Scott Henkel, *Direct Democracy: Collective Power, the Swarm, and the Literatures of the Americas*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2017. xii + 209 pp. (Cloth US\$65.00)

Direct Democracy has two stated goals: to look at “direct democracy” as conceptualized by authors who wrote about the Americas and to show how they used the “swarm metaphor” to describe it. Scott Henkel’s clear writing renders the foundational lexicon of European-based political philosophy accessible. And his comparative analysis puts the political philosophy of such people as seventeenth-century Dutch Baruch Spinoza and nineteenth- and twentieth-century German Carl Schmitt into conversation with the writings of intellectuals in Britain, Germany, Haiti, Trinidad, Mexico, Scotland, and the United States. He addresses what it means to challenge “constituted power,” a term that appears throughout the book.

On the one hand, Henkel considers texts by authors who benefitted from the privilege of whiteness—Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle, U.S.-American essayist and poet Walt Whitman, U.S. attorney Thomas R. Gray (who wrote *The Confessions of Nat Turner* [1831]), and the Chicago-born, German-raised socialist B. Traven. On the other hand, he looks at writers whose lived experience was marked indelibly by the question of racial discrimination, even if some such as Haitian Marie Chauvet also enjoyed a family history of privilege. Finally, he includes Trinidadian socialist/political activist C.L.R. James and Chicago-based labor organizer Lucy Parsons.

In considering the question of the legitimacy of the right to organize, protest, and revolt in the effort to achieve equality, Henkel includes both writers who unequivocally supported what he calls the “Riot Act situation” (p. 123) and intellectuals who were vehemently against it (such as Carlyle), as well as others (such as Whitman) whose texts are problematically, but nonetheless productively, ambivalent. His argument for studying the potentialities, but also the dangers, of direct democracy is successful and may be read as both a textbook and a serious work in political philosophy.

Henkel deliberately considers as veritable historical actors the individuals who make up the “swarms,” to which each of the primary texts’ authors refer, to varying degrees. Whether these “swarms” figure as “real” protagonists in non-fictional texts such as James’s *The Black Jacobins* or are understood as fictional as in Chauvet’s novella *Love*, Henkel problematizes what it means for them to be described as masses rather than individuals. He then asks why narratives that represent histories of mass revolt resort to organizing the narrative around a binary that posits the exceptional protagonist—either celebrated as a hero or denigrated as a madman (such as Toussaint or Nat Turner)—against that of a

“swarm,” understood as a conglomerate of homogenized beings, who lack individuality. His answer hinges on the complexity of constituted power. That is, even when those who are marginalized achieve access to power, they cannot necessarily change the nature of constituted power.

Henkel's book also actively meditates on the texts as a way of thinking through the predicament of power (that which is established, that of the revolting masses), and what it means when the threatening underdog comes to occupy the space of constituted power. Drawing especially on Spinoza and more recently on Nick Nesbitt's work on Spinoza, as well as Paul B. Miller's writings on the “leaders/masses” dynamic, Henkel gives attention to what he argues is one of James's own regrets in his various versions of the *Black Jacobins*. He argues that James would have liked to pay far more attention to the individuals who composed the masses that sustained the Haitian Revolution, those individuals whom a fictionalized Toussaint, in James's play *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History* (which preceded the various iterations of *The Black Jacobins*), is referred to as “a people in arms ... two thousand leaders to be got rid of as well” (cited on p. 33).

On the one hand, in focusing on the individuals who make up the masses and their relationship to varying types of power, Henkel, whose work is overtly informed by Marxist thought, successfully avoids the grandiose language of those contemporary Marxist scholars who stubbornly dodge the indisputable realities of contemporary neoliberalism. On the other hand, given Henkel's superb mastery of canonical European political theory, and his fascinating readings of texts that usually do not receive much attention by political theorists, it would be exciting to see him, in future scholarship, think through the work of political theorists who are less canonical and/or whose deliberations offer alternative perspectives for thinking through the question of power, such as: Joyce Mitchell Cook, Démesvar Delorme, Enrique Dussel, Kathryn Gines, and Kaiama L. Glover. And although Henkel mentions Colin Dayan's work briefly, a more sustained attention to her deliberations on the implications of Locke's writings in *The Law is a White Dog* (2013) would be an exciting further interrogation.

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