suffer against his will, or to even be injured; 2) P, in S, believes 1) to be true; and 3) P, in S, chooses to perform as part of M inter alia just because of 2).\(^73\)

The problem with defining nonviolence in such a hard and fast way (and Pontara notes this) is that in situations of conflict and struggle it is impossible to both 1) struggle and 2) not cause one's opponent some sort of suffering. Resolving conflict through struggle necessarily involves doing or causing things to happen that one's opponent does not want to happen—which means inflicting suffering on one's opponent. Pontara expresses the dilemma like this:

The difficulty is still more aggravated by the fact that if methods of nonviolent struggle shall have a chance of being put forth as credible alternatives to the traditional methods of violence there must be some good reason to believe that they are efficacious means for the attainment of at least some desirable ends (which violence in certain situations undoubtedly has been). But here lies the dilemma of nonviolence, as the demand of efficacy and the demand of non-violence would seem to clash. Or are there efficacious methods of nonviolent struggle?\(^74\)

Thus, under Pontara's definition, nonviolent struggle against an opponent is not possible.

The example that Pontara discusses to demonstrate this issue is the boycott of British cotton by the Indian people organized as part of Gandhi's Satyagraha. Rejecting British cotton caused businesses in Lancashire, England to lose revenue and workers to lose jobs, thus causing some suffering among civilians in England. For this reason, Pontara concludes that the Satyagraha is not a truly nonviolent method, but rather a method that is efficacious while involving a minimum of suffering.

To support of Pontara’s characterization of the issue, one should also consider a wider notion of violence, specifically, Galtung’s notion of structural violence. (Galtung 1969)

\(^73\) Pontara, "The Concept of Violence", 27.

\(^74\) Ibid., 28.
Although this term has been the subject of considerable debate, it is useful for demonstrating how some of the results of nonviolent action can resemble violence. The term structural violence is used to describe contexts where people occupying particular locations in the “social structure” (by being members of a particular class, gender, race or other categories) are more likely to experience certain harms than members of other social groups. For example, in general the poor are more likely to suffer and die from starvation or from particular diseases than the rich. These harms are not “intended” by anyone in particular, nor do they target someone in particular. Rather they are the predictable result of the particular social or institutional arrangements we have set up for ourselves. So, when 19th century textile workers lost limbs on dangerous machinery because owners found it easier to hire replacements than to install safety measures, we can use the notion of structural violence to call those harms both violent and unjust, rather than just accidents.

The issue this raises for nonviolence is that some of the methods it utilizes seem to generate the kind of non-intentional risks that might in other contexts be called structural violence. The issue of whether effective nonviolence exists is brought into question by a structural notion of violence. If ones does accept a structural notion then we have to explain why some kinds of “nonviolent power” that look like they result in structural violence are not actually violent.75

For Pontara effective and truly nonviolent methods of struggle do not exist. To be effective a method must resort to a minimum of violence (which is none-the-less completely different in character to the large scale violence that groups more typically resort to in such situations).

When we include the effective political activities that are traditionally viewed as nonviolent and examine them with a definition of violence, we find it is hard to distinguish them from violence on the basis of that definition. The theorist of nonviolence, it seems, must fulfill two contradictory criteria in developing a definition of nonviolence. First, nonviolence must be distinguished from violence. Second, activities normally thought of as nonviolent (protests, strikes, noncooperation, etc) must not be excluded from the category by our definition. These two criteria become difficult to reconcile for activities in the realm of what is called “strategic nonviolence.” Because of its effectiveness at social change (in that it constitutes a kind of force or social power), it becomes difficult to strictly distinguish strategic nonviolence from violence. As John Smith notes, “The advocate of nonviolence is torn between the conviction that nonviolence is “right” come what may and the thesis that it is in fact the most effective instrument for achieving some desired results.”

One possible way of distinguishing violence from nonviolence is to say there that if a movement does not exceed a threshold in the suffering it causes then it does not violate the first clause of Pontara’s definition. For instance, while causing an opponent some bodily harm would violate the suffering clause, causing him to lose his position as dictator (along with the material benefits) would not violate the suffering clause. Unfortunately, this leads to a difficult process of defining what kind of inflicted suffering is wrongful and constitutes violence and what kind does not. Also, whether a type of suffering constitutes violence would then seem to depend on the moral context. For instance, reducing the unjustly gained wealth of a dictator does not seem to constitute violently inflicted suffering, but causing a racist business owner’s shop to close down

76Smith, ”The Inescapable Ambiguity of Nonviolence”, 157.
through boycott, and leading to severe economic hardship for he and his family may constitute
violent suffering rather than nonviolent action. One is tempted to say that in cases of political
oppression, the resistors are justified in inflicting a certain amount on non-mortal suffering upon
the oppressors to enact social change (such as delaying their bus and making them late). This
suffering constitutes a harm but not violence. Under this reasoning, it was fine to reduce the
wealth of former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, his family and his supporters by
overthrowing his regime. The regime and his resulting wealth was unjustly acquired.

This way of attempting to distinguish violence from nonviolence, however can easily be
turned into justifications for violence, defeating the goal of distinguishing the concepts. For
instance the same reasoning might conclude that because it would end injustice, Mubarak might
justifiably have been assassinated (given that most participants of nonviolent movements are not
pacifists). So, we are still swimming in muddy waters in terms of distinguishing violence from
nonviolence when focusing on the character of the relationship between the movement and the
opposition. In response to this problem, one of the main moves I make in this project is to shift
the focus (or prioritize the investigation) onto how adopting nonviolent methods affects the
participants in the movement itself (rather than its relationship to the opposition) in order to
define it apart from violence.

So, the task for an ethical theory of nonviolence is to explain why the force or the power of
nonviolence is different from the force or the power of violence, even though both can (in
theory) be politically effective and both can cause certain kinds of social harms. To consider
historic examples—why would closing textile factories England through boycotting in India
(generating nonviolent power through economic noncooperation) differ from closing those
factories by bombing them (as with the bombing of German industries by the Allies during World War 2)? Aside from the facts that making such factories economically unfeasible is less directly risky to the lives of the workers than bombing the factories, and the building and instruments of the factories are not destroyed as they are from bombing, the loss of livelihood and resultant suffering of the workers (and possibly those who relied on their products) seems similar in a way that makes the exercise of nonviolent power suspect.

The problem of the ethical indistinguishability of violence from nonviolence under the strategic paradigm can be expressed as follows:

1) For group $A$ to have power-over someone or some institution $B$ means that $A$ can cause $B$ to act in a manner or to experience effects that are against $B$’s interests. As Robert Dahl defined it, “$A$ has power over $B$ to the extent that he can get $B$ to do something that $B$ would not otherwise do” 77 When $A$ does exercise this power-over $B$ against $B$’s interests this is called domination.

2) In situations of political resistance, the resistors $A$ attempt to gain power-over an institution $B$ because they disagree with some (or many) political aspects of that institution and they wish to change or destroy it. In order to qualify as a case of resistance these changes cannot be achieved through existing and legal institutional channels (i.e. voting, lobbying, etc, etc…). Resistance must be non-institutional. In the most well known cases it is carried out again authoritarian governments (or against governments that violently uphold politics of domination, even though they are ostensibly democratic as was the case

for the American Civil Rights Movement).

3) Because the changes that these resistors seek are radical from the point of view of the institution, it systematically opposes them and must be forced to make the changes or must be forced from power.

4) This can be achieved through many different techniques, though we can broadly classify them into violent and nonviolent techniques.

5) Violent techniques involve threats-to and the actual physical destruction of the members and property of the institution in order to coerce or destroy it. Violent insurrection, terrorism, and civil war are examples of violent techniques.

6) Nonviolent techniques, otherwise known as civil resistance, seek to disrupt the capabilities and functioning of the institution through acts of disruption such as general strikes, occupation strikes, sit-ins, boycotts and other acts of collective consent withdrawal. These actions seek to forcefully coerce or destroy the institution, which will lose its sources of power as a result.

7) When violent or nonviolent techniques of political resistance are successful they force the institution being opposed to capitulate to the demands of the resistors. Thus both violent and nonviolent kinds of resistance involve domination of the opponent to some degree. (This is precisely the aspect of nonviolence that the moral paradigm does not consider, since it explains the effectiveness of nonviolence through the mechanism of “conversion” rather than some kind of domination. As I have mentioned before, although conversion does sometimes occur, I’m interested in the cases of nonviolent political domination.)
While there may be ways to distinguish between specific violent and nonviolent techniques based on physical consequences (for instance, claiming that bombs tend to kill more people than general strikes do), the character of the relationship between the movement and the institution it opposes is one of domination for both violent resistance and nonviolent civil resistance. Thus, it is difficult to provide an ethical argument for the use nonviolent techniques rather than violent ones if nonviolence is viewed simply as more strategic or effective technique for generating power-over than violence is. If it turned out that assassinating the president, or bombing his cabinet meeting were possible and effective techniques of dominating the institution, then from the perspective of the strategic paradigm they ought to be carried out for pragmatic reasons. Although, according to the civil resistance literature, nonviolence is more effective at dominating the opposition, there is no ethical reason to choose nonviolent techniques over violent ones given the pragmatic goal of disrupting and gaining power-over the opposition. The perspective of the strategic paradigm is limited to pragmatic discussion comparing the effectiveness of nonviolent and violent disruptions.

For instance, Hannah Arendt uses the concept of instrumentality to distinguish between power and violence in On Violence. Power is a manifestation of non instrumental forms of politics, while a capability for violence, though often misunderstood as power, is merely instrumental. Under this framework, nonviolence starts to look a lot like violence when it is understood only by its instrumental effects. I think this is a significant philosophical issue given the widespread positive views of nonviolence and the universal praise for choices to use
nonviolent methods rather than violent ones. Under the strategic paradigm the only reason we can give for this view is something like, “nonviolence is a more effective weapon than guns and bombs at neutralizing the opposition.” To begin to deal with this issue, in the next chapter I will discuss the way Gene Sharp has conceptualized the power that nonviolent movements develop. The position I develop is that nonviolent power is much more like a non-instrumental, Arendtian, “power-to” that requires a shared political commitment to a project, rather than an instrumental kind of “power-over.”
Conclusion: Defining Violence and Nonviolence

This project will provide a more complete description of nonviolence than has been provided by the moral and strategic paradigms. I describe a concept of nonviolent power that is ethical because it is predominantly the democratic and communicative development of political power and is more of a kind of “power-to,” rather than simply being “power over.” Thus, the project as a whole is an attempt at defining the crucial elements of nonviolence. One reason for this project is that traditional ways of distinguishing between politically motivated violence and politically motivated nonviolence have changed in the transition from the moral paradigm to the strategic paradigm.

This chapter has detailed two ways that nonviolence has been broadly conceptualized. As understood through the moral paradigm, violence, as a threat to the physical bodies of those in the opposition is coercive and, thus, disrespectful of their personhood. Nonviolence functions through moral persuasion, respecting the autonomy of the opposition. The strategic paradigm, however, characterizes nonviolence as a form of power, which is not concerned with the autonomy of the opposition. Though the opposition may still be “converted” in some cases, the political power of a successful nonviolent movement often forces the opposition to accommodate it, coerces the opposition, or disintegrates the opposition’s power completely (in Sharp’s terminology). Rather than being defined through a kind of respect for the autonomy of the opponent, nonviolence under the strategic understanding comes to be defined through the technique it employs.

For Sharp nonviolence is the “withdrawal of consent,” which can take many different forms (strikes, sit-ins, calling in sick, etc, etc…). The distinguishing characteristic is that consent
withdrawal does not include the use of weapons or the destruction of property (though obviously, through strikes for instance, property is prevented from being produced). For Sharp, the important limit to nonviolence is that it does not physically threaten the opposition with weapons. Violent behavior like that legitimizes a violent response from the opposition; a problem as Sharp argues, because the state has greater access to the means of violence than activist political movements. So for the strategic paradigm, nonviolent discipline is maintained not for moral respect of the opposition but because it works better to achieve political goals.

Despite the distinction based on whether direct bodily threat is present or not, however, the ethical boundary between violence and nonviolence is not very clear. States often find massive strikes very threatening: there is the frequent historical example of strikers being shot for striking by the military or the police. How can nonviolence be ethically distinguished from political violence, when the opposition finds both threatening? After all, a dictator does not feel better about being forced from office through a strike rather than guns, even though he may be relieved that his immediate future involves prison rather than death.

What justifies, ethically, the kind of political force that nonviolence generates, and why does political violence lack that justification? The view I will develop claims that nonviolent power can only be generated communicatively and democratically, whereas the coercive threat of violence can never be generated in this way. This legitimizes nonviolence in a way that is not possible for political violence. Although political violence may be justifiable in other ways (through a principle of self defense for instance), the ways that violence gets organized and deployed is vastly different in character than the way nonviolence gets organized and deployed. Nonviolence gets its power through mass participation. This requires communicative activities
and democratic organization. So even though both may appear to have a coercive relationship to
the opposition, nonviolence possesses a kind of ethical justification and legitimacy based in its
democratic character that violence does not.

A second aspect to my argument focuses on the fact that the goal of a nonviolent
movement is to change the form of an existing political institution. This means deposing the
membership of an existing political institution (and the loss of the privileges of that membership)
as a result of putting into place a new form of politics. However, it is significant that the
membership of the opposition is not the direct target of a nonviolent movement; rather the
institution that they uphold is. Furthermore, nonviolence requires the development of new,
participatory and discursive forms of politics among the movement’s members.

In contrast, I would argue that political violence, targets the membership of a political
institution rather than the political form of that institution, with the goal/result of installing its
leaders as the privileged members of it. Political violence is organized hierarchically and
authoritatively. Thus, violence does not involve discursively developing new forms of politics
and is very restrictive about who may participate. Rather than replacing a particular form of
politics with a newly developed form, violence simply replaces the members of a political
institution with its own members.

Chenoweth and Stephens show that violent civil resistance, even if successful, results in a
much high risk of further civil wars in the following decade, than nonviolent civil resistance.
They theorize that specialists in violence simply reproduce the previously problematic political
institution they were opposing, and that they lack the skills to deal with conflicts after the
revolution other than by violence.\textsuperscript{78} A historical example of this might be the Bolshevik revolution and what Carl Boggs calls the communist party’s focus on statism and state power. Instead of being a prefigurative form of politics (which entails having the movement organize itself same form as its institutionalized political goal), the communist movement in the USSR believed that appropriating state power was the means for a later, more complete, socialist revolution towards worker freedom. This justified its totalitarian and undemocratic character and resulted in little progress away from authoritarianism towards democratic freedom after the transition from monarchy to state socialism. The violence of the revolution precluded the development of new forms of politics in the movement itself. Violent movements are only prefigurative for authoritarian and hierarchical forms of government.\textsuperscript{79}

In the next chapter I focus on Sharp’s theory of nonviolent power, his arguments for it, and the criticisms of it. Sharp’s fundamental conceptualization of nonviolent power is that it involves the withdrawal of consent of the governed. Other strategists of nonviolence have largely adopted and still use this theoretic framework. Thus, Sharp will serve as the archetypal thinker for contemporary theories of nonviolent power that activists use today. His focus on consent and the use of the dissenter’s own agency rather than on constraining the agency of others is an ethically relevant characteristic.

However, the criticisms of Sharp’s conceptualization make it necessary for a theory of nonviolent power to not only describe the process of withdrawing consent (the negative act that Sharp focuses on) but also the positive action of using the newfound agency collectively to

\textsuperscript{78} Chenoweth and Stephan, \textit{Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict.}

create communicative forms of power.
CHAPTER 3
Issues of Power in the Strategic Paradigm

Introduction

In the previous chapter I defended Sharp’s departure from the point of view that nonviolence movements only “succeed” through the social mechanism of converting the opinion of the opponent. Arguing against the conversion explanation, I claimed that most successful nonviolent movements actually wielded power-over their opposition, and that in many historic cases nonviolent movements had generated political change forcefully rather than through conversion. This conclusion required me to think further about nonviolent power. I take up this topic here in Chapter 3 by developing a critical perspective on the strategic paradigm with respect to its concept of nonviolent power.

The strategic paradigm theorizes nonviolent action as the development of political power whose effectiveness does not depend on successfully “converting” the opposition. Nonviolence, according, to Sharp, typically succeeds by 1) getting the opposition to accommodate the political goals of movement because of the movement’s power, 2) coercing them into accepting them, or 3) disintegrating the opposing institution entirely to remove them as barrier. None of these “mechanisms of political change” depend on institutional opponents changing their minds or coming to agree with the nonviolent movement’s political goals; they are exertions of power. Although conversion does sometimes occur through nonviolent movements, I’m specifically interested in cases where a movement exerts power-over its opposition through the strikes, boycotts, sit-ins and other acts of disruption that Sharp describes.
My research question for this chapter asks, “How should nonviolent power be theorized?” Given the central question of my project, a satisfactory theory of nonviolent power should not only explain why nonviolent techniques are effective ways of creating political change (the explanatory question), but also why they are ethically distinct from violent political resistance (the ethical question). The central conclusion of the current civil resistance literature is that nonviolence is effective at creating political change, which makes the explanatory question an important one. The term ‘nonviolence’ itself, and the circumscription of nonviolent techniques from violent ones carries a normative assumption that nonviolence is explicitly different from violence. This makes the ethical question of how to conceptually distinguish the two, an equally central question about nonviolence.

This chapter focuses on Gene Sharp’s theory of political power: the consent theory of power. This liberal and voluntaristic conception of political power informs much of the civil resistance literature. In brief, Sharp argues that political power depends on the consent of the governed, and because those citizens can withdraw their consent through nonviolent techniques, they can reduce, disable or destroy the political power of institutions that a nonviolent movement opposes. This argument, according to Sharp, shows why it’s possible for nonviolent movements to successfully oppose, control and overthrow violently oppressive political regimes, and why doing so nonviolently is more effective than doing so violently. I argue that Sharp’s theory of power fails to answer both the explanatory and the ethical questions in a satisfactory manner. In this chapter, I present two major issues with Sharp’s theory of power that demonstrate the need for an expanded the concept of nonviolent power. This chapter makes the case that nonviolence political power has been theorized inadequately by Sharp and the strategic paradigm.
I will briefly summarize the two issues with Sharp’s treatment of nonviolent power that I develop in this chapter:

1) Sharp’s consent theory of power purports to explain why nonviolence can be effective. With respect to the issue of domination, Sharp takes a voluntarist/subject-centered approach that claims that individuals choose whether or not to obey/consent to existing political authority. From his perspective, resistance and disruption simply require that one withdraw their consent to existing political institution—robbing those institutions of their power. This picture is attractive for activists because it seems to make available an entire literature of disruptive techniques, such as strikes, boycotts and sit-ins (Sharp devotes much of his theoretical space to cataloging these techniques). However, the simplicity of this theory is problematic once one acknowledges that what Sharp calls consent, is often actually a kind of disciplined obedience (in the Foucauldian sense), engendered by structures of domination—rather than something freely controlled.

The secondary literature responding to Sharp’s consent theory of power focuses on this problem. Resistance to this domination has occurred, historically, through the disruptive techniques that Sharp catalogs, but Sharp’s explanation that this occurs because individuals simply withdraw their consent is not satisfactory. Arguments from feminist, Foucauldian, and structural approaches explain that what may appear to be consent is actually structurally determined. Resistance is, thus, something considerably more complicated than simply making a choice to withdraw consent.

Thus, in section 2, I ask whether it makes sense to keep the notion of consent when thinking about civil resistance given the structural and post structural objections to it. I argue that it is still necessary to include a consent based conception of agency for resistors (given the goals
of the strategic paradigm/civil resistance literature), and that we can do so if we take a position like Steven Lukes does in *Power: A Radical View*. Even through power often takes the form of structures of domination that an individual may not even be aware of, such power does not totally constitute a subject Lukes argues. There is still some degree of autonomy (and thus resistance through consent withdrawal possible). Bringing in the criticisms of social theory, however, point to the fact that nonviolence involves developing “structures of resistance” and new kinds of social relationships that make it possible to break from structurally determined domination that manifests as obedience. To understand how structures of domination can be challenged, the identified locus of nonviolent activity must be shifted away from disruptive action, which I argue is only one particular kind of action made possible by (and derivative of) a more fundamental kind of power. The capability to withdraw consent collectively can only be developed through communicative action that generates participation in the movement. This leads to my second criticism of Sharp’s conception of nonviolent power.

2) Sharp does not name or classify a form of nonviolent power (which I will label as *empowerment* or *power-to*) distinct from the *power-over* that disruptive techniques exert. He focuses on the ability of nonviolent movements to be disruptive in order achieve power-over an opposition, categorizing the techniques for doing this. However, among these techniques of disruption he lists techniques that are constitutive of new political institutions (parallel government, alternative economies) without acknowledging that these are a fundamentally different kind of activity. This focus on nonviolence as a disruptive kind of power-over is what leads to the problem of distinguishing violence from nonviolence because it allows no way of establishing the ethical character of nonviolence. I argue therefore, that nonviolence must be
conceived of fundamentally as an empowering and transformative kind of power-to, rather than simply power-over. Doing so will allow us to include communicative activities as nonviolent action and thus better understand why nonviolence is such an effective method of political change, and explain how it is ethically distinct from violence. These arguments cannot be made from within a framework that has a completely voluntaristic theory of consent and one that only acknowledges the disruptive aspects of nonviolent movements.

The chapter is organized into three sections. The first introduces the strategic paradigm’s theory of nonviolent power through Sharp’s thought; the second and thirds sections each present a criticism of that theory and outline a position that better accommodates the ethical concerns of my project.
Part 1

Estienne de la Boetie

Sharp’s analysis of political power begins by asking what power’s source is. The most widespread view of political power, he claims, believes that the power of the government is “emitted from the few who stand at the pinnacle of command.” Sharp calls this belief the “monolithic” view of power. According to this perspective, the power of the government is only opposable through “overwhelming physical might.” The monolithic picture sees power as durable and self perpetuating—something that is reified and out there—a something that will not go away unless it is destroyed by force, and (most importantly to the ideology that maintains authoritarian rulers) some thing that is “intrinsic to the power holder.” This kind of view undergirds arguments for the use of political violence as well as capturing the general logic of warfare: “Faced with the actual or potential destruction of men, weapons, cities, industries, transport, communications and the like, the enemy will be forced to accept a settlement or to surrender (unless he has the greater destructive capacity).\(^8\) Sharp’s central thesis, however, which he argues makes strategic nonviolence both possible and effective, is that this view of political power is wrong.

Although the “monolithic” theory of power has always been present in public consciousness there have also been political theorists going back to the Renaissance writing about the dependency of authoritarian leadership on the cooperation of its citizens. The principle inspiration for Sharp’s thesis here is Estienne de La Boétie, the French, Judge, anarchist and writer’s work *Anti Dictator* (Originally published in 1576, it is also known as *Against One Man*.

or *Anti-One*). Boétie, like Machiavelli a few years before, noted the fragility of the Monarch’s position as well as his complete dependence on the cooperation of subordinates. This is a descriptive passage:

> He who thus domineers over you has only two eyes, only two hands, only one body, no more than is possessed by the least man among the infinite numbers dwelling in your cities; he has indeed nothing more than the power that you confer upon him to destroy you. … How can he have so many arms to beat you with, if he does not borrow them from you? … How does he have any power over you except through you? How would he dare assail you if he had no cooperation from you? … Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break in pieces.\(^{81}\)

Similarly, many of Machiavelli’s treatises on political power deal with maintaining the support of important subordinates and not jeopardizing one’s popularity through cruel actions.\(^{82}\)

Boétie, therefore is a relevant “founding” theorist for many dissident thinkers such as Gandhi, Tolstoy, Thoreau, the German Anarchist Gustav Landauer, and Simone Weil. What was revolutionary about *Anti Dictator* was how it introduced the importance of the subject to political dissent. Boétie’s work was a move away from Medieval theo-centricism towards a modern humanism. Like Martin Luther’s religious revolution, *Anti-Dictator* emphasized the importance of the subject and their perspective.

In a sixteenth century world where the subject and the very notion of human agency barely existed, Etienne de la Boétie’s *Anti-One* was a radical text. … La Boétie’s rhetorical position was part of an emerging humanist challenge that symbolized the transition from the medieval to the modern period. Humanism defied the prevalence of God and placed humanity at the center of attention. With it re-emerged the long lost notion of human agency, the idea that people are their own masters, equipped with the ability to change both the world and themselves.\(^{83}\)

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Roland Bleiker argues that Boéte was the first to theorize a modern, individualistic idea of political dissent. The ideas from *Anti-Dictator* were then taken and applied to collective movements by modern theorists like Tolstoy and Gandhi. Although they collectivized Boéte’s idea of political resistance, according to Bleiker, both Sharp and Gandhi placed importance in the autonomous self and an individualistic form of human agency, and hence strongly identified with *Anti-Dictator*.

**Sharp’s Theory of Power**

Instead of a “monolithic” centralized theory of power, Sharp describes political power as fundamentally deriving from getting others to obey commands, and others deciding they will obey those commands. His definition of social power is the capacity to control the behavior of others either directly or indirectly. Political power is a subcategory of social power that is used for achieving political objectives. Sharp defines it as “[T]he total authority influence, pressure and coercion which may be applied to achieve or prevent the implementation of the wishes of the power-holder.” 84 Because of the focus on commands and obedience, Sharp classifies people as either rulers or subjects. In a state structure, ‘ruler’ applies not only to chief executives but all “ruling groups” that give commands within the state structure.85 People who are not rulers are subjects. This kind of description falls into the category of “power-over” theories of power.

Sharp explains that the political power of rulers manifests and exists through a number of categories: (1) The perceived Authority the leadership possesses, (2) the Human Resources (the number of people who obey/cooperate with the leaders), (3) the Skills and Knowledge of his

84Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action: Power and Struggle*, 7-8

human resources that can be used to meet the needs of the leadership, (4) *Intangible Factors* under which Sharp puts shared ideologies of religion, race, gender, political party, etc, (5) *Material Resources* such as access to natural resources and economic systems, control of the transportation and communications systems and finally, (6) *Sanctions* that are executed by the military and police.

The key realization for nonviolent movements, according to Sharp, is that all these categories of political power depend on the continued obedience of either specific or large social groups within the population. Hence, the shared basis of all categories of political power is that they depend on whether subjects accept a ruler, whether they recognize his or her authority and whether they obey or cooperate with his or her orders. These kinds of political power “depend *intimately* upon the obedience and cooperation of the subjects.” 86

Rulers, to the extent that they lead “systems” (political, economic, military, etc) require subordinates to run these systems and implement their policies. Thus garnering the cooperation of these assistants is vitally important to political power. To a large extent these direct subordinates can sabotage a ruler’s prerogatives by simply being conscientiously inefficient in their work and passively refusing to carry out orders—not to mention actually resigning and explicitly refusing to cooperate. Specialists, like finance ministers, defense secretaries or head of technological systems (like water quality and sewage for instance) possess knowledge and contacts of that system that are not easily replaceable. Once the importance of all these specialists is established it becomes clear the political power of the ruler exists through a network of relationships with direct subordinates that must be maintained.

This description also captures the necessity of cooperating “rank and file” workers in these systems as well. If workers in energy, communication, food or transportation systems decide to not cooperate on a significant scale, the political power of the leadership can quickly be degraded. Even sanctions, which seem at first glance to be the cause of and not result of obedience, can be understood as depending on obedience. Sanctions can be used as punishments or to elicit the desired behavior. They are used domestically as well in relations between nations (in the forms of military strikes, economic embargoes or the breaking of treaties).  

The leadership tends to be group which has the easiest access to sanctions against unwanted behavior, however the effectiveness of these sanctions is contingent on the willingness of police and military to carry them out. The police and military tend to be made up of members that come from the general population (it is rare that a police or military would be made up solely of elites). Because of this they can be influenced by the degree to which there exists popular support for “police” or “military” force—most have moral/psychological disinclinations against harming their populations.

Additionally, those forces require the material support (food, fuel, weapons etc) of the general population, as well as the acquiescence of the vast majority—no police force is large enough to arrest gatherings after they reach a certain size. The enforcement of sanctions depends on the voluntary obedience of most of the society. “Enforcement and obedience are interdependent: the greater the voluntary obedience, the greater the chances of detection and punishment of deviations. Compliance and enforcement thus reinforce each other: the stronger the compliance pattern, the more effective the enforcement (and conversely).”

87Ibid., 11-12.
88Ibid., 15.
Sharp’s analysis of all these loci of power leads him to conclude that “the most important single quality of any government, without which it would not exist must be the obedience and submission of its subject. Obedience is at the heart of political power.” 89 This thesis can be summarized as the consent theory of power. Although the presentation of this analysis of political is a relatively small portion of the overall project of the Politics of Nonviolent Action it forms the basis for the claims of effectiveness of nonviolence and is the principle that guides the uncovering of nonviolent methods later in the work. It has also been taught extensively to activists. 90 The important conclusion of Sharp’s analysis of power is that nonviolent action can be strategically effective:

If the subjects deny the ruler’s right to rule and to command, they are withdrawing the general agreement, or group consent, which makes possible the existing government. This is loss of authority sets in the motion the disintegration of the ruler’s power. That power is reduced to the degree that he is denied authority. Where the loss is extreme, the existence of that particular government is threatened.91

This line of thought traces directly back to the humanist, agency oriented conception of political dissent that was originally framed by Boétie. Nonviolent movements are thus strong methods for altering, reducing or utterly destroying institutions of political power they oppose through the withdrawal of participation and consent. Contrary to the popular notion that to be a realist about political power must involve violence, this theory of political power views the mass withdrawal of political consent to be an effective way to counter political power.

It is control of the ruler’s power by the withdrawal of consent. It is control, not by the infliction of superior violence from on top or outside, not by the persuasion, nor by hopes of a change of heart in the ruler, but rather by the subjects declining to supply the power holder with the sources of his power, by cutting off his power at the roots. This is resistance by noncooperation and disobedience. 92

89Ibid., 16.
92Ibid., 47.
Sharp, in the Boétian tradition, believes that the essence of political power is consent—that fundamentally, political power does not exist without the consent of the ruled as its basis. Kate McGuinness describes him like this:

[H]e [Sharp], maintains a strong degree of human agency in his theory. In fact, Sharp’s may be considered an ‘actor’ model of social and political interaction, rather than one with either a more systemic or structural perspective. Sharp assumes that the actors involved make a choice about their behavior: in his words subjects agree to obey rulers, or they agree to disobey them.

According to Sharp, once one comes to the understanding that power depends on consent the methods and mechanisms of nonviolence that were described in the previous chapter become visible as the techniques of nonviolent resistance.

Thus, Sharp’s theory of political power can be summarized as follows: First, Sharp employs a simple classification of rulers and subjects, and sees their relationship as the location of power. He adopts the traditional power-over way of conceiving power. Second, political power is fundamentally constituted through the consent and thus obedience of large parts of the population. Obedience is basis of authority, human resources, skills and knowledge, intangible factors, material resources, and sanctions. Because obedience is necessary and at the same revokable there is always the possibility for the autonomous agent to effectively resist through strategic nonviolence.

The assumptions of Gene Sharp’s theory of power that I organize my arguments around are thus: 1) The consent theory of power strongly assumes the existence individual autonomy, based on a traditional liberal theory framework. 2) Sharp and the literature on civil resistance assume that nonviolence is primarily a method of gaining power-over a movement’s political opposition through disruptive activities. In this chapter, my first criticism addresses Sharp’s emphasis on

consent and autonomy. The second, more important criticism, argues that while Sharp (and contemporary theorists of power) focus on power-over, nonviolence is more fundamentally a kind of power-to. Although it does develop power-over its opposition, the capability of nonviolent movement cannot be solely with a power-over framework.
Part 2

Structural and Post Structural Criticisms of Boétian Theories of Political Power

Gene Sharp’s consent theory of power is attractive because it presents a simple observation that has profound implications for dissenters in nonviolent movements. However, ongoing discussion of the consent theory of power in the secondary literature attacks either the viability of nonviolence as a method of political change by pointing out inaccuracies in the consent theory of power, or argues that the consent theory of power does not accurately describe the power of nonviolent movements. The general format of these criticisms (Brian Martin, Kate Mcguiness, Robert Burrowes and Iain Atack all discuss some version of position) is to claim that the consent theory of power focuses too much on the individual agent, and ignores structural forms of power that constrain agency and consent. Brian Martin, sets the context for this criticism by highlighting the contrast between how Sharp’s work has been taken by activists and theorists.

Sharp’s research on nonviolent resistance has been useful to activists in the USA as well as activists in the People Power Movement in the Philippines (1986), the First Palestinian Intifada (1987-93), and pro-democracy movements in Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Egypt (2011). In fact, linking theory with practice has been encouraged in the civil resistance tradition. On the other hand political theorists have largely ignored Sharp, despite the uptake of his work by civil resistance movements. Recently, Kurt Schock argued that one reason for this was that Sharp is a central theorist in the field of Civil Resistance Studies, which aims to connect theory with practice and has activists as its primary audience. In contrast, the scholars of “social movements and revolutions” have academics as their audience, and thus take more structural approach to their theory, even though they study the same social phenomena. Martin attributes

the ambivalence about Sharp in the academic community to the fact that the theoretical underpinnings of his work seem simplistic and in some respects seriously flawed.  

Structural analysis in the discussions of Sharp presented by Martin and the others rely on Marxist analyses of capitalism, feminist analyses of patriarchy, and anarchist analyses of the state. A structural approach, according to Martin, looks at how “…certain types of social interaction are so regular and entrenched that they take on a dynamic of their own.” So for instance a Marxist analysis will look at how capitalism requires owners to extract surplus labor power from workers, and how this practice is structurally reproduced through laws protecting private property, the distribution of wealth through taxation, and the socialization of individuals in capitalist ideology. A structural analysis looks at how decisions within particular spheres of organization (the economy or gender for example) are constrained. The individual intentions of business owners may vary, but they must all extract surplus labor from workers or they will be put out of business by a competitive market. Choices that conform to the values of the structure are rewarded, while antagonistic choices are punished in various ways. These factors, highlighted by the structural approach, problematize the notion of individual choice.

The voluntaristic focus of the consent theory of power, on the other hand, does not focus on how the structural context surrounding a potential act of dissent may hinder or help it, and relies on an assumption that choices are readily available to individuals. Sharp devotes a large percentage of his book to discussing forms of economic noncooperation (strikes, calling in sick, etc) but does not discuss the structure of capitalism at all. He simply lists the possibilities of what can be done from the individual worker’s perspective. This is problematic according to Martin,

95 Martin, “Gene Sharp’s Theory of Power”.

96 Ibid., 215.
because an analysis of capitalism reveals many situations where consent may be compromised. Although worker noncooperation is always theoretically possible, workers may be divided by status, wages, ethnicity or gender. At the same time they are being exploited by capitalism they may also be earning a higher standard of living than their parents, complicating decisions to strike.  

Furthermore, Sharp’s neglect of the details of political organization in his analysis seems to ignore crucial issues for activists. Political movements tend to involve workers in bureaucracies, presenting a need to analyze the structure of bureaucracies. “[T]he ruler-subject dichotomy is of limited value here, since in a typical bureaucracy, nearly everyone has both superiors and subordinates.”

Many (though not all or even most) battles against oppression today are fought without an obvious ruler/subject dichotomy that can be used to easily determine targets of nonviolent action. Although Sharp presents a type of structural analysis when he claims that “loci of power” must be diffused in society in order for that society to maintain democratic control its rulers his point is only presented to further establish the ruler/subject dichotomy. The problem then, generally, is twofold. Within particular social structures, people can act both as subjects and as reproducers/enforcers (for instance in the way that Althusser describes how ideologies are maintained). This is to say, while they are subjects, they are also partially on the side of the rulers, and they receive rewards for acting in this role. Women’s roles in patriarchy are an example of this—there are many social rewards for conforming to feminine standards. For

97Ibid., 216.
98Ibid., 216.
99Sharp, Social Power and Political Freedom 47.
instance, consider Bourdieu’s idea of symbolic violence.

Second, the “loci of power” that Sharp presents as important checks to the power of rulers often come to entrench other forms of oppression. Martin brings up the example of labor unions, a kind of institution established through conflict to develop the power of workers nonviolently against the exploitation of capital. However, after being established, unions sometimes come to serves as stabilizers of the status quo rather than a radical force for workers. They may prevent wildcat strikes, and they have, historically, put up strong opposition to the acceptance of women workers in certain industries. Thus, although it served as opposition to capital, that particular “locus” of power has, to certain extents, become co-opted by the opposition, and has even been a source of oppression and opposition to struggles against patriarchy.

Martin points out that Sharp’s historical examples are struggles against Feudalism, Fascism, and colonialism for which their exists a vast political consensus against, rather than some of the more contemporary social issues caused by patriarchy and capitalism. A structural analysis problematizes the subject ruler dichotomy and the basic consent theory of power that most forms of strategic nonviolence relies upon. However, despite these issues, Sharp’s work remains relevant for opposing authoritarian regimes, and according to Martin, is a good starting point to which activists can “add in” a structural analysis according to their own contextual knowledge. The emphasis on consent is important because structural analyses often suffer from a difficulty in linking their analyses to practical recommendations for actions that should be taken by activists coalitions and campaigns.

The difficulty confronting theory in this middle-ground of providing guidance for campaigns ‘on the ground’ is one reason why the task is often forsaken in favour of producing erudite works which provide deep insight into structures but almost no guidance about involving oneself and others in social activism. …

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The task of linking structural analysis to direct action is a vitally important one; the point here is that it is quite difficult partly because structural approaches do not have the obvious and immediate implications for social action.  

Martin continues by observing that while Sharp’s use of the consent theory of power suffers from theoretical problems that require the development of a more complex picture of partially supporting and partially antagonistic forces, its purpose is not theoretical understanding, but practical advice for actions. In Martin’s view, he sees more developed structural theories as failing to surpass Sharp’s work in doing so.

Kate McGuiness provides another detailed criticism of the consent theory of power focused on patriarchy. The idea that consent is the basis of power and can be used to define power relations does not accurately represent the power dynamics in patriarchy. First, drawing on Carol Patemen’s work, McGuiness argues that Sharp’s assumption that everyone possesses their own consent, which may then be withdrawn, rests on the faulty assumption that everyone is equally and fully constituted as a member of that society. Since, as Patemen argues, (in The Sexual Contract [102]) women are not constituted as members of society to the same degree as men, they do not possess the socially recognized ability to consent in the same way men do. “Their identity is differentially constructed in order to maintain their subjugation by men. This mitigates the role of consent as it relates to women and power.” [103] McGuiness is not optimistic that Sharp’s functional approach can ever be useful for feminists since his relational approach (ruler and subjects) does not examine how those relationships are structurally determined.

The [Boetian] suggestion that servitude is voluntary, and that any system of domination would crumble immediately if only its subjects would withdraw consent, fails to understand the complexities of the discursive system of domination in which women are confined. [104]

[101]Ibid., 218.


While, Brian Martin and Kate McGuiness argue that a more accurate and usable theory of power requires that *structural* analysis be done either by activists after learning about the importance of consent (Martin) or in lieu of a consent based approach to nonviolent power entirely (McGuiness), there is also a post structural critique of Boétian, consent theories of power developed at length by Roland Bleiker in *Popular Dissent, Human Agency and Global Politics* (2000). Bleiker argues that conceptualizing acts of political dissent as the result of a humanist and essentialist notion of human agency ignores the important criticisms of that picture of agency that post-structuralism has introduced. In Bleiker’s view, the consent theory of power relies problematically on a conception of human agency that Foucault has shown to be untenable. The idea that we can become completely aware of the power relationships that constitute our subjectivity and simply cease to consent in them is naive, and the consent theory of power rests on the assumption that nonviolent resistance is possible precisely because of this. Bleiker argues that if we take Foucault’s understanding of power seriously and conceptualize power as a series of discursive strategic relationships then a consent based theory of power makes no sense.

Using a Foucauldian framework, Bleiker argues that power develops through *discursive practices* (modes of things, bodies of knowledges). As a result dissent must also function by resisting and changing discursive practices, something that involves much more than protesters showing up at the Berlin Wall or organizing massive strikes. The Boétian idea that power exists in the relationship between the ruler and the ruled (which Bleiker calls a parsimonious grand theory) is too “spatially delineated” to explain the “complex and transversal” events of

dissidence like East Germany in 1989 (his primary historical example).\textsuperscript{105} To conceptualize the anti-communist movement in Germany as occurring between that state and its dissident citizens ignores how many international features (such as West German free market ideology and the loss of Soviet military support due to Glasnost and Perestroika) came together to cause the fall of the Berlin Wall. A theory of power based on consent attributes too much causality to conscious decision making and on the autonomous individual. Boétian theories of resistance like Sharp’s fail to see that power exists as Foucault described it, in complex strategic arrangements, and that the autonomous individual, able to use reason and to freely choose to consent and participate or to not is a “fiction” of modernist humanism. Bleiker claims that the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 was not the product of conscientious dissent and direct human agency. This kind of explanation is “simplistic and grandiose.” Instead there were a numbers of systems and discursive practices that changed. For instance, the system of rewards for members of the surveillance system and the punishments for those who were observed became archaic and no longer functioned. The USSR decided it needed to reform and shrink and no longer provided financial and military support for repression by the Honecker regime. Finally, Honecker, the personality behind the communist authoritarian regime, “became ill” and could no longer appear publicly.

Bleiker thinks of political dissidence as a “transversal” practice; it occurs across nation-state boundaries and in many different spheres (politics, economics, art, popular culture, etc). The final, concrete and visible acts of movement that strategists of nonviolence place theoretical emphasis on are actually the result of and not the cause of changes in discursive practices. Thus

\textsuperscript{105}Ibid., 136.
the emphasis on the agency of the subject in the consent theory misconstrues and oversimplifies how social change occurs through dissent.

While Sharp does devote significant space in *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* to discussing “why men obey” and theorizing how consent is maintained through what could be termed “discursive practices” in the Foucauldian sense, it’s clear he’s chosen “consent” because it’s something (from a liberal, humanist perspective) that seems to be in one’s own possession and control. The idea that consent is at the basis of political power is attractive because it makes the success of nonviolent resistance seem imminently possible. In *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* it makes sense to locate the fundamental possibility of nonviolent action in consent because it is an easily graspable concept and is generalizable enough that it can be used to describe a variety of types of nonviolent action in a variety of contexts. From a political theory perspective, however, it is severely oversimplified. These structural/post structural criticisms raise the issue of whether consent is the appropriate concept for civil resistance, and to what extent agency is possible for a participant in a nonviolent movement. I take the position that consent is important and defendable, once one acknowledges the structural criticisms.

One of the problems of a Foucauldian framework is that an analysis that focuses on how human subjectivity is shaped by discursive frameworks (what Foucault calls *subjectivation*) risks losing the theoretical possibility of human agency. Bleiker’s position tends toward what Steven Lukes has called “the extreme thesis of Foucault:” the idea that the subject is entirely constituted through power relations. According to it, there is no sphere free of power relations where decisions can be made by the individual. Bleiker says the following about the existence of agency and its manifestations with respect to political resistance:
Moving along these constantly shifting transversal terrains of dissent is to resurrect a notion of human agency from a discursive viewpoint. Yet, it is not a notion based on a causal understanding — a perspective that presupposes an autonomous agent and a clearly separable and identifiable object upon which agency is projected. It is not a notion that embodies claims to totality, that believes every process of social change requires an agent to trigger it. Many dynamics are beyond the influence of human agency, and certainly far beyond our ability to understand them adequately.\textsuperscript{106}

However, the extreme thesis of Foucault is a form of determinism, making consent and agency impossible. Operating solely within such a framework is not useful for a theory of civil resistance.

Bleiker, with his Foucauldian framework, argues that all resistance and political change occurs indirectly, through changes in ways of thinking which he calls transversal dissent.

Transversal forms of dissent cannot succeed overnight. An engagement with linguistically and discursively entrenched forms of domination works slowly and indirectly. The effect of such interferences are difficult to see or prove, especially if one approaches the question of evidence with a positivist understanding of knowledge. But transversal dissent is nevertheless real.\textsuperscript{107}

But this framework drifts too far away from the activity of nonviolence to speak to the literature of civil resistance. As cited above, Bleiker discounts the importance of the disruptive activity to protecting and making developing alternative politics possible, identifying such events as the final effects of transversal dissent, rather than the actual causes of political change.

It [transversal dissent] enters the social context in the form of what East German poet Uwe Kolb called a ‘trace element.’ It does not cause particular events. It engenders human agency through a multi layered diffused process, though a gradual transformation of societal values. This process has no end.

No matter how successful they are, discursive forms of dissent, even if they manage to transgress national boundaries, are never complete. There is no emancipatory peak to be climbed. Dissent is the very act of climbing, daily, doggedly, endlessly. It is not an event that once, a spectacular outburst of energy overcomes the dark forces of oppression and lifts liberation into a superior state of perpetual triumph.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{106}Ibid., 277-78.

\textsuperscript{107}Ibid., 281.

\textsuperscript{108}Ibid., 281.
While I agree with Bleiker’s description of dissent as an on going process without clear emancipatory peaks to mark destinations, his framework leaves little room for theorizing about the kinds of political activities that are identified and studied as civil resistance.

Iain Atack, another commentator on Sharp, also thinks that a Foucauldian perspective really problematizes a consent based theory of power. Through its critique of the subject such a perspective `puts into jeopardy the idea that conscientious dissent is possible. “If the knowing subject is the result of, rather than the instigator of, regimes of power it is difficult to see how he or she can be an innovative and autonomous agent of social change.” 109 Atack’s response is to incorporate Antonio Gramsci’s idea of hegemony with Sharp’s consent theory of power. Gramsci’s hegemony refers to the ability of particular social institutions (like the state or the economic system) to create and reproduce the consent among non dominant social groups. This theory explained how the ideology of capitalism prevented the workers from acting in their own interests seizing the means of production. Brian Martin summarizes hegemony as as “the process by which a given way of organizing social life, in which one class dominates another, becomes accepted as inevitable and desirable by most people.” 110 Atack summarizes it as “the prevalence of a ‘close identity between people and their political and social institutions’ as the basis for embedded systems of power.” 111 The idea that political power is primarily generated by a hegemony of ideas coming from dominant social institutions can be reconciled with a Boétian consent theory of power. It provides an explanation for how consent functions in society and provides targets for dissidents to work at in changing accepted ideas.


111Atack, "Nonviolent Political Action and the Limits of Consent", 93.
So, this raises a dilemma about how to understand actor agency in situation of civil resistance. Agency is either naked and uncompromised under Sharp’s Boétian characterization of consent, or non-existent under Foucault’s “extreme thesis.” I believe that a “middle-ground” framework of nonviolence, which allows for human agency based at least somewhat in dissent against discursive practices must be developed. Explaining how nonviolence can deal with structural domination remains of the major problems and tasks of the civil resistance literature as Kurt Schock has noted. 112 Although I will not focus on this issue, I will outline a brief defense of the existence of agency and role of consent for a theory of nonviolent power. The conclusion that I draw from this discussion (most relevant to my project) is that the structural criticisms of Sharp highlight a need for expanding the kind of actions associated with nonviolence. The criticisms show that actions associated with direct consent withdrawal, disruptive action, are not satisfying answers to the explanatory question.

**Agency, structural constraint, and Power**

The most well known theory of power that emphasizes a structural analyses of domination while retaining a robust conception of human agency comes from Steven Lukes, whose book *Power: A Radical View* has remained the touchstone work in the field. Lukes distinguishes between three “faces” (ways of understanding) of power, that have arisen historically through research on power: 1) Power was first studied and quantified in the visible and measurable form of decision making ability in situations of open conflict. 2) This was then followed up with an expanded theory, which argued that power also involved the ability to set agendas and thus prevent certain discussions and changes from happening (also in a context of conflict). 3)
Lukes’s argument is that there is a third aspect of power, which he calls *domination*. Drawing on Marx’s theory of false consciousness and Gramsci’s theory of *hegemony*, it explains, why agents often make decisions against their own interests. The third face approach to conceptualizing power seeks to understand why some issues do not appear as conflicts at all.

Lukes advances a conceptualization of power that goes beyond visible decision making by incorporating a structural analysis of domination. What’s significant for civil resistance research, however, is that he still incorporates a theory of human agency in this theory of power. Thus, Lukes’s position offers a way to incorporate the insights of structural understandings of power while still maintaining the existence of agency and the importance of consent for a theory of nonviolent power. It represents a kind of middle ground that could accommodate to the structural criticisms of Sharp while maintaining a role for consent.

By criticizing the one and two dimensional understandings of power, Lukes (like Martin, Mcguinness, Bleiker and Atack) also provides an explanation for what is problematic with Sharp’s consent theory power. Sharp’s assumption that whether to consent or not is a decision simply available to dissenters means that we can categorize Sharp as staying within the decision making framework of power. “Consent withdrawal,” without the insights of social theory, appears to be conceptualized solely within the first face of power. Staying within this first dimension of power is problematic for Lukes because it ignores the insights of social theory on agency.

The one-dimensional view of power offers a clear-cut paradigm for the behavioral study of decision-making power by political actors, but it inevitably takes over the bias of the political system under observation and is blind to the ways in which its political agenda is controlled. The two-dimensional view points the way to examining that bias and control, but conceives of them too narrowly: in a word, it lacks a sociological perspective within which to examine, not only decision-making and nondecision making...
However, agency is not jettisoned by the third face of power. In fact, Lukes argues that agency is a necessary presupposition for a concept of power. The notion of power is incompatible with a deterministic framework:

To use the vocabulary of power in the context of social relationships is to speak of human agents, separately or together, in groups or organizations, through action or inaction, significantly affecting the thoughts or actions of others (specifically, in a manner contrary to their interests). In speaking thus, one assumes that, although agents operate within structurally determined limits, they none the less have a certain relative autonomy and could have acted differently. The future, though it is not entirely open, is not entirely closed either (and, indeed, the degree of its openness is itself structurally determined). In short, within a system characterized by total structural determinism, there would be no place for power.

Luke’s argues, that Foucault in fact, eventually backed away from his extreme thesis, and the extent to which Foucault’s subject is constituted by power has been overstated by his interpreters. Lukes’s points us to this passage from Subject and Power:

When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others, when one characterizes these actions by the government of men by other men-in the broadest sense of the term-one includes an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized. Where the determining factors saturate the whole, there is no relationship of power; slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains. (In this case it is a question of a physical relationship of constraint.) Consequently, there is no face-to-face confrontation of power and freedom, which are mutually exclusive (freedom disappears everywhere power is exercised), but a much more complicated interplay. In this game freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power (at the same time its precondition, since freedom must exist for power to be exerted, and also its permanent support, since without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination).

Lukes argues that Foucault in the end, did not represent a deterministic position, and thus for the compatibility of structural domination and the existence of human agency.

Power’s third dimension is always focused on particular domains of experience and is never, except in fictional distopias, more than partially effective. It would be simplistic to suppose that ‘willing’ and

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114 Ibid., 56.

‘unwilling’ compliance to domination are mutually exclusive: one can consent to power and resent the mode of its exercise.\textsuperscript{116}

Adopting such a framework allows conceptual space for the agency and consent of political resisters, while at the same acknowledging that they are to some degree constrained by structures of domination. The decisions of actors, while not determined, are not free of power either.

Given this framework, I believe that developing the will to resist domination involves more than understanding disruptive techniques, that the civil resistance literature has focused on. It involves participation in communicative activities that work to develop conceptions of political alternatives to those that dominate the members of the movement. The structural criticisms of Sharp show that an important component to resistance involves dealing with the ideologies, cultures and behaviors that prevent the conceptualization of alternative politics and enforce a disciplined consent to existing institutions. This component must occur before or alongside the aggressive, disruptive kinds of nonviolent action that Sharp focuses on. April Carter’s discussion of structural criticisms of Sharp outlines a position similar to one that I want to take with respect to the possibility of consent withdrawal and role of agency for nonviolent action:

So the cooperative theory of power [Sharp and Arendt’s] can also recognize structural domination—if not always very explicitly or coherently. The cooperative theorists are essentially making two distinct claims. The first is that, however effective ideological, economic, social and political systems of domination are, people can and sometimes do see through them. Therefore they may at certain points withdraw their consent (whether manipulated or enforced) and begin to act to undermine this domination. So ultimately all forms of domination are fallible and depend on cooperation from below. The purpose of nonviolent dissent is to reveal domination and at the same time the possibility of undermining it.\textsuperscript{117}

Carter’s assessment of how nonviolence can be a way of resisting structural domination raises a question and highlights one of the tasks of theory of nonviolence: If we acknowledge that consent is always in some way the product of power (it is constituted through structural

\textsuperscript{116} Lukes, \textit{Power : A Radical View} 150.

\textsuperscript{117} Carter, \textit{Direct Action and Democracy Today} 53-54.
domination), but that actors in nonviolent movements have somehow arrived, collectively, at the point where they can and actively want to “withdraw their consent” from existing institutions, then how do they get to that point? What about the existence of a nonviolent movement makes this possible and encourages it? A general strike doesn’t occur because each individual worker decides, independently, to stop working at the same time. This question, (which Sharp gets criticized for not discussing) points at the need for an expanded framework for categorizing what nonviolent action is, and what kind of power it develops.
Part 3
The history of the debate about how to theorize power in the 20th century can to be applied to developing a theory of nonviolent power today. The theoretical moves and responses made by Steven Lukes, Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault as responses to the predominant theories of power at the time they were writing can also be applied to Gene Sharp’s consent theory of power, leading to a more comprehensive theory of nonviolent power: one which shows the normative and democratic character of nonviolence and helps distinguish its instrumentality from that of violence.

First, just as Steven Lukes added to the existing behaviorist and “agenda setting” conceptualizations of power with his, third, “radical understanding”—we too can acknowledge that structural understanding of consent and domination need to be incorporated into a theory of nonviolent power.

Second, Arendt and Foucault present a challenge to the idea that power is always power-over—domination or control, rather than empowerment or power-to. This is the more fundamental revision of the idea of nonviolent power that needs to occur. Arendt’s communicative power and Foucault’s productive power—both based in language, can also be used to present a more accurate picture of nonviolent power.

The contemporary literature has distinguished two ways of theorizing power: power-over and power-to. The strategic paradigm, which focuses on techniques of disruption has categorized nonviolent action as a way of gaining power-over the opposition. In this section I will argue that nonviolent power, when used strategically for “disruption” is a form of power-over, but that, more fundamentally, nonviolence is best conceptualized as power-to. Although the strategic
literature categorizes techniques of nonviolent action as methods of coercion or intervention—emphasizing the ability of nonviolence to have power-over its opposition—I argue that this emphasis creates a number of theoretical problems.

First, because it limits itself to a power-over framework, the strategic literature is unable to classify certain important techniques in a consistent manner. While some nonviolent techniques are about directly resisting or destroying domination by the opposition, many nonviolent actions are about creating new kinds of politics or institutional forms. The capabilities of these new institutional forms are best understood with a power-to conception of power, not as another kind of power-over.

Second, a power-over framework fails to distinguish violence from nonviolence ethically. Finally, the strategic paradigm does not explain how disruptive forms of power over get generated. It begins with the assumption of working forms of consensus existing within the movement. My own position is that nonviolent power is a kind of power-to that gets developed through what Hannah Arendt calls political action; this makes it communicative, intersubjective and based on consensus. I do not disagree that nonviolent movements often possess and exercise power-over their opposition through disruptive techniques like strikes, but I argue that this power-over is derivative of a kind of power-to.

**A Power-To Theory of Power**

Overwhelmingly, theories of power have defined power as an asymmetrical relationship of control. There are a number of theorists who define power as, the power to get someone else to do something. Max Weber gives the classic articulation of power-over by calling power “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own
will despite resistance...” 118 Robert Dahl articulated a similar position when he said “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.” 119 Lukes has called his theory a variant of “the same underlying conception of power, according to which A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests.” 120 The exclusive categorization of power as power-over is a position which I reject in conceptualizing nonviolent power.

As an alternative to “power-over” theories of power, there is also a tradition of defining power as the “power-to do something.” Hannah Pitkin claims “[T]hat power is a something — anything — which makes or renders somebody able to do, capable of doing something. Power is capacity, potential, ability, or wherewithal.” 121 Thomas Wartenberg argues that the “power-over” vs. “power-to” debate over definitions has arisen because ‘power’ gets used in two different ways in everyday language. Since theorists tend to be interested in introducing precision about concepts they have tended to focus on one way of using a word while excluding the other. Thus he argues (along with Pitkin), that it does not make sense to conceive of power in a singular way because there are two different phenomena that the word refers to. 122

Hannah Arendt, however, offers the most well known definition of political power in this category through her distinction between “power” and “violence.” Whereas theorists had

120 S Lukes, Power: A Radical View (London Macmillan, 1974), 30. Though, in the second edition of Power: a Radical View he acknowledges the existence of power as power-to.
previously had previously included a wide range of phenomena as examples of power, Arendt argued that this missed crucial distinctions and represented the longtime, historic reduction of power to forms of “power-over,”:

It is, I think, a rather sad reflection on the present state of political science that our terminology does not distinguish among such key words as ‘power,’ ‘strength,’ ‘force,’ ‘authority,’ and finally, ‘violence’—all of which refer to distinct, different phenomena and would hardly exist unless they did. . . . To use them as synonymous not only indicates a certain deafness to linguistic meanings, which would be serious enough, but has resulted in a blindness to the realities they correspond to. 123

She famously says that power is “the human ability not just to act but to act in concert.” 124 For Arendt power is a capability or potential to do something that arises between a group of agent through the process of communication. Those agents must decided independently that they want to act in concert, by coordinating their positions, identities and views. Their communication is aimed at mutual understanding. “Because people have the capacity to reflect critically upon their situation, that self-understanding—and the relations of power predicated upon it—is subject to change. Power can, in short be a relation in which people are not dominated but empowered.” 125

Arendt’s concept of power as empowerment is thus, non-instrumental and only exists, intersubjectively, between people who share some sort of understanding through communicative practices. (I take up Arendt in more detail in the next chapter)

When we say of somebody that he is ‘in power’ we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated . . . disappears, ‘his power’ also vanishes. 126

Now, is this really different from Sharp? April Carter notes that like Arendt, Sharp’s

123Arendt, On Violence 142-3.
124Ibid., 44.
126Arendt, On Violence 44.
consent theory of power is based in the necessity of cooperation. However, Sharp focuses on
the instrumental exercise of this to coerce or destroy the political power of the opposition. The
literature of the strategic paradigm generally focuses on the ways nonviolent movements can
exert power over their opposition. Arendt, on the other, believes that power is fundamentally
non-instrumental. Although she agrees that power can marshal instrumental forms of power-over
(so, for instance, the ability to carry out a general strike, which she would classify as a form of
coercion or force rather than power), we should not reduce power to an instrumental, power-over
conception. Adopting Arendt’s stance on power takes us a long way towards distinguishing
between violence and nonviolence, ethically.

**Inconsistencies in the strategic literature’s focus on disruption**

The literature on nonviolent strategy developed by Gene Sharp and his interlocutors,
(Robert Helvey for instance) treats nonviolence in instrumental terms, and focuses on the
possibility of disrupting a regime. In the conclusion to *On Nonviolent Strategy: Thinking About
Fundamentals* (2004), (published by Sharp’s *Einstein Institution*), Helvey describes nonviolent
struggle like this:

> Another contaminant is the mistaken notion that the struggle for democracy requires democratic
organizational structures to wage the conflict. This is a nonviolent war, but war, never the less. It requires
strong leadership and discipline. It is not a “happening” but a well planned and executed strategy to
destroy a dictatorship.  

The comment reflects the a general viewpoint of the strategic literature. Nonviolence is a
strategic replacement for violence that disrupts and damages the institutions of the oppositional

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127 Carter, *Direct Action and Democracy Today* 53.


government. Although Helvey’s work is designed to be more of a practical guide for training activists, looking at Sharp’s own work, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle* (2005) and the practical guide, *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (1994) (both revisions of the *The Politics of Nonviolent Action (1973)*) we see the same orientation in his focus on the withdrawal of consent. In the heading of Chapter 4 of *Waging Nonviolent Struggle* Sharp calls the 198 methods he has categorized the “weapons of nonviolent struggle.” 130 This way of conceptualizing nonviolence understands it as a form of power-over that employs force in the same way that Weber envisioned power as necessarily employing force. Sharp defines power as “… the total authority, influence, pressure and coercion which may be applied to achieve or prevent the implementation of the wishes of the power-holder.” 131 Although Sharp does not include “power-to” in his conception of power, the way he describes the techniques of strategic nonviolence makes it clear that he could have. One of the main methods of “nonviolent intervention,” in Sharp’s typology, is the establishment of parallel government or other institutional alternatives to the opposition. This is an example of the reorganization (or redeployment) of consent used as the “power-to” establish new forms of governance. However, Sharp’s focus on the disruptive aspects of nonviolence fails to recognize and categorize these techniques as involving power-to.

Sharp classifies the methods of nonviolent struggle into three categories: 1) Protest and Persuasion, 2) non-cooperation, and 3) nonviolent intervention. 132 The first category is primarily expressive and serves to build collectivity in the movement, and as a precursor to noncooperation and intervention. Noncooperation, which Sharp considers the fundamental form of nonviolent

power, is described in negative terms around the withdrawal of consent; where there was a cooperative practice before the nonviolent movement, afterward there is no such practice. The practice has been disrupted.

Noncooperation” means that the resisters in a conflict either deliberately withdraw some form or degree of existing cooperation with the opponents or the resisters refuse to initiate certain forms of new cooperation. Non-cooperation involves the deliberate discontinuance, withholding, or defiance of certain existing relationships—social, economic, or political. 133

Under the category of nonviolent intervention the negative characteristic of the previous categories of methods (the expression or the practice of dissent under “protest and persuasion” and “non-cooperation”) change to include practices that are not easily categorized by the withdrawal of consent. Nonviolent intervention, to Sharp, means a more active form of nonviolence. One is not just staying home from their job, for instance, but is being actively disruptive. Examples of intervention include “…sit ins, nonviolent invasion, nonviolent interjection, nonviolent obstruction, nonviolent land seizure, [and] seeking imprisonment,… .” 134

As a nonviolent act, sit-ins are more visible than workers collectively staying home from their jobs, and they can be carried out by outsiders to the institution, but for both methods, the goal is to hinder the normal functioning of the institution.

Sharp, however, also lists the development of dual sovereignty, parallel government, and alternative economic, social, transportation, and communication systems as methods of intervention. While “Negative interventions may disrupt, and even destroy, established behavior patterns, policies, relationships, or institutions. Positive interventions may establish new behavior patterns, policies, relationships, or institutions.” 135 I want to point out that with dual sovereignty

133Ibid., 54.
134Ibid., 62.
135Ibid., 62-64.
and parallel government the activities have advanced beyond the realm of consent withdrawal into something substantially more involving. For instance, under the “Social Intervention” category, there is both “Overloading of Facilities” (a disruption) and the construction of “alternative social institutions” and “alternative communications institutions.” Under “Economic Intervention” there is both the “stay-in strike” (disruptive occupation of the worksite) and “alternative markets, transportation systems, and economic institutions.” While all these methods exist under the category of intervention, it’s clear that only some are disruptions that exert power-over the opposition. The others are constructive, communicative forms of nonviolence—they create new political forms and practices themselves. Rather than merely withdrawing consensus collectively, these techniques are the reforming of consensual forms of cooperative action.

The same observation can be made about Helvey, who talks about a nonviolent movement being like a military campaign (he’s a former U.S. Army General) – it ought to be organized hierarchically, not democratically. Earlier in his book, however, he discusses the importance of developing consensus among the participants of the nonviolent movement. One of the first steps the movement must take is to write down its narrow and specific political goals.

The form of government to be selected by public consensus is based on the characteristics of the society that the citizens want in place at the end of the struggle—in other words, a “vision of tomorrow.” Unless citizens give some thought to what should replace a repressive regime, they may remove one tyrannical government only to bring another, more despotic government into power. Thus, it is necessary that “visions of tomorrow” be translated into objectives that will result in pragmatic changes. … This consensual vision is then translated into movement goals and political objectives. These, in turn, are translated into more specific strategic objectives. The movement leaders may provide these specific objectives to the planners, or the planners themselves may translate policy objectives and statements into strategic planning objectives.

Military planning normally occurs within a well-defined hierarchal organizational environment. The organizational environment of a nonviolent movement, however, is normally a coalition of “equals,” with all the “equals” vying for the status of being “first among equals.” 136

136 Helvey, On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict, 48-9, 67.
This, in Helvey’s mind, occurs before the movement, and hence there is no contradiction with his statement in the conclusion, but it does highlight that he is aware that that consensus in the movement is important, although his focus seems to take its existence as a given. He seems to start with an assumption of political consensus and moves immediately to the question of how a movement can strategically attack its opposition. However, as I will show with the example of Solidarity in Poland, although there may be some political consensus at the start, much of the process of political learning and development of “a vision of tomorrow” happens after a space for politics is opened up. For this reason, nonviolent power is more accurately conceived of as a form of power-to, rather than power-over or domination. Although the focus of the strategic literature on nonviolent civil resistance focuses on techniques that are examples of power-over, I argue that they are subsets of capabilities that are better described as power-to. While Sharp and Helvey describe forms of nonviolent politics that are not disruptive and not militaristic, and they fail to give these techniques their own category and to recognize their distinct role in the development of nonviolent power.

Thus, in my view there is a larger categorical division that cuts across Sharp’s three methods (protest and persuasion, non-cooperation, and non-violent intervention). Sharp describes these categories as presenting disruptive types of nonviolent action (power-over). However, I believe some of the techniques he describes actually involve the development of mutualities and consensual agreement about what new forms of political institutions ought to take, and are a communicative kind of nonviolent action (power-to). Sharp does not acknowledge or highlight the difference between these types of nonviolent action, but I think this difference is the key to developing an ethical conception of nonviolent power. Both of these kinds of actions are
necessarily part of nonviolent power, but I argue nonviolent power is fundamentally power-to, and that the disruptive, power-over, capabilities of movements are derivative of a movement’s broader “power-to.”

**Problem of distinguishing violence and nonviolence**

Since the beginning of this project one of the central questions has been how to distinguish nonviolence and violence. Adopting a power-to theoretical perspective is what makes ethically distinguishing between violence and nonviolence possible. In order to develop the capability to be disruptive using nonviolence, a movement must engage in a very different kind of power building than it must in order to become capable of violence. However, if one focuses solely on the disruptive capabilities of movements, this distinction is lost. Viewed instrumentally as ways to disrupt or destroy existing forms of institutional power, violence and nonviolence are difficult to distinguish.

The techniques of protest and disruption are what occupy the most space in Sharp’s *Politics of Nonviolent Action* (perhaps because they can be employed similarly in the widest variety of contexts—a strike in one country will work like a strike in another— whereas the ways of developing new forms of politics (the second aspect of nonviolence) are specific to the particular movement, require intense creativity and are hence less “abstractable” into a manual of techniques). However, a purely power-over conception of nonviolence fails to distinguish itself from violence because it omits a description the communicative activities necessary for a nonviolent movement to exist. One of the major themes in Hannah Arendt’s political philosophy is the incompatibility of violence and politics. In the introduction to *On Revolution* she says

> Where violence rules absolutely as for instance in the concentration camps of totalitarian regimes … everything and everybody must fall silent. It is because of this silence that violence is a marginal
The idea of violent politics involves a contradiction arising from the political’s fundamental constitution in speech and the impossibility of speech (or communication generally) in contexts of violence. While violence is contradictory to politics, for Arendt, nonviolence is a fundamental form of politics, or politics *par excellence*, and is the archetypical development of political power. This possibility of understanding nonviolence as politics is proscribed by the strategic paradigm’s focus on disruption.

Sharp, Helvey, Schock and Zunes take the perspective that there is little to distinguish violence and nonviolence other than effectiveness. Their reasoning begins and ends in a practical claim: The use of violence against the state by a social movement has the guaranteed effect of invoking, legitimating and reinforcing the effectiveness of a violent, repressive response by that state. Nonviolence is more effective because potential violent responses by the state generate support for the movement and seem illegitimate (or cast the legitimacy of the regime into question). Hence the main means available to the state cannot be invoked without significant political costs, and are thus not automatically and immediately invoked to combat the movement. While I agree with this analysis, which captures succinctly the dilemmas that governments encounter when trying suppress nonviolent action, it does not address the explanatory question of how disruptive capabilities get generated within the movements themselves.

Consider the following example. The website, *Waging Nonviolence* recently published an article about nonviolent strategy. The article discussed how Walmart’s workers might unionize (“cracking the anti-union wall at the nation’s largest employer”) by paralyzing the globalized
supply chain the corporation depends on. According to the article, although globalization has tremendously reduced the power of unions by moving production to vulnerable and unregulated markets, this shift has created an increased reliance on transit and a longer supply chain.

The supply chains are apparently quite vulnerable as they must pass through a central hub. For instance, six class 1 railways pass through the Chicago area, creating the possibility that strikes in a few yards could stop the movement of a significant proportion of goods that national retailers depend on.

Workers at key points in the supply chain can create massive disruptions in the process. A report conducted in 2002 found that a West Coast longshoremen lockout cost the U.S. economy $2 billion daily. And, in the recent strike of just two dozen subcontracted Walmart warehouse workers in Elwood, Illinois, the strikers heard reports from allies at Walmart retail stores in the region that there were already shortages of goods. This occurred less than 10 days into the strike, Elwood warehouse worker Mike Compton told me. 138

A strike at these railway yards aimed at paralyzing commerce would certainly be effective at getting the attention of Walmart and other retailers, and the importance of the rail yard and ship yard workers has already been used to gain material concessions from their employers.

But, this kind of strategic move highlights the similarities between merely disruptive nonviolence and violent resistance. The strength of those yard workers is clearly the key necessity to enacting a successfully disruptive act. Are they willing to risk their jobs? Do they have the personal courage to make demands of their employers (who are wealthier and will certainly be angered by the act)? A similar kind of disruption could be achieved by burning or blowing up these shipping yards. Although the violent disruption is reversible or temporary in the way a strike is, and would criminalize the actors and thus be unlikely to succeed at achieving any political or material gains, one can see that disruption is only one aspect of nonviolence.

Both violence and the strike, if targeted appropriately, can create a significant disruption in the everyday process of an institution. However, for the labor movement to achieve any wide-ranging progress for workers through the deployment of a calculated disruption, it would additionally need (either in advance or created during the disruption) a clearly developed conception of its demands as well as the support all the different kinds workers in that industry. A temporary disruption, because of the vulnerability of the supply chain, is relatively easy to create, (whether through a violent act or through a strike) because it only depends on the strength of a few. A unified idea of what workers should demand from their retail employers, the collectivized support of workers in different industries, the development of a shared self identity as oppressed workers— these are all elements of power-to and are more difficult to create.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I’ve put forth two criticisms of the strategic paradigm that outline what a theory of nonviolent power must do in order to answer the explanatory and ethical questions. First, a theory of nonviolent power must incorporate the knowledge that social theory has developed about structural constraints to individual decision making and agency. Sharp’s consent theory of power (and even Arendt conception of political action) face significant objections because they assume that consent is available in an unqualified way for revolutionary movements. A theory of nonviolent power must acknowledge the structural constraints on agency explored by 20th century social theory, since nonviolent movements attack structural forms of violence as often as they attack injustices wrought by dictators. In incorporating a structural perspective, however, the existence and role of consent cannot be jettisoned. A robust notion of consent is requisite for the activist and policy oriented civil-resistance literature. This
raises the question of how agency gets collectivized into resistance, which is not well explained by the strategic literature’s consent theory of power or its focus on disruptive techniques.

Second, nonviolence is a more accurately conceived of as a form of power-to rather than as a form of power-over. A power-to theory of nonviolence is able to incorporate and explain the disruptive techniques that Sharp focuses on, while at the same allowing for the crucial ethical distinction between violence and nonviolence. Whereas power-over theories present power instrumentally, a power-to theory of nonviolence makes it possible to understand nonviolence using the ethical concepts of communicative action, democracy and political empowerment.
CHAPTER 4:
Solidarity and the Co-Generative Relationship Between Disruption and Communicative Action

Introduction

There were three major periods of resistance to the Soviet Union (and countless minor ones) in Eastern Europe: Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Poland in 1980-1. Although none were entirely successful in overthrowing Soviet rule, all three were largely nonviolent and in many ways paved a path for the democratic revolutions of 1989. Poland’s Solidarność (Solidarity) movement, was the largest and most successful of these movements, and to this day provides us with the largest historical instance of the general strike. It was an unlikely movement that emerged in a totalitarian Polish state ruled by communist Party members (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza or Polish United Workers Party, PZPR) and, ironically, actually united and stood for the interests of workers from industries all over the country (as well as farmers) against communist rule. Amidst a situation where positions of leadership in every institution in the country other than the church were held by a ruling class of loyal party “yes-men” (largely comprised of working class poles who had been socialized for the positions by the Soviets after World War 2 through material and status rewards), the Solidarity movement forcibly carved out space for civil society in which the class divisions between the clergy, intelligentsia and workers were broken down and both rural and city inhabitant shared a political orientation against authoritarian communist rule.

Although it is ironic that an anti-communist movement erased class distinctions between citizens and created extensive solidarity between workers, it is not surprising that such a
movement was highly motivated in Poland. Stalin once commented that bringing communism to Poland was like “putting a saddle on a cow,” an observation that, though uttered with disdain, was regarded with pride by the Poles. Poland after all, being the breadbasket fields between two historically powerful and warring nations had a contempt for Germany that was only outweighed by their contempt for Russian rule. So, right from the origin of their post war situation at Yalta, it can be safely generalized that the Polish citizenry were opposed to their Soviet installed communist government. However, since Poland was strategically important, both materially and as a buffer against NATO, the Soviets brutally repressed any potential opposition to their leadership. They carried out the Katyn Massacre (executing half of all Polish military officers as well as member of the intelligentsia and professional classes like doctors) and established totalitarian control over all social economic and political institutions country. One could literally not hold any kind of position of leadership, whether it be local political leader, a factory boss, or even a professor without being a party member in the post World War 2 period.

Only the Church maintained some independence, though it only solidified this independence after Karol Wojtyła became Pope John Paul II in 1978. Thus, though Poles had strong motivation to resist Soviet installed communism, there were tremendous obstacles to organizing and carrying out such resistance, the greatest of which was threat of invasion and military crackdown by Russia. The fact that a trade union movement, backed by a long existing underground press was able to unite the country and protect a thriving civil society against government suppression from August 1980 until martial law was declared in December of 1981, and that the leaders of this resistance were able to emerge from prison in the mid 1980s and continue to carry out resistance tactics, get democratic elections in 1989 (making Poland the first
Soviet Bloc state to go democratic), and become the new government is extraordinary. This resistance movement was carried out completely nonviolently through a number of interlocking tactics.

Recap/theoretical outline

In the previous chapter I asked how nonviolent power has been conceived by the strategic paradigm and argued that any conception of nonviolent power must be able to answer the explanatory and ethical questions: Why is nonviolence an effective method of political change? and, How is it different from violence? The strategic paradigm’s focus on the instrumental aspect of nonviolent techniques obscures, I argued, answers to both of these questions. A conception of nonviolent power understood solely as a capability to carry out disruptive acts fails to answer those two central questions.

I argued, first, that nonviolence power, though based on individual agency and consent, must also take into account the structural constraints on agency that contemporary social theory has revealed. Sharp’s consent theory of power assumes that collectivized nonviolent action is possible without explaining how it overcomes some of social/structural forms of power that constrain agent thinking and behavior. The need to explain how structural domination is overcome shows that a more complex notion of nonviolent power (one, I argue, which involves communicative actions as the fundamental form of nonviolence action) must be developed.

Second, I argue that the strategic paradigm’s understanding of the variety of nonviolent techniques occurs solely through a framework of disruption. The categories of nonviolent action in Sharp’s work are all framed in terms of ways for a movement to affect the opposition directly: protest and persuasion, non-cooperation, and intervention. This framework presents nonviolence
as fundamentally disruptive. While nonviolent movements must act in ways that are disruptive, I take the position that nonviolent power cannot be understood solely as disruptive. Instead I argue that nonviolent power must also be defined by the way that a movement constitutes itself, by generating participation and developing relationships between members. This is a shift from both the Moral and the Strategic Paradigm’s focus on how a nonviolent movement disrupts the opposition, and toward understanding how a movement organizes itself. Rather than understanding nonviolence solely as a way of generating power-over the opposition (a framework which prevents the possibility of distinguishing violence from nonviolence, ethically) I argue that nonviolence power is more accurately theorized as “power-to,” though it does also exert forceful and coercive “power-over” an opposition through disruptive acts. The distinction between the power-over and power-to, allows me to distinguish between the instrumentally disruptive and the communicatively constitutive kinds of nonviolent action (strikes vs. underground presses) that movements engage in.

While Sharp’s Politics of Nonviolent Action includes non-disruptive techniques that develop the power-to of a movement (like underground presses, alternative economies, and parallel governments) he presents them as disruptive acts for exerting power-over the opposition instrumentally. Although these techniques do develop the potential for a movement to carry out instrumentally disruptive actions, the techniques themselves are communicative forms of nonviolent action that cannot be understood instrumentally. Nonviolent movements empower their participants to act politically, transform their sense of political possibility and involve democratic learning. By understanding nonviolent power using a power-to framework I will develop a theory of nonviolence based on communicative action and a non-instrumental
conception of politics. This, I will argue, is the basis for distinguishing between violent from nonviolent instrumentality. Because nonviolence can only develop its power (including the capability for exerting power-over through disruption) by promoting democratic participation through communicative action, its power is fundamentally different in character than instrumental disruptions carried out using violence (political violence). Nonviolence is ethical because effectiveness is equivalent to a commitment to develop participation through communicative action.

But, let’s not go too far and throw the baby out with the bath water! The disruptive techniques that Sharp and the strategic paradigm focus on are still fundamental parts of a nonviolent campaign. My move to distinguish between instrumentally disruptive acts and communicative kinds of nonviolent action raises the question, What is the particular relationship between these two kinds of nonviolent action? This chapter formulates a theory about that question, and looks in detail at how a movement constitutes itself through communicative action. I do this by analyzing the case of Poland’s Solidarity Movement (1980-89), one of the largest and most important historical examples of a mass, nonviolent action. Solidarity’s members helped orchestrate the transition to democracy and capitalism at the end of the decade, and its leader, Lech Wałęsa, became Poland’s democratically elected president in 1990. I approach the case by asking two questions: How did Solidarity generate participation and organize relationships between its members? and What role did the disruptive actions play in terms of generating participation and allowing for communicative action?

The instrumentally disruptive actions of Solidarity are well documented. The movement initially employed massive and lengthy occupation strikes at factories around the country,
paralyzing particular industries in the summer of 1980. In the following Autumn and Spring, it then orchestrated the largest ever instances of the general strike, which paralyzed (or threatened to paralyze) the country several times and included more than 10 million participants out of Poland’s population of 35 million. Thus, the movement is a spectacular instance of the use of forceful nonviolent techniques that the strategic paradigm of nonviolence focuses on.

Simultaneously, however, the movement had a highly developed political strategy that was central to its strategic successes. Its members started, extensively developed, and maintained a massive underground press to provide a forum for free political discussion that was verboten in the communist state. It also remained committed to democratically organizing its leadership and decision making. Finally, it eschewed the traditional goals of revolutionary movements—goals of taking control of the state—focusing instead on maintaining a public sphere and the ability for citizens to participate in civil society. Solidarity was effective at resisting its communist government because it was both explicitly oriented toward the development of a public sphere and communicatively oriented political power. This made it a form of what Habermas calls radical democratic politics and popular sovereignty, and an example of actual politics (in Arendt’s sense) emerging in situation of political repression by a totalitarian government. (I present my conception of nonviolence using the political theory of Arendt and Habermas in detail in chapter 5)

What is interesting about these two groups of action (the disruptive strikes and the communicative actions) is that they relied on each other to exist and develop. The strikes were made possible by the extensive network of activists who shared ideas developed in the forum of the underground press and who came to know and trusted each other through meetings.
Conversely, the strikes served to first expand and then protect the nascent civil society that made participation in a public sphere possible for ordinary citizens when the government attempted to suppress it. Thus, the various elements of Solidarity, I argue, show a kind of co-generative relationship in a nonviolent movement, between communicative and disruptive actions. Participation and organization/collectivization were first developed through the process of consent building in the underground press (the most important result being the decision to pursue independent unions). Then, coordinated occupation strikes were employed to forcefully create space for a public sphere and participation in a civil society (by getting the Gdansk Accord legalized). Later general strikes and threats of general strikes defended and expanded this space against totalitarian suppression. While Arendt and Habermas can be criticized for not explicitly dealing with the issue of conflict in their communicative ethics, Solidarity provides an example where communicative orientations were combined with forceful strategic action. The potential for disruptive action gave the will of the public sphere “teeth” and, simultaneously, expanded the space in which participation in the movement could occur.

In the latter part of Solidarity’s legal existence in 1981, the movement also wrestled with questions about how to organize itself as it grew. This culminated in the Bydgoszcz crisis in March of 1981, which almost resulted in a massive general strike. Although Solidarity had mobilized and provisioned for weeks of striking, on the eve of the strike Lech Wałęsa called it off after negotiating an agreement with the government by himself. This sparked controversy in the movement, which subsequently moved toward even more democratic forms of organization, despite the fears that this would make the movement more strategically vulnerable. I discuss this in part 3 of the chapter. The discussions about balancing democratic organization with executive
capability show that Solidarity prioritized and believed that communicative networks and participation were the means for maintaining the power of the movement. This experimentation in newly democratic forms of organization made participating in Solidarity a transformative experience and an act of democratic learning. At the end of the decade this contributed to the peacefulness and stability that characterized the transition away from communism, and accelerated Poland’s political development in comparison to neighboring Soviet Bloc states.

In Part 1 of the chapter I look at the historical context of Solidarity in the 1970s. Although there was a prevailing attitude of hopelessness in resisting Soviet domination, Polish thinkers such as Kolakowski, Kuron and Michnik drew upon the “anti-political” stances of Konrád and Havel to formulate a strategy for resisting Soviet totalitarianism. Ideas for political strategy were discussed through the massive underground press (Biblua), while intellectuals began to collectivize themselves through organizations like the KOR. In Part 2, I focus on the massive, nationwide occupation strikes that resulted in the right to have independent trade unions (legalized in Gdansk Accord) at the end the of the “Polish August” in 1980. Part 3 focuses on how Solidarity expanded in the fall of 1980 and spring of 1981, and how it protected the gains in the Gdansk Accord through the threat of a general strike. I also use the Bydgoscz crisis to highlight the debate in Solidarity about the importance of democratic organization and participation to nonviolent power.

Finally in Part 4, I look at the period of martial law that starts in December of 1981 and the resurfacing of Solidarity in the latter half of the decade, as well its overall outcome at the end of the decade.
Timeline

The Solidarity movement was officially in existence from August 1980 until 1989, though it went under ground during a period of martial law from December of 1981 through 1984. In the late 1980s it is better characterized as a political party than a nonviolent movement. I will be describing activity from four historical periods, the first of which contained activities that allowed Solidarity to emerge as successfully as it did.

• Development from 1970 to August 1980
  ◦ earlier strikes
  ◦ KOR and underground press
  ◦ anti politics and group nonviolent discipline

• August 1980
  ◦ the massive August 1980 Strikes culminating in negotiation with the Party and the Gdansk Accord
  ◦ Nonviolent techniques: occupational strike, interfactory strike committee and communications techniques

• September 1980- December 1981:
  ◦ Post August 1980 development of civil society and the threats of the general strike in December ’80 and in March ’81:
  ◦ Discussion of the use of democratic procedures rather than a unified but authoritarian organization—highlighting the non-instrumental character of the movement
• Also the appearance of democracy from below within the PZPR in April-July 81.

• Finally, the realization that the movement would need to take control of distribution of food from the party to be able to motivate its members to accept the austerity measures necessary for economic revitalization.

  
  • reappearance of the underground press,
  
  • lack of violent uprising,
  
  • amnesty by the government 1986
  
  • General strikes again in 1988
  
  • Round Table Talks and finally dissolution of the communist government in 1989
Part 1

1970 and burning the party building, setting the context of hopelessness

After a few years of economic stagnation the Polish communist government announced on December 12, 1970 that food prices would be increasing across the board. For instance, meat prices would increase 17.5 %. At the time working class Poles spent around half their income on food. This announcement generated unrest among shipyard workers at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, who on the Monday following the saturday announcement decided to strike. The group first visited the director’s office of the shipyard before deciding to march to provincial party headquarters to voice their complaints. About a thousand workers left the shipyard late in the morning, arms with pipes and metals tools, singing the socialist hymn, “The international,” and the Polish national anthem. After visiting the party building and being told by a party boss that there was nothing he could do, the strikers left to recruit strikers from other shipyards and from Gdansk’s Polytechnical Institute. Rioters filled the streets that night.

Overnight, many of the strike leaders were arrested, and when workers arrived at the shipyards Tuesday morning and found this out, they again gathered and marched out of the shipyards. Though they first attempted to break the strike leaders out of the police station, the strikers eventually gathered at the trade union building and at the party headquarters. While strikers stormed the trade union building, throwing chairs and desks out windows, the strikers at the party headquarter faced a volley of gunfire from within the building. This gunfire did not have the intended effect and the group of strikers, armed with stones and molotov cocktails did not disperse. Soldiers inside the building, at this point, refused orders to fire on the workers again and threw their weapons out the window. The strikers responded by torching the building, and
most, eventually returned to the shipyards and then went home that afternoon, celebrating the immolation. The strike leaders remained in the shipyards overnight.

By this point, party leaders in Warsaw had enacted a plan for military retaliation against the strikers and troop carriers rolled into Gdansk. Poliburto members called the strikers “gangs of criminals and blackguards,” and swore that “Even if 300 workers die, the revolt will be put down.” The next morning, the shipyard was surrounded by troops and had artillery trained on it by warships in the Baltic. When a group of 15 workers tried to walk out through Gate No. 2 they were shot at. 15 were wounded, 4 killed. After pulling the bodies back inside, the strikers elected a committee and drew up a list of demands. These demands were far reaching for communist Poland at the time. They demanded that the special privileges enjoyed by the military and the party be scrapped and that they be allowed to organize trade unions independent of management by the party. At this point on Wednesday, December 16th, the strikers decided that an occupation strike, where they would remain in the shipyards and keep them shut down until their demands were met, was the best method of putting force behind the demands. Unfortunately, given the recent violent pretext, the army commanders issued an ultimatum at 10:00pm that evening: if the strikers did not vacate the premises within four hours they would be bombed from the air and assaulted by troops. Given the fact that workers had already been killed the strikers decided to surrender and end the strike.

In Poland in the 1970’s there was also a general feeling that attempting to democratize the communist government of USSR was futile. Events like the invasion of Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the brutality with which the regime dealt with strikers in Poland had

generated feelings of resignation and hopelessness among dissidents. The general interpretation of the Brezhnev Doctrine, which had been demonstrated in the invasion of Afghanistan, was that the USSR could not allow for any governmental reform in Warsaw Pact states and retain its power. This made resistance unlikely to reform a state as it would trigger Soviet intervention, such as in Czechoslovakia in 1968. As David Ost put it in *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics*:

> At the time it was not easy to combat these views, for the chances of reform did not look bright. The experience of the 1940s showed that the Party would not tolerate a parliamentary opposition, and the Hungarian experience of 1956 demonstrated that the Soviets would not allow one of its “allies” to leave the fold. The revisionist strategy of gradual, moderate reform from above had seemed plausible until the experiences of 1968. After 1968, a belief in the hopelessness of democratic reform efforts in the Soviet bloc seemed to be the only honest position a reasonable person could take. 140

This particular event and subsequent attitudes and memories were the historical context within which the KOR and later the Solidarity movement formed and began to resist the Soviet Union.

**AntiPolitics**

Nonviolent strategy within the Solidarity movement is best understood as a reflection of the political orientation of the movement. This political orientation was, as David Ost described it, *to be “anti-political.”* First, to be clear, Anti-Politics did mean not foregoing politics in the philosophical sense. Ironically, to be anti-political means a shift to focusing on what Arendt and Habermas consider to be the most fundamental political action; it is a shift toward politics in civil society. Since, for dissidents, the term “politics” referred to the instrumentality of the totalitarian government, the notion that solidarity was to be anti-political meant that its goals were not to challenge the government directly by forming new parties and obtaining a share of

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state power. Instead, the KOR and later Solidarity believed that change could occur through the formation of independent social institutions in civil society. While such a goal is undoubtedly political in a philosophical sense, its focus lay away from state politics and so was self-conceptualized as “anti-political.”

Activists specifically sought to avoid generating confrontation with the government and shared a belief that the government would not change. They knew that one of the ways the government would (and did repeatedly) justify suppression of their activity would be to label them as anti-socialist. Thus, they explicitly avoided any kind of overt political agendas such as a call for democracy or free markets. They explicitly avoided threatening Poland’s status as a defensive asset for the Soviet Union by ignoring Poland’s foreign policy (history had shown that the USSR would invade states trying to escape this role). The general strategic intent of “anti-politics” is well described by Aleksander Smolar:

> The objective was not to defeat the ruling power but to progressively liberate society from its control. The new strategy of the opposition relied on the assumption that the emergence of an archipelago of new islands of autonomy would be gradual and sufficiently limited so as not to push the communist authorities to a confrontation. ¹⁴¹

From an ethical perspective the “anti-political” stance reflected a disgust with and rejection of the instrumentality of state politics and the “newspeak” that they had been subject to by the government. Poles had been lied to since Yalta in blatant and absurd ways. It was clear to the average citizen that government’s relationship to them was one of manipulation. My own grandmother in Poland (who was 30 years old when the PZPR took over) once told me that “everything the government says is propaganda.” Members of the party viewed the population as a mass to be controlled.

In the experience of ordinary people in the Soviet bloc, world history is regularly rewritten. Censorship and propaganda not only control perception but distort it in complicated ways. Information is limited, and available interpretation is skewed in the direction favorable to officialdom and its ideology, which is commonly known. … The deepest shadow cast over people of the Soviet bloc is found in the realm of interpersonal relations. Communication in factories and universities, in schools and government bureaus, is mediated by an official language which is referential almost exclusively to itself. … A broad array of human relationships is based, therefore, on uncertain grounds. 142

Many of the historians writing about dissident activity in Poland during communism (Ost, Ash, and Penn for example) have noted the difficulty in gathering sources. “Public” media could not be trusted, and other than research that demonstrated the success of the Party (nothing critical), social science from this era did not exist. Detailed records of dissident activity by the police were locked away in files that have not, and likely will not be made accessible, leading to speculation about how much dissident activity occurred before the public strikes of August, 1980.

Even during the period of massive activity, from August 1980-December 1981, when at certain points 10 million Poles participated, the Solidarity movement had to explicitly demand and coerce the government to get their activities and political gains reported in the public media. One of Solidarity’s victories of the August 1980 strikes was an agreement called the Censorship Act. Since 1946, the party had been legally able to censor anything they liked, but this Act created “a long list of publications and performances (parliamentary speeches, scholarly works, internal union bulletins) which would not be pre-censored.” It was, as Ash puts it, “…an incredible document by Soviet bloc standards.” 143 Of course, it took until the summer of 1981 for it to appear officially in legislation, and even then, the official media kept up and even intensified its campaigns of disinformation against Solidarity. This included things like


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fabricated documents of communications between Solidarity leaders that purported to show their anti-socialist agenda.

The publications of the underground press, foreign media reports, and accounts from individuals were the only sources of information that were not first and foremost propaganda. Thus in choosing to be anti-political, there was an explicit rejection of what Habermas calls distorted forms of communication and the instrumental politics that such means engendered.

Vaclav Havel writes about anti-politics in precisely these terms:

'I favour "anti-political politics": that is, politics not as the technology of power and manipulation, of cybernetic rule over humans or as the art of the useful, but politics as one of the ways of seeking and achieving meaningful lives, of protecting them and serving them... Yes, anti-political politics is possible. Politics "from below". Politics of people, not of the apparatus. Politics growing from the heart, not from a thesis.'

In an abstract sense, the anti-political stance in the 1970s foreshadowed how the movement was to become a reimagining of politics and an exercise in political learning, using social institutions and practices, that, at the time, did not exist in Poland.

The most influential writing about the Eastern European “anti-political” stance was by the Hungarian, George Konrád. For Konrád, the politics of the Cold War meant existence in a strategic situation between competing nuclear super powers. Politics was certainly not about the welfare of the citizens in the battlegrounds states of the Cold War, but had become a struggle over achieving greater means to violence. In contrast to a democratic politics, the instrumental politics of the Cold War had culminated in “mutually assured destruction.” Thus: “Thinking Europeans question the right of the superpower elites to decide upon the total destruction of our continent. Society’s defenselessness before the state is embodied most brutally in nuclear

weaponry.” 145 In leveling his critique against instrumentalist politics, Konrád makes the Arendtian point that the Cold War represented a degradation of politics to military might. Like Arendt, he saw the impotence of government based on threats of violence, and like Arendt and Habermas, he saw the importance of developing a politics that was not at its roots about physical force. In his own words:

The political elites of our world don’t all subscribe equally to the philosophy of a nuclear *ultima ratio*, but they have no conceptual alternative to it. They have none because they are professionals of power. Why should they choose values that are in direct opposition to physical force? Is there, can there be, a political philosophy—a set of proposals for winning and holding power—that renounces a priori any physical guarantees of power? Only antipolitics offers a radical alternative to the philosophy of a nuclear *ultima ratio*.

Antipolitics strives to put politics in its place and make sure it stays there, never overstepping its proper office of defending and refining the rules of the game of civil society. Antipolitics is the ethos of civil society, and civil society is the antithesis of military society. There are more or less militarized societies—societies under the sway of nation states whose officials consider total war one of the possible moves in the game. Thus military society is the reality, civil society is a utopia. 146

Although he uses the terms politics and power to refer to the opposite of what Arendt refers to by those terms, the intention here is clearly in agreement with her. Antipolitics, the theoretical orientation for Solidarity movement activists holds that actual politics emerges out of civil society interactions and is nonviolent. It is an anti-instrumental conception of politics. Konrád even has a conception of something like Habermas’s concept of democratic power, which he calls “spiritual authority,” that can emerge from an active civil society:

Centralized political authority is one pole; decentralize spiritual authority is the other. At one pole is executive power; at the other inquiry. …The summits of political power are occupied by designated figures. …. But intellectual authority has no summit. It is like a forest: there are smaller and larger trees, but each is only one tree. The forest is as dense as our common spiritual condition. Those who stand in the tower—do they hear the rustling of the forest? Do they feel the democracy of the oaks? In every village and every workshop there are people whom others listen to. Everywhere there are clusters of old people and of audacious youth. A network of spiritual authority exists. We know of one another. We know one another. … Spiritual authority expresses our mute common knowledge. 147


146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.
Konrad’s critique was leveled at both the USSR and the US/NATO, showing that, although Eastern European dissidents sought more liberty (including in the market), they were not focused simply on “switching sides.”

If liberal and communist rationalism—the two prevailing political doctrines of modern civilization—can guarantee only this extraordinarily fragile kind of security four decades after the end of World War II, we must conclude that the philosophies of the industrial world are inadequate.  

This ambivalence about industrial society was also reflected in Solidarity’s economic proposals, which were a unique mixture of socialism and capitalism. For instance, in March of 1981 Solidarity was deciding on how to implement the point 6 of the Gdansk accords, which allowed for worker self-government. At this point it was being forced by the growing economic crisis in Poland to consider taking some control over distribution (a change from its “self-limiting” nature that avoided any of the roles of the state). There was a strong popular sentiment, given how well organized the strikes had been, that workers could run the factories better than the Party management. This led to a number of proposals to Solidarity’s leadership from worker’s networks about the forms it should take. These, “… contained important elements of French Syndicalism and even Bennite industrial democracy.” The alternative institutions being developed by worker activists drew from many different economic ideologies.

This perspective is one of the main examples of what Ost calls the “Third Road” to civil society, that rejects both of the dominant political paradigms of the Cold War. While capitalist societies have ostensibly free civil societies, these societies are organized around the market and “Market factors mean that citizens can obtain political influence by buying their way into the public sphere.” Ost, here, seems to be talking about what Habermas calls distortion of

148Ibid., 31.

communication by the economic system. At the same time, the civil societies of Socialist states are completely organized and dominated by the state. The party, rather than the market determines who gets to speak and what gets heard, meaning that no social groups independent of the state get to speak. “For those who seek extensive citizen participation in politics, for the advocates of “permanently open democracy,” neither system is the answer. Statist and market principles both appear as a constraint on public freedom.”  

This criticism by Ost seems right from the mouth of Habermas and matches his description of systematic distortions of communications in the public sphere and radical democracy’s need for will formation, public opinion, and influence based on undistorted communication. The interesting point is that Ost thinks this is the predominant general attitude of the Eastern European resistance.

And so, the idea of a “third road”—a civil society based neither in the state nor the marketplace, but in a vibrant political public sphere itself. This seems to be the theory underlying the Post-’68 social movements of Eastern and Western Europe.  

The evidence for this is found in the forms that anti-political resistance took in the early actions of the Solidarity movement. All of the ad-hoc social organizations free from Party control, such as underground newspapers, discussion clubs and the flying university are “… constitutive elements of a democratic public sphere [and] are not mere means to an end (that is, “power”) as they were for many previous social movements, but are ends in themselves.”  

There was a strong commitment to an independent public sphere, even before nonviolent tactics of disruption began to be used.

Solidarity’s antipolitical stance highlights that nonviolent movements involve the process of


\(^{151}\)Ibid., 30-1.  

\(^{152}\)Ibid., 31.
creating space for political participation in contexts where such participation has been systematically eradicated in the interest of domination. It’s a space where Konrad’s “spiritual authority” rather than military authority take precedence. It’s the growth of civil society in between or in resistance to powerful forms of structural domination, like totalitarian communism.

**Reimagining Politics**

Ost credits three political thinkers as having developed a viable strategy of social resistance to the Soviet Union in the 1970s: Leszek Kolakowski, Jacek Kuron, and Adam Michnik. In 1971 Kolakowski published the essay “Theses on Hope and Hopelessness,” 153 which elaborated on the thesis that the state socialist system was un-reformable. He explained that because the state socialist system was a political and economic, dual-monopoly any genuine democratic reform would involve a weakening of this monopoly and would be opposed by the state. Since the main function of the state is to uphold such a monopoly it must adopt a policy whereby it attempts to destroy any forms of social life or social organization independent of the state, making such forms of life impossible, and leaving the regime in a position unable to grant more social rights. Despite the apparent hopelessness of the situation, Kolakowski maintained that resistance does offer hope for a reasonable life under state socialism. In developing a new theory of societal democratization, Kolakowski separated the idea of reform (which is something the state does), from the idea of resisting (which is something that groups and individuals in civil society can do). What counts as resistance follows from the observation that the state cannot tolerate forms of social life independent of the state. Hence: “…Any form of independently organized social

activity constitutes resistance to the system. Any sustained resistance counteracts a fundamental principle of the state socialist system and thus constitutes a de facto reform of the system. The “Thesis of Hope” is, thus, that reform is possible through independent social activity—that is, through an independently organized civil society.”\(^\text{154}\) Thus resistance (which could lead to reform) is constituted by activity outside of the realm of the state. By not challenging the state foreign and security policy, these new forms of civil society could expand and improve Polish society (and the economy) without directly threatening the state. These activities would generate “pressure from below” onto the party, which would then enact reform. It was an idea of democracy from the grassroots up.\(^\text{155}\)

The Polish political activist Jacek Kuron expanded on this strategy in his 1974 article “Political Opposition in Poland.”\(^\text{156}\) Whereas for Polish dissidents the meaning of ‘political’ had previously referred to the state and state-power, Kuron developed the idea that a movement focused on developing independent polish culture that took place in civil society alone could also be considered political activity. Rather than just being a precursor to real political activity, a movement of this type is actually political activity itself, which, even though it ignores the formal, state locus of political activity, could generate democratization in society without reforming the state. Kuron’s famous injunction was “Don’t burn down committees, found your own.”\(^\text{157}\) Because his notion of democracy is broader than parliamentary democracy and state granted democratic rights, Kuron was focused on generating an active citizenry in the public


\(^{155}\)Ash, *The Polish Revolution* 25.


sphere. This was a direction that only indirectly challenged the state and gave potential movements a greater possibility to remain in existence.

A result of this view was that Kuron thought a large part of Polish society was actively part of political opposition in this form, though they had yet to recognize it: “I fear that very few participants of this movement realize the significance of their activities, or understand the dimensions, the influence, or the possibilities of the movement of which they are a part.” On Kuron’s view, because the socialist state recognizes no boundaries on its monopoly it always has the totalitarian tendency to dominate civil society and the public sphere. Thus engaging in any kind of social activity not controlled by the state serves to reconstruct civil society and constitutes a form resistance. As Ost sums up Kuron’s views: “The strategy of the opposition, therefore, should be to reconstruct social ties. The social is the political!”

Finally, the dissident thinker, Adam Michnik put forth the idea of “anticipatory democracy.” He agreed with previously made assessments that the U.S.S.R. was post ideological, meaning that Marxist categories and theory no longer had any bearing on that state. The values expressed by Marxism were only superficially part of the guiding policy of the state. Because of this change, Michnik shared with Kolakowski and Kuron the perspective that the idea of democratically reforming the state had to be abandoned. Its ostensible ideology was no longer relevant. “It is not realistic in Poland today to think of a change in government while the political structure of the USSR remains what it is, and it is dangerous to organize conspiratorial

158 Kuron quoted in Ibid., 66.
159 Ibid., 66.
activities.” Instead of confronting the state directly and attempting to get democratic changes instituted at the top, Michnik called for Polish citizens to act as if they already possessed such basic civil rights. Ost calls this anticipatory democracy: “behaving in the present the way one would like to be able to behave in the future; acting today as if the desired tomorrow were already a reality.” Michnik thought this would make political life more democratic by expanding opportunities for a democratic citizenship.

The antipolitical stance gradually developed into more specific political orientations by Kolakowski, Kuron and Michnik. Living in conditions of political suppression these thinkers shared the idea that political change required investment in new mediums for political participation. They understood both ethically and strategically, that challenging the government directly, whether violently or nonviolently would be a mistake. It would generate a violent response by the government. To them totalitarianism was abhorrent; taking control of its mechanisms was not a political goal. “Taught by history we suspect that by using force to storm the existing Bastilles we shall unwittingly build new ones.” Instead they theorized that effective resistance would involve acting as if one had civil rights (or public autonomy in the Habermas’s philosophical terminology). Kolakowski, Kuron and Michnik’s theories are explicitly about effective nonviolent action in the context of Soviet totalitarianism, which meant generating democratic participation among citizens. Their project, “to create political facts through collective action,” aimed at reconstituting civil society and generating democratic reform

161Ibid., 68.
162Adam Michnik and Maya Latynski, Letters From Prison: And Other Essays (University of California Pr, 1987), 87.
from the bottom up.

*Bibula (underground press)*

In 1970s Poland, a public sphere, or way for public opinion to shape state action was both completely missing and desperately needed. The public sphere serves to mediate between private individuals and the state. This desire manifested itself in the social unrest of 1970, which was carried out violently to disastrous effects for the participants. The absence and a social desire for a public sphere were clearly visible. Learning from this, Polish activists switched to nonviolent tactics that represented the desire to create a public sphere.

The way the public sphere began to first emerge concretely was through the underground press. Although the opposition was only estimated to be a few thousand people in the late 70s, it was mostly comprised of intellectuals, students and a few collaborating priests.

The media and especially the print media were solidarity. All right, Solidarity was a trade union and the workers had demands and the intellectuals supported the workers, but the civil society in Poland was built through the underground press. Almost everyone was involved in either the writing or the printing or the distributing or the transporting or even the producing of the ink. Everyone felt involved.  

This small group took the first steps towards liberating Poland from authoritarian communist rule by breaking the complete government control on information.

An influential piece of writing for many Polish activists was the Vaclav Havel’s essay, *The Power of the Powerless*. In it Havel talks about the “Big Lie” that was the picture of public life described through the lens of official propaganda and state controlled media. For Havel, the basis of resistance is the delegitimation of this lie by presenting alternative descriptions of public life. Once people have the opportunity to be concerned with “Living in Truth” they can begin to motivate and organize themselves to resist authoritarianism and develop democracy. Toward this

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goal, many underground monthly newspapers, collectively referred to as the *bibuła*, provided reliable factual information not expressed in official news sources. After mimeograph machines were obtained the underground press began publishing books and pamphlets, for instance the poetry of ex-pat Czeslaw Milosz and works by George Orwell, that would have been censored by state officials.

*Bibuła* [from ink blot paper], also referred to as “drugí obeig” [second run], underground publications were widely circulated with several hundred titles self-published mostly after 1976 with the growth of organized resistance after the founding of KOR and ROPCiO. They included titles like *Robotnik, Puls, Bratniak, Glos* and *Zapis* quarterly among many others. The Gdansk *Strike Bulletin Solidarność* was printed in about 30,000 copies.  

It is difficult to overstate the role and the reach of underground media in Poland in the 1970s and 1980s. The underground press constituted a vibrant space where politics and the actions of the state were discussed without censorship. According to the center for journalism research in Krakow, before 1980, 1 in 4 poles had read an underground newspaper and over 200,000 read them regularly.

The underground press was also one of the only forms of resistance that survived the suppression of Solidarity through the imposition of martial law in December of 1981. While most of the male leadership of Solidarity was rounded up and spent the next few years in prison, many women, unsuspected by the authorities, carried on the resistance through publishing. This was a considerable feat given the challenge of balancing domestic and resistance work in Poland’s patriarchal society.

Martial law was not a time for spectacular actions, for demonstrating, organizing public events, or making speeches. “To throw a bomb [against the authorities] would have been suicide,” Polish *émigré* author Irena Grudzińska-Gross told me in 1991. “The road to salvation [was] in thinking and creating … without *Tygonik Mazowsze*, the underground press could not have existed. It was a forum in which political

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opinions and declarations could be made. It was a link among people in finding sympathizers in a dangerous time when people were dispirited. \[166\]

So although public activity was strongly curtailed by the police after December of 1981, the public sphere that had flourished from August 1980 until then, continued solely, albeit in an underground form until police action subsided and resistors were freed in 1984. Penn argues persuasively that this incredibly vital activity for Solidarity was mainly carried out by women publishers, whose work has gone largely unacknowledge.

**KOR and independent unions**

In 1976 activist intellectuals formed the *Komitet Obrony Robotnikow* (Workers’ Defense Committee —referred to from here on by its Polish acronym KOR), which sought to aid dissidents. Although the size of the group has been debated (it had thirty public open members, but countless more all over Poland and its membership was diverse ideologically (Catholic intellectuals, social democrats, liberals), they shared a commitment to opposing the USSR, generating democracy, and upholding human rights. \[167\]

It contributed to the opposition explicitly by raising money to legally defend dissidents and support dissident activity, and by organizing publicity campaigns for the opposition. For instance, toward the end of 1976, a thousand workers from the factories of Ursus and Radom signed a protest petition that was sent to President Gierek. The KOR also took advantage of foreign public opinion, since Poland’s economic strategies in the 1970s depended heavily on foreign public investment. Interviews were given to West German, French, Italian and English


\[167\] see Michael Bernhard, "Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland", *Studies in Comparative Communism* 24, no. 3 (1991): 313-330. who argues that scholars arguing against the “elite thesis” have mistakenly taken the number of public signatories to indicate the size of KOR participation)
journalists by Jacek Kuron, Koloakowski, Michnik and other KOR members, attacking the regime’s carefully managed public image as a liberal communist regime.

When the Solidarity movement began in Gdansk in the summer of 1980, leading to massive, coordinated occupational strikes, KOR members of the intelligentsia joined workers as advisors during the strikes. This helped provide a class buffer between the lower class workers and the upper class party negotiators, and was an additional form of solidarity between Poles of different social backgrounds.

The most important activity of the KOR, however, was the publication of the underground newspaper Robotnik. Started in 1977 and written in language aimed at workers, the weekly paper presented the history of resistance in communist Poland as lessons for the workers. It translated the theoretical positions of intellectuals into practical instructions for workers, such as how to organize strikes and what demands to make. A whole issue in September of 1979 was devoted to a charter of workers rights and it contained many of the demands that were eventually presented to the party in August of 1980 during the Lenin Shipyard strikes. Demands for higher wages, safer working conditions and shorter working hours were bracketed by the radical demand for the existence trade unions independent of the state.

Only the independent trade unions, which have the backing of the workers whom they represent, have a chance of challenging the authorities; only they can represent a power the authorities will have to take into account and with who they will have to deal on equal terms. 168 This demand for independent unions became the lynchpin of Solidarity’s strategy for developing a viable public sphere inside a civil society.

Openness

Regardless of how separate the “worker’s own autonomous political learning process” was from intellectual influence, sixty five activists of the KOR (workers, intellectuals, and technicians) signed and gave their contact information on the charter of demands, demonstrating a soon to be characteristic openness of the Solidarity movement. 169 Despite the harassment it invoked in the form of surveillance, beatings, university expulsions, and even a few cases of state sanctioned murder, the publishers and the KOR in general remained very public and open about its members. Although there were many more involved in the KOR, those 65 were intended to serve as points of contact for others interested in getting involved in the resistance. Such openness served to underscore the importance of the Charter’s demands and to promote the strike and independent union agenda.

Rather than work in secret, they moved in broad daylight; it was the only way to inspire others to follow their example. While it made them targets—there was no mystery about who the main figures of the opposition were—it offered a certain protection. The regime was inhibited if it had to operate in the open. The more visible the dissidents were, the higher would be the political costs of hounding them. … People were not arrested en masse and locked up for years, because the party—afraid of the outrage at home and outcry abroad that a major crackdown would bring—did not want to jeopardize the domestic stability and foreign economic ties that had been cultivated since 1970. 170

Ironically, this openness allowed the Robotnik and other underground newspapers to serve as the beginning of a public sphere, where political opinions could be expressed with sincerity. Ash notes that the “…KOR’s whole ethos was based on the refusal of the Lie. Unlike the ‘loyal opposition’ they would not use any part of the ‘doublespeak’ which is as vital as guns to the survival of a communist regime.” This openness and commitment to facts and language that were not obfuscatory gave the political discussions in the underground press a motivating quality similar to speech in what Arendt calls the Space of Appearances, where individuals present their

169Quoted in Ibid., 27.

170Ackerman and Duvall, A Force More Powerful: A Century of Non-violent Conflict 130.
identities to others. It was an abrupt departure from the strategic propaganda that most poles experienced in the media.

This strategy ended up working for KOR, as in 1977, the regime released all jailed dissidents who had participated in the strikes and unrest of the previous year. Openness, the promotion of information, and visibility were principle characteristics that the Solidarity movement adopted from the KOR until the onset of martial law in December, 1981. Overall, during the late 1970s the KOR formed a kind of small and educational leadership that promoted the development of independent civil life in Poland and showed publicly that resistance was possible.
Part 2

Occupation Strikes, Interfactory Strike Committee, and Independent Unions

At the start of July in 1980, suffering from shortages of foodstuffs and other necessities after years of economic growth through foreign investment, the PZPR declared a price increase on major foodstuffs due to decreased importation. This resulted in a number of strikes, starting around Warsaw, but the regime managed to quell protest by offering each particular group of strikers increased wages. By the end of July the strikes had stopped. However, on August 7th, a hard working, well-liked and “grandmotherly” activist, Anna Walentynowicz, was fired from her job at the Lenin shipyard just three months shy of earning her pension. This sparked an immediate response among other activists, who seized on the opportunity to organize the workers by printing and handing out leaflets over the next few days. The workers responded and occupied the shipyard on the morning of August 13th, led by Lech Wałęsa (who had been fired from that same shipyard 4 years earlier). They drew up a list of demands that included the reinstatement of Walentynowicz and Wałęsa to their posts in the shipyard, a raise with a cost of living clause, the roll back of meat prices, the erection of a monument to the workers who had been shot in 1970 and (most importantly) the right to organize trade unions independent of the government. This last demand had been the lynchpin of the activist plans for the past few years. It was the practical realization and most important instance of the general goal of reconstructing social ties in Poland that were independent of the state.

This historical moment represents a critical and illuminating shift in activity from a communicative kind nonviolent action to the disruptive form. Strategically, the workers were kept in the shipyard forming an occupying force. The storming out into the streets that eventually
resulted in the violent crackdown a decade before was actively prevented. Crucially, the next day workers at other industries in Gdansk also went on strike, resulting in thousands occupying various industrial centers around the city. This was possible because of connections built up between activists through the earlier strikes and the underground press.

Initially the director of the Lenin shipyard, Klemens Gniech, made the seemingly democratic appeal that since the strike committee only represented a few shipyard departments, further delegates should be elected to constitute a more adequate representation. Wałęsa was forced to agree to this appeal although he realized that the director’s intent was to dilute the number of radicals in the negotiating strike committee. This turned out to be the case, and after a few days of negotiation with the enlarged strike committee (which was broadcast over loudspeaker), during which the committee was offered the reinstatement of Wałęsa and Walentynowicz, a guarantee against reprisals, a monument to the 1970 victims, and finally pay raises close to the original demand, the committee, against the wishes of Walesa, agreed to end the strike.

Because of the internally democratic nature of of the process (delegates from all departments in the factory voted) Wałęsa made the announcement the strike was over over the loudspeakers and workers began to leave the shipyard. However, once outside, Walesa was confronted by upset delegates from factories who informed him that although the Lenin shipyard workers were appeased, there was growing unrest among workers in other industries around the city. They were upset that the Lenin Shipyard was going to end the strike. Changing his mind Wałęsa told the crowd:

We must respect democracy and therefore accept the compromise, even if its not brilliant. But we do not have the right to abandon others. We must continue the strike out of solidarity until everyone has won. I
said I would be the last person to leave the shipyard, and I meant it. If the workers here want to continue to strike then it will be continued, Now, who wants to strike? 171

Unfortunately, in the meantime the loudspeakers had been disconnected by the shipyard director and the Wałęsa was unable to make the announcement to all of the departing workers in the huge shipyard. A group numbering in the hundreds (out of thousands of shipyard workers) was all that remained over the weekend waiting for the rest of the workers to return on Monday, and messages were sent to other striking factories that the strike was still on.

Over the weekend, a new strike committee, calling itself the Inter-Factory Strike Committee, (polish initials MKS) was formed, made up of free trade union activists and collaborating dissident intellectuals. Meeting at the shipyard, they spent two days drawing up a list of demands, which included the right to free trade unions, but also tangible material demands (pay raises, time off), a guarantee of no reprisal by the police, and the ending of special perks for security and party employees.172

One issue of contention was whether the demands for free speech should include an absolute abolition of censorship. Eventually it was concluded that these such a demand (along with a demand for elections) was too direct a challenge to the political control of the PZPR, and that the right to independently organize trade unions was the most strategic political goal to aim at. Thus independent trade unions, the right to strike and respect for independent speech and publications became the first three demands. 173

171Ibid., 44.
172There was also an MKS strike committee formed in the city of Szczecin that was eventually recognized and negotiated with the PZPR. It, however, kept its negotiations secret—no journalists—and so there is relatively little known about the proceedings, other than the eventual accord which was published.
The demands were printed up and sent off to other factories and industries in the region and a vast general strike began to develop. Twenty Two factories and shipyards had already been participating. By monday night the MKS was representing more than 150 factories in the region, after Wednesday over 300, and by August 22, almost 400. During the week Party officials absolutely refused to recognize the MKS—though they were repeatedly invited to talks, and considered breaking up the strike with force. However the PZPR’s chief, Edward Gierek, was strongly opposed to such an option because the strike was publicly visible to much of the world through the presence of foreign journalists. Poland’s economy depended heavily on Western investment and the regime greatly feared negative publicity and any change in foreign perceptions this might cause.

The striking workers did not act alone during the week. They were able to sustain and develop the general strike through aid from farmers and rural workers, who provided supplies to those occupying the factories, and through the communications work of students, activists and academics, who translated for foreign media and ran messages as couriers out of Gdansk throughout the region. By the end of the week the Gdynia-Gdansk region of Poland was paralyzed by a general strike representing hundreds of thousands of workers. Finally, the regime agreed to talks on Saturday.

According to Ash, who was present in the Lenin Shipyard after August 21st, there was a carnival like atmosphere, given the coming and going of activists, volunteers and journalists, but also important senses of discipline. Although cartloads of food were being brought in to feed the thousands of occupiers, baskets were searched for alcohol, and the strike committee even asked the local government to ban sales of alcohol during the strike (a dramatic change for a shipyard
where vodka was often distilled and sold onsite to workers in various corners during the
workday). In another instance, when an agent-provocateur from management gave a speech to
workers intended to confuse their developing views (it was a call to Gierek) and this intention
was revealed by Walentynowicz, an angry crowd gathered around him. Wałęsa took the
microphone quickly calling for peace and the speaker was peacefully escorted out of the
shipyard, revealing a dignified orientation towards peaceful conduct. 174

When the MKS met with the regime at the Lenin Shipyard, they first set a number of
preconditions that included the ending of beatings and arrests of strike couriers, a requirement
that news of the talks be broadcast over official media, and that phone lines to Warsaw be
reconnected (they had been disconnected a week prior). The regime made technical excuses and
refused to comply at first, but when the MKS waited them out, they reconnected the phone lines
and acknowledged the strike on official television news Monday night, and negotiations began
on Tuesday. Ash has highlighted how heavily Solidarity depended on telecommunications, both
during the August strikes and later in maintaining their existence against government
suppression.

When Solidarity called a warning strike [later, after the August Strikes], the strike call was followed in the
remotest corners of the country: …. This capacity for simultaneous co-ordinated action was key to
Solidarity’s success. It was based on a modern communications network. … the telephone, the telex, the
cassette-recorder, the duplicating machine, the radio all played a vital role. 175

Unfortunately, this communications network was easily disrupted by the government by cutting
phone lines. Sixteen months later, when martial law was enacted on December 13, 1981 and
Solidarity activists around the country were arrested simultaneously, members were unable to

174Ibid., 50-4.
175Ibid., 297.
communicate rapidly with each other to spread warnings or mobilize resistance in the form of strikes.

The MKS presented itself, not as a threat to state socialism, but as representatives of the workers.

It [The Solidarity Revolution] was “self-limiting also in the sense that its declarations and communicated in the written and spoken language were usually restrained. They did not contain demands to remove the Soviet troops and restore the nation’s sovereignty, but concentrated on work-related issues (most of the Gdansk 21 demands). 176

Disingenuous as this may have been, it convinced the party negotiators to deal with them, and they agreed to the main concessions demanded by the workers, including the right form independent unions. The 21 demands were of two categories, first political rights of workers and second material rights. Political rights included the right to organize independent unions, to strike, and freedoms of speech and communication for worker organizations. Workers fired for political action were also to be reinstated and worker persecution by the PZPR was to stop. Material demands included increased pay, maternity leave, and saturday off. The Gdansk Agreement signed on August 31\textsuperscript{176}, was an authentic social contract with the government, and included most importantly the right to form independent unions and legally strike. Realizing their defeat in Gdansk, however, the government negotiators had delayed the nearly reached agreement for two days near the end of the week so they could quickly push through the accord with another MKS in Szczecin. The Szczecin Accord, signed on August 30, left the status of the newly formed unions unclear through vague language. Although unions were explicitly allowed to be self-governing, the word ‘independent’ was omitted.

By Sunday of that week the negotiating teams had worked out the details in Gdansk. Workers (though only in the factories represented by that MKS) would get a new law allowing them to strike and to organize through independent unions. There were economic promises as well, and promises that the regime would not retaliate against the strikers and collaborators. For its part, the Party included a clause that bound the unions to “recognize the leading role of the PZPR in the State and not to oppose the existing system of international alliances.” In the Szczecin Accord, this stipulation was notably absent and instead those new trade unions were to operate according to the Polish Constitution. Although this was perceived as something superior in the Szczecin Accord by many activists, David Ost has theorized that this was actually worse from the strategic perspective of wanting an independent civil society. “In fact, it would seem that the Szczecin appeal to the Polish Constitution, which guarantees a “leading role” for the Party in all realms of public life, was far more compromising than Gdansk’s reference to the “leading role of the Party in the state.” The Party might have been able to argue that real trade union independence was in conflict with the Polish Constitution, which is the reason, Ost theorizes, they delayed the Gdansk Accords and quickly pushed through the Szczecin Accords—they wanted the language in that contract to be precedent.

Obviously since this was the primary political goal of the activists, for whom independent unions was the most important stepping stone, the movement was facing a dilemma with respect to its anti-political, non directly confrontational posture. After the regime officially published the agreement factories all around Poland sought the same rights and concessions. In September a

177 Ackerman and Duvall, , A Force More Powerful: A Century of Non-violent Conflict 152.
National Coordinating Commission, which gave advice to striking workers all over Poland, had been formed. Solidarity counted 3 million workers as members at that point, and 10 million by the end of the year.
Part 3

September 1980-December 1981: Bydgoszcz Crisis /Warsaw Agreement

After the agreement, during the fall and winter of 1980-81, the PZPR attempted to renege on its concessions in the Gdansk Accord. It arrested a printer at the Solidarity offices in November, Jacek Kuron on March 5th and otherwise harassed the KOR. Workers were told they would be working two Saturdays a month even though they had agreed to Saturdays off. To resolve these issues strikes were called and the regime settled each time with compromises (workers would only work one Saturday a month, for instance). By December of 1980, Ash considers Solidarity to have become a dual power with the PZPR. The size of the Party had shrunk as many members had handed in their cards.

In the spring, a major crisis (the Bydgoszcz crisis) nearly occurred when farmers attempted to organize their own Rural Solidarity and a major meeting of their delegates was violently disbanded by the police. In response, many of the leaders of Solidarity wanted to enact another general strike, but Wałęsa convinced them to only stage a four hour general strike instead on Friday, March 27, 1981. Poles foresaw the possibility of more drastic tactics by the opposition at this point. Instructions were circulated before the strike via “Solidarity Radio” that indicated what to do if the union’s national leadership were arrested or if martial law were declared (proceed to an on going general strike and establish new leadership committees) and described methods of resistance should the Soviets invade (changing street signs, denying requests for food).

This “warning strike” was the largest and most well organized general strike in world history. Solidarity had around 9.5 million worker members, out of around 12.5 million workers total in
Poland. Bells and sirens went off at 8am and across the entire country workers waited peacefully (and with disciplinarily enforced sobriety) until noon before resuming work. At this point Solidarity was at its height of organization and participation, to the extent that even official members of the opposition were drawn into anti-regime activities: “For the Party leadership the most shattering feature of this national demonstration was the almost universal participation of Party members, against the explicit orders of the Politburo.”

This demonstration of the organizing power of Solidarity was incredibly effective, but created serious tensions with the Soviets, who recognized that Solidarity was a threat to their political control. They brought tanks into Poland and carried out military exercises to demonstrate their capability for violence. Since the attempted reforms of the Prague Spring and the subsequent Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Soviet Union had espoused the “Brezhnev Doctrine.” Originally presented as a retroactive justification of the invasion, it maintained that the cohesiveness of Eastern Bloc Soviet satellite states was absolutely vital to Soviet security. No anti-socialist activity or independence of Soviet hegemony would be tolerated. Such activity (as defined by the USSR) would be suppressed militarily. Although Solidarity would eventually be suppressed by a domestic military crackdown without Soviet military intervention (despite the requests of Poland’s General Jaruzelski) at the time it was not known that Solidarity would be the first major break in the Brezhnev Doctrine. This was two years after the invasion of Afghanistan, widely viewed as an extreme example of the Brezhnev doctrine. Russian leadership in the early 80s was divided, according to historians, about their capability to use violence to maintain obedience in Warsaw Pact states, a trend that eventually

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179 Ash, The Polish Revolution 165.
resulted in Gorbachev becoming Party Secretary and a policy of non-intervention in the late 1980’s. ¹⁸⁰

While Solidarity prepared to followup Friday’s warning strike with an on-going general strike on Tuesday March 31st, a number of leaders urged them find a way to resolve the crisis. Wałęsa ended up meeting alone with the government’s negotiator Monday and came to an agreement, which has come to be called “The Warsaw Agreement.” As Poles watched the evening news Monday, after a weekend spent preparing for a prolonged strike by hauling food and sleeping supplies into their factories, they witnessed a televised announcement from Wałęsa and Andrzej Gwiazda calling it off. While Solidarity would abstain from the general strike the government would apologize for the police actions and recognize Rural Solidarity. This is an example of what Smolar has called the “self-limiting” characteristic of the revolution in Poland (a term which originated with Jadwiga Staniszkis). ¹⁸¹

Although it’s unclear what the repercussions would have been from the PZPR and from the Soviet Union, the general historical judgement of the incident is that Solidarity successfully expressed their power without over provoking the opposition into civil war. Although many of Solidarity’s leaders were upset with this compromise, the movement had achieved something by effectively demonstrating the potential of its disruptive capabilities while not actually having to use them. Wałęsa, in particular felt that risk of violent retaliation by the Soviets against another general strike was too great. At this point Poland had been changed immensely from the year


before. Industrial workers, doctors, nurses, teachers, university students, engineers, technicians, farmers and even police officers were organized through institutions outside of party control. “The ideal of a self-organized society inside a communist state had become a reality in only a matter of months. … The privately developed civil society advocated by Kolakowski, Kuron and Michnik had materialized.” 182

Centralization/Decentralization and participation/unity
It’s worth focusing a bit more on the fallout within Solidarity’s membership over the Bydgoszcz crisis/Warsaw Agreement, as it demonstrates the communicative and democratic practices that Solidarity had sought to (and did further) develop. The meeting prior to the potential strike on Monday March 30th, between Wałęsa and the Party’s Rakowski was held largely behind closed doors, and the text of the agreement was not circulated before being signed by the two leaders. This decision not to enact a general strike was received very critically by the activist members of Solidarity. It was the last time (until 1987) that Solidarity had the ability to carry out a general strike, and was, arguably, at the peak of its organizational and disruptive capabilities. The fact that Wałęsa made the call alone, in particular, generated criticism surrounding the situation. Solidarity’s membership, which had been psychologically mobilized for the general strike felt disappointed at the outcome, and among the leadership, Wałęsa’s solitary decision making capability became a topic of discussion.

At a meeting Wednesday, February 1 at Solidarity’s headquarters at the Hotel Morski in Gdansk, its press spokesperson, Mozdelewski (who happened to been an academic medievalist) resigned, citing the undemocratic nature of the decision making process. He commented that:

“Solidarity was beginning to resemble a feudal monarchy, … [however] Wałęsa must not be
dethroned: for in the eye’s of millions of Poles he was the symbol and lynchpin of the union’s unity.”

A debate, which had been in place since last August, between the strategic value of unity and the importance of democratic procedures was suddenly active again. This moment marked the beginning of a significant departure in the leadership style of Solidarity, which, subsequently moved away from the authoritative rule of Wałęsa towards more institutionalized democratic procedures.

Solidarity had begun this debate back at a meeting in September 1980, immediately after the Polish August. Numerous smaller strikes were occurring all over the country at that time to get the concessions of the Accord in place their particular locales. The Gdansk Accord did not create a nationwide union incorporating all workers, but merely made it possible for the local strike committee (MKS’s) to organize into unions independent of the Party. Newly formed unions had to strike simply to come into existence and get access to physical space and supplies. The PZPR resisted at every stage and instance of implementation rather than simply granting the agreed upon concessions, according to their position that they must be be “forced from below.” This was likely because they needed excuses for their loss of totalitarian authority to give to the USSR.

The leadership of Solidarity, although not in direct control of these local organizations, had to take into account demands coming in from all over the country, as a result of “…their basic philosophy of solidarity between all social groups (‘social self defense’) …” Solidarity became the destination of all local grievances intended to improve the situation in Poland. At the

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184 Ibid., 83.
local level, on the other hand, activists were reproducing the social organization that had been so successful in standing against the Party in Gdansk: “Though not themselves initially elected, most local leaders manifested an almost fanatical commitment to democracy—as pure as it was amateur, for of course they had no personal experience in democratic politics.” 185

On September, 17, 1980 a meeting was held regarding the relationship between the Gdansk leadership of Solidarity, and all the regional unions. Ost frames this discussion of how Solidarity should further organize as a debate between “centralists” and “decentralists.” Decentralists argued that each local movement should organize and use nonviolent action itself in order to gain experience in dealing with the Party. Without the learning that comes from political struggle, local activists would either be too timid or too aggressive in developing space for civil society. “The experience of autonomous public activity, they [the Decentralists] felt, was in and of itself a major goal of the movement. Independent trade unions, after all, were not just unions; they were a way for society to recapture public life from the monopoly control of the Party.” 186 Additionally, decentralized organization of local unions would be more democratic and better represent the pluralized civil society Solidarity held as an ideal. The decentralists represented Solidarity’s position as an “anti-political” force aimed at reconstructing civil society. An eventual national union composed of federated local unions that had experience in political organizing would be much stronger, argued the decentralists, than a national union composed hastily at that moment.

Centralists argued that the present survival of the movement was the most important goal, and that instituting the changes agreed upon in the Gdansk agreement was their current task (and

185Ibid., 82.
186Ost, Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland Since 1968 103.
one which indicated a role for the movement that had gone beyond simply creating a public sphere within the space of civil society). A national union would be better able to organize and threaten general strikes to discipline the government, which at the time was doing ever thing it could to passively obstruct the implementation of the Gdansk Accord and lure Solidarity members toward Party unions.

At the meeting the centralist position won out, according to Ost (setting up the subsequent reversal the following March), *but did so ambiguously*. Roman Laba, on the other hand argues that the decentralists won the debate at this point: “Essentially the decentralizers had won. In this manner, solidarity acquired the decentralized democratic form that effectively governed its actions over the next 500 days of its life.” 187 The decentralist position wanted to emphasize the communicative and democratic aspect of nonviolence, while the centralist position was focused on the disruptive capability of the movement. This debate shows how nonviolent movements are constituted by both kinds of actions, and that both are equally important to the strength of the movement.

Ost, more specifically, argues that, although it declared itself a national union (supporting the centralist position), in fact Solidarity deliberately remained in an ambiguous status that was both centralist and decentralist at times. Wałęsa’s closing remarks to the meeting were: “Let everybody know that Gdansk has become the headquarters for everybody—no wait, that’s wrong—that…a central authority has emerged in Gdansk, though its not really a central authority, something like it, but not that exactly.” 188 Although central authority would rest with leadership


in Gdansk, Solidarity initially maintained that regional unions would remain as they were, a plainly contradictory position, that was left purposely unclear. This was done strategically, argues Ost, to in order to gain the benefits of both kinds of organization. Often regional unions would act counter to Solidarity’s decrees, and if it seemed beneficial, the leadership would ignore it; otherwise they would ask them to heel. This demonstrated that attacks to repress its leadership by the PZPR would not work given its decentralization, and at the same time Solidarity could still organize nation wide strikes by virtue of its national unity.

Jan Kubik agrees with the ambiguity thesis but argues that there were some disadvantages. “[T]he ambiguity between centralization and decentralization was Solidarity’s strength and weakness. Strength came from flexibility and the encouragement of grassroots participation that decentralization allowed.” And while there was some centralism, “…centralism within Solidarity was never rigid, and this proved to be a weakness epitomized in December 1981, when martial law caught the movement completely off guard, partially because of poorly developed centralized structures.” ¹⁸⁹ One of the most important functions of centralization was to prevent the rise of radicalized violence in the resistance. The activist Bodgan Lis described the function of the “Interim Coordinating Commission” like this: “Agreeing that there were bounds of acceptable social resistance, we wanted to prevent the rise of terrorist organizations, which the authorities might use for various kinds of provocations.” ¹⁹⁰

The debate between centralists and decentralists is directly related to the question of whether Solidarity’s 16 months of existence were marked by exceptional levels of democracy or


¹⁹⁰Lis Quoted in Ibid., 457.
whether a deference to authoritarianism persisted. Poland was “the most democratic society in
the world” during Solidarity’s legal existence in 1980-81 according to Lawrence Goodwyn. 191
Roman Laba (who, along with Goodwyn, is one of the main proponents of the thesis that
Solidarity was caused mainly by workers, not intellectuals or clergy) also believes in the
democratic nature of Solidarity. However, the above mentioned “Bydgoszcz crisis” was settled in
negotiations by Wałęsa that were largely seen as undemocratic. Another activist leader,
Borusewicz, believed the settlement of the crisis was indicative of a “cult of leadership.” Kubik
argues that the democratic character of Solidarity was a majoritarian rather than liberal one.
While a liberal democracy emphasizes pluralism, much of Solidarity’s membership was most
concerned with unity and “… was highly sensitive as to whether a given decision was supported
by the “majority,….” The reasons for this according to Kubik are the persistence of the
“authoritarian personality,” nationalism and an “undifferentiated definition of “we” ” among
poles culturally. 192

Timothy Ash presents a picture of rupture and pluralism in the attitudes of Solidarity
members that seems to corroborate or at least fit with Ost’s ambiguity argument. After the
Bydgoszcz crisis, Wałęsa and Andrzej Gwiazda exchanged “open letters” that were published for
the membership, and represented a divide in Solidarity that Ash describes as between
“fundamentalists” and “pragmatists.” Gwiazda’s fundamentalist position held principles of
“honesty, democracy, dignity, sovereignty” as the most important, while Wałęsa’s pragmatic
stance stressed the need for compromise and the political imperative of unity. Although Gwiazda

191Lawrence Goodwyn, Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland (Oxford University Press New York,

192Kubik, "Who Done It: Workers, Intellectuals, or Someone Else? Controversy Over Solidarity's Origins and Social
Composition", 458.
later declared that he would fight dictatorship in July, including the dictatorship of Wałęsa and his supporters, the pragmatists and fundamentalist camps remained blurred and fluid. In September Gwiazda argued for the pragmatist side, against the idea of self government.

Ash characterizes the fundamentalists as those who refused to censor their ideals of power for Solidarity and a free Poland, even though “Every single Solidarity member carried around this tension between the ideal and the possible.” There was also a tension, in this picture, between dealing with the PZPR strategically, and remaining true to the democratic practices that empowered Solidarity in the first place. So, although fundamentalists did not have their way completely at Solidarity’s First National Congress in September 1981 (“…as the pragmatists argued, such a profusion would fatally weaken the unity and therefore the fighting strength of the union.), their orientation ended most of the self-censorship, and created a pluralistic and “…decentralized, disorderly and at times anarchic democracy.”

**Insights about nonviolence from the debates within solidarity**

The debate within Solidarity over centralization vs. decentralization and the values of unity, authority and democratic decision making suggests how nonviolent movements must conduct themselves if they wish to maintain and develop their political power. Transforming into a centrally led movement would destroy much of the participatory aspect that allowed Solidarity to be so successful. Kurt Schock and other theorists of nonviolence have argued that nonviolence is a largely *non-institutional* phenomenon. The effectiveness of these movements depends strongly on generating participation, and thus consensus through communicative action in a public sphere. Disruptive capability will not develop without a commitment to rational

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194 Ibid., 230.
democratic procedures. Solidarity could not transform into a centrally led government without losing its base of power. Thus, the immediate strategic benefits were not the only reason that it choose ambiguity, or to put it more accurately, the democratic ideals that decentralization fulfilled were still seen as the most important reason for the success of the movement—a cause that needed to be balanced with disciplinary unity.

As a centralized union, Solidarity could reply to obstruction with unified strike action and to conciliation with unified assent. It could show the government that it was strong enough to insist on long term reforms, and disciplined enough to guarantee social peace. As a decentralized union, it could demonstrate that civil society was still mobilizing on its own. 195

This debate in Solidarity between a decentralist focus on democratic ideals (developing a public sphere) and a centralist focus on coercively (instrumentally) dealing with the opposition illuminates the relationship of these two aspects of nonviolent action generally. The fluid shifts in strategy and simultaneous adoption of both unity and democratic participation illuminates dramatically the need for nonviolent movements to generate both democratic participation and disruptive capabilities simultaneously to be effective. This mediation within Solidarity is indicative of nonviolent political action generally. It captures the co-generative character of the disruptive/instrumental and constructive/political elements of nonviolent action.

**Democratic Activity During the Revolutionary Period**

There is evidence of democratic development in Poland as a whole as a result of the movement. The decision to grant executive authority to Wałęsa, though popular for the first few months, was questioned seriously in March of 1981, after he worked out a deal to prevent the general strike in isolation (the Bydgoszcz crisis). Afterwards, Solidarity consciously became more democratic in its decision making procedures, shifting toward decentralization. In Ash’s

opinion, this had a negative effective overall on Solidarity’s success:

From March onward, democracy increasingly gained the upper hand over unity, and Solidarity’s Congress, unlike the American Congress, would not be counter balanced by a strong administration. It is from the aftermath of the Bydgoszcz crisis that one can chart the rapid growth of those factions and divisions which were to weaken the union so visibly in the autumn. From March, too, one can date the growing public challenge to the personal authority of Lech Wałęsa. 196

However, this renewed orientation toward democratic procedures, both in the ranks of its national leadership and in its regional units produced a number of radical political phenomena. Three examples in particular are (1) The democratic procedures of the first and second Congresses of Solidarity, and the political and economic Programme that resulted from them, (2) the development of corporatist, worker-self government initiatives as a way to improve the economy, and (3) the Polish Communist Party’s attempts at democratic reform from below during 1981.

(1) From September 5-10, and Sept 27-Oct 7, 1981 Solidarity held a national congress. This meeting was marked by exceptional levels of democratic participation by delegates from all over Poland.

Ultra-democratic rules of procedure ensured that every delegate had the right to intervene in the debates at almost any point. Every regional platoon of delegates on the floor of the Olivia sports hall had its own microphone. A bevy of messengers circulated around the floor like ball-boys at a tennis match, carrying proposals for resolutions, protests and apologies from group to group and from the floor to the platform. 197

This description shows a realization of Arendt’s “Space of Appearances,” through the civil resistance of Solidarity, where politics could occur without distortion, free from the instrumentality of the PZPR. Along these lines, still dealing with fallout from the Bydgoszcz crisis/Warsaw Agreement one of the major issues debated was whether Solidarity should

197Ibid., 219.

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formally adopt a more centralized internal government with a leadership capable of making executive decisions itself or whether executive decisions should be made by the general vote of a national Commission representing all regions proportionally by their population. Again, Solidarity wrestled between a focus on strategic effectiveness and a focus on democratic participation. The product of the congress was known as the “The Programme”—a democratically arrived at political and economic plan for progress that charted a plan for self government and was “neither utopian nor incoherent.”

The plurality of the vision that Solidarity members arrived at during the Congress is evident in Ash characterization of its politics:

The Solidarity Programme was a conservative-socialist-liberal manifesto: predominantly socialist (and Christian) in its approach to social questions, predominantly liberal democratic in its political vision, predominantly conservative in its cultural goals, and borrowing from all three in its economics.

Although the Programme would not be carried out, and sometime during this period the PZPR would secretly begin planning the imposition of martial law, Solidarity’s Congress shows the connection between civil resistance activities and democratic institution building.

(2) As Solidarity began to embrace its role as a dual power in 1981, it began to develop an alternative economic program to the Party’s as a response to the economic collapse in Poland that had continued and intensified since 1976. Ost describes this period as a move toward neo-corporatism, a political situation where Solidarity and the PZPR would share governmental responsibilities. Solidarity’s orientation toward neo-corporatism was indicated by their willingness to negotiate with the PZPR over the implementation of the gains in the Gdansk
Accords (such as work free Saturdays) and the PZPR’s increased reliance on Solidarity to carry out what were previously state functions (like distribution of food rations). Both the Party’s economists and Solidarity believed that a program of austerity (including some unemployment) was necessary to improve Poland’s economy. The Party, throughout 1981, implored Solidarity to agree to and support austerity measures, since without Solidarity’s agreement any cutbacks would be met with further strikes. Solidarity was open to such a program but only if they were granted significant control over the economy. To take responsibility for an economic overhaul without having any control over it, as the Party urged them to do, would not be beneficial to their political power and, in any case, they had no faith in the ability of the PZPR to improve things.

Control for Solidarity meant two things: first, the ability to oversee the distribution of certain goods like food, to ensure that the economic cutbacks were absolutely necessary. The national attitude was of complete distrust in the government’s sincerity and capability. A Solidarity activist once commented that “…we cannot say that the market [is] … deliberately disorganized; you need to be well organised to disorganise.” Austerity would only be accepted when a trusted leader of the movement verified its necessity. He or she would have to be able to declare something like: “We have seen the stores. We have seen the figures. It is true, the cupboards are bare. The Russians are not eating it all,” and make assurances that resources were not being diverted to the Party or the military.

Second, economic control meant control over industry output. The sixth point of the Gdansk Accord allowed for meaningful participation in management by workers. This eventually

developed into the idea of “worker self-government.” Between late March and July of 1981, competing “inter-factory network[s] of self government” composed of more that 3000 enterprises had formed, eager to become the new governing structure of the economy. Polish workers wanted to decentralize the economy, and believed, having participated in the amazing organizational feats of Solidarity, that they could do a much better job than “management.” This of course represented a realization and acceptance that Solidarity was changing from an anti-political, civil society trade union to parallel government institution that was going to control material distribution in a communist state. As part of this discussion Solidarity developed the idea of worker-self government before and during the First National Congress in September 1981.

With the demands for self government and control over food distribution the National Commission would stake a claim to a share of power over economic and social policy. With self government they opened up a perspective in which larger areas of social, economic and cultural life would gradually be placed under increasing social controls through democratically elected bodies. 202

On the eight free Saturdays Solidarity was proposing to work, the workers themselves were to control what they produced, taking care to distribute the product in ways that would most effectively alleviate the crisis. This was a tactic that Kuron had proposed and that Lodz activist Zbigniew Kowalewski and others had championed as the “active strike.” 203

At this point in the movement (August and September of 1981) the PZPR had broken off negotiations with Solidarity, but Solidarity continued to define itself as a democratic institution that served parallel to the communist government.

(3) Finally, although it was not a success, it must be mentioned as rare example in the history of Soviet Bloc politics: From April to July of 1981 there was a bottom up attempt at reform within the PZPR, itself, towards democratic socialism. The Party had lost 216,000 members by March

202Ibid., 201.

203Ost, Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland Since 1968 132.
of 1981, and over a million (out of three million) of its members were also members of Solidarity. This resulted in some democracy at the local level, with Party officials being replaced by elected officials in many locations. The newly elected Party members then pushed for the PZPR to become a socialist democracy rather than a top down dictatorship at the Party’s official congress on July 14th. This was a break from the Leninist mould of no factions within the Party, and top down, “apparatus” control of the Party membership. It failed and Stanislaw Kania’s (General Secretary of PZPR) cabinet remained. This was due both to fear of invasion by the USSR, and because the Party revolutionaries lacked a power base in Poland’s working class, which refused to support them. However, it was the first example of attempted democratic reform within the Party since Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Later in September, after Solidarity’s first Congress session, Kania refused to compromise from above with Solidarity, but the Sejm (Poland’s parliament) forced Kania back to the original compromise with Solidarity. This was “…without precedent in the history of Poland since 1947,” because, “For the first time, infected with democracy after a year of revolution, the deputies had directly and publicly rejected the communist Party whip [Kania].” 204

204 Ash, *The Polish Revolution* 223.
Part 4

Martial Law and the Round Table Talks

After almost a year and a half of Solidarity's existence as a dual political power with the PZPR, General Jaruzelski declared a “state of war” (martial law) on December 13, 1981 arresting Solidarity's entire leadership.

In that freezing winter’s night the Polish army and security forces invaded their own country. Tanks advanced into the center of Warsaw….Civilian telephone and telex lines were cut everywhere. Neighbors were woken by the sound of crowbars smashing doors as thousands of Solidarity activists, advisors, intellectuals and even critical Party members were carried off to ‘internment’ camps. All but a handful of Solidarity’s national leaders were caught in their hotel rooms, like doves in a cote, between 2 and 3 am. 205

Solidarity had been operating in an entirely open and un-secretive manner since August of 1981. Documents show that this crack-down had been planned secretly by Gen. Jarulzelski sometime between late July and late September 1981, meaning that the final few months of negotiation with Solidarity (Sept-Nov) were done in bad faith to maintain appearances. During the summer the Party began to doubt whether they could count on their military forces to carry any ordered repressions. Solidarity counted 40,000 police (out of around 150,000 total) among its members, and most new military conscripts would be young men enthusiastic about Solidarity. Thus, the Party set up a separate portion of the army called the “Internal Defense Force” (Polish acronym, WOW) and a motorized riot police called ZOMO, made up of men who were “…carefully selected, often from poor rural backgrounds, isolated from society, exceptionally well fed, housed, medically treated, indoctrinated and brutalized.” 206 These military operational groups were kept in seclusion in the countryside before being used for the military suppression in December. As part of the declaration of Martial Law, telephone

205Ibid., 273.
206Ibid., 248.
communications were cut for civilians all over the country.

The two weeks following the declaration of martial law were marked with protests and local strikes that, without their leadership and the communications blackout, were unsuccessful. The public response to the declaration of martial law by the PZPR was ambivalent. They were tired of revolution, very stressed by the uncertain atmosphere going into winter, and believed seriously in the possibility of a Soviet invasion—an atmosphere that the PZPR had deliberately cultivated over the fall by breaking off negotiations. Martial law, however, did not resolve the crisis of the Party (which never appeared omnipotent again) nor the continuing economic crisis. Remaining dissidents formed an underground opposition because they felt they had to, but Solidarity could not function as an underground movement. The movement’s vital characteristic was openness and its purpose was to work with the government.

Although Solidarity had been halted by martial law, some of its successes carried on in a manner that would be crucial later in the decade. Ash explains the changes that remained in Polish society:

That Poland could not be ‘normalised’—i.e. returned abnormality—is a lasting achievement of the Polish Revolution. … None the less, said my Hungarian friends, Poland was in a better condition than Hungary. It was in a better condition because millions of Poles, and, in particular, a whole generation of educated young workers, had sixteen months’ direct experience of democracy. Of what other communist country could that be said. It was in a better condition because for sixteen months the Poles had put an end to the lies and the double life on which every Soviet system is built. In Poland, every schoolchild knew that he or she was born with certain inalienable human rights, which were now denied. … In Hungary, my friends explained, ‘civil society’ had been destroyed after 1956, and they were only just beginning, with painful slowness, to reconstruct it. But in Poland the consciousness of belonging to something called ‘the society’ was almost universal. This society possessed its own clearly articulated set of values, goals and symbols—they were written down in a Programme. What had been the vision of a tiny minority of so-called ‘dissidents’ in December 1979 had become a mass consciousness by December 1981. 207

The civil society that Solidarity created, could not, as Ash put it, “be bottled” up, or co-opted by

207Ibid., 316-7.
a government which continued to ignore workers and activists. The government was not as repressive of oppositional views during the martial law period as it had been before Solidarity. The work of the underground press intensified.

Even though printing equipment was confiscated, Bibuła appeared the day after martial law [December 13, 1981] and rapidly grew to several hundred titles, which included Tygodnik Woyenny, Tygodnik Mazowsze, and Nowy Zapis, among others. Tygodnik Mazowsze reached circulation of over 60,000 copies.

Ost quotes Kuron on the fundamental change wrought by Solidarity:

Harking back to his ideas from the 1970s, Kuron argued that for the system to survive intact, the Party must control the public sphere and suppress independent social ties. It now turns out, he said, that despite martial law, the Solidarity period shattered these two conditions irrevocably. The press became so free and pluralist during the Solidarity period, as well as the underground afterward, that the authorities could either “carry on with their pointless propaganda or agree to real information in the mass media. They chose the latter.” Consequently, “the official vision of the world has practically ceased to exist,” and with it has gone the Party’s monopoly on public life.

**Post Martial Law**

Eventually, on September 11, 1986 the government declared amnesty and released all political prisoners. From this point on Solidarity became a political party, and the leadership moved away from factory level issues and organization.

The post martial law existence of Solidarity was different in character than the mass social movement of 1980-1. It existed as a political party based around its leadership, and did not function as a trade union constituted primarily by worker participation. Still, in April, May and August of 1988, strikes were held in all of Solidarity’s major strongholds leading to the formal discussions between the government and Solidarity known famously as the *Round Table Talks*. In November 1988, a debate between Wałęsa and Alfred Miodowicz (leader of the “official” trades unions) was televised depicting Wałęsa skillfully dismantling his opponent’s arguments. Finally,

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after months of further Round Table talks, Solidarity became legally registered as a political party in April of 1989. Tadeusz Kowalik usefully summarizes some of the progress of the Round Table talks:

The “Agreement on Political Reforms” contains the following general principles: political pluralism, freedom of speech, democratic appointment of all representative organs, independence of the courts, and a freely elected strong local government with full rights. These were constitutional settlements _par excellence_, auguring a radically changed Constitution. Among concrete provisions, an important matter was the time and character of parliamentary elections and the acceptance of trade union pluralism, which signified the legalization of Solidarity. 210

In June 1989, 35 percent of the seats in the _Sejm_ and all the seats in the house came up for election. Solidarity candidates won the entire 35 percent allowed to them, and 99 out of 100 seats in the house. It was a wholesale rejection of the communist party via popular democratic decision making. In December of 1989, the parliament passed the ‘Barłcerowicz plan,’ changing the economic laws as well as Poland’s name to the “The Republic of Poland.” Wałęsa is elected president the following year. The outcomes, at least in this period of dramatic transition, were the culmination of a decade of forceful influence by a very active public sphere. Public will formation in conjunction with disruptive nonviolent activities resulted in the implementation of wholesale changes to Polish legislation, destroying the authoritarian character of the Polish government.

The longterm, overall outcome of the nonviolent Solidarity movement has of course been more ambiguous. The transition to capitalism has been controversial, with many critics highlighting that privatization involved a huge transfer of capital from the state to those of the _nomenklatura_ during the communist era. Many of the socialist and humanist values of Solidarity’s _Programme_ (from the First Congress) and the even the positions espoused by Wałęsa

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during the 1989 Round Table talks were abandoned in favor of free market capitalism soon after 1989 (Kowalki call his history of this period, *From Solidarity to Sellout*). Ironically, the Gdansk shipyards, center of the *Polish August* strikes and representative of workers all around Poland, was quickly downsized after privatization. It experienced bankruptcy and changes of ownership and now has had luxury condominiums built on much of its former grounds. Today (facing bankruptcy again as of October 2013) it only employs 1800 workers—down from 18,000 during the 1980s.\(^{211}\)

However, despite the rather disappointing economic outcome (relative to the values expressed in Solidarity’s *Programme*, Poland was the first Soviet Bloc state to develop into a durable and pluralistic democracy. It served as an important progenitor for the peaceful fall of communism in Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Russia. The Soviet Union was dissolved peacefully soon after in 1991. It has been classified as a success according to its political goals in Chenoweth and Stephan’s massive study of civil resistance movements.\(^{212}\)

**Discussion, Analysis, and Conclusion**

The most interesting aspect of Solidarity with respect to understanding the practical and ethical character of nonviolent power is the movement wide orientation towards developing a public sphere that could influence politics, but not actually seek to replace existing political institutions. This was an orientation towards democratic behaviors, and not instrumental control of “political apparatuses.” Although, Solidarity did later transform into a political party and gained significant institutional presence (Wałęsa was elected the first president of the Republic of


\(^{212}\) Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. 163
Poland in December of 1990), the periods of greatest conflict—from 1970 until 1982—despite the massive mobilization of the population, never witnessed the violent or nonviolent removal of the PZPR. This was certainly a possibility given Solidarity’s level of support, though, as historians have noted, it may have trigged a Soviet invasion.

Solidarity’s antipolitical strategy was successful in generating political participation. Its orientation towards communication (creating a situation free of the newspeak and censorship of the regime) and pluralism indicates a commitment to democratic ideals. Solidarity understood that its power was a manifestation of participation—and sought both to cultivate that participation directly, and to protect a space for it through strategic disruptions. Successfully striking would not have been possible without the network and communications developed by the underground press, and at the same time, those activities of a public sphere could not have further developed without the strikes that forced the PZPR to legally recognize and act on the demands for an independent public sphere. From the August 1980 Gdansk Accord throughout all of 1981, the numbers of potential and actual strike participants expanded rapidly until it was a majority of the adult population, and even a significant portion of Party members. It expanded to the point that there was a movement within the communist government toward democratic reform. Without this simultaneous cultivation of political participation and strategic deployment of disruptive tactics, the movement would not have been successful. That is to say, the strikes would not have been as successful at curbing totalitarian policies towards the public sphere without the development of communicative institutions (underground publications, and democratic, nationwide strike committees), and at the same time, those communicative institutions were protected and expanded, by coercive strike techniques. Neither the development
of communicative institutions (the foundations of the public sphere and radical democracy) nor the negative disruptive techniques could have occurred in isolation.

Thus, what the example Solidarity demonstrates is that there is a co-generative relationship between disruptive acts of nonviolence and those aimed at generating consensus through communication. The underground press, the KOR, and a network of strike committees were all necessary to generate the massive strikes that resulted in the Gdansk Accords. Those Accords had provisions for the existence of a civil society with an effective and less distorted public sphere. However, the totalitarian tendencies of the PZPR attempted to actively suppress this sphere as it was developing after August of 1981. General strikes (both threatened and actual) lead by Solidarity were necessary to protect and expand this sphere, leading to increased participation by Polish citizens and even Party members. Without the use of communicative practices, the participation necessary for the effective use of disruptive tactics would not have been possible. Subsequently, disruptive tactics were used to protect the developing public sphere and to generate further participation.

The ongoing discussion within Solidarity over whether to adopt a more centralized governing structure to ensure unity in decision making or whether to remain decentralized to promote democratic participation and plurality is further evidence for the co-generative relationship between disruptive and communicative practices in nonviolent action. Unity (under the authority of Wałęsa) could most effectively threaten and negotiate with the PZPR. On the other hand, a decentralized structure maximized the possibility for communicative participation by members, leading to a plurality of positions and authentic discourse. Both of these elements of Solidarity were maximized in different ways to the extent that they did not become a
detriment to the other. The best balance between these elements was itself the subject of much debate within Solidarity’s leadership and membership.

This co-generative relationship is one way of conceptualizing how the effectiveness of nonviolent political action is directly linked to its ethical character. Effective disruption will not occur without the development of prefigurative politics that promote participation. In order for consent to be withdrawn collectively, counter consensus must be developed. At the same time, nonviolence also relies on disruptiveness (a kind of force) for the development of political power. It is here that we seek the link between word and deed that constitutes Arendt’s conception of political action. Solidarity shows how the effectiveness of nonviolent political action depends on communicative action. The strategic capabilities of the movement (in Solidarity’s case to enact a general strike) depended on generating participation through communicative practices, making the power of the movement dependent on democratic behaviors. The power that nonviolence develops cannot be understood as merely instrumental because it relied on the discursive generation of politics to increase participation. The communicative character of effective nonviolent politics is largely ignored by Sharp and subsequent theorists in the civil resistance literature.
CHAPTER 5:
The Ethical Concept of Nonviolence

Introduction

Recent research on nonviolent movements has concluded that the higher level of participation in nonviolent resistance movements is the main reason that nonviolent action is more effective than violent tactics at achieving political goals. 213 In Chenoweth and Stephan’s analysis of 323 resistance campaigns that occurred between 1900 and 2006, nonviolent movements had, on average, 150,000 more participants than violent movements (sizes of the movements varied from the low thousands to millions). Although one in four nonviolent campaigns in their study were total failures, they found that nonviolent movements were twice as likely to achieve either full or partial success compared with violent campaigns in that period. 214

While this recent research provides evidence for the claim that nonviolence is more effective than violence, there are still significant gaps in the civil resistance literature’s description of nonviolence and in the way it explains the effectiveness of nonviolence. Chenoweth and Stephan’s work remains focused on the disruptive aspect of nonviolence: they argue that greater levels of participation allow movements to more effectively deploy what they call tactics of concentration (protests, sit-ins, occupational strikes) and dispersion (general strikes, stay at homes, boycotts) in order to remove the pillars of support of the opposition. But, while they do discuss some of the reasons why nonviolent movements enjoy greater participation


214Chenoweth and Stephan, , Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict
(mainly focusing on the barriers to participation in violent movements), they do not discuss how nonviolent movements generate participation and the particular nature of that participation.

In this chapter I address the central questions of the dissertation (How should nonviolence be conceptualized? What makes nonviolence a distinctly ethical form of political action, especially in comparison with violent political action?) by starting with the idea that participation in nonviolent movements is what distinguishes nonviolent from violent movements, both in effectiveness and in ethical character. The civil resistance literature frames nonviolence pragmatically, promoting it on the basis of its effectiveness compared with violence. That literature explicitly avoids using any normative language to describe, explain, or frame nonviolence. Its argument for the use of nonviolence is *contingently* based on historical research about its effectiveness at achieving goals. While I endorse the message of this literature (the historical cases it is based upon are a source of optimism), I will take the position that there is room for a philosophical approach that begins where the observations of the civil resistance literature end and analyzes the particular character that participation in a nonviolent movement takes.

Nonviolence has historically been understood using two frameworks. In chapter 2 I discussed the *moral paradigm* of nonviolence, which is characterized chiefly by its description of nonviolence as a way to *convert* the opposition to the moral position expressed by the nonviolent movement.

To blunt its coercive edge Gandhi stressed that even noncooperation “must have its roots in love. Its object should not be to punish the opponent or inflict injury. …” But Gandhi stubbornly refused to concede that although love and innocence might lower the temperature of a heated labor struggle, coercion remained the overriding factor at play in noncooperation. 215

This framework suffers from a number of issues. Most importantly, the focus on the conversion of the opposition makes conceiving of nonviolence as a form of power impossible. Nonviolence is powerful, and I argue that even tactics that aim at conversion, rather than being experienced as dialogic or educational by the targets of a nonviolent movement, are experienced as forceful and coercive. Furthermore, the moral paradigm does not match the self understanding of participants in nonviolent movements. Demographically, participants do not predominantly identify as pacifists, but choose nonviolence because they believe such tactics will be more successful than violent tactics. The disruptiveness of nonviolence is a central aspect of its effectiveness. This makes it problematic to conceive of the relationship between the movement and the opposition as a moral one in which the autonomy of the opposition is completely respected. Chapter 2, thus, left me with the conclusion that nonviolence must be conceptualized as a form of power, but also that this leaves the moral basis that distinguishes violence from nonviolence in question.

Following that analysis I turned to the strategic paradigm (presented through Gene Sharp’s *Politics of Nonviolent Action*), which conceptualizes nonviolent action as an effective form of disruption. Sharp characterized nonviolence as possessing a kind of power-over its opposition that consequently can disrupt the power of existing institutions by coercing or disintegrating them. While this understanding of nonviolence is closer to my own position, I argued that Sharp’s particular conceptualization of political power, based on a presumption of agency, also suffers from a number of issues. While it categorizes the disruptive potential of nonviolence in great detail, it does not explain how the consent of participants gets mobilized for withdrawal in the first place—a major problem given how contemporary social theory has questioned the

216 Schock, "Nonviolent Action and Its Misconceptions: Insights for Social Scientists".
extent agency is available for those living under structures of domination. Furthermore, Sharp himself suggests that nonviolent action involves more than disruptive acts, but does not identify or categorize activities like developing a parallel government or alternative economies apart from disruptive activities. For these reasons, I argued that his approach, which focused on the instrumental, power-over aspect of nonviolence was incomplete. Instead I suggested that nonviolence could be better understood as developing a very important kind of power-to (which includes the capability to be disruptive to oppositional power) that allows for a more complete explanation for how nonviolence counters structures of mental domination (develops agency) and, most importantly, reintroduces an ethical understanding of nonviolence.

In some respects my focus on how nonviolent movements generate participation and particular kinds of relationships between participants seems similar to conversion. My discussion of the fact that effective nonviolence must involve developing participation could be interpreted as saying that nonviolent movements convert people to their cause—and that there is a communicative basis to the moral paradigm. I don’t think this is accurate, though. My ethical conception is intersubjective in a way the moral paradigm is not. I focus on the political relationships between participants instead of the relationship between a member of the resistance and a member of the opposition. Furthermore, ‘conversion’ implies that the movement has a doctrine or dogma that one gets enlightened about by witnessing the self suffering of the individuals in the movement. “Regarding conversion: Gandhi called this “quickening the dead conscience into life.” 217 The moral paradigm’s explanation of conversion of the opposition focuses on the individual, and presupposes that the nonviolent movement has an already

developed, attractive (and just) political position, that an individual “learns or realizes.” There is a kind of transfer of moral knowledge from the movement to the opposition that occurs when self-suffering is witnessed. I disagree with this conceptualization of nonviolence. This assumption that the movement’s political position or stance is already developed and available to be “learned by the opposition” is, I believe, wrong. Nonviolent movements are the process of developing inclusive politics that are attractive to everyone.

Rather than being educated, individuals join a nonviolent movement because it allows them to become actors in the development of inclusive politics. It attracts participation because it creates a space for this kind of activity to occur where political activity was previously suppressed. I’m also in agreement with the strategic paradigm that nonviolence is disruptive, but I argue that conceptualizing it solely in terms of disruptive capability fails to explain its effectiveness and ethical character. So while there are some points of agreement with the moral and strategic paradigms of nonviolence, my ethical conception of nonviolence is distinct in its focus on the character of the relationship between participants. In significant respects the moral and strategic paradigms of nonviolence do not conceptualize the kinds of accomplishments that nonviolence is capable of making.

In this chapter I tie together these earlier claims along with my historical analysis of Solidarity to develop my own, ethical conception of nonviolence. In order to deal with the problems from Ch. 2 (the absence of a concept of nonviolent power in the moral paradigm) and Ch. 3 (distinguishing effective nonviolent power from violent politics ethically)—I make the move of relocating the focus of what is ethical about nonviolence away from the relationship between the movement and its opposition to the relationship between the participants of the
movement itself. The moral paradigm focuses on the relationship between the individual resister (who is beaten, dragged or otherwise suffers) and the opponent in whom she awakens a new consciousness, while the strategic paradigm focuses on the forceful and coercive actions a movement uses to disrupt the opposition (dropping the normative understanding of nonviolence). Neither, however, focus on the particular way that nonviolent movements constitute themselves, and the character of the relationship between participants.

I argue in this chapter that nonviolence develops a very effective form of power (communicative power), that requires ethical relationships between its participants. I develop this position by describing participation in a nonviolent movement using Arendt’s communicative conception of politics and Habermas’s theory of communicative action and communicative power. Since nonviolent movements must generate participation to effectively carry out disruptive nonviolent action, and because that participation must be of a particular character to maintain and grow a movement (in particular, the literature argues that campaigns are most effective when they foster diverse participation), nonviolent movements commit themselves to developing shared political goals among a large group of participants. The non-institutional and voluntary nature of participation in nonviolent acts of disruption means that movements have no way of generating participation instrumentally (like, for instance, through the coercive sanctions and direct material payments that violent movements often use to recruit and maintain the participation of fighters). Because the effectiveness of a movement (its chance of achieving political goals) is directly related to how well it develops space for political participation, and the degree to which that space is inclusive, I argue that nonviolent movements are particularly important instances of the development of public rationality. Successful
resistance movements against authoritarian and totalitarian institutions have used nonviolent
techniques to develop important elements of what Habermas calls the *public sphere* and
*communicative power*. The necessity of this commitment to a consensus building process, I will
argue, shows that nonviolent movements have a distinctly ethical character which arises from
their rootedness in communicative action and public rationality. Since the effectiveness of
nonviolent action directly relates to the extent that it develops the communicative and democratic
practices that Habermas theorizes, nonviolence is effective to the extent that it is ethical.

From the perspective of the individual participant, nonviolence is experienced as an
activity that allows for transformation from a politically manipulated object into a politically
active subject. Nonviolence is a kind of action through which private autonomy can become
public autonomy (in situations of political repression), engage in public will formation, and if
successful determine the character of new institutions of law through forceful engagement with
repressive institutions. While the *moral paradigm* locates the normative achievement of
nonviolence in the relationship *between the movement and its opposition* (in the mechanism of
conversion), I locate the normative character in the relationship between the participants of the
movement itself. My position is that an ethical character arises from organizational commitments
that follow from practical decisions to use nonviolent tactics, rather than from a pacifist
commitment to converting the opposition. Despite the fact that their tactics are disruptive,
coercive and forceful against the opposition (something true of violent tactics as well) nonviolent
movements are ethical because movements engage in communicative action and develop
communicative power between their participants.
This is especially evident in the example of Solidarity, where democratic learning among a population allowed a robust democracy to emerge at the end 1980s after four decades of communist totalitarianism in Poland. The links between Arendt and Habermas’s political theories and nonviolent action show that an instrumental, strategic, or purely pragmatic conception of nonviolent action fails to describe the most important political work that nonviolent movements accomplish.

Outline of the chapter:

Part 1, The Importance of Participation looks at the research of Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, who compared the outcomes of hundreds of violent and nonviolent resistance campaigns from 1900-2006. They argue that participation is the most important factor in the greater success of nonviolent civil resistance compared to violent campaigns. They also discuss some the significant barriers to participating in violent campaigns.

Part 2, Public and Private Autonomy in Between Facts and Norms discusses Habermas’s argument that private autonomy is co-original with public autonomy.

Part 3, The Public Sphere and Civil Society, looks at Habermas’s argument that popular sovereignty (and public/private autonomy) depends on a functioning public sphere. I argue that nonviolent campaigns, in order to generate participation, must develop their own public sphere through communicative action. I also explain in what ways Solidarity’s activities developed a public sphere and embodied a commitment to communicative action.

Chenoweth and Stephan also found that even unsuccessful nonviolent movements resulted in a much greater likelihood of durable democracy developing and a much lower likelihood of civil war occurring in the decade after a conflict. They devote Ch. 8 of Why Civil Resistance Works to discussing the democratic outcomes of nonviolence.
Part 4, **Communicative Power: tracing from Arendt to Habermas**, argues that a communicative concept of power originates in Arendt’s thought, and discusses how Habermas further develops it. I also argue that nonviolent power is best described as communicative power.

**Part 5, Implications for political theory** discusses how a focus on civil resistance can add to Habermas’s conception of how democratic politics function in situations of conflict.
Part 1 The Importance of Participation

One of the central conclusions of Maria Stephen’s and Erica Chenoweth’s study comparing violent and nonviolent resistance movements, *Why Civil Resistance Works* (2011) is that *participation* is the key factor affecting the chances of a movement’s success. Their work, which compares the outcomes of 323 resistance campaigns (over 100 of which were largely nonviolent) that occurred between 1900 and 2006 is the most significant recent development in civil resistance research. Although there have been a number of projects cataloging nonviolent resistance campaigns and looking at them either as case studies or in comparisons with small numbers, there have been few studies looking comprehensively at nonviolent campaigns and doing relative comparisons between violent and nonviolent forms of political resistance. 219 I am only aware of two recent studies that attempt to provide a quantitative analysis of the success rates and outcomes of nonviolence. 220 This literature (which begins with Sharp’s *Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973)) has traditionally employed qualitative, case study comparisons between small numbers of historical examples. Chenoweth and Stephan provide the first quantitative comparison of violent and nonviolent campaign success that attempts to be inclusive


of all historical examples in recent history. 221

Chenoweth and Stephan analyzed three kinds of resistance campaigns, anti regime, anti-occupation, and secession (self-determination), that have traditionally been associated with violence tactics. What they found was that campaigns that were largely nonviolent were almost twice as likely as violent campaigns to have either partially or fully successful outcomes with respect to their stated political goals (out of three categories of outcomes: failure, partial success and full success). The only exception to this advantage was in secession campaigns, for which the were no successful nonviolent campaigns. However, only 4 out 41 violent secession campaigns were successful. 222 Chenoweth and Stephan devote an entire chapter of work analyzing and discussing levels of participation in these cases, finding it to be the most important indicator of a resistance movement’s chances of success.

What they find is that nonviolent campaigns tend to have more participants than violent campaigns, averaging 150,000 more participants per campaign than violent campaigns. Nonviolent campaigns have much higher levels of participation, even when controlling for population within the particular states. 223 Participation in nonviolent movements is also more diverse in terms of who makes up the movement. This diversity of participation is a relative strength of nonviolence and contributes to the resiliency of nonviolent campaigns compared to

221 Renat Shaykhutdinov looked at 168 ethnic groups involved in struggles for political autonomy within states between 1945 and 2000. These were minority groups concentrated within particular territories in their state, who sought generate some sort of territorial autonomy arrangement with their state. In quantitatively comparing the outcomes between violent and nonviolent campaigns he also found that nonviolence tactics greatly increased the chances of success, especially compared to violent resistance tactics. I don’t focus on his research here because the scope and the level of his analysis in his article is much smaller than in Chenoweth and Stephan’s book. However, there is some agreement between researchers in the quantitative political science on the effectiveness of nonviolence.

222 Ibid., 7.

223 Ibid., 32-4.
violent ones. For instance, as I discussed in the previous chapter, after martial law suppressed much of the activity of Solidarity by jailing its leadership, the underground press was expanded and in an important sense civil society was maintained by women publishers who were not suspected by the PZPR. In analyzing cases of nonviolent resistance in Iran, Palestine, The Philippines, and Burma, Chenoweth and Stephan found that:

The diversity of participants has been as important as the numbers of participants. Some violent campaigns, like the Philippine insurgency, mobilized tens of thousands of members. However, most of these participants were young men who rallied around the Marxist ideology, thus excluding those who found that ideology unattractive. Perhaps more important from a strategic perspective, the reliance on a single opposition ideology cut the Marxist insurgents off from the opponent regime [in terms of recruiting defectors]. More diverse campaigns which include multiple age groups, classes, occupations, ideologies, and genders, are likelier to have links to members of the regime, such that opportunities to create divisions within the regime become more ubiquitous.

In turn, broad-based participation increased the likelihood that these campaigns could achieve meaningful links within the regime that they used as leverage during the conflict.

Nonviolent movements generate increased mobilization and greater diversity among the mobilized population. Greater numbers and greater diversity within those numbers increase the ability of a campaign to remove the pillars of support that regimes depend on (here Chenoweth and Stephan are using language similar to that of Sharp’s consent theory of power and the idea that consent withdrawal disintegrates power). Nonviolent tactics of disruption are more effective with larger numbers of participants. Diversity, on the other hand, increases the chance for personal connections between resistors and members of the regime and makes a wider variety of strategies of resistance (methods of concentration and dispersion) available to the campaign.

Chenoweth and Stephan attribute the greater levels of participation in nonviolent movements to a number of barriers that participants who may wish to participate in violent

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226Ibid., 192-3.
resistance face. First there are the “physical barriers” to violent campaigns: participants must possess “…endurance, agility, willingness to train, ability handle and use weapons, and often isolation from society at large.” This limits who can participate in violent campaigns to young men, and except for exceptional cases, excludes women and the elderly. 227 On the other hand, the nonviolent tactic of noncooperation, with its wide ranging levels of confrontation with the opposition (strikes and sit-ins vs. boycotts and staying at home) do not face the same physical barriers to participation.

Violent campaigns also suffer from an “informational problem”: violent revolutionaries must remain underground and carry out their actions in secret. They cannot present themselves openly or freely publicize their actions without subjecting themselves to violent suppression by the state. While violent acts tend to be spectacles, the identity of campaign members and actual numbers necessarily remains a secret. This secrecy prevents large levels of participation, because it makes it difficult to access the movement. Nonviolent campaigns do not need to maintain secrecy to such a degree because the risk of repression by the state tends to be lower. In fact, openness tends to encourage participation. Being able to see the participants of the movement invites more participation: “When communities observe open, mass support and collective acts of defiance their perceptions of risk may decline, reducing constraints on participation.” For violent campaigns, “The absence of visible signs of opposition strength is, therefore, problematic from the perspective of recruitment.” 228 Participating in illegal acts of nonviolent resistance becomes less risky for individuals the larger a nonviolent movement gets since the typical forms of repression, like arrest, become impossible to carry out against large numbers. Greater numbers

227 Ibid., 35.
228 Ibid., 35-6.
of violent resisters, on the other hand tends to generate greater military responses, maintaining a high level of physical risk.

From a psychological perspective, violent campaigns also face what they label as a “moral barrier.” Though it is not trivial to decide to carry out nonviolent acts of non-cooperation, many are completely unwilling to carry out violent actions against other human beings. This prevents many who may be sympathetic to the goals of a particular violent movement from participating.

For these reasons, Chenoweth and Stephan argue that nonviolent campaigns develop much greater degrees of diversity in their population of participants, making them more difficult to suppress (more kinds of targets to deal with among the participants) and thus more resilient.

However, while Chenoweth and Stephan identify the barriers to participation in violent campaigns, they do not discuss what makes participation in a nonviolent campaign unique compared to participation in violent resistance campaign, nor what political needs it fulfills, or its particularly communicative character. The fact that nonviolent campaigns tend to have more participation is taken at face value in their analysis. In the previous chapter I argued that participation in Solidarity was promoted by the creation of spaces for communicative action: underground presses, the flying university, the interfactory strike committee and then the extensive development of local Solidarities around the country after the Gdansk Accords. Strikes were used to defend this space for civil society and in turn made participation in it less risky, growing the population of participants very quickly between the summer of 1980 through 1981.

In this chapter I present an argument for why this kind of participation is ethical: First, I will argue that this participation is transformative for the individual resistor. It allows the person

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229 Ibid., 37.
to change from a politically manipulated object to an autonomous subject. Habermas argues that public and private autonomy depend on public will formation through communicative action and control of legislative procedure through sluices from the outside in. I argue that nonviolence creates the possibility for this to occur in situations where political participation has been prohibited, restricted or otherwise made unaccessible. Violent and nonviolent resistance movements develop in situations of irresolvable political conflict where political action is actively suppressed. In cases of decolonization, like the Indian Independence movement, access to institutional channels of change in British politics were denied. In the American civil rights movement, institutional methods of change (like voting) were denied through racist laws, a racist judiciary, and campaigns of terror. Soviet Bloc countries with authoritarian communist government like Poland most clearly faced a ban on political activity, but all nonviolent campaigns have had to take illegal action because legalized institutional pathways for politically activity were being suppressed. These movements occur in situations where a political system, rather than making democratic participation possible, has reduced citizens to objects of manipulation and domination. Participation in nonviolent action allows, as Arendt argues, for the development of political identity. To do so one must not only express an identity, but take action according to it—word and deeds.

Second, as direct result of their transformative effects, nonviolent movements are the development of what Habermas calls communicative power, and as a result have democratic outcomes. Because their power depends on promoting participation, effective nonviolent movements commit themselves to communicative activities, inclusiveness and creating spaces for political involvement. These activities promote the development of relationships and
habits/abilities (in particular, ways of dealing with conflict with the movement) that increases the chances for durable democratic institutions and lasting peace after the conclusion of the campaign. In this respect nonviolent movements are highly distinguishable from violent movements, which develop “specialists of violence” through participation in the movement, who then continue to use their skill sets in violent techniques to resolve conflict after the movement is finished. Chenoweth and Stephan found that a recurrence of civil war in the decade following the conflict was much less likely with nonviolence.

Our central contention, then, is that short-term strategic victories achieved by violent campaigns usually do not translate into democracy or civil peace. Success of a nonviolent campaign, on the other hand, is more likely to produce these long-term outcomes. In fact, strikingly, the long term effects of failed nonviolent campaigns are more favorable to democracy and civil peace than the long-term effects of successful violent campaigns. 230

Their study found that 5 years after a successful violent campaign the probability of a country being democratic was only 5 percent, while 5 years after a successful nonviolent campaign there was a 57 percent chance. Nonviolent resistance movements that occurred within democratic countries also tended to maintain the level of democracy within that country whether the movement was successful or not, in comparison with violent movements which greatly reduced the chances of the country remaining democratic.

Again Chenoweth and Stephan focus on why violent campaigns fail to promote democracy and result in civil wars following the conflict.

Post- war societies must rebuild infrastructure destroyed during the conflict and develop confidence in the financial and political systems to attract future investment and tourism. Additionally, civil wars tend to impose major public-health crises upon societies, even after the conflicts have ended. … In particular studies have found that civil wars create weak governance and civil-society institutions, increase the probability of international conflict, and create more “specialists in violence than in politics. 231

230Ibid., 213.
231Ibid., 206.
They do however suggest that aspects of the participation in nonviolent movements are what result in the long-term positive outcomes.

However, mass participation in nonviolent political change, we suggest, encourages the development of democratic skills and fosters expectations of accountable governance, both of which are less likely when transitions are driven by opposition violence. Second, in countries where nonviolent resistance has succeeded in removing entrenched power, the victorious party has demonstrated that nonviolent means can be effective in winning power. Such victories become part of the collective memory. ....

In sum, nonviolent transitions that have succeeded contain inherent potential to continue to maintain accountability of the new state through civil society using nonviolent means, whereas successful violent insurgencies have premade violent civil society norms and organizations that are antithetical to democratic practices and the nonviolent resolution of inevitable conflicts. In addition, the new elites likewise learn that successful nonviolent campaigns can recur if they fail to deliver public goods. Shared expectations between rulers and ruled in the new regimes enhance certainty about laws and institutions. 232

Because of their limited membership and the kinds of skills they develop among their leadership, violent campaigns do not function as platforms for developing new forms of inclusive, participatory and otherwise democratic politics, whereas nonviolent movements necessarily engage in this activity. Chenoweth and Stephan suggest that nonviolent campaigns result in democratic learning and habit building, and in particular the ability for a population to deal with its conflicts using nonviolent methods. Building off of this suggestion, I now turn to Habermas for his discussion of the importance of a public sphere for the development of private autonomy and communicative power. Although he presents the public sphere as an artifact of a constitutional democracy, I argue that his description also applies to nonviolent movements and shows us what is ethical about them.

232Ibid., 207-11.
Part 2 Public and Private Autonomy in *Between Facts and Norms*

In *Between Facts and Norms* (BFN), Habermas conceptualizes an ideal normative picture of the relationship between the lifeworld and the political system. His theory of democracy arises from the idea that law exists both positively as a fact (if one breaks the law, he or she faces sanctions) and as a norm (laws gain their legitimacy from being socially accepted values). Because of this, law, therefore, becomes the main category for legitimizing society in modernity. Because modernity contains a plurality of world views there is no single, shared religious or cultural understanding of “the good life” (which did exist to some degree, on the other hand, in pre-modern societies) to legitimize society. Society can only be legitimized by democratically formed laws that guarantee both the *private* and *public* autonomy of its citizens. The crucial thesis for Habermas is that law is the setting that can serve as a bridge between the normative or communicatively oriented life-world and the strategically oriented systems of economics and administration.

The legal code not only keeps one foot in the medium of ordinary language, through which everyday communication achieves social integration in the lifeworld; it also accepts messages that originate there and puts these into a form that is comprehensible to the special codes of the power-steered administration and the money-steered economy. To this extent, the language of law, unlike the moral communication restricted to the lifeworld, can function as a transformer in the society-wide communication circulating between system and life world. 233

Law, thus, has an incredibly important function when it is the product of discursive politics.

In a complicated argument, Habermas argues that existence of private autonomy requires public autonomy and vice-versa. He calls this the *co-origination* of private and public autonomy in radical democracy. The legitimacy of law depends on the law guaranteeing private autonomy. However, this right of individual freedom is only an expression of freedom if citizens themselves

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participate in the generation of the laws which interpret their rights of personal freedom. Cohen explains the argument for this by referring to the Janus-faced nature of law. It “…permits individuals to choose whether to comply for strategic or normative reasons … .” 234 When a person decides to obey the law they can do so either because they want to avoid sanction or because they agree with the norm the law expresses. For a person to be free, according to Habermas they must not be required to reveal their motive in doing something permissible under the law. This aspect reflects their ability to treat the law’s positive existence strategically. “Private autonomy extends as far as the legal subject does not have to give others an account or give publicly acceptable reasons for her action plans.” 235 For the other face of the law to exist, however, it must be a possibility that one agrees with the norm that the law expresses. The significant consequence of this observation about law is that in order for law to actually possess a normative/legitimate face, citizens must be democratically involved in the development of the laws that govern their private autonomy. 236

Habermas outlines this procedure of legitimate lawmaking through the democratic principle: “The democratic principle states that only those statutes may claim legitimacy that can meet with the assent (Zustimmung) of all citizens in a discursive process of legislation that in turn has been legally constituted.” 237 To be involved in the development of the law requires the exercise of ones public autonomy through participation in political discourse that informs law creation. However, “co-originally,” public autonomy also depends on private autonomy, because

235Habermas, Between Facts and Norms. Trans. William Rehg 120.
236Ibid., 122-131.
237Ibid., 110.
the existence of public autonomy is only guaranteed by including rights of political participation among private rights. Public autonomy, i.e. rights to political participation, take the form of individual, private rights. “… [B]asic political rights must institutionalize the public use of communicative freedom *in the form* of individual rights.”

Therefore, since private rights must be interpreted democratically by an individual through political participation, and rights to political participation can only be guaranteed through individual rights, *private* and *public autonomy* are co-original.

The principle of discourse can assume the shape of a principle of democracy through the medium of law only insofar as the discourse principle and legal medium interpenetrate and *develop* into a system of rights that brings private and public autonomy into a relation of mutual presupposition.

Cohen summarizes Habermas’s position like this:

So public autonomy requires private autonomy because public autonomy requires a legal order, which order is legitimate only if it ensures equal liberties; and private requires public, because the legal regulation of private autonomy is legitimate only if it emerges from a discursive process that ensure[s] political rights. Thus we have co-originality.

This dual picture of autonomy, which circumvents the debate between a liberal democratic theory focused on private rights and a republican democracy focused on public will, forms the basis for Habermas’s procedural picture of popular sovereignty in radical democracy.

Now, one interesting response to this thesis is to ask, Does the democratic process that allows for the existence of public and private autonomy only occur within the context of a constitutional democracy? (as Habermas’s focus on private legal rights suggests). He does not offer a conceptualization of how this develops in situations of political conflict, where such rights to public/private autonomy are denied. Since the ideal democracy that Habermas describes

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238Ibid., 130.
239Ibid., 129.
240Cohen, "Reflections on Habermas on Democracy", 393.
does not exist anywhere in the world yet, it is very important to consider how the democratic process that allows for public and private autonomy “emerges” in situations where political activity is suppressed. Rather than discussing how citizens deal with being politically suppressed, there is a presumption of existing democratic practices, institutions and the conceptualization of the ideal democratic situation. In reality, the ability to be politically active through communicative action is compromised in all current contexts. This is not to say that Arendt and Habermas don’t deal with political change or conflict in other works, but Habermas’s normative theory of radical democracy in BFN does not deal with revolution. I will discuss Habermas’s treatment of civil disobedience later in the chapter.

When one looks at how nonviolent movements develop their power, there are many shared features with the democratic process that Habermas describes in chapter 8 of BFN, but these processes occur non-institutionally as resistance to political suppression rather than in the context of a constitutional democracy. While the civil resistance literature does not make much use of the democratic theory of Habermas (or other theorists of discursive democracy) I believe that the applicability of these democratic theories can be expanded by considering nonviolent movements.
Part 3 The Public Sphere

Popular sovereignty requires that “all political power derives from the communicative power of its citizens.” In order to develop what Habermas means by communicative power I will first talk about his two track model of democracy. This theory gives a crucial role to the public sphere in the legitimation law. Although nonviolent communicative networks differ in certain ways from the public sphere I will argue that the organization of nonviolent movements has similar critical features and shares the purpose/goal/intention of Habermas’s public sphere.

After describing what Habermas means by the public sphere I will present his idea of communicative power, starting with its roots in Hannah Arendt’s theory of power. I will discuss Jeffery Flynn’s contemporary reading of it and the role of the public sphere in generating it. Although Habermas’s discussion of communicative power and the public sphere are intended to be normative aspirations for democratic states, I argue that nonviolent political action works to generate communicative power in situations where democratic politics have been suppressed.

The two track model of democracy refers to what Habermas calls strong publics and weak publics. Strong publics are the legislative bodies in democratic states (the parliamentary bodies) that are able to generate binding laws. They are the formal, institutionalized bodies which exist primarily to justify “…the selection of a problem and the choice among competing proposals to solve it.” I.e. Strong publics exists to enact laws that deal with social problems.

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242 Ways that the communicative activity of a nonviolent movement differs from Habermas’s strict conceptualization of the public sphere include: 1) it exists both internally to the movement and between the movement and the broader public of nonparticipants (not just in the “public”) and 2) through the strategic disruption nonviolent movements do not remain “weak publics” as the contemporary literature understands the public sphere.

243 Ibid., 307.
On the other hand, informal, procedurally unregulated public spheres are what Habermas calls weak publics. These function as “the vehicle of public opinion” and serve as the “context of discovery” for social problems. Although weak publics by definition lack the ability to directly resolve problems (since they cannot legislate law), they are much better than strong publics at identifying problems, amplifying them to make them visible to the public, and generating normatively oriented solutions to them using communicative reason. A weak public has the advantage of being a medium of unrestricted communication. Here, new problem situations can be perceived more sensitively, discourses aimed at achieving self-understanding can be conducted more widely and expressively, collective identities and need interpretations can be articulated with fewer compulsions than is the case in procedurally regulated public spheres.  

Jeffery Flynn locates weak publics close to the grassroots level, “…which allows them to act as a ‘sounding board’ for the detection of the problems that require treatment by the formal political system.” Flynn also emphasizes that one of the features distinguishing weak publics is that they are not under pressure to make legal decisions like the strong public. Being free from a constraint of immediacy improves their ability to explore possible solutions. He notes Habermas’s claim that “uncoupling communicated opinions from concrete practical obligations tends to have an intellectualizing effect.” Overall, the picture is such that, whereas the “…formal decision making sphere is ‘strong’ in its authorized capacity to act but only has a weak capacity to detect on its own the kinds of problems that require political action”, the public sphere can detect problems “…with its closer relationship to the sphere of the private lives of

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244Ibid., 308.
246Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, Trans. William Rehg 361.
The interaction between the weak and strong public constitutes the two track model of democracy, and Habermas argues that this is grants law legitimacy through the instantiation of public and private autonomies. Because the formal political institution of the parliament is part of the administrative system it is dominated by concerns for efficiency. Thus it is unable to make decisions based on normative reasons, which must instead come from a public sphere emerging from an un-subverted life world.

My understanding of nonviolence departs from Habermas’s framework, however, in that while nonviolent movements develop a public sphere, they do not remain “weak publics,” because in carrying disruptive acts they can force existing legal institutions to change or destroy them. They act as contexts of discovery but move beyond that when they radically transform existing institutions or develop new political institutions. It makes more sense to understand nonviolence as incorporating elements of weak publics as well as strong publics.

As I described in the previous chapter, there was a self supporting relationship between Solidarity's communicative activities (the KOR, underground press, worker education, Solidarity Congress, etc, etc…) and its disruptive activities (the occupational and general strikes). The communicative activities first allowed for a mobilization of the public sphere and for networks to emerge between groups with shared political orientations. Then these networks were able to use strikes to legally enshrine space for this public sphere to continue to exist. When the PZPR (Poland’s communist government) attempted to further suppress the public sphere after the

Gdansk Accords in the Fall of 1980 and Spring of 1981, strikes and threats of general strikes were used to protect those activities. The PZPR was forced to stop its suppression, and in the newly expanded space Solidarity continued its public sphere activities. Solidarity worked on problems of food distribution and on developing a new constitution (Solidarity’s *Programme*) through democratically organized meetings and conventions. By legalizing the public sphere activity in the Gdansk Accords (and in enforcing that legislation through strikes) Solidarity acted as both a *weak* and *strong* public.

In contrast, when Habermas talks about presenting the problems that the public sphere uncovers in a way that disrupts the everyday routine of the government, he does not mean forceful nonviolent disruption. He means something like symbolic protest in the form of civil disobedience (The “outside initiate model” and “crisis consciousness” from pp. 379-384 of BFN). Under my ethical model, nonviolence requires a public sphere to generate public opinion and to develop participation, but by engaging in disruptive acts like strikes it behaves quite contradictory to contemporary understanding of the public sphere.

Charles Taylor, in *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004), describes the public sphere as detached from actual political power. The detachment of the debate from the exercise of political power (actual decision making) is what distinguishes the modern public sphere from ancient republics. In the polis, those who debated with each other were also the ones who came together in the *ekklesia* to make the final decision. For Taylor (and Habermas) the participants in the public sphere are not the politicians who make legislative decisions. Taylor says:

> It is a space of discussion that is self-consciously seen as being outside power. It is supposed to be listened to by power, but it is not itself an exercise of power. … The extrapopolitical status is not just defined negatively, as a lack of power. It is also seen positively: because public opinion is not an exercise of power, it can be ideally disengaged from partisan spirit and rational.
As Warner points out, the rise of the public sphere involves a breach in the old ideal of a social order undivided by conflict and difference. On the contrary, it means that debate breaks out, and continues, involving in principle everybody, and this is perfectly legitimate. The old unity will be gone forever, but a new unity is to be substituted. For the ever-continuing controversy is not meant to be an exercise in power, a quasi-civil war carried on by dialectical means. Its potentially divisive and destructive consequences are offset by the fact that it is a debate outside of power, a rational debate, striving without parti pris to define a common good. … So what the public sphere does is enable the society to come to a common mind, without the mediation of the political sphere, in a discourse of reason outside power, which nevertheless is normative for power. 249

Nonviolence does not completely fit this description of the public sphere. Though it may start out adhering to this conception, by developing and mobilizing a public sphere, nonviolent movements make acts of mass disruption possible and, thus, become powerful and effective. This is different from the way that the public sphere functions within constitutional democracies. But in many respects, nonviolent movements engage in public sphere building.

The public sphere comes into existence, in its theoretically smallest form, when two speakers create an (intersubjective) social space through communicative action. Communicative action means that subjects take a stance toward each other oriented at reaching mutual understanding through the use of public reason (in contrast to taking a goal oriented stance towards each other as during strategic action). “Founded in the communicative action, this spatial structure of simple and episodic encounters can be expanded and rendered more permanent in an abstract form for a larger public of present persons.” 250 Any other speaker is able to enter this space and expand it. 251

What emerges from the public sphere is public opinion. Habermas calls it “a network for communicating information and points of view … [which] coalesce into topically specified


251… Theoretically, See Nancy Fraser’s discussion of competing publics and exclusions from the public sphere for criticisms of this position in {1990}
bundles of *public opinion.*” He makes it clear that what emerges from the public sphere is neither an aggregation of public opinion or compromise, nor a shared and complete consensus about the normative content of life. Those two possibilities represent the liberal and republican models of democracy that fail to adequately describe what democracy should do (republicanism because of the plurality of modernity characterized by the lack of a shared cultural background and liberalism because it fails to account for private/public autonomy).

But the rules of a shared practice of communication are of greater significance for structuring public opinion. Agreement on issues and contributions develops only as the result of more or less exhaustive controversy in which proposals, information, and reasons can be more or less rationally dealt with. In general terms, the discursive level of opinion-formation and the “quality” of the outcome vary with this “more or less” in the “rational” processing of “exhaustive” proposals, information, and reasons. 252

The public generates public opinion about social problems and their possible normative solutions that is reasonable because it follows the procedure of Habermas’s formal pragmatics. A proper public sphere functions discursively.

Solidarity is an excellent historical example for highlighting the communicative basis of nonviolence because Poland’s totalitarian government meant that speech was severely distorted by the government's strategic interests. Not only was the news censored, functioning primarily as propaganda, but all public social groups had to be lead by party members 253. Solidarity’s power and success were directly related to the extent that it challenged the suppression of communication, and thus made political activity possible. In a series of steps starting with activists in the early 1970s, Poland’s public sphere was enlarged to engender greater and greater amounts of participation.


253The Catholic clergy was relatively free of this installed leadership, but but their space for uncensored communication was restricted to mass sermons.
One of central values of communicative action is an inclusiveness of persons, views points and reasons. Habermas’s principle of universalization in his formal pragmatics of argumentation requires first that everyone be allowed to participate without qualification:

- Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse.
- Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.
- Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.
- Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires, and needs.
- No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down [here].

Participants in communicative action must also be oriented toward arriving at shared understanding through the use of reason.

Whereas in strategic action one actor seeks to influence the behavior of another by means of the threat of sanctions or the prospect of gratification in order to cause the interaction to continue as the first actor desires, in communicative action one actor seeks rationally to motivate another by relying on the illocutionary binding/bonding effect (Bindungseffekt) of the offer contained in his speech act.

The fact that a speaker can rationally motivate a hearer to accept such an offer is due not to the validity of what he says but to the speaker’s guarantee that he will will, if necessary, make efforts to redeem the claim that the hearer has accepted.

From its early origins in the writings of Michnik, Kuron and Kolakowski there is an embrace of communicative action as a general strategy for Solidarity. Their antipolitical stance, which purposefully avoided attempts at directly reforming the state was adopted based on a rejection of the instrumentality of state politics during the Cold War and a desire for non-instrumental political relationships. They also realized that including the general population as resisters was necessary, and that there was a desire for this kind of activity in the population. For Kolakowski, participation in civil society was a direct form of resistance and Kuron thought that a large part of Polish society was already taking part in this kind of activity without realizing it or labeling it as such.

255 Ibid., 58.
256 I go into detail about this in the “Antipolitics” and “Reimagining Politics” sections of chapter 4.
The first step in making communicative activity possible and establishing a public sphere was underground publishing. Free from censorship, these newspapers, allowed anyone to freely express their political understandings and required them to be defended by reasons and claims that could be challenged by other writers. Except for the brief period of Solidarity’s legal existence, underground publishing was the medium for political discourse in Poland from 1970-1989.

When the 65 members of the KOR (Workers’ Defense Committee) openly signed a charter, the public sphere of the movement had developed to higher stage of visibility. This allowed interested citizen to find and network with the movement.

The central strategy of Solidarity, independent unions, was also developed communicatively. Worker groups as early as the 1950s had floated the idea. It was then picked up writers in the underground press in the 1970s who further developed arguments for it and attempted to disseminate the idea among workers in various large factories. Gradually, through discussion over a period of decades this idea that independent unions should be “seed” of civil society became a shared political understanding among a wide variety of workers, intellectuals and clergy. As the debate (ongoing today) about who was most responsible for the development of Solidarity, workers or intellectuals, shows, the politics and strategy of the movement went through a long period of debate before being carried in the August, 1980 strikes. \textsuperscript{257} The fact that it is unclear who should be credited for the strategy of independent unions shows that rather than being governed through a top-down intellectual hierarchy, the politics of the movement arose according the inclusive values of communicative action.

\textsuperscript{257}Kubik, “Who Done It: Workers, Intellectuals, or Someone Else? Controversy Over Solidarity's Origins and Social Composition".
The orientation towards developing a public sphere and allowing more Poles to become participants developed organically during the period of massive strikes in August of 1980. When the Gdansk factories went on strike and pulled in factories from all over the country, their first three demands were independent trade unions, the right to strike, and respect for free speech. After independent unions became legalized and local Solidarity unions were developing around the country (as well as rural solidarity), the PZPR made attempts to intimidate and otherwise suppress local political organizing. This lead to the general strikes of October and March. In both instances, Solidarity used its disruptive capability to protect the emerging space of the public sphere.

Finally, the highest level of civil society activity was demonstrated by Solidarity’s congresses held in the summer and fall of 1981, just before martial law was enacted. These meetings were run democratically with delegates from all over the country being able to participate in the formation of a new constitutional document (Solidarity’s *Programme*). In general, the period following the Bydgosc crisis (and the unpopularity of Wałęsa’s single handed decision making lead to a decentralization of movement decision making. The commitment to a communicative stance between participants developed organically as the movement progressed and resulted in massive levels of participation.

Although the public sphere is an intersubjective social space, the structural basis that that furnishes its existence are “…those nongovernmental and noneconomic connections and voluntary associations…” which comprise “a network of associations that institutionalizes problem solving discourses on questions of general interest to society…” Habermas calls this “civil society.” Obviously, the existence of civil society and thus the public sphere depends on

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“freedoms of speech, assembly, and association,” 259 however, whereas Habermas and Flynn focus on formal, institutionalized civil rights, the history of nonviolent action shows that civil society and elements of a public sphere can be generated without such formal rights and often directly against a government’s wishes.

I think this shows something important about the motivation that individuals have for communicative action. Habermas has been attacked for not explaining what motivates citizens to take a “stance” towards each other that attempts to reach mutual understanding, rather than a strategic stance towards each other in a public sphere. Flynn raises this criticism: “This is a strong normative requirement given that members of modern democracies tend to take up the client or consumer role more often than that of citizen.” 260 If Habermas is only arguing that this is possible, it is not much of an issue, but if his argument is that this how democratic power actually or ought to function then Flynn is correct in raising this issue. Since I read Habermas as saying this this how actual democratic power ought to function it raises the question, What motivates participants to take a stance oriented towards understanding with each other?

Nonviolent movements offer a solution to this problem in an important way: For nonviolent movements, strategic interests become synonymous with “taking a stance oriented toward understanding” because effective nonviolent strategy means, at a fundamental level, increasing participation and diversity in the movement.

The existing participants of a nonviolent movement must take a stance oriented toward understanding both toward each other and towards possible future participants and they must encourage anyone who desires so to speak. Participation cannot otherwise be achieved.

260Ibid., 443.
Increasing participation and diversity requires developing shared political understandings between as many people as possible. Without adopting this stance, participation falls apart. This is also why nonviolent movements must cultivate public spheres. Because the effectiveness of disruptive nonviolent action depends on having as many participants as possible and a movement’s resiliency and strategic flexibility depend on the diversity of social groups that participate, to practice effective nonviolence means adopting a communicative stance towards others in order to promote inclusivity. Choosing nonviolent tactics as a strategy, thus, motivates those activists to take a communicative stance towards each other to encourage participation.

Nonviolence must create spaces where “understandings” can develop communicatively.

While opposition movements are notorious for having divided elite leaderships, one of the most important roles a nonviolent mass movement can play is forcing the opposition leaders to unite, even if only temporarily. That way, the opposition has a chance against even brutal regime opponents. 261

Nonviolent movements do not function well with dogmatic political stances. Chenoweth and Stephan cite a number of resistance campaigns that failed because their leadership was inflexible or dogmatic in their expressed politics. People are not “converted” to preexisting politics through nonviolent protest. Nonviolent movements attract participants because they allow for participation in the generation of shared understandings in situations where such political activity was previously banned. They allow for private and public autonomy to develop in situations where it has been actively suppressed. So, in a significant sense, nonviolent movement can be understood the as forceful creation (in situations of conflict with “systems”) of the communicative lifeworld that Habermas calls the unfinished project of modernity.

Nonviolent tactics (both methods of concentration and dispersion as Chenoweth and Stephan classify them) are kinds of action that cannot be carried out through enforced authority.

They are strictly voluntary. How can a strike, a sit-in or a boycott be enforced nonviolently? Attempts at forcing people to participate in them through violence, pressure or other kinds of sanctions simply drives support and participation away. There is no institutional structure that can hand out sanctions to participants/non-participants for unwanted behavior. It is self defeating. Unlike violent political action, which can operate militarily using a hierarchy of authority with the possibility for violent sanctions for participants who fail to carry out orders and material rewards for those who do, a nonviolent movement has no means of enforcing participation. Instrumentally generated participation is not a feature of nonviolent movements. Thus, nonviolent mobilization has a necessarily voluntary character based on agreement or consensus with the movement’s political goals. To generate this participation nonviolent movements depend on communicative action that follows the principles of Habermas’s discourse ethics: The values of the movement only get transformed into participation (and thus strategic effectiveness) when they are acceptable to the widest range of possible participants through rational and uncoerced discourse.262

262This is not to say that nonviolent movements never engage in “campaign propaganda” or other distorted forms of communication. However, because of the structure of the campaign the “exclusive” self-interest of particular individuals cannot dominate if the movement hopes to be effective. It must appeal to the widest range of self-interests possible to generate participation. Gay Seidman has argued that nonviolent participation in South Africa’s Anti-Apartheid movement was sometimes generated coercively and argues that a “blurred line” separated violent and nonviolent action. My primary response is that threats against those who fail to participate are violent and compromise the effectiveness of a nonviolent campaign because they will drive away participants in the long run. Kurt Schock also address Seidman’s “blurred lines” argument in (Schock 2003). Gay W Seidman, "Blurred Lines: Nonviolence in South Africa", PS: Political Science & Politics 33, no. 02 (2000): 161-168.
Part 4 Communicative Power, tracing from Arendt to Habermas

Having discussed how nonviolence depends on generating the public sphere, I now turn to the theory of communicative power. The public sphere has two kinds of effects in Habermas’s discursive theory of democracy. 1) It disrupts the informal circulation of power (which normally flows from the center—governmental institutions, organizations, etc etc—to the periphery, or citizenry). 2) This allows the issues of the lifeworld to influence the decisions of the political system. These two effects satisfy the need for private autonomy to be involved in the interpretation of its own freedom through public autonomy. The public sphere acts like a “sluice,” transferring public opinion and normative reasons from the periphery to the center resulting in law that is legitimate because it is a result of communicative procedures and lifeworld concerns. Because of this, the legal system takes on a special role for Habermas as the only system that is legitimate and one which can control and subvert other systems. Since communicative practices result in law that sets limits on systems, Habermas calls this phenomenon communicative power.

In this section I adapt the concept of communicative power to describe the kind of power that nonviolent movements develop. I will attempt to answer one of my original questions about nonviolence, which is How can nonviolent movements be distinguished from violent movements when both seem to operate using disruptive instrumental actions? Strikes, boycotts and other kinds of nonviolent actions negatively effect opposing institutions. Is the power to do this ethical? I argue that nonviolent movements must develop communicative power within the movement in order to carry out the disruptive forms of nonviolent action that the strategic paradigm and the civil resistance literature focus on. I think the effectiveness of nonviolent
movements cannot be explained without using a communicative framework. But, this fundamental character of nonviolent power is also what makes it an ethical kind of politics in situations of conflict, especially in comparison with violent action.

Since the idea of communicative power has deep roots in Arendt’s political thought (which Habermas himself discusses both in Between Facts and Norms and in his article on Arendt in Philosophical-Political Profiles) I begin by discussing Arendt’s theory of power. In The Human Condition and On Violence she distinguishes domination and violence from communicatively generated power. For her, power is narrowly understood as inherently political, communicative and thus, not instrumental. Its legitimacy arises from its communicative nature, and it serves as a politically creative force (birth or natality) because it does not deal instrumentality with pre-existing ends. In this section I present the Arendt’s conception of power, the space-of-appearances, and her argument for the non-instrumentality of politics. I argue that these concepts also describe nonviolence and discuss how they lead into Habermas’s concept of communicative power.

In contrast to the more common, Weberian, notion of power as power-over, in which having power means being able to exert one’s will to get others to do something they would otherwise not do, Hannah Arendt’s notion of power is intersubjective and oriented around communication. She presents this concept of power in both The Human Condition and in her essay On Violence, in which she specifically contrasts power with violence. “Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps
together.” 263 Whereas violence has an instrumental, coercive character, and is close to strength in its ability to be wielded individually, power only exists where there is intersubjective agreement around a public purpose. “Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds are not brutal, where words are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.” 264 Power, for Arendt, is fundamentally communication that leads to action. It involves convincing others through the sincere presentation of oneself through speech and the use of reasons. It rests on persuasion among the plurality of agents, and only exists in cases where speech is deployed to articulate motives. Arendt claims that this gives power legitimacy. Power does not need to be justified. It can only exist in a legitimate form due to the “rationally binding commitments that arise out of a process of free and undistorted communication.” 265 So we can see here a direct inspiration of Habermas’s radical democratic conception of communicative power.

Arendt holds that politics (and power as she has conceived it) cannot be instrumental. She argues that it cannot be purely self interested, since the ends are not known in advance. She calls instrumental reasoning cognition. It relies on taking means to achieve predetermined ends within existing frameworks. Politics, on the other hand, attempts to achieve something outside of existing frameworks, or to establish new frameworks. What the ends will turn out to be can never be known in advance. The three characteristics of politics for Arendt are “the unpredictability of its outcome, the irreversibility of the process, and the anonymity of its authors.” 266 Means/end

263Arendt, On Violence 44.
266Arendt, The Human Condition 220.
(instrumental) reasoning is not applicable to the transformation of frameworks as a whole. It can only be used within existing frameworks, where the ends have already been predetermined. An important consequence of this position for Arendt (and the problem with totalitarianism and other instrumental forms of politics) is that the character of the means employed in politics is more important than the projected ends.

According to Arendt, instrumental approaches to politics were the cause of the totalitarianism she fled from in Europe. Purely strategic attempts at politics results in tyranny and totalitarianism. Under her conception of power, such types of government are actually not political at all, but are characterized by their lack of politics and thus, power.

Montesquieu realized that the outstanding characteristic of tyranny was that it rested on isolation—on the isolation of the tyrant from his subjects and the isolation of the subjects from each other through mutual fear and suspicion—and hence tyranny was not one form of government among others but contradicted the essential human condition of plurality, the acting and speaking together, which is the condition of all forms of political organization. Tyranny prevents the development of power, not only in a particular segment of the realm but in its entirety; it generates, in other words, impotence as naturally as other bodies politic generate power. 267

In this analysis, we can see Arendt directly rejecting a power-over conception of power. Getting someone to obey is the relevant capacity of dictatorships. What tyranny fears, and which it tries to destroy through the use of violence is the space of appearance that is the simultaneous and physical manifestation of power.

This conception of politics and power highlights important aspects of being a participants in a nonviolent movement as well. As I argued earlier, the ability to be involved in the creation of new politics is one of the most attractive features of a nonviolent, and serves as the motivation for taking a communicative stance and the discipline to keep a movement nonviolent. Communicative rationality (not simply instrumental rationality in the pursuit of a dogmatic

267Ibid., 202.
politics) must be exercised. Furthermore, while individual interests are often satisfied through participation in a movement, individual interests cannot come to instrumentally dominate the goals and approaches of a nonviolent movement. The interests must be common or participation dissipates.

This explains the reactions within Solidarity after Wałęsa single-handedly decided to call off the general strike that was scheduled as a response to the Bydgosc crisis in March 1981. That turning point lead away from the centralized leadership of Wałęsa and his advisors toward a much more inclusive and democratic decision making structure in Solidarity for the remainder of 1981. Although a centralized leadership structure was the most effective at instrumentally dealing with communist government through swiftly organized disruptive tactics, the trajectory of the movement had always been toward increasing political participation among it participants. Wałęsa, in demonstrating to the PZPR that he could, on his own, dismiss the general strikes, had instrumentalized the movement for the political goals he viewed as most important to a degree that began to clash with the movement's identity as a platform for political participation. Maintaining a centralized decision making structure was in conflict with the participatory mechanisms of the movement.

The idea of the space of appearances, where individuals freely discuss social issues and reveal their own personal identities in their approaches to solving them, is the third connection I’d like to make between Arendt, Habermas and nonviolence. Totalitarianism displaces politics with violence by both lying to its citizens, and actively suppressing the existence of the space of appearances. Habermas (who cites Arendt at the end of this paragraph in Between Facts and Norms) expresses a similar observation:
The tight connection between an autonomous civil society and an integral private sphere stands out even more clearly when contrasted with totalitarian societies of bureaucratic socialism. Here a panoptic state not only directly controls the bureaucratically desiccated public sphere, it also undermines the private basis of this public sphere. … Communicative rationality is thus destroyed simultaneously in both public and private contexts of communication.  

Because Poland (as the Peoples Republic of Poland, PZPR) existed under the communist totalitarianism of “the party” and more broadly under the threat of the Soviet Union, its nonviolent resistance movement against totalitarianism is a revealing example of nonviolent techniques being used to created the a space of appearance in Arendt’s sense.  

According to Arendt, power creates a space of appearances, and in many places she refers to their simultaneous existence. One depends on the other. “Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence.” At the same time power only exists while humans are engaged in activity (speech) in a space of appearances. “… [P]ower springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse.”  

It must continually be recreated by action. So, for Arendt, power means action that is decided upon through speech (“word and deed”) in a space of appearances under conditions of plurality. The space of appearances, being a place where one's self or identity is revealed is similar to Habermas’s “sincerity, rightness and truth criteria” for communicative action. Both Arendt and Habermas share the idea that politics, therefore, is not fundamentally instrumental, but about using communication to generate intersubjective agreement.  

My position is that nonviolent movements are fundamentally, attempts to make politics, in Arendt’s communicative sense of power and the space of appearances, possible in situations where it has been suppressed. Nonviolence, through its need to generate participation and its goal

268 Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, Trans. William Rehg 369.

269 Arendt, The Human Condition 200.
of removing the opposition is an activity that connects word and deed. It allows for the development of political identity within a newly created space of appearances.

Why does nonviolent action create these communicative possibilities whereas violent resistance does not? Sharp repeatedly argues that violence tends to drive away support for a movement, whereas nonviolence tends to generate support and there is evidence that this is the case: In almost every case of terrorism, the public reaction to the act is to associate the act not with the professed political goal of the terrorists, but the idea that the terrorists want to destroy the way of life or the actual people whom they have terrorized. 270

There other explanations for why less extreme, non-terroristic forms of violence (for example, the hypothetical example of blowing up train yards to paralyze distribution systems) fail to generate support among a population. These include the claims that there is a generalized social inhibition against participating in violence, that there is an increased personal risk created by participating in violence, and that participants tend to lack access to the means of violence. Chenoweth notes that, historically, almost all successful violent insurgencies needed and relied upon external material support.

However, the most important explanation is the prohibition against communicative action that violent movements operate under. Violent resistance, unfortunately, depends a lot on secrecy and has much higher barriers to participation compared to nonviolent movements.

Third, Successful campaigns that rely primarily on violent methods are more likely to operate by means of secrecy and martial values. Such values tend to reinforce themselves in the new regime, leaving little room for dissent or the establishment of consensual institutions that are necessary to manage conflicts and power relationships nonviolently. 271

270Erica Chenoweth and Adria Lawrence, Rethinking Violence: States and Non-state Actors in Conflict (MIT Press, 2010).

The age and gender barriers to participating in violent resistance do not exist for nonviolent movements. A violent movement must train individuals and keep them on for a long time before that have the ability and the trustworthiness to carry out acts of violent resistance. During this time, they must often be isolated in some way from their family and the general population. (Mother: “Where are you going today, son?” Son: “Oh, I’m learning how to build and place explosives, mom.”) Nonviolent tactics, although requiring training have a characteristic of relative openness and not secrecy. The strike, boycott and sit-in are tactics that are accessible and visible in a way that violent attacks or bombings cannot be. While terrorism creates instants of spectacle, nonviolent movements have a persistent visibility and accessibility. Nonviolent movements use their disruptive tactics to create a space for dialogue. In Poland, strikes protected the burgeoning civil society against totalitarian suppression. The sit-ins and boycotts of the Civil Rights movement both engaged the wider public to consider the politics of the movement and made it likely that a legal reconsideration of the rights of African Americans would take place for the first time in more than a century. The openness shows that the nonviolent disruption serves to create the space of appearance in situations where politics has been previously unable to function.

There are many links to trace from Arendt’s theory of power to Habermas’s theory of communicative power in *Between Facts and Norms*. First, both think that politics depends fundamentally on participation that is grounded in communication, particularly, everyday language, or speech. Second, both believe that politics cannot be fundamentally understood using a conception of instrumental rationality. Individual self interest gives way to rational, shared

272 Chenoweth and Lawrence, *Rethinking Violence: States and Non-state Actors in Conflict*. and Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking about Fundamentals*
political understanding. Habermas, however, transforms and develops Arendt’s idea of communicative power in a number of ways.

In *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, Habermas praises Arendt’s conception of power due to its grounding in undistorted communication. “She wants to read off the general structures of an unimpaired intersubjectivity in the formal properties of communicative action or praxis.” He discusses how she opposes the Weberian notion of strategic power by recasting it as violence, and notes that while systems theory thinkers (Talcott Parsons is his example) attempt to subsume what Arendt calls *power* and what she calls *violence* under a single theory of power (Parsons: “the capacity of a social system to achieve its goals”), “…the specific factor that separates the power of unifying discourse from instrumentally exercised violence is lost.” 273 However, locating politics in a pure notion of power raises two main issues for Habermas. One problem is that in completely eliminating strategic action from her conception of politics she fails to address situations where apparent legitimacy gets generated through ideological disruptions of communication. A second problem, according to Habermas, is that Arendt inadequately explains how consensus gets formed in the space of appearances by neglecting to establish how opinion gets validated.

Habermas claims that by eliminating all strategic action from politics she doesn’t adequately explain how governments without actual legitimacy are able to continue their domination. Without proper politics, (which he says Arendt has reduced to the Aristotelian notion of praxis: “…the mutual speech and mutual action of individuals with one another,…”) he reasons there must be some other cause that allows them to appear legitimate which Arendt fails

to acknowledge in her thesis. Habermas argues that their apparent legitimacy gets generated through ideology which is best understood as structural violence that is built into political institutions. Structural violence is violence because “it blocks in an unnoticed fashion those communications” which are necessary for legitimation through the generation of ideologies that are taken as personal convictions but are actually self deceptive about reality. This issue of ideology or false consciousness is not taken up by Arendt in her description of politics leading to a problem in explaining how political dominance can persist without actual legitimacy. Habermas suggests expanding Arendt’s communicative concept of power by explaining that “In systematically restricted communications, the participants form convictions that are free from compulsion from a subjective point of view but are illusionary; thereby they engender a power, which, as soon as it is institutionalized, can also be turned against the participants.” This criticism introduces ideology as an explanation for what Habermas would later call the “system colonizing the life world” or (in *Between Facts and Norms*) the normal circulation of power from system interests in the center outward to the periphery.

Although in this case Habermas raises an important issue about how to theoretically address the ideological generation of the appearance of legitimacy, I think Arendt’s often stated position that while “Violence can always destroy power; … What can never grow out of it is power,” contains the possibility of responding to Habermas’s objection. Though there may seem to be power generated through strategic use of ideology, she might reply that such governments are actually ineffective in the long run demonstrating their lack of actual power

274Ibid., 179.
275Ibid., 183-4.
despite appearing legitimate and thus functioning for a short period (a historical point that is of course debatable). What this criticism does highlight, importantly, is that Habermas has a wider conception of power than Arendt’s narrow, communication based definition, even though Habermas incorporates Arendt’s conception in his own theory of “communicative power.”

A related issue that has been raised about Arendt’s conception of legitimacy and politics is as follows: Arendt’s conception of politics is strong in her description of the generative act of power—linking speech with deed in the space of appearances. This is a powerful, existential picture of the birth moment of democratic creativity that can be used to solve social problems. However, it reaches a limit when moving on to discuss particularly how this fundamental form of politics should be institutionalized in the modern world. Habermas’s project in *Between Facts and Norms* (with its strong and weak publics) seems precisely to carry out a description of institutions and social phenomena that together can constitute a democracy formed around communicative action. Since law is this special medium through which the lifeworld can “countersteer” the system, it makes sense to think of the democratic process of developing legitimate laws as communicative power. He’s carrying on where Arendt leaves off. Speaking about Arendt in *Between Facts and Norms*, he says

… with the concept of communicative power, we get hold of only the emergence of political power, not the administrative employment of already constituted power, that is, the process of exercising power. … Politics cannot coincide as a whole with the practice of those who talk to one another in order to act in a politically autonomous manner. The exercise of political autonomy implies the discursive formation of a common will, not the implementation of the laws issuing therefrom. The concept of the political in its full sense also includes the use of administrative power,… This leads me to propose that we view law as a medium through which communicative power is translated into administrative power. 277

Arendt does not have an institutional description of how politics should function. In fact she talks about power and the space of appearances pre-dating any political institutions (Arendt 1958,

199)), and in some places she expresses skepticism about whether the institutional results of
democratic politics actually function as democratic politics itself. Some have attacked her as a
critic of “American Constitutional Democracy” because Arendt thinks that the lack of ongoing
participation by the citizens means that actual political activity only occurred during the
American Revolution (and during other revolutionary periods like the Civil Rights movement)
and does not occur in the institutionalized, everyday governmental processes. Her criterion of a
space of appearances and its communicative orientation seems like a high threshold for politics
from the perspective of a merely voting American citizen.

Habermas also expresses a form of this criticism of Arendt in his *Philosophical-Political
Profile* of her communicative theory of power:

…She becomes a victim of a concept of politics that is not applicable to modern relationships when she
asserts that “the intrusion of social and economic matters into the public realm, the transformation of
government into administration, the replacement of personal rule by bureaucratic resources, and the
attending transmutation of laws into decrees” has to negate an initiative toward a politically active public
sphere and toward radical democracy.  

However, the same criticism can levied against Habermas’s own description of democracy
occurring through the public sphere. Josh Cohen brings this up as the “problem of possibility”
for Habermas’s argument in *Between Facts and Norms*: it seems like Habermas may be arguing
that radical democracy, as he has described it, is only possible when the public sphere gets
mobilized under particular circumstances of crisis. This then would be then the same overall
position as Arendt’s; a skepticism that real politics can be institutionalized in an everyday format.

Cohen thinks a disappointing conclusion to *Between Facts and Norms* would be that

…the argument does make democracy, as reconceived, foreign to the settled institutional routines of a
modern polity. Except for the exception conditions in which associations break free from the
institutionalized circuit of power, so to speak, the system rules: [making the argument] a reconception with

278 Habermas, *Philosophical-political Profiles* 178.
Of course Cohen does not think that *Between Facts and Norms* has such a limited scope, but it does show that both Habermas and Arendt can be criticized for presenting “unrealistic” expectations for democratic participation. I do not bring this issue up here to debate whether “actual” democratic politics can exist institutionally, but to show why nonviolence is such an important political phenomenon to focus on. Nonviolence is extremely relevant when it is understood as the method of political change that involves the mobilization of the public sphere in a circumstance of crisis.

Another criticism, which comes from Habermas’s central, micro theory of formal pragmatics in *Theory of Communicative Action*, is that Arendt does not explain what grounds decision making in the public sphere. She has according to Habermas an “outmoded concept of theoretical knowledge” under which opinion rather than argument is the central discursive feature of communication and eventually results in “some impartial generality.” The transition from opinion to knowledge and, thus, communicative power is not grounded in arguments, for Arendt, but in ability to “make and keep promises.” 280 About this Habermas says that she “… retreats into the tradition of natural right,” because “She regards as the basis of power the contract concluded between free and equal persons, by which the parties are mutually obligated to one another.” 281 I am not qualified to defend Arendt against this objection as I am more familiar with Habermas’s formal pragmatics and the “shared perspective on the validity of goals” basis for action in his discourse theory than the natural rights tradition, however, I do think it

280Habermas, *Philosophical-political Profiles* 184. and Arendt, *The Human Condition* 244.
281Habermas, *Philosophical-political Profiles* 185.
demonstrates that the epistemological foundation of Habermas’s political theory is more developed than Arendt’s.

Where Habermas does directly build off of Arendt is in *Between Facts and Norms*. He first agrees strongly with the Arendt’s thesis about the legitimacy of power, stating that for law to possess legitimacy, “…then a jurisgenerative communicative power must underlie the administrative power of the government.” He has a nice reconception of the space of appearances using the framework of his theory of communicative action: Unhindered communication allows for rational opinion and will formation. This cognitive event in turn creates a “motivating force,” which he likens to Arendt’s idea of power. “The shared belief that is produced or even just reinforced, between speaker and hearer by the intersubjective recognition of a validity claim raised in a speech act implies a tacit acceptance of obligations relevant for action;…” Because of this, Arendt’s many analyses of revolutionary movements and civil disobedience highlight a phenomenon that Habermas is theorizing in *Between Facts and Norms*: “the close kinship of communicative action with the production of legitimate law.”

Thus, a comparison of Habermas and Arendt shows that Habermas agrees fundamentally with Arendt’s communicative theory of political power, and her idea that the justification of law lies in the fundamental legitimacy of intersubjective power. Where he expands on Arendt is in his conception law as a medium through which communicative power gets turned into administrative power, an institutional conceptualization that doesn’t exist for Arendt’s more narrow conception of power. Because of its broader scope, Habermas’s notion of power is able to incorporate more of the spectrum of nonviolent actions than Arendt’s concept of power. I’ve

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conceived of nonviolent power, fundamentally, as a kind of power-to (communicative power) that can then act and exert power-over an opposition through acts of disruption. Since Habermas allows for a strategic aspect to power, his framework allows for my conception of nonviolent power, whereas Arendt’s very specific conception of power only describes the communicative aspect of nonviolent power.

So, having discussed the roots of communicative power in Arendt, let us return to Habermas’s overall description of communicative power. For Habermas, communicative power is 1) the development of rational opinion and will formation in the public sphere that 2) gets transformed into administrative power through “sluices” from the periphery that 3) function to inform the formal administration’s development of law. The weak public in the public sphere, which has the ability to discover and provide normative solutions to social problems is the alarm or sounding board for the strong public (parliament) which has the ability to generate binding laws. Habermas’s theory of discourse, (D) “just those action norms are valid to which all possibly affected could agree as participants in rational discourses,” gets applied to law and changes into the principle of democracy: “Only those statutes may claim legitimacy that can meet with the assent of all citizens in a discursive process of legislation that in turn has been legally constituted.” 283 A constitutional state makes power legitimate by: “…strip[ping] such power of its violent substance by rationalizing it.” 284 Because it helps develop the legislation that determines public and private autonomy, and because it is generated communicatively, Habermas calls public opinion and will formation in undistorted public spheres, communicative

283Ibid., 107,110.
284Ibid., 148.
power. Like the law, it has both a normative component in its rational formation and an existence (fact) component in that it informs the development of law.

This wide scope for the concept of communicative power has given rise to a debate about specifically what Habermas is referring to by it. Under a “wide reading” of communicative power, (which is how I’ve been describing communicative power), “communicative power originates in the public sphere, even if only residing there in a diffuse manner, and then ‘takes shape’ in authoritative decisions of a democratic institution.” 285 Evidence for this can be found in statements like this:

Although such power originates in autonomous public spheres, it must take shape in the decisions of democratic institutions of opinion- and will- formation inasmuch as the responsibility for momentous decisions demands clear institutional accountability. 286

However, Habermas also makes statements that discourage such a wide reading of where communicative power resides, raising a question of whether it is limited to formal administrative bodies. According to Flynn, “A narrow reading of the role of communicative power would locate its generation primarily in the institutions authorized to make binding decision.” 287 This reading is indicated by the passage where Habermas says

Within the boundaries of the public sphere, or at least a liberal public sphere, actors can acquire only influence, not political power. … But public influence is transformed into communicative power only after it passes through the filters of the institutionalized procedures of democratic opinion-and will-formation and enters through parliamentary debates into legitimate lawmaking. 288

Flynn’s believes the issue of where communicative power lies arises from the fact that (as I discussed above in relation to Arendt), Habermas is trying to accommodate both the normative

286 Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, Trans. William Rehg 486.
aspects (based in communicative action) and the institutional results in a single concept. Thus,

The normative ideal that he presents does not clearly differentiate between the ideal of the discursive formation of communicative power by citizens, on the one hand, and the requirements of democratic legitimacy associated with deliberative bodies authorized to make binding decisions, on the other. 289

Inasmuch as my project is attempting to provide a normative picture of the kind of power that nonviolent movements generate, and since such movements take place outside of state institutional structures, I am committed to wide reading of communicative power in BFN. To support such a reading, which maintains the radical democratic, popular sovereignty essence of BFN, I agree that (as Flynn characterizes Habermas) “revitalized public spheres would have to rival both the economic and administrative systems, while not overtaking the functions of either.” 290 In fact, nonviolent action is one of the most important example of communicative power functioning outside-of, and against institutional structures.

So how is Habermas’s framework also a description of nonviolence? Do nonviolent movements follow the discourse principle? I argue that nonviolence shares many features with what Habermas calls communicative power. Although it occurs outside of the institutional boundaries of constitutionally democratic state, it too involves rational opinion and will formation that gets transformed into administrative power or law (when a movement is successful). It is effective at changing political institutions and thus must be understood as power.

The power of nonviolent movements gets developed and operates in similarly to communicative power. Nonviolent movements must create conditions in which public opinion can be generated through communicative action in order to attract participation. Dogmatic or

290 Ibid., 451.
authoritative presentations of politics will not work for nonviolent movements. Their participants, must, to some degree adopt a communicative stance towards each other and the larger public for the sake of developing participation in the movement. Nonviolent action, at its core must be oriented toward developing and maintaining a public sphere. Participants must adopt the communicative presuppositions expressed in Habermas’s discourse principle to create the chance of a movement becoming powerful. Without an active public sphere, a movement has no ability to increase participation and gain more disruptive capability. Because the effectiveness of a movement also depends on a diversity of participation from many social groups, it must foster an inclusive politics. These are the same values that Habermas uses to characterize communicative power.

Furthermore, nonviolent movements exist both normatively and as a fact (to borrow Habermas’s description of law). They possess disruptive capability (fact) that can overturn existing institutions, but this disruptive capability gets generated rationally through communicative actions. Just as the constitutional state makes power legitimate by rationalizing it, a nonviolent campaign’s disruptive actions are legitimated through discursive rationalization necessary to attract participants. In choosing to use nonviolent tactics, participants commit themselves to developing communicative power—there is no other way to motivate and coordinate action. Violent resistance movements are less effective than nonviolent ones because the preconditions of violent action suppress communicative relationships between participants and prevent communicative power from developing.

The transformation of a rational public will into law occurred for Solidarity both when Gdansk Accords of 1980 were ratified and when its members became able to participate in
Poland’s official legislature in 1989—eventually leading to a complete replacement of the communist government. I believe however that this description applies to all successful nonviolent movements—they give rise to new forms of institutionalized politics.
One final aspect of *Between Facts and Norms* that I want to discuss is the section where Habermas grounds his argument for the possibility of radical democracy in civil disobedience (pp. 380-384). This section highlights how the civil resistance literature addresses some of the gaps on political change in situations of conflict in Habermas’s theory. I argue that nonviolent action serves as the strongest example for the possibility of radical democracy.

According to Habermas, sub-institutional protest movements are a way that the public sphere gets mobilized around public controversies even in situations where a public sphere is “more or less power ridden” (meaning that power is flowing from the economic and bureaucratic system out to the periphery). Crisis has the effect of consolidating “scattered critical potentials” into mobilized public spheres that can influence the formal administration. Civil disobedience for Habermas is an unconventional, symbolic rule violation that is used for “obtaining more of a hearing and greater media influence for oppositional arguments” in places with liberal public spheres.

On one hand Habermas expresses a position similar to my position about the effects of choosing to use nonviolent techniques. “Independent of the current object of controversy, civil disobedience is also always an implicit appeal to connect organized political will formation with the communicative processes of the public sphere.” On the other hand, Habermas adopts the problematic viewpoint that civil disobedience is primarily *symbolic* and works through persuasion. Civil disobedience works in two ways, he says: Its participants “…appeal to office holders and parliamentary representatives to reopen formally concluded political deliberations so
that their decisions may possibly be revised in view of the continuing public criticism,” and “they appeal ‘…to the sense of justice of the majority of the community,’ as Rawls put it, … .”

To back up his position Habermas cites a definition of civil disobedience the that Cohen and Arrato provide, which states that “The aim of civil disobedience is to persuade the public opinion in civil society and political society … that a particular law or policy is illegitimate and a change is warranted.” For Habermas, civil disobedience is a phenomenon that occurs within a constitutional democracy when the public sphere has become “power-ridden” by systemic interests. While that is a place where nonviolence can work this, unfortunately, narrow view ignores how nonviolent movements have forcefully generated their own public spheres within context of suppression by authoritarian political regimes. Nonviolence often functions coercively to generate such space, completely bypassing the need to convince the political system to allow for its existence.

Furthermore, Habermas does not have a clear explanation of how a mobilized public sphere actually influences the law making institutions. He speaks about them persuading the legislators, and that the influence of the law makers depending on the approval of the public:

…[O]ne can say that even in more or less power-ridden public spheres, the power relations shift as soon as the perception of the relevant social problems evokes a crisis consciousness at the periphery. If actors from civil society then join together, formulate the relevant issue, and promote in the public sphere, their efforts can be successful, because the endogenous mobilization of the public sphere activates and otherwise latent dependency built into the internal structure of every public sphere, a dependency also present in the normative self-understanding of the mass media: the players in the arena owe their influence to the approval of those in the gallery. At the very least, one can say that insofar as a rationalized lifeworld supports the development of a liberal public sphere by furnishing it with a solid foundation in civil society, the authority of a position taking public is strengthened in the course of escalating public controversies. Under the conditions of a liberal public sphere, informal public communication accomplishes two things in cases in which mobilization depends on crisis. On the one hand, it prevents the accumulation of indoctrinated masses that are seduced by populist leaders. On the other hand, it pulls together the scattered

292 Cohen and Arato, , "Civil Society and Political Theory".
critical potentials of a public that was only abstractly held together by the public media, and it helps this public have a political influence on institutionalized opinion- and will-formation. 293

But Habermas’s explanation here only applies to constitutional democracies with liberal public spheres. It ignores how nonviolent movements have forced oppositional institutions to accommodate their “public opinion” by threatening to, or actually removing “pillars of support” through acts of disruption. There is no discussion of how nonviolent movements have actually established constitutional democracy in situation of political repression. Habermas describes how a liberal public sphere (not one arising despite conditions of totalitarianism) can influence law making bodies. A survey of nonviolent history reveals examples nonviolent campaigns (mobilized publics) successfully changing all types of governments through mechanisms much more intense than influence. Nonviolent action is the technique through which communicatively functioning public spheres can be brought into existence, even under authoritarian conditions. For this reason, I think understanding the mechanisms by which nonviolent movements create political change (the techniques of concentration and dispersion; Sharp’s explanation of the nonviolent mechanisms of accommodation, coercion, and disintegration) increases the scope of applicability of Habermas’s democratic theory. The strategic literature on nonviolence provides a crucial understanding of how the public opinion and will formation of communicative politics can exercise popular sovereignty, even in authoritarian contexts outside of constitutional democracies.

Nonviolence is the activity of building communicative relationships between resistors in order to develop shared political understandings and make mass disruption of existing institutions possible. The communicative basis of nonviolent action explains how mass forms of

293 Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, Trans. William Rehg 382.
disruption become collectivized, allowing movements to change existing political institutions. This makes nonviolence fundamentally about the development of communicative power. Nonviolent movements must generate these communicative relationships between their participants and foster a politics inclusive of the wider public in order to generate and maintain the possibility of disruptive acts. Because the necessity of this communicative orientation to the effectiveness of nonviolence, and because communicative action fosters the existence of public and private autonomy in individuals, nonviolence is an ethical form of political change.
Chapter Conclusion

Where does an ethical conception of nonviolence leave the moral and strategic paradigms of nonviolence? One way of describing this project is as an attempt to both incorporate the insights and move beyond the limitations in those two paradigms in order to provide a more complete conception of nonviolence. Building off the strategic paradigm I argue that nonviolence does necessarily involve disruptive action, though I disagree with its narrowly instrumental framework. My final relationship to the moral paradigm is little bit more complicated to articulate, however. While I maintain my stance that conversion is the incorrect way to describe the mechanisms by which nonviolence succeeds, it is the case that nonviolent movements do involve “convincing,” “consensus building,” and, one could say, conversion of people to a shared political understanding of the movement (although the term ‘conversion’ lacks the rational emphasis that communicative action has). While I believe this occurs discursively between participants of movement, and not of the basis of witnessed suffering occurring between and opponent and a resistor, one can argue that the moral paradigm at least has a moral conception—something completely lacking the strategic paradigm. Both the moral and strategic paradigms are one-sided social theories, lacking either a conception of power or a moral framework.

The ethical conception of nonviolence refers to something more than universal morality (the prohibition on killing for instance) because nonviolence is a kind of political power. Nonviolence is not just a kind of pacifism: it can result in new legislation and even new political institutions. On the other hand, it is not adequately conceptualized as an instrumental politics because of its particularly communicative mechanism of participation. I adopted the term ethical, in the first place, to acknowledge the normative character of nonviolence while still
distinguishing my conception from the moral paradigm. I conclude however that nonviolence is actually an important aspect of what Hegel calls *ethical life*. It is a kind of social action that creates condition under which morality is possible by altering and creating political institutions. Hegel and Habermas’s social and political theories are, in one respect, reactions to Kant’s lack of explanation of the conditions which make living morally possible. For Hegel, compatibility of the individual subject with “the good” required moving past personal morality to the ethical. They both discuss the institutional context and the importance of power to making acting according to a universal morality possible.

Ethical life is the Idea of freedom in that on the one hand it is the good become alive — the good endowed in self-consciousness with knowing and willing and actualised by self-conscious action — while on the other hand self-consciousness has in the ethical realm its absolute foundation and the end which actuates its effort. Thus ethical life is the concept of freedom developed into the existing world and the nature of self-consciousness.  

Nonviolence synthesizes power and communicative rationality in a radical democratic project. It is the ethical form that political change takes when it occurs outside of institutional channels.

By incorporating the idea of communicative power with nonviolence the ethical conception describes a kind of social action that involves the exercise of agency. Although actors in nonviolent movements may not identify their participation in this way (though they often do), they are acting ethically, not merely instrumentally, by participating in “other-regarding” and “freedom regarding” activities that generate power. Nonviolence is a rational exercise of agency and thus is a context of political change in which autonomy is made possible, especially in distinction with violent forms of politics. That nonviolence is ethical because of its power is an exciting idea.

CONCLUSION

This project was an attempt to redevelop the concept of nonviolence in light of the contemporary strategic paradigm in the civil resistance literature. It was a response to the problems of understanding what makes nonviolence an effective form of political change and understanding in what ways it can still be considered ethical. This dissertation proposed the questions 1) How has nonviolence been understood ethically? 2) How is nonviolence undertaken for strategic purposes ethically distinct from political violence undertaken for strategic purposes? and 3) How should nonviolence be fundamentally conceptualized?

My research study was an examination of the existing ways that nonviolence has been conceptualized. It focused on the assumptions and implications of what I called the moral and strategic paradigms of nonviolence (also known as the principled and pragmatic approaches in the civil resistance literature). It also engaged in a historical analysis of Poland’s Solidarity movement, one of the largest recent examples of strategic nonviolence. The way nonviolence is conceptualized shifted in the 1970s away from the moral paradigm, to a strategic conception which presents nonviolence without a normative framework, as an instrumentally superior technique to violence.

To deal with the problems I identified in the moral and strategic paradigms, and building from the organizational strategy that my analysis of Solidarity revealed, I proposed a reconceptualization of nonviolence that understood it fundamentally as communicative action undertaken to create political change. My conceptualization of nonviolence relies on the political theory of Habermas and Arendt, focusing specifically on their communicative conception of power, and the concept of the public sphere.
In response to the question, How should nonviolence be conceptualized?, I argue that rather than focusing on how a movement interacts with its opposition, a more complete understanding of nonviolence is possible by asking how participants must relate to each other and to the wider public in order to make effective disruption possible. The moral paradigm conceptualized both the effectiveness and the ethical character of nonviolence in the mechanic of conversion: Nonviolence was something that occurred between a resister who suffered and an opponent whose consciousness was awakened by witnessing that suffering (and whose autonomy, thus, was not violated). My findings suggest that defining nonviolence primarily in the mechanism of conversion raises contradictions in the explanation of how nonviolence functions. I agreed with objections that questioned whether self-suffering in order to convert really respected the autonomy of the opposition, as well as historical analyses that argued that disruptive force was a necessary and more important factor than conversion of the opposition.

The shift to the strategic paradigm retained this focus on the relationship between the resistance and the opposition, but re-characterized it as one of disruption and force. Though conversion might still occur, the current understanding among theorists is that nonviolent movements typically operate as forceful disruptions of the power of opposing institutions. Respect for the autonomy of the opposition and thus the ethical character of nonviolence vanished from its conceptualization in the shift to the strategic paradigm. Both paradigms, however, presume that a consensus exists among the participants of a movement, but neither theorize how that consensus gets generated. The idea that nonviolence changes people’s political positions is better explained using a discursive framework than either the individual sufferer/witness framework or the disruptive resistance framework alone.
With respect to the strategic paradigm, I raised a number of issues related to how it conceives of the power that nonviolent action generates. First, the presumption of agency in Sharp’s “consent theory of power” ignores many questions about the existence of such agency raised by contemporary social theory. His voluntarist and subject centered analysis of why nonviolence can be effective does not explain how activists collectivize their resistance, and how that gets transformed into disruptive potential. Second, while Sharp’s catalogue of techniques includes activities that are not disruptive in the same sense as boycotts, strikes, etc, he does not discuss them using an empowerment or power-to framework. His analysis of nonviolent power restricts itself to a power-over classification of nonviolence, which I argue, severely limits his explanation of the effectiveness of nonviolence.

In response to the question, what distinguishes violence from nonviolence, I argue that the participation necessary in order to carry out acts of nonviolent disruption can only be generated through communicative action. Nonviolent movements must facilitate activity within the public sphere —activity that fulfills the requirements of Habermas’s formal pragmatics—in order to generate the freely undertaken participation that makes nonviolent movements powerful. Nonviolent disruptive acts are collective and yet voluntary. They cannot be motivated through the instrumental interests of individuals in way that violent political acts are motivated (rewards or fear of sanctions). Because participants must take a stance oriented at reaching understanding with respect to each other, nonviolence serves to promote the existence of public and private autonomy in individuals, making it an ethical technique for generating political change. Violent movements on the other hand, are restricted in the degree to which participants can relate to each
other communicatively. We see the practical results of this difference in the greater effectiveness of nonviolence at generating political change and the more democratic nature of its outcomes.

At the core of my position is the argument that to get the large and diverse degree of participation necessary to undertake acts of disruption like boycotts, strikes and sit-ins that are highly voluntary requires coordination and motivation through communicative action. The disruptive capability of the movement, and hence its power is directly related to degree that its political stances are understandable, shared and in the interest of the largest percentage of the movement. This requires that it be developed communicatively. The more a movement develops public sphere activity, the more it creates possibilities for individuals to participate in generating the discourse about the movement's politics. My analysis of Solidarity revealed that disruptive techniques are effective when they increase the possibility of individuals to participate in the public sphere (or protect that sphere from suppression by the opposition). Because of the voluntary nature of nonviolent disruptive activities (it is easy for people to stay away) the motivation for participation arises when the values/politics/positions of the movement are adopted by individuals discursively. Participants must be able to be involved in the development of the movements politics and strategies. Thus, movements generate more participation and become more effective in direct relationship to the degree that they develop communicative relationships between participants themselves, and between the movement and the wider public. This reliance on communicative activity means the activity which makes nonviolent movements effective also makes them ethical.

My research suggests that an important kind of work that nonviolent movements engage in—work that is significantly different from the work of disruptive acts—has been
unacknowledged in the literature’s conceptualization of nonviolence. Nonviolent movements are most effective when they create a space for communicative action in situations where that space has been suppressed or dispersed (by separating or alienating individuals). Another consequence of my position is that normative language can be used to describe nonviolence without opening up nonviolence to objections that this compromises the “palatability” of nonviolence by linking it with pacifism.

Those who educate activists will be interested in my reconceptualization of nonviolence because it suggests that teaching the catalogue of disruptive techniques must also be balanced by education in communicative techniques. An emphasis must be placed on the importance of developing particular kinds of relationships between activists. Highlighting the importance of communicative activity will also be of interest to scholars studying nonviolence using both quantitative and qualitative techniques because it broadens the category of activities that should be researched as components of nonviolent action.

As a result of this project further research might well be conducted on the communicative basis of other successful nonviolent movements. While I focus on Solidarity, it remains an important question whether other movements take similar or different approaches to generating a communicative relationship between participants. I suspect that the form that the public sphere of a movement takes depends on how those communicative relationships between participants are being disrupted or suppressed in a particular society. My theoretical reconceptualization of nonviolence could be used as a lens for historical analysis of other successful and unsuccessful movements. Further research needs to be done in describing and cataloguing techniques of public sphere building that take place in difference movements.

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More research needs to be done on looking at the relationship between participants in
violent movements and in the recruiting practices of those movements. Although I argue that
violent movements prohibit for practical reasons, the kinds of communicative relationships that
nonviolence promotes, my evidence is mainly drawn from the civil resistance literature itself.
Whether the literatures on violent movements support my thesis remains a question.

Given the non-institutional nature of nonviolence, there are also connections to be drawn
with social theory about anarchism. The outcome of the need to organize communicatively in
nonviolent movements means that democratic orientations emerge from informal and non-
institutionalized human relationships. Conflict appears to be an important motivator for
developing shared politics. The fact that nonviolence involves a very particular kind of ethical
relationship between its participants means that social theory on alienation could also be useful
for theorizing nonviolence and could itself be informed by nonviolence.

One of the most important findings in recent years is the connection between nonviolence
and democratic outcomes. This remains a relatively unexplored relationship, however. Given the
importance of popular sovereignty to Habermas’s conception of radical democracy, I think it’s
important to further establish the connection between how nonviolent movements organize
themselves and the development of democracy generally. Some, like Chabot and Sharifi (2013),
have criticized Sharp’s strategic approach to nonviolence by arguing that it leads to neo-liberal,
capitalist and other problematic, globalized market outcomes. The development of an
understanding of the communicative aspects of nonviolent action will help address concerns such
as these.
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