appears to include elements that are simultaneously hierarchical and nonhierarchical.

A closer analysis of P.S. reveals that what at first appears as hierarchy among the Reticulites, Initiates, and Seekers should be understood more properly as a productive structure that coordinates relationships organized by pedagogy rather than power. For P.S., what counts is the way that individuals relate to a stage of education and their process of entering into knowledge (where knowledge is always a process, never a fixed state or just an accumulation of things to know). The effects in this process are far from unidirectional, altering both teacher and student, Reticulite and Initiate, alike.

At times, Reticulites are mistaken for a priest class. Despite their appearance, and the prevalence of the misnomer "red monk," the Reticulites are not driven by dogma or consensus. The reason for this requires brief historical contextualization. P.S.'s fundamental departure from sociopolitical and historical norms has to do with the world outside of the parasite. After all, none of us, not even those members of P.S. whose life has been changed by being in the presence of the parasite, operate in a vacuum.

What follows may seem like a digression to some, but P.S. has sought to withdraw from the fundamental modes of liberal governance that have guided Western thought at least

from the period of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century (following the ideas of philosophers such as John Locke and economists like Adam Smith). As an overview, the eighteenth century saw an increased uptake of ideas about equality and liberty as central tenets of democracy. At the political level, in place of the 'Divine Right of kings," concepts such as freedom of speech and secular government rose to prominence. Within the economics of this period, there was an uptake of the fundamental belief in the free market (with the later development of neoliberalism in the 1970s, the free market came to be theorized increasingly and more extremely as a self-perpetuating machine that enabled total economization). The thread of continuity across political and economic thought in the period of classical liberalism was "the individual," a concept characterized by its ability to flatten the kaleidoscopic differences of everyday people into subjects that could be treated *as if* they were identical and equal, without histories or particularities. Up until World War II, this form of liberalism was arguably the dominant political and economic worldview. We might say that liberalism had garnered "legitimacy" based on the idea that everyone was equal.

Following World War II, the United States and liberal governmentality underwent a series of so-called "legitimacy crises." An assemblage of events revealed that perhaps, after

all, not everyone was being treated as equal because of fundamental imbalances across categories such as race, gender, class, citizenship status, and sexuality. Without going into detail about this important historical period, which several P.S. scholars have studied in great detail we might gesture toward the rise of the Civil Rights movement in the U.S., as well as an acceleration of anti-colonial social movements and decolonization around the world. Such movements famously culminated in the global political events of 1968, including civil unrest in France during May 1968, which included the occupation of the Administration Building at the University of Chicago. This global event of "1968" came to mark a boiling point of a broader set of socio-political movements that put pressure on traditional forms of government that claimed to uphold liberty and equality, but in fact relied on segregation, exploitation of workers, colonization and imperialism, patriarchy, and so forth.

Some political theorists have argued that, after 1968, the political legitimacy crisis of the 1950s and 1960s turned into a crisis of culture. Various Western nations, including the U.S., began instituting both formal and informal policies as a strategy for addressing the challenges of difference. Some of these cultural policies took the form of concepts that are

familiar today, including "multiculturalism" and "diversity." Sometimes, these ideas have been summarized as belonging to the "politics of cultural recognition." Because of the tireless efforts of various activist movements, the state was pushed to recognize different minority and marginalized groups as significant to the public sphere. Several political thinkers have explored a "culturalization of politics" that unfolded in the 1970s. In a way, countries like the U.S. approached the crisis of liberal legitimacy by figuring out how to carve out a space to allow different cultures a place within liberalism without disturbing the core frameworks of liberal governance. In other words, these theorists have argued that by the 1970s and 1980s, there was a move to change culture by adopting concepts like multiculturalism and diversity, but without making a major change to beliefs about the free market or about inequalities in income, which had only increased around the world during this period. One version of this conflict may be familiar to some through the politics of assimilation through which compliance has been demanded of minoritized people, cultures, and perspectives.

The cultural anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli, for instance, points out that there is a foundational contradiction at play within this way of thinking, insofar as it posits two competing claims. First, liberalism is grounded in the belief that

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in cases of cultural conflict the problem of difference is solved through public reason. Essentially, for liberalism, debate always yields ultimate consensus. A second claim, however, clashes with this idea. [Liberalism also posits that we need to bracket certain forms of difference, which need to be removed from public debate until we reach a time that their challenges can be managed.] In moments when these two imperatives clash, what happens? In the simplest terms, the state or any institution in question no longer engages in cultural recognition, frequently shifting the burden and responsibility to people who are not part of a perceived consensus or majority.

Here is the historical and theoretical juncture at which P.S., including the Reticulites, emerge as alternative actors, making perhaps their most important and radical contribution. To put it directly, P.S. does not believe that the best end point to any rational process is consensus. We can characterize this view as radical, insofar as within liberalism, any political goal outside of consensus is unthinkable. However, later political thinkers give us the important concepts of "dissensus" and "difference" as articulated by thinkers including Judith Butler, Audre Lorde, Jacques Rancière, and others. The critique of consensus explores the way in which it yields homogeneity and maintains a harmful fantasy of resolution. In its place, dissensus describes processes of assessment and adjudication

that are bottom-up (not top-down) and emerge from a queasy and messy space of difference that refuses the normalizing undertow of sameness. Dissensus is not about complete disagreement or chaos. It is not a mode of anarchy, as that term is commonly understood. Neither is it, however, an acceptance of the liberal value of tolerance, which still carries with it a degree of patronizing aggression (i.e., if I tolerate you or your viewpoint, I let you be, but I don't face and grapple with your difference). While consensus understands difference as a problem that needs to be dealt with, dissensus embraces difference as the foundation of solidarity. Dissensus introduces a way of being together in difference, with all of the ambivalences and irresolvable challenges it brings, without prematurely pushing the ejector button of discomfort. Dissensus calls for an accountability for oneself and for the emergence of one's community. Dissensus calls for courage and resilience. Dissensus creates a space from which major change can emerge.

In so many ways, the Reticulites dwell within and practice dissensus. Disagreement with the Initiates, for instance, does not currently yield some totalitarian invocation of the law, as it does in most hierarchical systems. In this way, P.S. can be said to be a "world": a world that thrives on the the creative practice of change. As Lauren Berlant and Michael

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Warner have observed, "a world-making project" or "world" is different "from community or group because it necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright." In this sense, it is not strictly correct to call P.S. a "community," "group," or "society" as it is so often characterized. Though different members take on different roles at any moment in time, the operations and people of P.S. are never stable (even the characterization in this text is nothing more than an interpretation at a particular moment in the unfolding of a complex assemblage, multiple pens represented While a group or a society refers to a quantifiable set of individuals, "a world" could not be captured using a membership roster. Instead, as Hannah Arendt teaches us, "a world" is the space of possibility for action and speech. A world does not point to a collection of people, but the potentiality produced through their collectivity. In this way, through both its dissensus and its commitments, however paradoxical it may seem, P.S. aspires to be a world, to always change and exceed itself.

Remember: P.S. is change and adaptation. As the parasite has taught us, change can come from any direction. It happens perpetually. As so many thinkers, writers, and leaders through history have realized, in so many different languages

and terminologies, <u>change is the only lasting truth</u>. Change is multidirectional, and all that you change changes you in return. Such change is the source of vulnerability and thus of true power in the world. To remain the same is to decay and dissipate. To change is to embody difference, to risk everything, and ultimately to make anything possible.