

Marxism and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

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Abstract

Using ideological concepts found in Marxism, this thesis contends *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a decidedly orthodox, revolutionary Marxist text that commits itself to the necessity of overhauling the old framework by means of a bottom-up revolution. The research investigates three key Marxist thinkers—Eduard Bernstein, Vladimir Lenin, and Rosa Luxemburg—and explores how each of them interprets Marx's works differently in order to acquire a more holistic view of the politics Marxism inspired. The paper finds that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a specific embodiment of Rosa Luxemburg's view of Marxism owing to the novel's stance that a corrupt system cannot be fixed within its existing paradigm and that a revolution must derive for and from the people in order for it to have lasting impacts.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The legacy of Karl Marx is a tragedy of Shakespearean proportions. He dedicated his life to challenging the collective's indifference of the wretched and disposed, yet, he is remembered as the mind behind many of the most heinous evils of the latter twentieth century. This is lamentable, as Marx was not driven by narcissistic cravings for power but by frozen-fingered, needle-strewn, downtrodden, dirty, and deviant members of society. Marx implored the working classes to actively engage in politics. He saw a future in which the proletariat rose up and replaced the existing capitalist framework with communism. It is the continued relevance of discourse surrounding the exploitation of the working class that ensures Marx's vision stays relevant in the twenty-first century and continues to inspire any number of creative works that explore Marxist themes.

If one is searching for a novel that exemplifies Marxist themes and highlights the differences between schools of thought within Marxism, one need look no further than Ken Kesey's 1962 *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. A fictional tale about a "sane" man trapped in a mental institution, *Cuckoo's Nest* is a master-class allegory that explores themes of freedom, liberty, and the heinous restrictions that social and moral authority places upon the individual. It is a text concerned with power, production, and profit—factors that Marx believes drive the backward society he despised. *Cuckoo's Nest* is an especially useful lens to understand Marxism because, rather than simply showcase general Marxist themes, the novel takes a stance on issues debated within the Marxist community—namely, what revolution is, who leads it, and who it is for. Ultimately, what I am arguing is the novel ultimately comes to an orthodox Marxist conclusion and, specifically, aligns best with the views of the revolutionary Marxist figure Rosa Luxemburg: only a revolution for and by the proletariat counts as a true Marxist revolution.

For the purposes of this paper, I will consider the following three alternative approaches to understanding Marxism: two varieties of orthodox Marxism and one variety of revisionist Marxism. Orthodox Marxists argue society must be rehailed via revolution, overthrowing the existing framework and replacing it with a new framework. The revisionist school argues revolution is not necessary for change, provided that reforms like increased wages, limitations on working day hours, and unions fix problems within the existing framework. While orthodox Marxists Vladimir Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg argue reforms are a societal response to the fear of a revolution (as opposed to an attempt to overhaul an exploitative society), revisionists like Eduard Bernstein claim reforms provide the improvements the working class seeks without stooping to violence. Revolutionaries respond that revisionists are at best foolish and, at worst, a threat to Marxism, in believing that reforms provide any long-term solutions. They are not humanitarian advances but vapid shows of short-term appeasements in order to pacify the proletariat and keep them from revolting.

The intellectuals explored in this thesis are the revisionist Eduard Bernstein and the more orthodox Marxists Vladimir Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg. Where Lenin and Luxemburg differ within the orthodox school is their belief as to *who* must act as catalysts for the revolution. While Lenin argues that it is up to the elite classes with more privilege to develop and share out the conceptual ideas within Marxism to guide the masses towards their enlightenment, Luxemburg contends this defeats the whole point of Marxism. A revolution must arise from the proletariat itself. Additionally, the very idea that a revolution against those who control the masses could be orchestrated by those same individuals who benefit from the existing system is paradoxical. Sure, a result of this kind of revolution could be a different kind of society, but it will still be the people with privilege controlling the minds and bodies of those without privilege. While Lenin's Marxism imagines a world in which the masses stumble about in trying to define their own

self-interest and receive assistance from the upper classes to clarify their wants (wants and needs that, sometimes, the working classes do not even *know* they have before being enlightened by the intelligentsia with the time to dedicate to Marxism), Luxemburg argues that collective proletarian enlightenment from the bottom-up is the only way the proletariat can free itself from the bonds of capitalist society and move forward into the next stage of economic development.

Cuckoo's Nest is a specific illustration of Rosa Luxemburg's Marxism, exemplifying the necessity for an overhaul of the old system through a bottom-up, grassroots effort. Randle P. McMurphy, the protagonist of the novel, is a repeat offender who gets himself placed in an asylum as opposed to prison by faking insanity. The joke is on McMurphy, however, when he finds himself tormented by the confining rules the hospital places on him. Throughout the novel, he battles to retain a defiant spirit and inspire his fellow oppressed patients to rise against their oppressors. In the end, his rebelliousness is rewarded with the ultimate silencing—a lobotomy—so that he might never speak against the powers that be. Throughout the novel, McMurphy and the other patients are characterized as the oppressed. Nurse Ratched and the other hospital staff are the oppressors. Kesey takes care to illustrate that even those who oppress—in this case, the hospital staff—are also mere cogs in the crushing wheel. They, too, are puppets controlled by the superstructure. The medical community tells the hospital staff how patients should be treated. Like managers at factories, they follow suit because they benefit from the system where they get to oppress people. Sure, they are oppressed in their own ways, but they are better off than the patients or, in the Marxist analogue, the proletariat. Some individuals use their privilege to hurt and exploit—case in point, Nurse Ratched—but most are less malicious. It is, therefore, impossible for the staff regardless of intention to change much for the patients. They are told what to do by the “real” medical experts. They, too, are stuck in the existing paradigm.

In the novel, it is a bottom-up effort from the patients with McMurphy acting as a catalyst that allows for change. McMurphy is the first to point out numerous examples of exploitation. He awakens the patients to their oppression which acts a wake-up call for characters to undergo changes in behavior. Each starts down his own path of revolution. McMurphy acts as their stimulant in a world of sedation and shocks them out of their walking states of apathy. It is upon their enlightenment that the patients begin to fight back. Little revolutions, combined with the ensuing injustice of McMurphy's punishment, culminate in the final revolution of the narrator of the novel, The Chief, performing a mercy killing of McMurphy and escaping the hospital. The rest of the patients proceed to rebel in their own little ways, many even leaving the hospital. The overarching theme of the novel is that real changes come from the oppressed. Only the oppressed can find their own best solution. The novel is, therefore, distinctly Luxemburgian Marxism, as opposed to Bernsteinian or Leninist. The primary focus of this thesis is to show how Cuckoo's Nest is an example of Luxemburg's distinctive (and, I will suggest, quite faithful) version of Marxism. To argue this, I will analyze the plot, characters, and setting of the story in conjunction with Marxist ideas and showcase how they support or do not support Luxemburg's Marxism.

Chapter 2: Brief Overview of Marxism

One of many ways to understand Marx is by comparing and contrasting him with Hegel. At the time of Marx's rise, Hegel was the prevailing philosophical presence. Some have argued that the vast majority of twentieth century philosophy was simply a reaction to or against Hegel's work. Marxism's philosophical undercurrent is essential to understanding the theory, and a way into this philosophy is by comparing and contrasting him with Hegel's ideas.

Karl Marx was originally a Hegelian, and he incorporated the following two Hegelian ideas into his theory: (1) reality is a historic, dialectical process; and (2) human progress is moving towards a goal, and until we get there (wherever "there" is), humans will experience alienation. Both Hegel and Marx want men to see rationality in their everyday lives. For Hegel, the way humans will find themselves at home in the world is by recognizing rationality in the world around them. They find it by looking at something that seems irrational, finding the rationality, and finding some semblance of peace (this will be more concretely illustrated in an example on the following page surrounding the Napoleonic Code). Marx, on the other hand, wants men to take the irrational things and turn them into rational ones.

Let us consider the first idea: Hegel argued reality is a historical, dialectical process. The first part might seem a tad obvious. Necessarily, the present is a consequence of the past. The second part, however, is where Marx recognized the revolutionary elements of Hegel's work. Marx called Hegel's dialectic inherently revolutionary as it "regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence," suggesting that Hegel's interpretation of history suggests capitalism is not long for this world (Marx, *Capital*, 103). For Hegel, the key to understanding history is observing the pattern of societies establishing a status quo only for the status quo to be upended via revolutions. We can put this into context with the example of ancient Greece. Hegel

characterizes it as a harmonious society. Hegel writes, “In ordinary life we like best the men and families that are homely and contented in themselves, not desiring what is outside and above them, and so it is with the Greeks” (Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 36). The Greeks felt so naturally at home in their society that they didn’t even think to criticize it. They did not ask why Greece did not match their ideals because Greece *was* the ideal. Hegel says succinctly, “They have known and borne themselves as men that were free” (Hegel, *LOTHOP*, 38). Note that Hegel is not praising the Greeks here, merely observing that they were a result of their time. He writes, “The Greeks, in other respects so advanced, knew neither God nor even man in their true universality” (Hegel, *Shorter Logic*, 379). Hegel suggests the fracturing of individuals and society, and therefore a catalyst of progress, began with Plato speaking about ideals outside of the existing framework (Hegel, *POR*, 20). According to Hegel, this kind of thinking only increased over the centuries. It is a key characteristic of the modern world that humans don’t see much rationality reflected in their institutions; unlike the Greeks, we moderns feel very much not at home in our world. During the French Revolution, for example, rebels were capable of thinking “Our society is not rational,” appealing to ideals independent of what was reflected in their society and trying to make changes. History is guided by this “dialectical process.”. Every complex situation has conflicting elements which destabilize the existing situation (the thesis). The situation then breaks down into something else (the antithesis) into which those conflicts are dissolved (synthesis). Then we get new conflicts. This is how humans develop.

For Hegel, our institutions have rationality in them, even if we don’t see the rationality. Consider his example of the Napoleonic Code as a way of contextualizing this idea. During Napoleon’s rise to power, all different towns had different laws and practices of medieval origin. On the surface, they did not seem similar. One town had a rule that if you were a witch, you were

dunked underwater. In another town, you were burned. There was no apparent rationality for why one town picked one practice over another. Yet the Napoleonic Code sought to uncover a deeper, rational principle beneath the surface-level diversity of local practices. Perhaps, one town had a lake and no matches, so the lake was preferable to burning. The other town had no lake but plenty of wood to burn. The towns shared a common ideal of wanting to rid their communities of magical threats but went about the execution differently. The Napoleonic Code sought to take all of the practices with implicit connections and say what they were by articulating principles. Each town might have different practices, but each town is bound by the same kinds of logic. For Hegel, once we realize that we as humans, despite the recognition of our diversity (which disrupted the Greek worldview), share a grain of common rationality, we'll once again be able to feel at home. Hegel writes, "Reason governs the world and has consequently governed its history. In relation to this Reason...all else is subordinate, subservient, and the means for its actualization" (Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, 40). Reason creates external conditions and our purpose as humans should be to consciously see it so we can feel at home in it.

Marx agrees with the dialectical idea as a whole in the sense that elements from the past provide conditions for progress, but differs when it comes to the role of rationality. To be sure, where we are now and where we are going depends on the past. But, unlike Hegel, who claims that rationality creates external conditions, Marx argues that external conditions create rationality. If external conditions aren't rational, humans will feel alienated from their world and further understanding of the world alone will always be insufficient to overcome this sense of alienation. Consider a modern-day example: if Hegel were to look at the windowless interiors of the CU Engineering Center, he might suggest that there are reasons for the unattractive design. The focus of American culture at the time of the building's construction was on rapid technological development, not aesthetics. Cold War America needed a building for engineers

and they needed it fast. Though it isn't pretty today, it is a product of human rationality. Hegel believes "the state is the actuality of concrete freedom" (Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 285). Marx might reply that the Engineering Center is a result of elitist architects who thought the brutalist style was best, and the unwelcoming environment engineers now have to work in is a result of this power dynamic. The lack of windows and conditions the building creates for its students is totally irrational in today's day and age. The engineering student body, therefore, ought to coalesce into a group and demand renovations that reflect the rationality they possess as people.

Putting this into the context of Marx's time, Marx argues the proletariat ought to take the bull by the horns and change the external conditions so he can improve his conditions as an individual. While Hegel says, "Philosophy cannot teach the state what it should be, but only how it, the ethical universe, is to be known," suggesting that it is futile to know what should be without looking at what exists, Marx disagrees (Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 19). Marx writes, "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" (Marx, *Theses*, 2). There is something empowering to this, and this is one reason Marx's rhetoric is so appealing. For Hegel, the world's rationality in the modern era is already a product of man's rationality, and there will be changes over time that get people to a further progressed place. For Marx, the world's rationality is a product of man's rationality, *and* if the world does not seem rational, humans can do something here and now to change it. Marx analyzes history through material changes because material circumstances inform what people think. Marx writes that he first looked to Hegelian philosophy and found that "types of state are to be understood neither on their own terms nor in terms of the so-called general development of the human intellect, but are rather rooted in material relations of life" (Marx, *A Contribution*, 6).

In layman's terms, we shouldn't understand society by how it defines itself ideologically but in the actual, concrete conditions that permeate throughout one's everyday existence.

To further clarify this, Hegel makes a second point that development is not random but pushing people towards a "goal" which is ultimately the greater development of spirit towards freedom. This sounds rather mystical, but does not have to be. Hegel thinks there's a "goal" in the same sense that an acorn has a "goal" of becoming an oak tree. Hegel writes, "When we want to see an oak, we are not satisfied to be shown an acorn instead. In the same way science, the crowning glory of a spiritual world, is not found complete in its initial stages" (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 7). People are not content to ask about the future and be shown an acorn as opposed to an oak, and yet it is true that seeing this acorn allows us to guess what will happen in the future, so long, at least, as we can understand the principle of its development. The oak tree, in some sense, already exists within the acorn. The oak tree is its potential. The acorn actualizes itself by becoming what it already is. History is the same way for Hegel. History's "goal" is actualizing its potential. To this point, greater development of spirit is taking what are abstract ideas of rationality and baking them into something concrete. For Hegel, this has already been done. Humans, for instance, took mud, shaped it with a plan, and built buildings. That is spiritual for Hegel. Humans should, therefore, look at what exists out in the world, find what's rational—after all, things have been made for reasons—and follow those reasons through. When people walk through city streets peppered with skyscrapers, they ought to be comforted by the fact their own rationality has produced a rational world which, in turn, reflects their own rationality back to them. They are in the world they've created for themselves.

Marx, too, acknowledges humanity should see itself reflected in the world, but argues that it is because modern culture with its dirtied population and disheveled institutions does *not* reflect rationality that humans should critique the current state of affairs. For Marx, reaching the

“goal” Hegel alludes to isn’t possible within the existing system, and it doesn’t seem attainable to find rationality in the irrational. Eventually, working through these tensions will lead us to Communism—a rational system in which all people collectively own the means of production (factories, infrastructure) and determine by way of a rational plan how goods and labor are allocated. It will lead us to a world where we are no longer alienated. For Marx, capitalism does a poor job of reflecting rationality back to people. This is especially true for the working class. The proletariat is irrationally compelled to work itself into a state of extinction. The proletariat must work to live, but stands little chance of living long nor fruitfully given their working conditions. The harder the proletariat works, the more certain the proletariat’s death. As Marx summarizes, “The proletariat is compelled as proletariat to abolish itself and thereby its opposite private property” (Marx, *The Holy Family*, 49). Marx argues that the proletariat in the current state of affairs is caught “between its human nature and its condition of life, which is the outright, resolute, and comprehensive negation of that nature” (Marx, *THF*, 50). Man is caught between his rational desires and the cruel conditions he lives in, which leads man to feel estranged from the very rationality he ought to be seeing in what he produces. Under a capitalist system, the proletariat is irrationally compelled to work itself into a state of extinction. The communist system provides a welcome promise of equality the capitalist system unforgivingly lacks.

For Marx, the supposed rationality Hegel discusses is not accessible. Alienation will only be stopped when the external conditions change. To clarify, Marx thinks many existing things *are* rational that we don’t recognize as such that create alienation, but there are also clearly many irrational things humans don’t see as rational. Market forces, for instance, are in fact nothing but our own rationality reflected back to us—just not (under capitalism) in a way that allows us to recognize our rationality in them. Marx says as much when he writes, “Reason has always

existed but not always in reasonable form” suggesting there are rational things humans fail to put in reasonable form. Human actions (take, for instance, the hiring process) need to be put in reasonable form by humans so when we see the market forces reflected back at us, we can comprehend and experience our own rationality in those forces themselves! If we make the market itself responsive to a rational plan we ourselves have devised, the very activities people do that give rise to economic phenomena won't look irrational anymore. The human activity that gave rise to these economic phenomena will already have been rationally organized.

Marx asserts, however, that capitalism, in its present state, perpetuates alienation of the human being from their work, themselves, and their fellow human beings. First, consider man's relationship with work within the capitalist system. The better off capitalist system as a whole is, the worse off the proletariat is. Marx writes, “The devaluation of the human world grows in direct proportion to the *increase in value* of the world of things. Labour not only produces commodities; it also produces itself and the workers as a commodity and it does so in the same proportion in which it produces commodities in general” (Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 28). The more important commodities become in society, the less important people become. This is paradoxical, as people are responsible for the commodity creation, but understandable in that people are slaves to the objects they create, as opposed to the objects doing the bidding for humans. Each worker is only a small part of the creation process of a product; he does not feel, himself, attached to that work. If a man is only in charge of tightening the bolts on a table, does he feel like he built the table? More generally: is the product of labor something in which he recognizes his own reason or planning at work? If he still were tightening bolts and could at least see his own place in the production process as a result of a collectively chosen plan of work, maybe man would have purpose. Yet Marx would say man cannot see this when he is merely a cog in the machine. The individual is alienated from what Marx calls the

final product. In assembly line work, the individual is constrained to making one tiny part of the thing, so he has no relationship to the final product. He never makes anything as a whole. He has no interaction with the creation that will never be a part of his life, as he will likely never be wealthy enough to afford the product he has a part in assembling.

Next, consider man's alienation from himself and his fellow man. Marx writes that capitalism undermines "species-being" or the parts that make a man a man. He includes productivity, creativity, activity without suffering, man's relationship with nature, his notion of beauty, his will and consciousness, self-determination, ability to plan for the future, and free development of mental and physical energy as a few concepts that can be wrapped up in species-being. Marx argues that it is man's impulse to connect with others, work, and express himself creatively. He claims capitalism undermines this and spurs an endemic sense of alienation in people. Individuals have an antagonistic relationship with everything and everyone around them. With one's fellow workers, for instance, people feel the effects of any time one has to be a human being (examples include swatting a fly or using the bathroom). Everyone blames this man for the delay. Stakes are too high. Getting fired means starving to death. In capitalist society, humans are prevented from relating, helping, or knowing one another in a meaningful way. And this is antithetical to the human experience. In capitalism, they are forced to police one another. They are locked into antagonism. They lack community, relationships, and the ability to empathize.

So who has the power to change the state of affairs in the existing society? This is a major subject for debate among Marxists in the twentieth century that will be further explored in the next section, but Marx seems to think the proletariat requires a major role, if not *the* major role, in the revolution. This is logistically inconvenient, as capitalists live amidst glitter and glitz while the poor live among the needle-strewn. Capitalists have the most time to think and reflect,

as they lead the most comparably leisurely lifestyles, so are in the best position to change the systems. Yet capitalists are both the control and the product of the currently corrupt system and therefore might not wish to or be able to fix the issues. Marx writes, “It is not the consciousness of men that specifies their being but...their social being that specifies their consciousness” (Marx, *A Critique*, 4). It is a man’s role in society that provides the conditions to determine what he will think and feel. Every aspect of man’s life is based upon the economy. Family life, religion, philosophy, and more are manifestations of the economic system—merely members of the “superstructure”. Capitalists, therefore, do not seem to be the ones who ought to (nor can they) make the changes society desperately requires. This must be a revolution by the proletariat.

Though capitalism is negative for the proletariat, Marx argues that it is a necessary step because, as suggested in the dialectic, it creates intolerable conditions that spur the proletariat to self-conscious organizing activity that results in a revolution. It takes humans out of the existing paradigm and into the next one. It guarantees progress. This is a step society has to take to actualize itself, harkening back to the acorn becoming the tree it is destined to be. By reducing the proletariat to a homogeneous class with the same interests and organizing it economically, the development of capitalism itself helps produce the social force that will ultimately overwhelm it. Capitalism makes its own worst enemy. The capitalist group growing smaller and the proletariat (working class) growing larger increases exploitation which increases proletarian resentment. This does not seem “good” but will increase the numbers of the proletariat which will provide their strength when they finally revolt.

Additionally, the globalization of the state through the continued spread of capitalism creates the ability for the international community to communicate which, in turn, creates conditions for a global revolution. Marx writes, “The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle

everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere” (Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 476). It is in every capitalist’s best interest to advertise his product to as many people as possible. Consider the modern-day example of McDonald’s. The corporation grew from an American-based restaurant to a brand whose influence spans the world. This means that Americans now have more in common with French or Chinese than they did a century ago. All these citizens eat the same food. They relate to one another in some way. For Marx, this comradeship is useful for the impending revolution. He writes, “National differences and antagonisms between people are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto” (Marx, *TCM*, 488). The negative effects of capitalism lead to the positive components that are necessary for the establishment of communism.

Marx does not outline a communist society with pinpoint specificity, claiming it would be inconsistent to claim that one could see outside of the current paradigm. Communism will establish itself through the process of revolution and rebuilding. That said, Marx claims man will be active again and find himself less alienated from the world, his fellow mankind, and himself. Characteristics he does outline include no owning of land, a heavy income tax, centralization of credit in the hands of state, centralization of means of communication and transport in the hands of the state, abolishing of factories, instruments of production owned by states, equal liability to labor, the establishment of industrial armies, combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries, and abolition of the distinction between city and town. Marx acknowledged the consequences of his theories and had many rebuttals to those who criticized his vision. “You are horrified,” he wrote in response to those who stood shell-shocked in response to his assertion that private property be abolished, “but in your existing society, private property is already done

away with for nine-tenths of the population” (Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 23). In short, change is terrifying, but it is up to the people to change their irrational institutions so they might live out their existences as oaks as opposed to forever unrealized acorns.

CHAPTER 3: EXPLORING BERNSTEIN, LENIN, AND LUXEMBURG

Marxism is historically oversimplified. Nietzsche calls it “a philosophy of mediocrity...values of the herd” (Nietzsche). Critics call Marxism contrary to freedom and personal values. In the United States, Marxism is of particular controversy given communism’s key role in the Cold War. President Reagan famously said a communist is “someone who reads Marx and Lenin ” while an anti-communist is “someone who understands Marx and Lenin” (Suderman). It is challenging for those born in a post-Cold War world to imagine a time when Marxism was a hotly, publicly debated political philosophy. Pre-World War I, politicians, philosophers, and scholars alike engaged in a flurry of debate regarding Marxist theory. This debate reached its peak in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries upon the founding of the Second International—an organization of labor parties (1889-1914) where respected thinkers from different countries could debate Marxist theory. Many consider these few decades the golden age for Marxism owing to the burgeoning of theoretical conversation surrounding ideas. The Second International was what Marx himself envisioned: “...an assemblage of parties representing the masses” so that conversation might flourish and talk of revolution might result in decisive, global action (Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 4).

This period was dominated by two ideological camps, revisionist and orthodox. Revisionists argued that changes could be made within the existing societal framework to make capitalism more equitable and fairer for the proletariat. Reforms such as increased pay or the presence of unions could greatly improve the lives of workers and make society a happy, habitable place. Orthodox Marxists or “revolutionaries” rejected their existing society and the claim that the existing capitalist society could be reformed in a meaningful fashion without an overthrow. For revolutionaries such as Lenin or Luxemburg, reforms are a response to fear of a revolution as opposed to an attempt to overhaul an exploitative society.

One of many overarching debates between these two camps was whether revolution was a natural inevitability or merely a possibility within the historical tendency of the capitalist economy. Members of the revisionist camp such as Eduard Bernstein observed that revolutionary Marxists predicted that the evolution of capitalism would result in fewer and fewer owners holding more and more land. This, as Bernstein pointed out, was not the trend. Luxemburg summarized Bernstein's views as follows: "With the growing development of society, a complete and almost general collapse of the present system of production becomes more and more improbable, because capitalist development increases on the one hand the capacity of adaptation and, on the other—that is at the same time—the differentiation of industry" (Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, 5). The growth of socialist parties at this time positively affected members of the working class. Orthodox thinkers like Rosa Luxemburg refuted of-the-moment trends and held to Marx's vision of growing class polarization over the course of human history. She argued Bernstein's claims undermined the necessity of the cause. She wrote, "If one admits with Bernstein that capitalist development does not move in the direction of its own ruin, then socialism ceases to be objectively necessary" (Luxemburg, *ROR*, 9). A revolution is the most drastic and violent of measures a population can take to overhaul a failing society. A revolution is only the solution if all other measures are doomed to fail, considering its extensive costs. If it is, as Bernstein holds, that the existing system can be fixed within its current framework without the need for a violent overthrow, there is no need for a revolution. Luxemburg, like other orthodox Marxists, saw Bernstein as a threat to the cause and unworthy of the term "Marxist" in the first place, as his dogma undercuts Marx's insistence that a communist society is inevitable, that is, "objectively necessary," given the trajectory of society. Luxemburg most scathingly wrote that "proposing to change the sea of capitalist bitterness into a sea of socialist sweetness, by

progressively pouring into it bottles of social reformist lemonade, presents an idea that is merely more insipid but no less phantastic” (Luxemburg, *ROR*, 33).

Today, the reformist Marxist interpretation of the state-of-affairs holds up. More non-productive workers’ positions (trade, admin, education, etc.) appeared. The middle class grew. Conditions improved. Reformists, too, condemned the violence that would later become inseparable from communism. Reformists reasoned that violent revolution was an extreme way to go about improving conditions for the proletariat given that the “general extension of the workers’ political rights” could be found through reforms (Kołakowski, *MCM*, 108). Bernstein asked, in regards to revolution, “Must the proletariat take power only by means of a political catastrophe? And does this mean the appropriation and use of state power exclusively by the proletariat against the whole non-proletarian world?” (Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*, 5). He saw society moving in a decidedly non-revolutionary direction and claimed that the greater aims Marx strove for could be achieved within the existing framework.

Orthodox Marxists argued capitalism could not be meaningfully altered by reforms, as capitalism’s “catastrophic consequences of depression, poverty, and unemployment are unavoidable” (Kołakowski, *MCM*, 5). Orthodox Marxists adhere to Marx’s texts and prioritize doctrinal purity, opposing attempts to supplement Marxist theory with outside influences. Within the Second International orthodox camp were two leading figures who differed in method—Lenin and Luxemburg. While both agreed aims ought to be centered around hastening the course of history and both agreed that it would necessarily happen in a revolutionary form, they disagreed about whom the revolution would be led by and what the revolution would look like.

Lenin rooted his politics in what he saw as harsh realities. According to Lenin, the working class was incapable, on its own, of developing any meaningful conception of the mission behind the revolution. He wrote, "The spontaneous development of the workers'

movement leads precisely to its subordination to bourgeois ideology...the ideological enslavement of the workers to the bourgeoisie." (Lenin, *Vol. V*). The proletariat does not have excessive time to educate themselves about the revolution. They do not have the time to read the thousands of pages contained in Marx's *Capital*. Lenin believed that it would be up to those in more privileged positions of power to act on behalf of the proletariat in order for there to be change. The goal of the party should be to act as guardians, holding the hand of the proletariat. He wrote, "Alone, by their own forces, the working class is capable of developing a pure-and-simple trade union consciousness. . . . But the teachings of socialism have grown out of the philosophical, historical, economic theories which were worked out by the educated representatives of the possessing classes..." (Lenin, *Vol. V*, 347-48). While Lenin defends his dogma by claiming that his way is the only realistic way forward, one can already sense the dangers of any elite acting as the so-called "vanguard of the working class" where this elite is given the moral go-ahead to infect the greater populace with what this elite claims to be the populace's "historic mission," all while this may not be what the general populace truly wants.

Luxemburg, while also a socialist revolutionary, was a vehement critic of Lenin's vision. She called his rhetoric "pitiless ultra-centralism" (Luxemburg, *The Letters*). She spoke out against what would later come to fruition—a government where Lenin and a group of elites dictate to the masses. She disdained that Lenin and his central government would be the "only thinking element" (Luxemburg, *TL*). She also criticized his claims that the public was incapable of spontaneity. She wrote, "Socialism by its very nature cannot be introduced by ukase [edict of the Russian government]...Only unobstructed, effervescing life falls into a thousand new forms and improvisations, brings to light creative force, itself corrects all mistaken attempts" (Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*). Of necessity, revolution cannot be compelled by the state. It must come from the people. In response to Lenin's criticisms of the populace's ability to

successfully revolt, she asserts, “Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee” (Luxemburg, *TL*). Finally, she advocated for a society that reflects freedom, writing, “Freedom only for the supporters of the go of one party-however numerous they may be-is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently...its effectiveness vanishes when "freedom" becomes a special privilege” (Luxemburg, *TRR*).

Luxemburg’s vision was often accused of being vague, impractical, and even anarchist. Engels wrote in his “Letter to Cuno” that the key difference between anarchists and communists is that anarchists say, “it is above all the state which must be done away with and then capitalism will go to blazes of itself. We [Communists] say: Do away with capital the concentration of all means of production in the hands of the few, and the state will fall of itself” (Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*). Luxemburg in her attempts to build a pure communist society is accused of wanting to do away with any form of authority, guilty of something bordering on anarchism. For Engels and Lenin, the goal is not the doing away with the state but the overthrow of capitalism. While the overthrow of that state might be inevitable, it is not the goal itself, nor a long- term effect. The old state will be replaced with a new one labeled the “international.” Luxemburg would merely reply that nobody, including Marx, knows exactly what a post-existing-framework communist society should look like. Maybe there is no state as it can be currently conceptualized in the existing paradigm.

Luxemburg believed that the revolution had to happen organically, and it had to come from the common people. Lenin disagreed, stating that the interests and aims of a social class “can and indeed *must* be determined without that class having a say in the matter” (Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*). Lenin was not without backing. Engels wrote, “a revolution is the most authoritarian thing there is...a small segment of the population imparts its will upon the other by

means of rifles...” (Engels). In her staunch adherence to an orthodox Marxian interpretation, Luxemburg accepts an overthrow in the hopes that some new, largely yet-to-be understood system leads the people into a utopia. Lenin labels Luxemburg as overly idealistic, if not entirely deluded. Lenin points out that the proletariat is too occupied with the day-in and day-out realities of working to have time to educate themselves or organize a revolution. It would realistically be up to enlightened individuals in the upper class to organize a revolution so that the entirety of the population could live a better life. Additionally, the upper classes would be better equipped to know what the better life is. When the lower classes organize revolutions, the ensuing result proves all-too-often to be a maddening chaos. One need only look at the French Revolution to see what proletariat-led revolutions can lead to. One cannot help but be reminded of Rousseau’s “forced to be free” mentality that mandating religion, censoring certain kinds of speech, and filling decisions by lot are required to be free, paradoxically undermining much of what people define as freedom in attempts to find some greater good for the masses. Like Lenin, he saw that certain kinds of exercises ought to be prevented in order to protect the greater good.

Luxemburg condemned Lenin on this front, specifically claiming that it cannot be up to the elite to appropriately determine what the masses do or do not need. She openly balked, “The very idea of socialism excludes minority rule” (Kolakowski, *MCOM*, 87). Lenin was guilty of underrating the “spontaneity of the masses” and seemed to her a mere replacement of the old ways—the rich deciding what is best for the poor (Kolakowski, *MCOM*, 82). She believed in a “pure” revolution led by and for the people, even as Lenin asserted that no “pure” proletarian revolution would ever occur (Kolakowski, *MCOM*, 96). While accused of “mystic” Marxism, she held onto her pure vision of the future (Kolakowski, *MCOM*, 88). Though she did not know where and how the revolution would occur, she believed the future would result in a “doing away with...all forms of oppression” (Kolakowski, *MCOM*, 90). She asserted until her assassination

that “It is contrary to history to represent work for reforms as a long drawn-out revolution...social transformation and a legislative reform do not differ according to their duration but according to their content” (Luxemburg, *ROR*, 58). Reforms suggested by figures like Bernstein can only exist within the capitalist paradigm. Revolutions overthrow the paradigm, the base, and the superstructures. Though reforms are commendable, they do not provide a clean slate. Additionally, it is largely impossible to know what the universal values and morals would look like in a communist society without that society first coming to fruition. Bernstein is putting the cart before the horse in projecting some kind of ethical basis for socialism. The latter must instead create the former.

The previously intellectually-driven debates surrounding Marxism were overshadowed in the final years of the Second International, as the world became concerned with an ever-impending World War I. Initially, reformist and orthodox Marxists alike argued that their role was not to take a position on the war. War is a larger part of the existing Capitalist system which results in the slaughter of the proletariat. Some orthodox Marxists such as Lenin and Luxemburg even went so far as to argue war could be used as an opportunity to encourage the population to overthrow capitalism. In 1914, however, the International collapsed, as most individuals aligned with their respective countries.

CHAPTER FOUR: *ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST*

Many of the greatest novels explore questions about how man can be entrapped in uncaring and flawed societies, but none does it better than Ken Kesey's 1962 *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. It is first worth acknowledging the context in which Kesey wrote the novel. It is estimated that between 220,000 and 269,500 individuals with schizophrenia were sterilized or killed between 1939 and 1945 in Germany (Torrey). Individuals were famously used as guinea pigs for horrific experiments in Nazi concentration camps under the supervision of the "angel of death" Doctor Mengele. Soviet psychiatrists of the 1950s organized themselves into the medical arm of the Gulag state. One of countless examples of these Gulag "therapies" included putting a cord into patients' mouth, threading it from the throat up through nasal passages, and drawing the string out through a nostril (Hendrickson). Between the years of 1850-1900, women were systematically placed in mental institutions for symptoms such as "religious excitement, epilepsy, and suppressed menstruation" (Pouba). Today the largely-accepted narrative is that many of these women were thrown into asylums merely because their husbands disliked their behavior (Pouba). One housewife who simply stood up to her domineering husband wrote in a defense of her sanity, "I, though a woman, have just as good a right to my opinion as my husband has to his" but was institutionalized for defying "all domestic control" (Moore). This is all to say that the very criteria for "madness" as well as how to treat insanity has changed constantly throughout the decades and been used as a weapon by the privileged and powerful to control dissidents. During Kesey's lifetime, he got to witness the inventor of the lobotomy receive a Nobel Peace Prize for medicine and read about a lobotomy turning John F. Kennedy's sister into a vegetable. In short, he saw the bigger picture that the medical community was not to be trusted for its consistency, reliability, or trustworthiness in society.

Though he was not the first, Kesey was one of the loudest proclaimers that patients are not helped by infected institutions with sick and inhumane “treatments.” If society is sick, which, particularly during the 1960s, would not have been a wholly unpopular idea, it would follow that mental institutions are sick, too. Marx acknowledged that the economy acts as the base for a larger superstructure. If the economy is sick, so too then is the ideology, the culture, the government, and the institutions within that society. Exterior conditions inform the interior states of people. In the novel, the outside world is a corrupted environment. The narrator of the novel, the Chief, says many of the “chronics” or the patients in the hospital have “flaws beat in over so many years of the guy running head-on into solid things that by the time the hospital found him he was bleeding rust in some vacant lot” (Kesey 12). Society is corrupted and so it corrupts the interior states of people. Sartre housed this sentiment in his Marxist works surrounding anti-psychiatry, stating, “Society is presented to each man as a perspective of the future and that the future penetrates to the heart of each one as a real motivation for his [mental illness] behavior” (Jopling). In other words, those who require assistance in the form of psychiatry are rationally responding to the many unlivable situations that permeate society. These sick individuals then enter into the hospital, which, theoretically, acts as a safe haven from corruption. Yet the hospital is also a manifestation of corruption. It is funded by the corrupted environment. The doctors and nurses come from the corrupted environment. The conceptions of madness and solutions for it come from the corrupted environment. It then makes sense that Randall McMurphy, the supposed example of the worst society has to offer, given that he is a repeat-offender criminal, is the novel’s protagonist. Kesey’s underlying message throughout the book seems to be that it is not the patients who are so crazy but society itself.

The novel is arguably not a “Marxist” text simply because of its demonstration of Marx’s superstructure, but because of the way it tackles conceptions of revolution versus reform. In this

sense, the novel is not only Marxist but Luxemburgian Marxist. While Bernstein argued that reforms could occur in society without a revolution and Lenin argued that a revolution would stem from the intelligentsia, Luxemburg asserted revolution was the only way out of a sick society, *and* it must be at the behest of the oppressed peoples themselves. In Kesey's novel, the only tools provided to cure the sick are methods now condemned by the medical community (case in point: the now illegalized lobotomy). While once "thought of as the big bright hope for a future psychosis-free America," the lobotomy decreased in popularity by the 1950s owing to its rocky reputation of hurting more than helping (Singer). The lobotomy and the negative manner in which it is portrayed in *Cuckoo's Nest* emphasizes Luxemburg's perspective. Those within the medical profession during the time of the lobotomy's popularity were not the ones to take it down. It was such a popular method during its height, it was taboo to speak out against it (El-Hai). Even nurses who did not believe in the procedure were also largely helpless, as they worked at the behest of the experts who signed their paychecks. It was those outside of the medical apparatus, largely the general population and a few who popularized the public's dissent in movies and novels, who took the lobotomy down. Reforms were not made within the profession like Bernstein would have proclaimed nor ordered from top-down like Lenin would have imagined, but overthrown by the people in Luxemburgian fashion. Only revolutions led by and for the patients can overthrow the paradigm, the base, and the superstructures. As Sartre puts it, "everyone in capitalist society is mentally ill...only total social change can provide the preconditions for the liberating disalienation of its individual members" (Sartre). *Cuckoo's Nest* provides the ideal world, narrative, and characters to illustrate Luxemburg's arguments that the only way out of an ill society is revolution by and for the people.

The novel's Luxemburgian-flavored Marxism is perpetuated by *Cuckoo's Nest's* narrator Native American Chief Bromden. He repeatedly illustrates that the mental hospital is supposed

to remedy mistakes made within “The Combine” of neighborhoods, churches, and schools, but fails to do so because the hospital itself is a manifestation of all the ills within the infected larger operating system. He even goes a step further and insists the hospital merely acts as a fist to cripple the rebellious. The Chief writes, “When a completed product goes back out into society, all fixed up good as new...it brings joy to the Big Nurse’s heart; something that came in all twisted different is now a functioning, adjusted component, a credit to the whole outfit and a marvel to behold” (Kesey 31). The Chief suggests that those who oppose societal norms are thrown into institutions where they are forced to play their designated roles. Only when they master these roles may they live “freely” in the outside world. This “freedom,” however, is an illusion. The hospital is a capitalist mechanism that fixes men so that they can continue to play their roles in a sick society. As Sartre writes, “Psychiatry functions as the policing and colonization of the psychic...concentrates on changing the self to fit existing social structures rather than changing society to fit the real needs and desires of human beings” (Sartre). This goes back in a literal sense to Luxemburg's argument that there are no reforms. When one attempts to fix society by creating unions, setting fair wages, and legislating laws for how long people can work, this only does two things: appease the proletariat just enough so that they continue to work within the sick system of capitalism, and put the proletariat under the control of more systems that were created within the conditions of sick society. One scholar wrote, in an essay regarding patient ethics and the novel, that the hospital in *Cuckoo’s Nest* is “not reminiscent of a ‘snake pit.’ The staff remains outwardly respectful and professional” (Colt 243). It claims to better its patients with promises of glistening reforms and evolving medical technologies; all the while, the hospital is a symptom of a larger virus that only perpetuates sickness. Likewise, society with all of its promises for reforms often only does just enough to decrease tensions and allow for business to continue as usual.

This means all the more when the Chief considers his ancestors were kicked off their land so the government could build a hydroelectric dam, technology prioritized above the quality of life for human beings. When the government officials visit his land, Chief says he can "see the apparatus inside them take the words I just said and try to fit the words in here and there, this place and that, and when they find the words don't have any place ready-made where they'll fit, machinery disposes of the words like they weren't even spoken" (Kesey 181). Here the Chief highlights a few of Luxemburg's Marxist ideas—first, the new communist society will not truly be understood until society has actually undergone the change; and second, that society cannot shift its paradigm without a real revolution where people are provided with the tools and language necessary to express the new world. Marx famously stated, "Revolution is necessary...because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew" (Marx, *The German Ideology*, 42). It is not so much for the hospital staff or, in Marx's case, the bourgeois' sake that a revolution is required to overthrow the rich. It is for the proletariat to come to terms with their oppression and start clean so that new universal values may be realized. The Chief recognizes this and so, acknowledging he is not in a position to lead an overthrow of the existing system, decides to appear as the system most prefers him—deaf and dumb. He completes his tasks like a robot. He is the encapsulation of Marx's description of the specialization of the worker as "...a simple, monotonous productive force that does not have to use intense bodily or intellectual faculties" (Marx, *Capital*, 548). Capitalism prefers mindless drones; forget how this affects the spirits of humans. Of course, the Chief goes on to say, "it wasn't me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all," driving home Marx's understanding of the world as exterior conditions informing interior states (Kesey 161). It was not the Chief who decided to one day stop talking, but instead a society that consistently

estranged him from nature and his fellow man that pushed him to a point of no return. When McMurphy takes the Chief out on a fishing trip, he observes, “I could see some good in the life around me. McMurphy was teaching me. I was feeling better than I’d remembered feeling since I was a kid, when everything was good and the land was still singing kid’s poetry to me” (Kesey 198). This realization suggests that, though the Chief has been in the mental hospital for over a decade, it has not made him better. If anything, it has kept him sick. McMurphy offers up stimulus external to the Chief to change his mood and mental health. McMurphy, the symbol of someone who fights back against society, reunites the Chief with his much-needed sense of connection with nature and other human beings. McMurphy is proof that the oppressed do have the ability to fight their way out of the existing system if they can just remember there is potential for better. In some ways, it feels like a chicken-or-the-egg quandary. How does man solve his loss of purpose and objectification of himself to think that he is not good enough when he needs purpose and self-esteem in order to fix these feelings? How does the proletariat revolt and build a new society when they lack the resources to do so? Kesey’s suggestion here seems to be that all it takes is someone who first recognizes the injustice of their circumstances and then takes a step further to fight back in little ways, which create a butterfly effect of sorts of revolution. It just takes one man to inspire others to spur a revolution.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest speaks directly to Marx’s criticism of man’s estrangement from himself, a symptom of man’s alienation. Marx claims that man is estranged from his productivity, creativity, and relationship with others in capitalist society. Considering that these are the things that make a man a man, men in capitalist society are not really men. They are shadows of their true potential. Sartre describes mental illness and deviant behavior as ways of “living unlivable situations” (Sartre). Mental illness is not an illness of the brain but a manifestation of a sick society’s expectations on men. Mental illness is not “mad men versus

sane men” but on men as a collective, “some reaching a certain stage of distress, others avoiding that stage” (Sartre). In *Cuckoo’s Nest*, all the men in the hospital have broken in some way or other from society, unable to play the roles the world expects of them. Many of them struggle to work, create, or connect with others. Yet Marx would seem to suggest that they are not sick individuals of their own accord but the collateral of capitalism. These men are not so different from the average men out in society. If anything, they are prime examples. They are visually apparent, wholly transparent encapsulations of men in capitalist society. They make “sane” men uncomfortable because they remind them of who they are inside. As Sartre writes, “The psychiatrist is at once a wage-earner and a sick person like everyone else” (Sartre). The patients are merely the most rancid, ripped, and unsightly. They are the gaunt faces that “normal” men would rather not see. They are a reflection of a broken society and all the broken men in it.

Marx argues that the individual is not only alienated from the product he produces, but from the production process itself. In capitalist society, human behavior is driven by the necessities of the production process, not the other way around. The novel does an ideal job of demonstrating this kind of symptom in men at the extreme end of the spectrum, patients consumed by a never-ceasing schedule that keeps them busy day-in and day-out. They exist in a form of “psychiatric slavery” “liberating the insane by oppressing him” (Szasz 1). They must wear all-white uniforms, deprived of the freedom to express themselves. Only McMurphy has a shirt that is not white on underneath his white attire, indicating his dissension. The Chief reflects, “He’s not gonna let them twist him and manufacture him” (Kesey 124). Only McMurphy defies Nurse Ratched’s expectations, “growing bigger...growing almost into a legend” the more she attempts to beat him down with brutal electric-shock treatments (Kesey 224). Only McMurphy both sees the status quo for what it is and openly challenges the role he is expected to play. One of the more poignant moments in the book is when McMurphy discovers that the vast majority of

the patients are not kept inside the institution against their will. McMurphy responds in utter disbelief that “it’s bullshit” and that the patients must not “have the guts” (Kesey 152).

McMurphy’s reaction is understandable. If the men are not made to stay there under the law, what is stopping them from walking out the door? Yet Marx and The Chief see the bigger picture. A man is not compelled under any law to work for less than what he deserves under capitalism, but his other option is living in a hostile world that does not allow him to survive. Marx laments that the bourgeois loves to “declare that this fact [raising expected hours to work] was a fine demonstration of what the proletariat really wanted” because the alternative was “being thrown out of employment altogether” (Marx, *Capital*, 397). The upper classes act as though it is a mercy to provide the proletariat with the work that enables them to survive when, really, all they are doing is compelling the proletariat to work for more and more hours, devaluing their work and very human nature. They are not “free,” nor do they have “choice”. They are coerced. Similarly, in the novel, patients are “free” to leave, but will not survive the outside world. Patient Harding calls them “rabbits” throughout the course of the book, and states they recognize their role in society. Patient Billy Bibbit cries at McMurphy, “You t-talk like we stayed in here because we liked it! Oh - it’s n-no use” (Kesey 152). These men are not under any law to stay, but they have no choice.

In the novel, Nurse Ratched or the “Big Nurse” runs the operation that is the hospital. Yet she seems to be less a Marxist analogy for the factory manager and more an analogy for the machine who runs the men themselves. In the novel, the men are supposed to be the Nurse’s reason for existing. After all, nurses exist to care for the sick. Her existence arises out of a need for men to fix a problem—primarily, their illness. She is supposed to serve them. And yet, it is the men who serve her. She is described as “more machine than woman” (Kesey 22). Her voice is “electric” (Kesey 113). Even the name “Nurse Ratched” is suggestive, suggesting a “ratchet,” a

device that uses a twisting motion in one direction to tighten bolts into place. One scholar observed that her name, “alludes to the concept of power being used and abused to define and confine people by an authority” (Ma 57). A nurse should be a healer, a caregiver. Instead, she observes, finds weaknesses, and uses them against the patients for control. At one point, she chillingly says to McMurphy, “You are committed, you realize. You are...under the jurisdiction of me” (Kesey 127). Marx observes that men made technologies in order to help them achieve greater productivity, but the men then became slaves to these technologies to the point where quality of life decreased as a result. He says that, in the current system, “The movements of the automated machines [are that] to which he must adapt his skills, not the other way around” (Marx, *Capital*, 548). In the novel, Nurse Ratched is the sewing machine of sorts, and the medications, electric shock therapies, and lobotomies are her needle clamps. In what is arguably one of the most memorable chapters of *Capital*, Marx states that the “result of the immense impetus given to technical improvement” is the enforcement of “uniformity, regularity, order and economy” and the increase of “anarchy and the proneness to catastrophe” (Marx, *Capital*, 635). In short, the power of machines over man has allowed man to do more for himself on all accounts—including suppression and self-sabotage. Predictably, these feelings of constriction and claustrophobia only increase men’s sense of rebellion and make revolution inevitable.

Of course, all of these ideas bring about questions of what must be done to fix society. For many, including Marx, the obvious answer is revolution. This impulse is quite present in the novel. In one memorable scene, patient Harding is playing Monopoly—a game meant to teach players about the evils of private property, capitalism, and the suffering of landing on someone else’s property—and makes the connection of Monopoly’s rigged nature and that of the hospital itself. He sees the control panel as an analogy for raging against the machine. The Chief acknowledges the point is in the attempt as McMurphy “tries to lift something he knows he can’t

lift, something everybody knows he can't lift" because "just for a second" it makes the patients think "by golly, he might do it" (Kesey 98). When McMurphy loses the bet and he owes men money, he says, "But I tried, though. Goddammit, I sure as hell did that much, now, didn't I?" (Kesey 98). In this quote, he is technically referring to trying to lift the control panel, but the significance is greater. McMurphy is suggesting that the men complain about their position, yet never try to better themselves. They are in a corrupt, sick system. but they do not fight and so have less right to complain. It is no coincidence the control panel symbolizes all of the deeply rooted, unmoving, and unchanging aspects of a seemingly set-in-stone system. Revolution led by the people might seem doomed to fail—Lenin certainly thought so—but Luxemburg would be on McMurphy's side of the table. True revolution can only come from the ground up, and it is the duty of the oppressed to fight their own battles. Later, McMurphy physically lashes out at Nurse Ratched and is rewarded with a lobotomy. He is seemingly proof that rebellion and revolution always fails. Yet neither the book nor Marx's own conclusions would support this dismal suggestion as an overarching conclusion, given the later positive impacts he has even post-death on the lives of the patients he touched.

McMurphy is the novel's Marx-figure, albeit a contradictory one. Yet it is the contradictions that make McMurphy out to be more of a leader in the minimal way Luxemburg conceives of a leader as opposed to the authoritarian manner in which Lenin conceives of a leader. While McMurphy inspires the patients to defy Nurse Ratched's authority, verbalize wrongs within the hospital, and enable the "mute" Chief to speak, he is also a beneficiary of the corrupt system. He gets a rise out of people who stand up to Nurse Ratched. He wins money from playing games. He uses the Chief to his own ends. He is not a "giant come out of the sky to save us from the Combine that was networking the land with copper wire and crystal," as the Chief puts it, but an every-man (Kesey 244). He is both used and a user of the system. It is his

status as Luxemburg's envisioned everyman that enables McMurphy to relate to the patients. He does not pretend to be devoid of sin. If anything, he parades his imperfections, which allows the patients to respect and revere him. He is not like Lenin's version of an authoritarian, prescribing a vision for what revolution looks like or suggesting that he knows better. He is more like Luxemburg, seeking a system that is better than the existing one and attempting to better his own life. He says to the patients, "I couldn't figure it at first, why you guys were coming to me like I was some kind of savior...I want out of here just as much as the rest of you. I got just as much to lose hassling that old buzzard as you do" (Kesey 75). McMurphy does not seek power. His intent is not to be a martyr, despite his death. He, too, "wants out."

Nurse Ratched often points out just how much McMurphy benefits within the confines of the hospital in attempts to turn the patients against him. She says, after a day of their gambling, "I'm not criticizing this sort of activity as such; I just thought it would be better if we didn't have any delusions about the man's [McMurphy's] motives" (Kesey 204). She seeks to expose that McMurphy is not the hero they make him out to be. McMurphy's foil, Harding, continues this train of thought, saying, "What's wrong with him making a little profit...He's making the most of his time in here" (Kesey 204-205). He agrees with Nurse Ratched that McMurphy profits. This is when the other patients come to his defense. Billy, a reverent follower of McMurphy, replies, "Where is he making muh-muh-money out of teaching me to dance?" pointing out that McMurphy has done much to help the men out of the goodness of his heart (Kesey 205). He is not merely acting as a manipulator, nor does he act as though he is above the rest of them. He, too, is a product of the system.

McMurphy is not all good or all bad. He is driven by selfishness as well as philanthropy. He does what he can to survive and thrive within the current corruption, all the while searching for a way to overthrow it. Billy, a young, sweet-tempered man with a stutter, idolizes McMurphy

(“McMurphy was his special friend and hero”) and so McMurphy comes to make him his project (Kesey 201). Billy at one point asks McMurphy, ““Did you ever have people l-l-laughing at you? No, because you're so b-big and so tough! Well, I'm not big and tough”” (Kesey 151). McMurphy makes it his mission to prove to Billy that he is stronger than he thinks he is, inviting a girl into the hospital Billy can lose his virginity to. At first, this attempt proves successful. After losing his virginity, Billy introduces the girl to Nurse Ratched without a sign of a stutter. ““Good morning, Miss Ratched,’ he says, not even making any move to get up”” (Kesey 242). He displays no shame, seemingly making the symbolic transition from boy into man. McMurphy’s rebellion results in Billy’s coming-of-age. Sadly, in a successful attempt to revert Billy back to his childlike state, Nurse Ratched says, ““What worries me, Billy...is how your poor mother is going to take this,”” pulling Billy’s biggest trigger—his abusive (alluded to be sexually abusive) relationship with his mother (Kesey 242). He regresses back to his scared, child-like self, begging Nurse Ratched to please not tell his mother, in reply to which she calls him ““poor, miserable, misunderstood *boy*,”” refusing to acknowledge his status as a man. Pages later, Billy dies by suicide. Nurse Ratched assigns McMurphy the guilt, labeling Billy’s suicide a symptom of McMurphy’s ““God” complex. The irony here, of course, is that Ratched seems the most guilty of exercising this God complex, dictating what men are allowed to think, say, and do. One could draw an analogy here to capitalist governments which, according to Marx, control every facet of man’s life, yet accuse those who dare to rebel against it as the ones responsible for violence, as opposed to reflecting that it is the capitalist conditions that spurred the need for individuals to revolt any way possible. This is the final straw for McMurphy, who, owing to a lethal combination of grief, failure, and coalesced hatred, crudely attacks Nurse Ratched. This leads to McMurphy’s lobotomization—the ultimate silencing.

The symbolism of Billy's end is interpreted differently according to different characters in the novel. Some of the patients don't view it as such a failure. They see his suicide as an act of agency. Billy spent most of the novel regularly attempting suicide by "slicin' his wrists" but is always scared by Nurse Ratched into stopping (Kesey 202). Finally, at the end of the story, he overcomes his fear of her and asserts his autonomy—albeit a tragic autonomy—by opting to take his own life. On the other hand, McMurphy's attempts to empower Billy led to a complete collapse of self-esteem. In the hopes of inspiring him to revolt, McMurphy exposes Billy's lack of self-esteem which leads to a complete destruction of self-esteem. This can hardly be considered a success, and perhaps seeks to expose the dangers of attempting to inspire a need to revolt in a person who is already damaged beyond repair.

McMurphy's end in the novel is unquestionably brutal, Ratched laying out his body front and center with the words "lobotomized" clearly stated for all to see. He is a trophy to display to the patients showing that the Combine always wins. Yet his legacy lives on. The Chief writes that Nurse Ratched failed to get her ward "back into shape" with "McMurphy's presence still tromping up and down the halls...She couldn't rule with her old power any more" (Kesey 247). Rather than being scared into submission, the patients discover that power is an illusion. In numbers, they can rebel. Harding, a character who acted as McMurphy's foil in the novel because he always accepted his societal role of being a "rabbit," finally advocates for his release and tells Ratched she's "full of bullshit" (Kesey 247). Chief rips out the control panel and hurls it against the window, "like a bright cold water baptizing the sleeping earth," an analogy for the Chief's ability to change the supposedly unchanging and enable his own escape (Kesey 250).

Marx believed in the ability for the majority to revolutionize society. He considers it to be an inevitability. He writes, "By maturing the material conditions and the social combination of the process of production, it matures the contradictions and antagonisms of the capitalist form of

that process, and thereby ripens both the elements for forming a new society and the forces tending towards the overthrow of the old one” (Marx, *Capital*, 635). In other words, as technology improves and the capitalist system continues to clamp down, it only increases the disquiet among the proletariat and guarantees revolution. Granted, as in the novel, there is still ambiguity about how and when this overthrow of society will occur. In the novel, the Chief runs from the hospital, following the path of a dog and running towards the headlights of an automobile in the dark. Here there seems to be a suggestion: it is mankind’s fate to understand the struggle between the natural (dog) and the technological (automobile) and man’s place among them. Communism’s fate is similarly opaque. It has been said that “One of the difficulties Marx bequeathed his followers was his failure to define clearly the concepts of ‘proletarian dictatorship’ and ‘transition to communism’” (Bender). The defense for this is generally that Marx did this deliberately—believing that only after a proletarian revolution could these definitions derive any true meaning. In Marx’s mind, there is a sense in which those who fight for a revolution go into the darkness of ambiguity with the hope of finding something better.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The date of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* release certainly contributed to its long-lasting legacy. The 1960s were marked by the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and countercultural movements. Oppressive institutions like state hospitals would certainly seem to appeal less to a generation consumed with bodily autonomy. Though there is no concrete evidence President Kennedy read Kesey's novel, he nonetheless signed the Community Mental Health Act in 1963, which paved the way for the deinstitutionalization of state hospitals. Regardless of exactly the role the novel played in policy changes, it is impressive that a book whose overarching theme is power dynamics made such a difference in changing the psychiatric industry. The author of the novel, Ken Kesey, was the product of two Colorado dairy farmers (Gross). He had so little money in college he participated in CIA-financed studies involving hallucinogenic drugs to supplement his income (Gross). He is a living, breathing example of the Luxemburg-Marxist themes he explores in his novel, a poor man forced to turn his own body into a commodity who then managed to fight a superstructure and produce changes for millions of people.

There is an overarching question here of what it really means to change the world in a positive sense. One of the reasons Marxism continues to attract such a political following is its real-world applicability. Eduard Bernstein, Vladimir Lenin, and Rosa Luxemburg each had different ideas about what this real-world applicability boiled down to. Bernstein thought changing the world came down to legislative reform. Lenin thought it meant educating and directing the proletariat towards a better life. Luxemburg thought it meant the realization of the innate revolutionary character of the masses and an inevitable proletariat-driven battle for freedom.

I believe that the answer lies within the title, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. It stems from a nursery rhyme of unknown origin,

Three geese in a flock.

One flew east, one flew west,

One flew over the cuckoo's nest.

O-U-T spells OUT,

Goose swoops down and plucks you out.

The idea here then is that there are some birds who go one way, some birds who fly in direct opposition to them, and then one special bird who flies above them all. When the rhyme says, "Goose swoops down and plucks you out," it is my interpretation that it is the bird who flies above the rest who has the power to change other birds' directions. In society, there are those who are able to go along with the status-quo, divergent individuals who go directly in the opposite direction and are therefore caught in the crossfire, and those who get a bird's-eye view of the system and, in doing so, can do something about it. This bird who flies above is, too, going in a different direction than the birds who fly along with the status quo, but flies above rather than against, so as to protect themselves and get the perspective needed to then help those divergent individuals out of a dangerous path.

In the context of the novel, I interpret this to mean that McMurphy, while certainly a member of the divergent class of bird, flies above rather than directly against the individuals with the power. He is never so rebellious that he gets caught in the crossfire (at least not until the end), fighting the nurses with his humor and quick wit in order to rebel in small ways. In the nursery rhyme, each bird's origin is a nest. Each bird is a product of the "cuckoo" or the craziness that Marx describes as the external conditions corrupting mankind. Yet some are able to recognize the origins of their own alienation and estrangement and make the decision to differ from both the

followers and the contrarians. Some fly above it all, and act as a symbol of hope for the rest of the birds who hope to one day, too, fly over the cuckoo's nest and create a better world away from the nest that created the cuckoo conditions in the first place. Importantly for Luxemburg in this metaphor, these birds that fly above the rest are necessarily the weaker ones, and the divergent ones who were not privileged enough to be allowed into the flock of status-quo birds. Only the excluded birds have the origin to know what it is like to live out a divergent existence and can, therefore, help the others in their quest to find a new system where all the birds can live in a system that works for them.

The legacy of Marx is certainly clouded. While he committed himself to the enlightenment of the dispossessed and sought to improve the condition of man, the implementation of his theories led to some of the greater atrocities known to humankind. It is one of the greater ironies that thoughts that stemmed from a man so consumed with bettering the condition of people led to so much violence. Yet perhaps destruction in the shape of a revolution is necessary to achieve the possibility for the utopia Marx envisions. As tragically highlighted in the novel, the death of McMurphy is what spurs many of the characters to leave the hospital and Nurse Ratched to lose the respect and power she once commanded. When McMurphy strikes Nurse Ratched, the Chief writes, "We couldn't stop him because we were the ones making him do it...our need that was making him push himself slowly up from sitting...like one of those moving-picture zombies, obeying orders beamed at him from forty masters" (Kesey 245). The violence, when spurred by the suppression of a majority treated unjustly, seems inevitable. The question, then, is the following: would the revolution positively affect the world? To go back to the questions Hegel and Marx asked, consider: is it better to find the rationality in the home one has built or to fly the nest in the hopes of rebuilding and making a better world for all?

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