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Lenin's Twist, or the R-Factor of Communication

Abstract: Identity may be modeled by Spencer-Brownian qualitative mathematics, introducing identity as an argument agreed upon by communication taking place between first-order and second-order observers. The paper uses this notion and its mathematics in order to present a model of the role of Lenin's Bolshevik party in the Russian revolution and the institution of a Soviet state. The idea is to test the provision of sociological systems theory with a calculus of form representing the concatenation of observations acted upon in social intercourse. Lenin's twist consists in the invention of an exclusive, conspiratorial, and professional political party as the main actor of revolution. His knot, which strangles the idea of the revolution and many of its proponents, is the necessity of having to accept the state as the battlefield of that party and as the institution that has to fight a war, reorganize a national economy, reinvent Russia, and promote the socialist revolution in a capitalist environment.

I Introduction

Take an identity to be an agreement between two or more partners in a communication comprising first-order and second-order observers. The first-order observer indicates what s/he takes an interest in. The second-order observer looks at the distinction used by that indication, which excludes everything in which the first-order observer knowingly or unknowingly is, at that moment, not interested. The second-order observer communicates his or her observation as the objection of contingency as regards both the indication selected by the first-order observer and the possible issues of potential interest thereby excluded by that person. »Contingency« in terms of modality here means that every indication could be chosen differently and all possible issues of potential interest could be chosen in their places. Call »contingent« that which is neither necessary nor impossible.

The objection raised by the second-order observer, already changing the social system, can go unheard. Indeed, almost nothing happens if the second-order observer simply raises his or her objection. The case which interests me is when the second-order observer is, in turn, second-order observed by the first-order observer. I am inclined to call this case »communication« (Ruesch/Bateson 1956). The first second-order observer has to reinforce his or her objection in order to be heard by the first-order observer. He or she must indicate something in turn, i. e., spell out the risk of being second-order observed

in turn. He or she must not only mark contingency but exhibit it as well. He or she has to offer an argument so that both can enter into a discourse. »Identity« is an argument offered in the face of contingency upon which both partners of a communication can agree. They agree upon what they persuade, force, or trap themselves into agreeing upon.

Thus, identity concludes a three-step sequence of communication: (1) indication, (2) raising of an objection, (3) agreement upon an identity that settles the contingency of both the indication and the objection. Of course, the next step of the communication may take the resulting identity as the subject of a new objection. Usually, communication settles on some kind of identity which is defined by issues addressed and by communication partners being in some kind of control, both active and passive.

George Spencer-Brown (1969) has proposed a calculus of indication as a way of writing down an identity emerging from this kind of communication between first-order and second-order observers.

A revolution such as the Russian October Revolution may be shown to exhibit as its condition of success such an identity the social system of society agrees upon for some time and then has to watch its substitution and deconstruction by supplements and evolutionary drift. I shall not attempt here to develop new insights into Lenin's strategies, the design of the Russian revolution and the emergence of the Soviet Union. But rather, drawing on well-established knowledge, I will try to test the indication calculus as a modeling device for social theory.

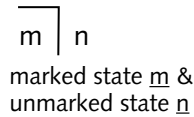
The paper begins by spelling out the mathematics involved (II) and goes on to present a model of the Russian October Revolution (III), and, finally, to draw a conclusion (IV).

II The Mathematics

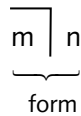
Using the terms and the notation proposed by George Spencer-Brown in his »Laws of Form« (1969), call »cross« a distinction: a »cross« denotes a distinction (1969) produced by a first-order observer in order to indicate some thing of value or interest to him or her:



Call m the marked state, and n the unmarked state of that distinction:



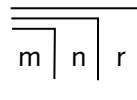
The marked state is the state indicated by the first-order observer. The second-order observer, watching the observer and the distinction he or she is making, looks at the »form« of the distinction, which consists of its two states and the line that divides them taken together (Spencer-Brown 1969, 6):



Using some concept, precept or function of »form«, the second-order observer looks at »the other side« of the distinction selected by the first-order observer, or even at how, viz. crossing a dividing line and producing it where nothing was there previously, he or she is performing the distinction. The second-order observer raises his or her objection, even if only looking at »the other side« and thus letting his or her attention wander freely to issues being excluded by issues chosen for attention and by distinctions being drawn where the indistinguishable might equally prevail.

Yet we should note the asymmetry of the cross. It means that further operations, carried out by first-order observers, are to connect to marked states, not to unmarked states. Unmarked states do not exist for first-order observers, and they only exist for second-order observers as marks of issues and matters excluded. The second-order observer, himself becoming a first-order observer, would have to indicate the unmarked state, thus transforming it into a marked state exhibiting an unmarked state as well.

If we assume that communication consists in the exchange of an identity, both the first-order and the second-order observer agree to indicate, or to super-code, both the marked and the unmarked state of the distinction. Taking up Spencer-Brown's (1969, 65) notation for a »re-entry« of the form of the distinction into the form, we speak of the r -factor of communication and formulate it as follows:



the r -factor of
communication

R is the indication of a state that consists of the marked state and the initially unmarked, now likewise marked, state of a distinction. It enfolds that distinction into its own realm of distinction, thus preparing it for infinite repetition as long as the partners in communication accept r as the identity of their argument. Note that the unmarked state of the marked state r goes unnoticed for the moment.

Let us assume that such an identity enfolding a distinction into the realm of the distinguished may be conceived as an *eigen-value* of recursive communication, as the in-formation of a social system, and as a product and precondition of communication. That is, the notation proposes links to notions developed in theories pertaining to comparable issues of communication and social systems:

- (1) Identity is to be regarded as the *eigen-value* of a recursive function $FD = OP (FD (FD (FD (...))))$ (von Foerster 1981). Whatever happens, it resumes the form of the form of distinction FD by the very operation OP of that form. In terms of nonlinear dynamic systems theory the form of distinction describes the possibly ›strange‹ attractor of a social system and thus the self-similarity of its structure.
- (2) Identity *in-forms* a social system in that it defines the frame (Goffman 1974) of any given message as »one *selected from a set* of possible messages. The system must be designed to operate for each possible selection, not just the one which will actually be chosen since this is unknown at the time of design« (Shannon 1963, 31; Baecker 1999). We may distinguish between a ›technical‹ design that gives a fixed set of possible messages, for instance, the alphabet in written language, and a ›social‹ design that has the set of possible messages redefined with any message actually selected. A technical design is the definition of a code that is to be accepted and applied within a social system. A social system can only rely on mutual reference.
- (3) Identity is a way to model *communication* since all communication consists of itself and its supercoding or meta-communication (Ruesch/Bateson 1951; Luhmann 1984). Thus we have the communication drawing its distinction and thereby crossing a line and indicating a marked state. And you have the same communication understood by reference to an observer as the observation of that form of distinction, thereby bringing in the unmarked state (as the set of possible messages) and the crossing itself (as produced by the observer drawing the distinction).

There are further characteristics of identity which may be of interest:

- (4) Identity works like a *joker* (Serres 1980). It is able to translate a perturbation arriving from the environment of the system, or in the system itself, into iteration reproducing the system, and to transform the very iterations of the system into a perturbation to be handled by the system.

- (5) The operating of identity, by producing a dividing line between the unmarked state and the marked state, behaves like a *différance* (Derrida 1968) when it produces the form, yet withdraws as soon as it is indicated itself, thereby revealing its unmarked state, and the cross of the distinction.
- (6) Identity works like a *discourse* (Foucault 1963) when producing knowledge (marked state) by actually acting out that knowledge (crossing the distinction) and establishing it by indicating the otherwise threatening unmarked state. A discourse thus works as the unity of distinction between knowledge and power.
- (7) Identity is a *machine* (Deleuze / Guattari 1972) which cuts its way into the continuity of the real and which depends, for any cut, on other cuts, i. e., on other machines, to be able to produce its own reality. Any machine is a system of cuts, i. e., a machine of machines.
- (8) Finally, identity resembles an *empty signifier* (Laclau 1994) in that it combines ambivalence, withdrawal, and hegemony. The form of distinction establishes its necessity in its ambiguity. We have to draw a different distinction in order to escape it, thus entering yet another hegemonic regime.

I shall now consider how this idea of identity, together with these characteristics, can be introduced into the model of a social system.

III The Model

The Bolshevik Communist Party is one of the more successful organizations in modern history. Philip Selznick's 1952 book »The Organizational Weapon: A Study of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics«, despite its Cold War framing by its publisher, the Rand Corporation, is one of the best accounts of the design of the party. In the model below I will also draw on the writings of Lenin, which are explicit in describing the mechanisms of the Communist Party, and evaluate them with the help of Selznick's analysis. I will focus on the exemplification of a comprehensive model, not necessarily on historical completeness and accuracy. However, the model should be able to serve as a heuristic search device in looking for further details of the form of Bolshevism.

According to Lenin (1913), there are three » sources and components« of Marxism. There is the German philosophical tradition of dialectic and historical materialism with its insights into humans as the always-imperfect designers of their society. There is the English tradition of a political economy that describes the law of capitalism as the law of the domination of capital to be overcome by the very labor that is the subject of that domination. And there is the French rejection of utopian socialism in favor of a commitment to the daily necessities of the class struggle. We may give these three sources and compo-

nents, or messages, the following forms, starting from the very first insight which may be formulated as follows:

$$\text{capitalism} = \overline{\text{labor}} \mid \text{wage slavery}$$

Capitalism is the realization and reproduction of a model of labor which results in wage slavery. Thus, the very first words of Lenin's (1913) article are: »Fight wage slavery!«

Now, the first message of Marxism, the message of German Historical Materialism (GHM), says there is an outside of that model of labor which is the human society which maintains a regime that facilitates wage slavery. The first-order observer, looking at »labor«, considers »labor« to be a quasi-natural state of that society. The second-order observer, informed by Historical Materialism, discovers and describes the regime of wage slavery as the context and condition of that form of labor. Communicating with each other, the first-order and the second-order observer invent the identity of a human society which actually consists in the state of that regime of wage slavery, yet is not identical with that regime. There are other possible historical states of that society, including a »human« one:

$$\text{capitalism}^{\text{GHM}} = \overline{\overline{\text{labor} \mid \text{wage slavery}}} \mid \text{human society}$$

The second message of Marxism, according to Lenin (1913), goes back to English Political Economy (EPE) and specifies not an abstract human society but economic »capital« as the precondition and context of the regime of wage slavery. Capital, here, is a new *r*-factor or »identity« of communication which provides both first-order observer, the laborer, and second-order observer, the economist and critic, with an understanding of the kind of regime to which they are subjected:

$$\text{capitalism}^{\text{EPE}} = \overline{\overline{\text{labor} \mid \text{wage slavery}}} \mid \text{capital}$$

The third message turns the historical and economic analysis into a political one, drawing on French Socialism (FS), which has its roots in the Paris Commune and the French Revolution. It identifies social classes as the historical subjects of the kind of society that realizes a certain economy based on the domination of capital. And it not only describes the actual class struggle but also calls for a struggle, using the very same terms, to subvert the relationship, i. e., the overthrow of »capital« by »labor«:

$$\text{capitalism}^{\text{FS}} = \overline{\overline{\text{labor} \mid \text{wage slavery} \mid \text{class struggle}}}$$

All three messages have the effect of turning analysis into action (see also Blanchot 1971). They describe a new historical state of society, called »socialism«, as the possible result of a class struggle, overthrowing »capital« in the context of a »human society« which exhibits both an actual state of capitalist domination and a possible state of socialist liberation:

$$\text{socialism} = \overline{\overline{\text{class struggle} \mid \text{capital} \mid \text{human society}}}$$

Here, the first-order observer, who enters into the class struggle by »revolution« or »reaction«, agrees with a second-order observer, being the analyst of the society, to accept »capital« as the main condition of a society that does not come down to just one state of necessity but knows different states of liberty, both a »capitalist« one and a »socialist« one.

Lenin subscribes to these distinctions. Yet, as a politician he takes a closer look at the kind of politics that the socialist model of the abolition of capitalism actually envisions. He discovers and describes the labor unions of the labor movement as the core political actors of the class struggle and identifies this as the Social-Democratic (SD) version of socialism:

$$\text{socialism}^{\text{SD}} = \overline{\overline{\text{labor union} \mid \text{capital} \mid \text{human society}}}$$

Lenin (1902 and 1904) agrees with »human society« being the *r*-factor of communication and with the second-order observer's distinction of »capital«, yet he perceives that labor unions are too weak to bring about a change from the regime of capitalism to a regime of socialism.

Turning from a Social-Democratic model to a Bolshevik (B) one, indeed inventing it, he proposes the work of a political party as the necessary operator of a possible form of socialism:

$$\text{socialism}^{\text{B}} = \overline{\overline{\text{political party} \mid \text{state} \mid \text{human society}}}$$

Lenin (1902) is explicit in identifying the weakness of the labor union in its inclusive and open character and calls in its place for the design of a political party that is exclusive in terms of membership, distinctly conspiratorial, and determinedly professional.

The decisive move proposed by Lenin is the political one of making the party his first distinction, thus defining the organization of Bolshevism. Lenin's twist is his interpretation of Marx's third message, the invention of a »political« party (Michels 1910) as distinct from the organizations of the labor movement. Yet the invention and institution of a political party shifts the context of the class struggle from the realm of »capital« to the realm of the »state«. This shift, as the unavoidable »other side« of Lenin's twist, does not go unnoticed. Indeed, it becomes the focus of the disagreement between the Bolsheviks on one hand and Mensheviks and Labor Unionists on the other (Trotzki 1924; Abendroth 1965). The latter, acting as second-order observers of Lenin's first-order politics, notice that there is, first, a new adoption of the state as a possible auxiliary of the revolution towards socialism and, second, a substitution of the wider social and economic aims of the labor unions by the possibly narrower social and political aims of the political party. Lenin responds to these objections by emphasizing both the necessary role of the nation state in the development of a national market, a national territory, and a national language (Lenin 1914) and the equally necessary and very Marxian demise of the state in its subjection by the proletarian revolution (Lenin 1917).

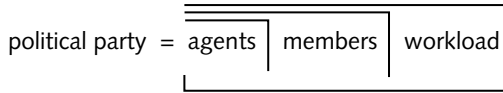
The invention of the state as the »outside« of the institution of the political party turns Lenin's twist into a knot (Kauffman 2001), strangling Trotsky and many others, preparing the action field for Stalin, and eventually disappointing Lenin (1923).

Accepting, or exploiting, the messages of historical materialism, political economy, and socialism which all assume the »identity« of a future human society brought about by fighting wage slavery, Lenin changes that very identity by diverting the attention of the revolutionaries from capital to the state. The distinction of the »state« acts, or so Lenin maintains, as a supplement to »capital«. Yet this »supplement« is as »dangerous« (Derrida 1967) as any other when it comes to the constitution of »identity«.

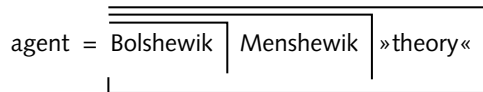
The shift that installs the supplement is not just a »logical« or »semantic« one. It entails action, or rather, a new kind of operation akin to the work of an exclusive, conspiratorial, and professional political party. This kind of operation is perfectly described by Lenin (1902; see also Trotsky 1924) and accurately analyzed by Selznick (1952) in spelling out the logistics, tactics, and strategy of the party:

The logistics of the party are given by its first organizational focus, the journal »Iskra«, which was used to install a distribution network throughout Europe that could be used at any time to provide not only readers but also strike activists with the necessary material. By sending correspondents to wherever anything of interest was likely to happen, it also had a close network of potential spies. And by laying down both the ideology and the daily duties of political work, it turned the members of a movement into the agents of a party.

The Bolshevik political party is defined by indicating »agents« to be selected and educated as ›Bolshevik men‹, to be distinguished from the self-selected and unreliable members of a typical labor union and a typical, all too inclusive, political party, and to be identified by the very workload he or she is able to handle:



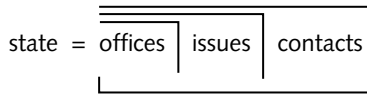
The daily workload is both the confirmation and the enactment of an ideology or »theory« that operates as the *r*-factor of communication distinguishing Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, thus giving any one agent his or her own profile of self-distinction and distinction vis-à-vis others:



Lenin insists on the necessity of such a »theory«. Selznick analyzes it as the precondition of the typical disintegration of conventional morale among Bolshevik party agents and for the introduction of a »party« ethic, authorizing, e.g., betrayal as a means of political struggle even among one-time friends. Once again, it is the daily workload, emphasized by an ever-present call for »self-criticism«, that promotes the adoption of the party ethic and the acceptance of its necessity. Revolutionary success, even if minimal by any standards, therefore becomes the very motor and fuel of the daily work of the agents. Without success, the necessary arrangement of distinctions dissolves.

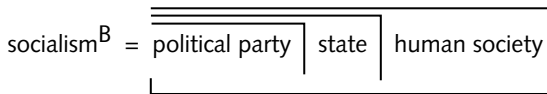
The form just described is also revealing with respect to the tactics of the party. The immediate context of the revolutionary agent's operations is not the »capitalist« government but the »Menshevik« unions, social-democrats, social revolutionaries, and anarchists competing with Bolshevism and thus presenting the real threat to the Communist revolution.

The strategy of the party is defined as a »strategy of access« (Selznick 1952) to all kinds of movements (labor, women, intellectuals, youth), authorities (government offices), and mass media (journals, broadcasting). As soon as these exhibited a certain degree of organization, they could be infiltrated and infected by the Communists' mechanism of »dual power«. All capitalism, as Lenin's analysis goes, is a struggle for power fought not on the streets or by the masses or by any economic or otherwise defined »logic of the system« but by authorities occupying offices, a remarkably »sociological« analysis (Luhmann 2000):

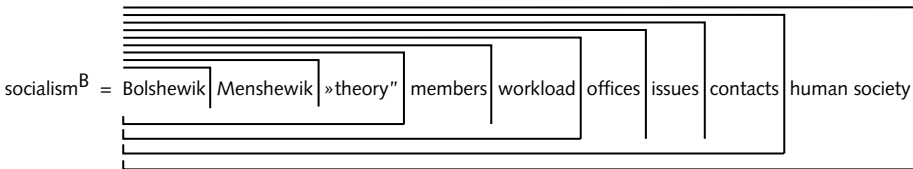


Any office provides access to power. Politics resumes in using the *r*-factor of »contacts« in order to identify the »issues« capable of providing the appropriate leverage in the competition for political offices (Baecker 2000).

If we now apply the logistics, tactics, and strategy features of Lenin's design of the Communist Party to the form of the Bolshevik Party, still given by the identification of a possible »human society«,



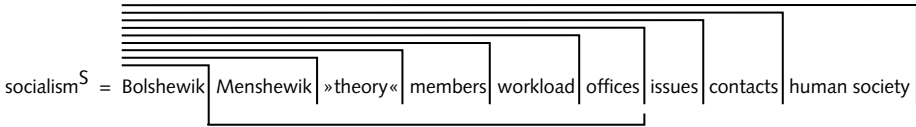
we get:



We may note the simplicity of the formula defining a mode of individual inclusion (»Bolsheviks« are »agents« as distinct from »members«), tactical aims of daily activities (a »workload« with respect to access to »offices«), and a theory of the political nature of the system as the frame of strategy (»contacts« with respect to the purpose of a »human society«). All that need be known at any given moment is who is to get where, i.e., which agent is to gain access to which office.

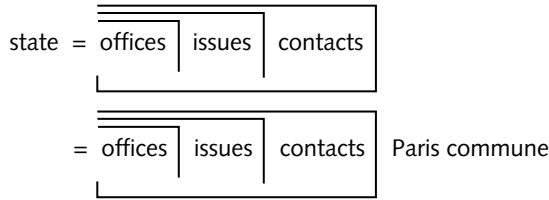
We find that even in the most simple representation of Bolshevik socialism, there are nine distinctions indicating what Bolshevism is all about. There are four *r*-factors, singling out a certain »theory«, a daily »workload«, political »contacts« to be made, and the »human society« as the purpose at the horizon of it all, allegedly adding to each other, complementing and supplementing each other, yet soon assuming a competitive stance towards one another as the revolution eventually takes off and gathers momentum (Trotsky 1924). Any one distinction may be used to absorb all others.

Indeed, Stalin's trick in exploiting Lenin's Knot and in turning Bolshevik (B) socialism into Stalinist or Soviet (S) socialism, consists in giving priority to the question of office power and in monopolizing access to offices, which may be formulated as follows:

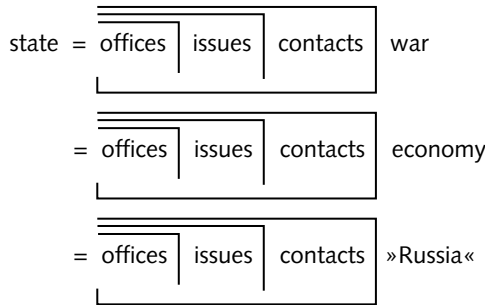


Yet, Stalin’s turnaround of Soviet socialism does not happen by chance. It has been prepared by Lenin’s and his comrades’ reception of the need to fight a war, to organize a national economy, to establish, when in power, a kind of »Russian« identity in order to appeal to the population, and, finally, to take into account Russia’s stance as the only »communist« power vis-à-vis the »capitalist« community of nations.

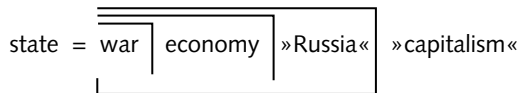
Lenin (1917) is still able to think about the state in terms of its abolition as, for example, by the Paris commune (Marx 1871), the »Paris commune« thus becoming the outside, the context, and the horizon of the state as envisioned by Lenin:



Yet, by having to face the war, the economy and »Russia«, this equation becomes:



Lenin’s knot then eventually reads:



This is the socialist state which he hands over to Stalin: an operative focus on war, viz. the ability to fight a war (arming the Red Army), supported by a reorganized »new political« (»one firm, one office«) economy, identified as necessary structures of a Russia that has to promote socialism among unfriendly

capitalist neighbors. This may aptly be described as the »zoning in« of socialism, giving Stalin his notion of »socialism in one country« as opposed to earlier ideas of the Communist International.

Lenin's twist has been to invent a political party as the main operator of the Communist revolution. The reverse side of this twist is the reception of the state as the necessary battlefield for the work of a political party. The state then has to do whatever it has to do to protect its boundaries and support industry. Finally, we should note that Lenin (1917) recognizes »accounting and control« as the identity of a Russian socialism, forcing its politics, its economy, and its societal behavior all under one umbrella.

Only the »fall of the Berlin Wall« in 1989, as prepared by Polish Solidarnoc in 1981 and Russian Glasnost and Perestroika in 1985, led to a »zoning out« again of socialism, which is now, as it was before the 1917 Russian Revolution and the 1924 construction of the Lenin Mausoleum, an international option once more.

IV Conclusion

This paper has not attempted to present novel insights into Leninist party organization but rather to construct a model representing the organization mechanism, drawing on Lenin's writing and Selznick's analysis.

We believe that sociological systems theory and the calculus of indications can be usefully combined. We have tried to show how a social system works its way through the invention and redundancy of a recursive function whose identity attractor r defines, and is defined by, the more or less stable *eigen-values* of meaning-production in that system. The recursive *eigen-value* of the form of a distinction is accomplished by the re-entry of the distinction between the marked state as indicated by a first-order observer and the unmarked state as indicated by a second-order observer into the form of the distinction.

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