The Point is to Change It
Theoretical Innovation and Political Practice in the History of Marxism

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SFI Graduate Workshop in Computational Social Science
June 28, 2018
Speech Acts

- Philosophy of Language
  - Why do people decide to write/speak?
  - What is the “purpose” of a linguistic utterance?
Speech Acts

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- Logical Positivism
  - Wittgenstein (1921), Carnap (1928), Popper (1934)*
  - Point of a statement is to describe something – description can be evaluated based on correspondence with observable world
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- Speech Act Theory
  - Wittgenstein (1953), Austin (1955), Searle (1969)
  - Everyday language contains tons of non-evaluable statements!
What I’m interested in: **Perlocutionary Effects**

“Workers of the World, Unite!”
- Evaluable?
- Utterance “does” something?

Contrast with “Illocutionary Effects”
- “I hereby pronounce you legally married”
The “Battlefield of Ideas”

“In previous armies, soldiers used their time to clean their weapons and stock up on ammunition. Our weapons are words... and we may need our arsenal at any moment.”
Gramsci and Ideology

“Ideas and opinions are not spontaneously ‘born’ in each individual brain: they have had a centre of formation, or irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion – a group of men, or a single individual even, which has developed them and presented them”
Gramsci and Counter-Hegemony

- **War of Maneuver**: direct confrontation with the state

- **War of Position**: ideological battle
  - “Resistance to domination with culture, rather than physical might, as its foundation”
  - “The only viable possibility in the West”
Measuring Innovation and Influence


- **Novelty**
  - How “surprised” are we by the discursive patterns in this text?
  - Should be high for texts introducing new ideas

- **Transience**
  - To what extent did the discursive patterns “stick”, in subsequent texts?
  - Should be low for influential texts

- **Resonance**
  - The “imbalance” between Novelty and Transience (mathematically, $N - T$)
  - Should be high for influential texts which introduced new ideas
Measuring Innovation and Influence

Novelty

\[ N_w(j) = \frac{1}{w} \sum_{d=1}^{w} \text{KLD} \left( s^{(j)} \mid s^{(j-d)} \right) \]

Transience

\[ T_w(j) = \frac{1}{w} \sum_{d=1}^{w} \text{KLD} \left( s^{(j)} \mid s^{(j+d)} \right) \]
Topic Model

- $K = 100$ topics
- Books broken into chapters, essays/pamphlets unaltered
- NLTK stopwords, words with < 3 characters removed
- 2,000 iterations
Extension to Barron et al. (2018)

- French Case
  - Speeches proceed one-at-a-time
  - Next speaker can refer/respond to previous speech

- This Case
  - Texts published at same time (competing party platforms, reportbacks from conferences)
  - Only some have explicit citations
## The Data: *Marx Before Marxism, Marxism After Marx*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Marx Era</th>
<th>Lenin Era</th>
<th>Bukharin Era</th>
<th>Other Era</th>
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<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Republic proclaimed in China</td>
<td>Luxuryburg: <em>Accumulation of Capital</em></td>
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<td>Stalin: <em>National Question</em></td>
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<td>1914</td>
<td>Outbreak of First World War</td>
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<td>Lenin: <em>Philosophical Notebooks</em></td>
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<td>1916</td>
<td>February and October Revolution in Russia: USA enters war</td>
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<td>Lenin: <em>Imperialism</em></td>
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<td>1917</td>
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<td>1918</td>
<td>Abortive revolution in Germany</td>
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<td>Bukharin and Preobrazhensky: <em>ABC of Communism</em></td>
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<td>Kronstadt revolt: beginning of NEP</td>
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<td>USSR established: triumph of Fascism in Italy</td>
<td>Trotsky: <em>New course</em></td>
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<td>1964</td>
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<td>1968</td>
<td>Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia: May events in Paris</td>
<td>Frank: <em>Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America</em></td>
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<td>Braverman: <em>Labour and Monopoly Capital</em></td>
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<td>Cohen: <em>Karl Marx’s Theory of History</em></td>
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The Data

- 28 full books
- 296 documents
- Novelty, Transience, Resonance for 230 documents
### Topics

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<th>Topic 59</th>
<th>Topic 97</th>
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<td>Class Structure</td>
<td>LTV</td>
<td>Role of Peasantry</td>
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Table 1: 10 Most Indicative Words for Each Topic
Results

Transience v. Novelty

- Counts
  - $10^0$
  - $2 \times 10^0$
  - $3 \times 10^0$
  - $4 \times 10^0$
  - $6 \times 10^0$

Resonance v. Novelty

- Counts
  - $100$
  - $2 \times 100$
  - $3 \times 100$
  - $4 \times 100$
Results

Transience v. Novelty

Stalin, "Economic Problems of the USSR", 1951

Lenin, "State and Revolution", 1917

Counts
### Results

#### Resonance v. Novelty

![Graph showing resonance and novelty distribution](image)

- **Resonance $R$**
- **Novelty $\mathcal{N}$**
- Count ranges: $10^0$, $2 \times 10^0$, $3 \times 10^0$, $4 \times 10^0$, $4 \times 10^0$

The graph illustrates the distribution of resonance values against novelty values, with a color gradient indicating the count ranges.
Results

Resonance v. Novelty

Lenin, "State and Revolution", 1917

Trotsky, "The Revolution Betrayed", 1936

Stalin, "Economic Problems of the USSR", 1951
**Novelty “sweet spot”?**

- $H(Cat \ in \ the \ Hat) \approx 6.4$
- $H(Harry \ Potter) \approx 8.0$
- $H(NY \ Times) \approx 7.5$, $H(Le \ Monde \ Diplomatique) \approx 8.3$
- $H(Hamlet) \approx 10.0$
- $H(Gravity’s \ Rainbow) \approx 10.8$, $H(Finnegans \ Wake) \approx 11.7$
Political Events: Resonance of a text before and after a major event?

- 1917: Russian Revolution
- 1956: USSR invades Hungary
- 1968: Paris, Czechoslovakia
- 1991: Fall of USSR

High novelty after event could indicate changing strategies
Large (statistically significant?) change points: do they match up with event timeline?
I ideological Competition and Strategy: How effectively does Marxism compete with nationalism? Liberation Theology (Christian and Islamic)? Fascism?

- Strategy choice: Throw out the old and innovate after a major event? Or “stick to your guns”? (“Revisionist” vs. “Anti-Revisionist”)
- Arab losses in 1967, 1973 wars against Israel: pan-Arab nationalism loses credibility
- Soviet invasion of Afghanistan: pro-Soviet groups throughout Central Asia, Middle East, North Africa fall out of favor (anti-Soviet groups? Rojava?)
- Oslo Accords: PLO issues “novel” statements, loses credibility. Hamas “sticks to their guns” (literally), rapid increase in support
Extensions

- **Hip Hop Lyrics**: Who was most novel/influential? Were they “rewarded” for their contribution?
  - RapGenius scrape: 2 million songs
  - RIAA sales dataset
  - How long do “styles” last?
  - Regional variation: which cities’ ideas/styles spread to rest of country? Which cities are most insular?
The End

Thank You!