

Who's Afraid of Revolution?

The State or Revolution: Separating False Friends

Revolution begins trivially yet ends with great consequence. A solitary suicide,¹ perhaps the right word in the right place,² wakes the masses from their slumber. Despair is replaced with a hope for a better world characterized by freedom, justice, and equality, and the isolated and depoliticized find a voice among people determined to act rather than be acted upon. A thousand conversations held in a thousand sites converge into a manifesto that inspires a thousand actions. The groundswell of discontent creates the potential for a new and better world, but can degrade into a nightmare. Either way, it produces a shift to which militants, counterrevolutionaries, and bystanders respond. “Join the revolution and fight for your freedom,” one side says. “Oppose it for your own safety,” says the other. “But consider carefully,” say both, “for a wrong decision could be deadly.” Revolution is a tantalizing potential for the oppressed, a perpetual danger for the elites, and, save for the brief moments when it captures center stage, it hovers constantly at the margins of society.

Hope for transformation, breaking down the status quo, and building a new society from the ground up are the sentiments at the barricades of revolution. Throughout the 2010s, protestors for radical change in society and politics declared their commitment to “loving engagement,”³ “solidarity amongst the protesters,”⁴ “rebuilding society,”⁵ and respecting the “voice of the people.”⁶ They made militant demands for “freedom,”⁷ an end to “dictatorship,”⁸ “consent,”⁹ and the obstruction of the “one percent.”¹⁰ As revolutionary movements appeared across the globe, the institutions and

individuals they targeted clung tightly to their traditions, lamenting the injustice of their circumstances and decrying the vitriol of the protestors. Elites condemned the “bad actors”¹¹ and speculated about what sinister reasons motivated the demonstrators to “vilify . . . success.”¹²

Justified or not, these movements raise a question: How does revolution transform the status quo? What transpired in Tahrir, Zucotti, Ferguson, Moscow, Cape Town, Hong Kong,¹³ Paris,¹⁴ and more—before our very eyes, yet still unseen—to bring about the greatest protests of a generation? Why did the “shot heard round the world”¹⁵ at Lexington and Concord catalyze a revolution when all the previously fired bullets did not? How is it that the deaths of several hundred protestors in Tehran became more significant to the Iranian people than the thousands killed in the decades leading up to Black Friday?

This book arises from my realization that no theory conceives of revolution without relying on the state, broadly defined as a consistent arrangement of concepts, subjects, objects, and forces. Concepts of revolution have always been centered around concepts of the state, while in political theory the attempt to understand the state has always preceded the attempt to comprehend revolution. Using concepts, subjects, objects, and forces that describe the state to define revolution renders the concept of revolution a product of the state. Until revolution is conceptually freed from that to which it is opposed, our attempts to use it to bring about transformative change will only reproduce the constraints of power under the guise of removing them. My goal is to separate revolution from the state—to study, analyze, and dissect radical change in order to understand its possibilities, its dangers, and its ability to inform our collective struggles.

Theories of revolution provide some guidance, but we do not yet have one that describes all revolutions. For example, the usual theories of revolution cannot satisfactorily explain the events of 2011. The protestors were not traditional proletarians—many could even be classified as bourgeoisie—nor did they aspire to seize the means of production. They did not desire a social contract that would lead them out of their natural state and establish a sovereign. Their target was not a repressive regime of signs, concepts, and structures; their goal not the deconstruction of meaning for the freedom of indeterminacy. To this day, most analyses of the events focus on the motivations and strategies of the protestors.

A model that explains the what, why, and how of revolution remains a mystery. For every revolution in which a particular theory has currency there is another revolution that calls that same theory into question. Jeff

Goodwin and Theda Skocpol point out that the conventional causes for the Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions—the suffering produced by imperialism and the capitalist exploitation of resources—fail to explain why other countries experiencing similar or worse conditions did not revolt. They conclude “one need merely raise these questions in order to see that the ‘misery breeds revolt’ hypothesis does not explain very much.”¹⁶ Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancıoğlu say that not only have there been few studies theoretically engaging revolutions, but that the field of international relations has “largely bracketed out revolutions from their conceptions of international politics.”¹⁷ In his historiography of the French Revolution, François Furet vigorously denies that revolutionary events were primarily motivated by successive attempts to embody the “people’s will.” Analyzing only how the ruling classes upheld or betrayed the legitimate interests of the common man ignores how revolution itself became its own telos. According to Furet:

That rationalization of the political dynamic of the French Revolution has one major flaw, for in reifying revolutionary symbolism and in reducing political motivation to social concerns, it makes “normal” and obliterates what calls for explanation: the fact that Revolution placed that symbolic system at the centre of political action. And that it was that system rather than class interest, which, for a time at least, was decisive in the struggle for power.¹⁸

As Hannah Arendt notes, those reading the American Revolution as the product of social concerns and new technologies ignore the almost exclusive focus of the revolutionaries on the proper form of government.¹⁹ Theories of revolution constantly struggle to find consistency in the number and variety of revolutionary events. They apply concepts developed by early modern political philosophers to communist revolutions, or read gender and racial uprisings through the lens of the dialectic. Their inability to unlock the state and revolution concurrently with a foundation that explains both has resulted in frustration. But as long as we hold that the state and revolution are intrinsically connected, we cannot abandon standard revolutionary theories without forfeiting the corresponding models of the states these theories are drawn from. If we do not want political thought to collapse into contradiction and inconsistency, we must question whether a theory of revolution must rest upon a theory of the state. Perhaps a

more fruitful avenue for exploration is to examine revolution from the perspective of revolution, so as to let revolution speak. The point of this project is to explore this possibility, and to see what utility it may offer.

Conventional theories of revolution are grounded in a specific understanding of the state. When the state collapses, revolution arises parasitically, using what it can from the state's framework for its own existence. The state itself disappears, but its cadaver remains, animated by a revolutionary spirit until a new state forms to replace it. The revolutionary model described in Hobbes's *Leviathan* is simply the misuse of the structures with which a proper state is composed. To desire a Grecian or Roman democracy is as "the biting of a mad Dogge" and "wanteth nothing more than a strong monarch . . . [yet who] when they have him, they abhorre,"²⁰ while opposing the sovereign in an organized fashion is to "set up a *Supremacy* against the *Sovereignty*" that afflicts the commonwealth with inconsistent commands.²¹ Hobbes argues any violation of sovereign power—including revolution—is an intolerable appropriation of the state. Likewise, Marx's communist revolution consists of "the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie"²² and the "conquest of political power by the proletariat."²³ Reforms of extant institutions like private property, the power of the nation-state, and labor are only possible because the proletariat has acquired a new status as a "ruling class" in control of the same "conditions of production"²⁴ the bourgeoisie once managed. Marx's communist revolution is, by this account, an exchange of leadership. The recognition of this danger leads Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri to say the use of nationalism by activists is a "perverse trick" that offers up the revolution, "hands and feet bound, to the new bourgeoisie."²⁵ Foucault also recognizes this danger when, in his debate with Maoists, he states that "the forms of state apparatus which [revolutionaries] inherit from the bourgeois apparatus cannot in any way serve as a model for the new forms of organization," as they carry a danger of repeating "the domination of the bourgeoisie."²⁶ In sum, revolutions act in political models like surgical operations. The state is broken apart, modified, and sewn back together. The result is an alteration of what was, but every vital part of the model remains.

These conceptions of revolution misrepresent what revolution is capable of. If revolution is drawn from the state, then it has meaning only in reference to the state, and its scope is limited by the state. A government may be overthrown, or a set of laws or policies changed, but a state will persist if fidelity to a certain perspective or set of practices remains. Without

a change in its foundation, the state will be reconstituted along similar lines over and over despite uprisings that put different people in control. Howard Zinn's work on the Founding Fathers shows how the American Revolution, successful in defeating the British government, yet maintained the legitimacy of "a government to protect [the rich's] property" in which "rebellions could be controlled."²⁷ Economic and social arrangements such as agricultural wage labor and slavery were outside the purview of the American Revolution. The Founding Fathers intended for the socioeconomic order of the colonies to persist throughout the revolution.

The co-option of the American Revolution is an example of how concepts, forces, and systems pulled from the state can reproduce oppression through successive governments. Believing that something must persist throughout a revolution—for example, a socioeconomic system or a concept of human nature—hides the creative potential of revolution and replicates the same order. We learn to see the end of a revolution as merely an altered version of the state that was overthrown. The figure of the sovereign reappears (perhaps with a little less power and the crown on another's head), or production resumes with the workers in control. In either case, the oppressive foundation remains. Subjugating revolution to rules, ends, or concepts drawn from a state is to misunderstand the power of revolution, which is to rewrite the state from top to bottom so that nothing necessarily persists. To say otherwise is to see revolution as part of what is universal and eternal, as a function of the conceptual system that determines our world rather than as an opening to radically new possibilities. It is to treat revolution as though it were a tool wielded by an empowered sovereign and not a potential open to the disenfranchised many. It is, in short, to turn revolution into the state.

If we are to understand revolution, we must learn concepts particular to it, not ideas that force it into a predetermined or circumscribed shape. Revolution's radicality, fecundity, and creativity call for a particular thematization. To take the topic of revolutions seriously means articulating a changing, productive, destabilizing force that resists incorporation into any prescriptive framework. The theoretical and social importance of this analysis comes from its ability to comprehend the agency that revolutions impart to the world. This agency is nonsubjectified as it is the product of the forces and processes that arise within revolution, and rather than being pure stems from the particular manner in which each state is organized. A new conception of revolution framed in this way will reveal new potentials for revolutionaries in both theory and practice.

The Dangers of Misusing a Revolution

Revolution, as a potential remedy to systems of exploitation and domination, lends itself to utopian visions of future societies. And yet to treat revolution as panacea is dangerous. It leads to flowery, romantic images of revolutions as festive,²⁸ omnipresent,²⁹ superhuman,³⁰ and immortal³¹—as though revolution is a one-stop shop for a picture-perfect life. Revolution's job is not to produce utopia, for problems and issues will inevitably arise within the new states that revolution creates. The aftermaths of the French and Cuban revolutions show how revolutionary zeal can distract one from the vital work building a new society demands.³² The Arab Spring's success in overthrowing tyrants and Occupy's victory in casting a harsh light on systems of inequality triggered new struggles against these forces. Utopian visions can manifest themselves through an obsession on previous triumphs and a desire to recreate the spirit of the past rather than act in the here and now—a trait Wendy Brown calls "left melancholy."³³ As Rosalyn Deutsche notes, following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, leftist protestors idolized the anti-war campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s to the point of foreclosing "possibilities of political change in the present."³⁴ For its message to successfully pass from the streets into the homes and institutions of society, revolution must follow an arduous process of organization, demonstration, and advocacy.

Treating all revolutions as a priori evil is also flawed. By ignoring legitimate grievances and portraying protestors as "growing mobs" engaging in "dangerous . . . class warfare"³⁵ the empowered can isolate revolutions from people sympathetic with their goals. Those who hate revolution equate it with pandemonium, violence, and destruction, ignoring revolution's ability to address serious issues. States embody order and stability, despite the fact that they are responsible for more pandemonium, violence, and destruction than any revolution has caused. Cuban and Russian revolutionaries garnered much support from their violent attacks upon the state while killing no more than several thousand enemy soldiers, while the nationalist fury of World War I and imperialist hunger of Vietnam together led to the deaths of at least eighteen million and the decimation of the continents hosting them.³⁶ Revolutions are dangerous, but the violence and destruction associated with them does not necessarily inhibit, and in some cases advances, their positive goals. Viewing revolution as destructive or as a cure-all does not reduce revolutions to the state, but also does not provide it a rigorous philosophical articulation. As panacea

or poison, revolution is oversimplified and its powers distorted. Calls for revolution and protestations against it, when poorly formulated, resemble romantic tales devoid of intellectual understanding.

Serious consequences come from circumscribing or oversimplifying the concept of revolution. Establishing a new state that reflects the old stifles revolutionary sentiment and exacerbates hostilities, as happened in the French Revolution when new rulers responded to the revolution's demands with another monarchical system. The numerous smaller rebellions that compose the French Revolution happened because attempts to return to a feudal system failed.³⁷ Even if revolutionary passion isn't further inflamed, assuming the return of a specific state can generate a brutal program of state formation, as happened in post-revolution Russia. The transition to communism theorized by Lenin begins with armed workers replacing capitalists and bureaucrats, but posits that many of the former state mechanisms should be available to the workers for the purpose of controlling society, labor, and consumption.³⁸ Taylorism, the study of how management can optimize the productive capacity of a workplace, was imported wholesale from the United States into Lenin's Soviet Union. Using Taylorist maxims of scientific management like "The work of every workman [must be] fully planned out by the management at least one day in advance," "Maximum output, in place of restricted output," and "The development of each man to his greatest efficiency and prosperity,"³⁹ the Soviets (with Lenin's blessing) organized their factories and workers using the same techniques, practices, and means of production as the capitalists they opposed.⁴⁰ Lenin's opposition to Taylorism was conditional; when it was attached to the capitalist system it stood for "man's enslavement by the machine,"⁴¹ but when organized by the Soviets it was "a necessary feature of [the] state."⁴² The Soviet appropriation of Taylorism is a prime example of how elements of a prior state remain after a revolution, as Soviets only altered, but did not abolish, the factory.⁴³ Lenin's theory forms the basis of Stalin's post-revolutionary program, which takes as dogma that the state will only wither away if violence and state power intensify for the purpose of crushing the "dying classes."⁴⁴ By using a theory that prescribes vicious actions as necessary to reach the post-revolutionary world, Stalin's mass executions,⁴⁵ his brutal Gulag archipelago,⁴⁶ and his treatment of traitors and capitalists "with an iron hand"⁴⁷ became affirmations of success.

Analyzing revolution as internal to a state has serious implications for philosophy, as it invests revolution with necessity or a shape that restricts what revolution can achieve. Karl Marx's revolution is immanent

to a specific material world and because of this follows a path to actualize a communist society. This interpretation is not speculative, but is a *real* movement that “results from the premises now in existence.”⁴⁸ The new state is drawn from the old; revolution only acts as the intermediary, with its beginning, middle, and end already decided. Hannah Arendt, too, sees revolutions as immanent, but her revolutions are intrinsic to the world formed when people come together in a community. Revolutions result from action that “can be accomplished only by some joint effort”⁴⁹ and have as their end “the foundation of freedom.”⁵⁰ Any revolution that alters the premise of human plurality obliterates the phenomenon that produces it. Revolution’s purpose is determined by the world from which it comes. This in turn narrows what counts as a revolution, a fact demonstrated by Arendt’s unwillingness to embrace the Haitian Revolution and anti-colonial movements in general. Her revolution requires citizens to forget narratives of violence that cannot be embraced by everyone. Since it is hard to develop a common narrative between slave and master, she ignores harms endured by oppressed minorities. Jennifer Gaffney says a better concept of citizenship “seems to depend on developing a new and more expansive notion of homecoming that makes room in the space of politics, not just for citizens, but also for the ghosts of the past that continue to haunt the modern political arena.”⁵¹ For Marx and Arendt, concepts of the state—conceived of here as a definite and immanent world—drive revolution, plotting its course and all the stops along the way. Revolution is only along for the ride.

What is needed in revolutionary theory is a model of exceptionality, inasmuch as revolution should be contrasted with the rule of law sponsored by the state. If the state always indicates an order and circumscribes change, then to theorize what is apart from it requires understanding the chaotic and disordered. Revolution must uncover what happens when the rules of the state cease to function. Understanding change as a difference between two stable forms or as movement governed by laws, forces, or predictable cycles must be replaced by a concept of unconditioned change whereby any limits to change can themselves be changed. Change must be an agent or a motive, not a result of interacting forces and beings. Several fields have formulated models of how change operates when a central buttress of traditional systems is removed. Set theory demonstrates how systems fall into paradox without axioms that define what is part of a set.⁵² Chaos theory questions whether systems can predict the future without comprehending the present and studies the vastly different outcomes that

can result from minor changes.⁵³ In other words, the utility of traditional systems is limited by their assumptions and the available data, leading contemporary theorists to study how manipulating assumptions or data alters how a system functions. Yet these new studies do not free change, but only swap one set of laws, forces, and predictable cycles for another. They provide a view of how change operates under specific conditions, not of change as a motive. A study of exceptionality must focus on understanding change without reintroducing limits. In philosophical terms, it is necessary to find the borders of fields like ontology and metaphysics, where states begin and end. This is different from seeking where one ontology replaces another or where one metaphysical system becomes another, as such exchanges happen only within the confines of another state. We must seek the frontier of all states and systems, for only at this point can we contemplate a truly independent revolution.

Modeling Revolution 1: Deviating from the Norm

If we can encounter revolution without the state and without depicting revolution as universally good or evil, what concept of it appears? What are the potential and dangers of revolution? What relation can it have to the state? The answers require a bipartite model that sees revolution from several angles, relating it to the state without reducing it the state. I call this model Dynamic Anarchism: “dynamic” to emphasize that the model does not refer to a constant situation—a status quo—but to movement and creation, and “anarchism” because the model purposefully avoids dependence upon the state.

To separate revolution from the state implies several things:

- Revolution has no definitive arrangement, design, or organization.
- Revolution cannot be anticipated (no one can know of its coming).
- Revolution cannot be determined (it is impossible to chart its path or manufacture its end).

Revolution is an *anomaly* in that it is entirely apart from the state, exempt from the status quo, and a deviation from the natural order. The state's

supposed consistency and ubiquity is inapplicable to revolution, for within a revolution the characteristics of the state we reflexively assume in our day-to-day lives move into a state of flux. Even to describe revolutions as pure potentiality, contingency, or creativity is inadequate, as each carries a functional relationship to its opposite—potentiality to actuality, contingency to necessity, creativity to constancy—and in doing so brings with it an element of normalcy. Revolution abstracts itself from the oppositional terms potentiality/actuality, contingency/necessity, and creativity/constancy. To the degree that these characteristics are applicable to revolution, they must have a meaning different than the one they have in relation to the state. The exceptionality of revolution necessitates that even the category of Being cannot be applied to revolution. Since what counts as a Being is determined by the state, inasmuch as revolution escapes the state, its ontology is unknowable. If we are to grasp revolution as more than a function of a political system, we must hold that *no* codes (e.g., revolution reverts back to the state of nature), *no* purposes (e.g., revolution overthrows the elites of the dominant class), and *no* methods (e.g., revolution undermines established meanings) belong to it.

As anomaly, revolution has three primary characteristics. First, because revolution cannot be arranged, it is *incommensurable*—it does not fit with what is around it, temporally, spatially, or otherwise. No common measure exists between it and the state, and the state provides no tools with which to build one. There is no definite where, no exact when, no specific what to revolution, yet its very absence is its where, when, and what. From the perspective of the state, its precise spatial, temporal, and descriptive coordinates are *somewhere*, *somewhen*, and *something*. Its presence is its inarticulability, its incapability of being delineated. The state cannot structure, fix, or organize revolution, and any attempt to do so further inflames revolution or extinguishes it entirely. It is impossible for the state to be the vanguard of revolution, for it is the lack of the state, the indeterminacy of revolution's where, when, and what, that marks it.

Second, because revolution cannot be anticipated, it is *unpredictable*. It follows no determinate path, no causal or dialectical chain, that tells us to expect its arrival or permits us to plot a course to the other side. Because it does not behave according to the laws of the nonrevolutionary world, its appearance is erratic and its effects are unknowable in advance. Conditions that brought about a revolution at one place and time will not necessarily do so again, nor does producing another revolution guarantee the same outcome. Strategies and tactics used to understand or anticipate

events in the state are destined to fail in comprehending revolution, for the unpredictability of revolution applies not just to its presentation but to its comprehensibility.

Finally, because revolution cannot be determined, it is *indiscernible*. Our very attempt to chart a path for it is an attempt to control it. Whatever understanding of revolution comes out of this project cannot reduce it to a handful of determinate steps or conceptualize it in such a way that its anomalistic character is erased. Revolution resists all attempts to synthesize it with the world we encounter, so it is impossible to be truly faithful to revolution. Fidelity requires being able to see some essence or promise within revolution that compels one to action. Similarly, developing a program for revolution implies the ability to chart a path between it and the state. Yet within the anomaly of revolution no such path or promise exists. The fidelity that is often claimed by revolutionaries is more accurately a fidelity to the appearance of revolution in the state. Although revolution must be held apart from the state to be truly revolutionary, it must be able to be made manifest for revolution's possibilities to come to fruition.

It is important to note that revolution does not form a binary opposition to the state. This preserves revolution's independence insofar as binaries carry a logic and an order from which revolution must exempt itself. Jacques Derrida describes this well, saying, "An opposition of metaphysical concepts (e.g., speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) is never the confrontation of two terms, but a hierarchy and order of subordination."⁵⁴ Signs, as Derrida demonstrates, do not have intrinsic meaning, nor do they receive it by allusion to an external referent. They gain their meaning through the play of differences between them and the signs surrounding them⁵⁵—especially those with which they share a direct opposition.⁵⁶ However, this logic cannot apply to revolution, for unlike the hierarchical oppositions and networks of significations Derrida describes, revolution is not encountered on the same strata as the state. The relationship between revolution and the state is one of exception, not opposition. Revolution is beyond the state, but not necessarily against the state; it is nonstate without being anti-state. Were the latter true, the path of revolution would be easier to chart, because revolution would consist of a contradiction to the state. Revolution's coordinates would be *nowhere*, *nowhen*, and *nothing* rather *somewhere*, *somewhen*, and *something*. If it were anti-state, revolution would be the opposite of what is counted and measured within the state.

To avoid a dualism between the state and revolution, and the host of problems that would accompany such a division, it must be the case that

the two do not have a stable, consistent relationship. Revolution cannot be in relationship to the state, even as a negation of the state, because its nature as exception extracts it from any bond; instead, their association is unclear, hazy, and ambiguous. Revolution appears to move away from the state in an endless number of directions, with no one direction being definitive. The purpose of revolution lacks definition, because there are many possible ends without any particular one being more authentic. Because revolution removes itself from the logic of the state, it should be understood as lacking any definitive label or designation. The anomaly of revolution can be seen from the state only obliquely and indirectly.

Modeling Revolution 2: Changing the Changes in the World

The definition of revolution must include a discussion of revolution as it is encountered in the state. How is it that revolution is able to affect the state, causing changes that are rightly celebrated—or justly condemned—from the USA to China? Defining revolution as anomaly captures its separation from the state, but it also appears in the world. In doing so revolution and the state become associated, though the connection is not one of mechanistic causality or teleological determination. Rather, revolution appears in the state as a *catalytic change*, a change that changes the changes within the world. Every variation of the state describes a range of means by which change is introduced in the world. Thomas Hobbes delineates a series of affects that alter both the moods of individuals and the orderliness of states. Michel Foucault describes how alterations in the power relations that create subjects lead to new practices for tracking mental health or discussing sexual behavior. The result of naming such changes is that the state is able to “reestablish ideologies of command and authority”⁵⁷ by hiding the possibility for other changes. It sets up a “transcendent power”⁵⁸ that colonizes the “plane of immanence.”⁵⁹

As a catalytic change, revolution undoes and redoes changes by modifying or removing them and in the process replacing them with others. It speeds up and slows down processes in the state, dissolving the old and producing new mechanisms for change. It restructures not just the things in the state but the state itself. Revolution is not just an intensification of existing forces or the quickening of the rate at which society’s possibilities are produced, for the changes of revolution are qual-

itatively different from the changes of the state. To say otherwise ignores the radical creativity of revolution.

Some of the traits unattributable to revolution (such as establishment of a legitimate sovereign) may appear to be true of revolution when seen from the perspective of the state. In applying itself to extant forces and values, revolution seems to operate with a program. Nevertheless, revolution is not expressing a determinate character when it acts as catalytic change. Rather, it is applying its destruction and creativity to the status quo. One way to conceive of this incursion of revolution into the state is to think of it as undoing the specific "world horizon" that is furnished to us by a state. According to Merleau-Ponty, a world horizon is a context or unity in which novel phenomena appear. This "horizon of all horizons"⁶⁰ is open, incomplete, and allows for many different appearances; at the same time, however, it emphasizes convergence instead of radical difference and sees all potential changes as latent possibilities within the horizon itself. Revolution does not operate with a world horizon itself, but is able, from the perspective of the state, to completely rewrite and add on to any extant world horizon. If the rewritten world horizon spreads enough that it becomes widely accepted as the norm, it will ultimately become a new state to replace the old. As catalytic change, revolution associates with the state, is of the state, but is not subjugated to the state. It maintains its independence and irreducible novelty.

This ultimately leads to a possibly contentious claim, but one supported by my analysis, which is that revolution can create *ex nihilo*. To grasp revolution's potential implies that revolution does not simply rearrange the material within the state or produce new beings using the substance of old ones according to natural laws. It produces what was literally not a possibility prior to it, or what was inconceivable before its advent. This is different from saying that revolutions produce possibilities that were conceivable but not actualizable, or that they can bring about what before was only a dream. It means that they can bring about what was neither a logical possibility nor an actuality, they can create what was neither a dream nor a reality.

Revolution shifts the terrain of existence rather than redrawing its boundaries. In doing so, it creates new impossibilities and new dreams alongside new realities. This is not to say that God-like revolutions create entire worlds down to the smallest detail, but they do create the outlines of worlds out of nothingness that in turn produce people, objects, and forces in fundamentally new ways. Revolution creates states *ex nihilo* using

new methods for the articulation and arrangement of such things in the world, creating beings out of each state's unique framework. My claim is that outside the framework for a particular world there is nothing, or nonbeing, the nature of which we necessarily must grapple with. Beings are conditioned by their state, revolutions yield the particular conditions of a state, and outside of that there is nothingness.

Although it is possible to posit in simple terms the *ex nihilo* creation of revolution, a bipartite answer is needed to identify that to which *ex nihilo* creation is applied. One cannot say that revolution operates only on the state without bringing revolution back to the state—this time by limiting revolution to reorganizing what was already there. Yet it is also impossible to say revolution operates on nothing without raising the question of how revolution is able to affect the state. Revolution can connect to the state without limiting it to that domain if we draw a distinction between the operations of revolution *qua* anomaly and revolution *qua* catalytic change. As anomaly, revolution is defined by creativity, and not attached to the state in any necessary way. What it operates on is unclear and inexact, and any impact it has on the state is encountered indirectly. But as catalytic change revolution operates directly on the state, and possibly all the changes, forces, and systems within it. It creates *ex nihilo*, but that creation is only measurable from and in relation to the state it operates on. Revolution manipulates the state, but it also extends into a beyond that from the state's perspective is unclear and indefinite.

Ex nihilo creation also means revising our conception of nothingness. Nothingness is often understood as emptiness or void, but recent discoveries and empirical data undermine this definition. Pure void and emptiness were reasonable understandings of nothing in the past, but science has revealed millions of substances, fields, waves, and more, that are out of sight yet detectable. Even the vacuum of space—perhaps the thing closest to emptiness we know of—is filled with plasmas, radiation, and particles, among other things. When you add in quantum physics' theories of the relationship between energy and mass, holding to our previous understanding of nothingness is problematic at best. A better description appears when we understand nothingness in relation to movement, not substance.

What at first glance seems to be lacking in this model is a place for thoughtful political action. It seems there is little to be done if revolution can rewrite the world from the outside in one, sweeping manner. But withdrawing revolution from the state does not mean radical change is wholly beyond our control. Though such a view is perhaps a necessary

consequence of situating revolution outside the state (where nothing can control or dominate it), revolutionaries can play a role in channeling the flow of radical change. The direct control revolutionaries have in other models of revolution is replaced in Dynamic Anarchism with an ability to shape the manner in which revolution occurs (even as they are shaped by it). One must be attentive to participate in revolution effectively, for by ignoring a revolution's currents and holding dogmatically to a prescription for change one becomes blind to the many possibilities revolution offers. This is why specific demands are anathema to revolution, for you cannot demand in advance what you are unaware of, and to create demands using concepts or institutions drawn from the prior state lays the ground for the return of that state after the revolution. The May '68 slogan of "Demand the Impossible!" better captures the openness found in revolution, though even that can be interpreted as a nebulous antipathy toward the state rather than as a call for constant attention, activity, and critique. Demands, if there are to be any, must be open to change without endangering the transformation sought within the state.

Revolutionary action takes place in a world of incomplete and inaccurate information, so while demands can (and often are) given prior to revolution, there is no guarantee that they will be relevant or useful following it. If, on the one hand, revolution cannot be controlled, yet, on the other, we are not destined to be like Hegel's Owl of Minerva, coming "always . . . too late"⁶¹ to do anything but describe what has already been, what can revolutionaries achieve? First, activism and protest spread revolution's message. And although revolution is not tethered to anything in the world nor motivated solely through subjective affectations, rebels play an important role in increasing or augmenting the scope and impact of revolution's catalytic changes. The broad range of tools within a revolutionary's belt affect how the revolution is seen and taken up, and whether revolution will renew itself or taper out. The most effective revolutions are those that cascade from place to place, revitalizing themselves each and every time they reach a new population or area. Revolutions do not need leaders to form their message, but participants to sustain and extend their impact.

Discovering the Outside of Time

The exceptionality of revolutions implies that there is no simple temporal or spatial description of revolution. A complete account of revolutions

demands an account of how revolution—both as anomaly and catalytic change—relates to temporality and, to a lesser extent, spatiality. Some theories address this issue by portraying events as instantaneous. Events are not part of a situation but follow a logic of their own, and because they operate as an exception to the norm, they are singular in nature. To characterize events as temporal is to include them within the situation, since temporal language drawn from the situation carries with it an ontology that events resist. But instantaneous events except themselves from a situation's temporality and retain their singular integrity. Events can prescribe a new understanding of time, yet they themselves lack a temporal structure. To avoid presenting events as part of a particular state of affairs, or undermining the deep-seated shift that events supposedly produce, theorists of events avoid describing events in the same terms as situations. Such a concern is entirely warranted, but nevertheless does not necessitate seeing events as instantaneous.

The bipartite model of revolution I propose exempts revolution, in the mode of anomaly, from a situation's temporality, but, in the mode of catalytic change, allows the revolution to be described—though not perfectly captured—using temporal terminology. Revolution's appearance in the world entails that it provisionally acquires a temporality, though there is no guarantee that the temporality will hold. This does not mean that revolutions are eternal, for the same reason that exempting revolutions from the world does not make them nothing. Designating revolutions as eternal implies normativity inasmuch as infinite time is logically opposed to sequential or unfolding time (compelling revolutions to obey the logic that accompanies binary oppositions). To claim events are eternal does not avoid their encapsulation in a world; it just avoids their encapsulation in *our* world by placing them in another. Events should be seen as atemporal in the sense of having no designated temporality and thus being outside of time altogether. The encounter with the temporality of revolution is an encounter with the absence of time inasmuch as time, in such a context, is indeterminate and unnamable. Nevertheless, the encounter of revolution from inside the world takes place within a temporal structure, and as such it is possible to say that the experience of revolution is one that can be designated temporally.

The temporality of revolution as it is experienced has elements of both itself and the world it mixes with, but properly belongs to neither. It results partially from what revolution introduces into the world, and partially from what was already in the world. As anomalies revolutions

are atemporal, but seen from within the state they can be instantaneous or seemingly without end. Similarly, revolutions are not localized within the state, but can appear to be so. They do not originate from a specific place, and cannot be reduced to a set of spatial coordinates, as they exempt themselves from the state's spatiality. Specific settings may play a symbolic role in revolutions, but this does not mean that they limit, cause, or determine anything. Squares, parks, and streets are a vehicle for the expression of revolution. But like temporal designations, locations within the state can change, and any attempt to situate revolutions within the world will not capture them perfectly either. It is only possible to conditionally localize revolutions in terms of their origin and effects on the state.

The Pathway to a New Theory of Revolution

The Dynamic Anarchism model of revolution takes its cue in part from contemporary theorists who have begun the process of thinking through the structure of events. The most salient questions concern the nature of an event—What is its fundamental being, how does it appear, and to what degree can we know or experience it? To answer these questions requires knowing how events relate to the world, and how they exempt themselves from its otherwise smooth functioning.

Before venturing into the contemporary discussion of events, it is necessary to demonstrate the importance of disconnecting revolution from the state by revealing how theories of revolution that fail to do so cannot capture the exceptionality of revolution. To that end, I will begin my investigation by critiquing three approaches to revolution, those that describe revolution as a function of the state, those that provide revolution with a telos or that constrain its movement, and those that use the notion of an event in an imperfect manner. Social contract theory, discussed in chapter 2, is a major example of the former approach. As the first unified school of thought to isolate revolution and treat it separately from war or civil unrest, social contract theory believes that the rational study of politics reveals how to build a government that obeys natural laws and respects individual rights. It sees the role of revolutions as the overthrow of unjust institutions. Social contract theory's strategy of measuring the state against ideals of freedom and justice provides an important tool for critiquing the state's existence. But, with the exception of concepts like sovereignty and the state, as well as John Locke's innovative uses of ideas

like “people” and “power,” it offers very little for a comprehensive analysis of revolution. Other modern philosophers like Hume and Montesquieu as well as contemporary philosophers like Habermas and Rawls, also use this approach when discussing revolution, and will be incorporated into my critique.

Dialectical theories—Marxism being the most well-known—follow the second approach, discussed in chapter 3. These theories claim that the modern society inevitably develops in due course as the result of working out the contradictions they form, whether ideological or material. According to these theories, revolution is a product of historical forces like poverty, alienation, property, and the desire for wealth. No longer is it just a corrective, for dialectical thinkers say past revolutionary developments have led to negative as well as positive results. Ultimately, revolution will teleologically resolve all the contradictions in society, bringing humans back to their true selves and destroying society’s artificial institutions. Dialecticism undermines many of social contract theory’s illusions, but does so through the development of a state organized around permanent processes, actions, and needs. While some of the dialectic’s errors are fixed by later dialectical thinkers, none fully escapes the subjugation of revolution to a telos or program. I will focus on six variations of dialectical thought: (1) the idealism of Hegel, (2) the absolute idealism of fascists, (3) the materialism of Marx, (4) the communism of Lenin, Trotsky, and Mao, (5) Benjamin and the critical theorists, and (6) postwar French Marxism, which can be subdivided into the structuralism of Althusser and the humanism of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.

Evental theorists, who are discussed in chapter 4, have a lot to offer theories of revolution. Theorists like Badiou, Kuhn, Foucault, and Deleuze will be examined in light of their additions to both evental and revolutionary theory. Their transposing of transcendental structures into immanent ones helps us think about how states can be rewritten. In addition, they emphasize how figures, subjects, and objects are the result of accidents, presubjective processes, and discursive formations. Particularly anathema to these thinkers are schematic expressions of revolutions that accentuate figures, stages, and agency in an attempt to prescribe a revolutionary formula. Instead, they emphasize differences, productive forces, multitudes, and powers. The resulting focus on newness leads them to examine revolution’s creative potentials. Revolution plays an important role throughout the political philosophy of evental theorists, although thus far it has been connected to the methodologies with which these thinkers work. Processes

and operations persist through both states and revolutions, shaping the outcomes of movements for radical change. While these thinkers leave meaning and being open, these processes and operations constitute protostates that still tether revolution to an abstract order.

The theory of Dynamic Anarchism is laid out in chapter 5. In addition to referencing evental theory, Dynamic Anarchism will engage with systems theory—and in particular phenomena like emergence, resilience, adaptivity, complexity, and interconnection—in order to make Dynamic Anarchism's case for a new theory of revolution. In addition to discussing the phenomena in systems theory that indicate the need for Dynamic Anarchism, the chapter will spell out the advantages of this theory in comparison with other event ontologies. The previous three sections of this chapter discussed the basic tenets of this theory.

After laying out the theory of Dynamic Anarchism, this investigation will shift from a study of the form of revolution to its practice in order to show the relationship of Dynamic Anarchism to the strategy of revolutionaries. This occurs in chapter 6. I will concern myself primarily with writers who develop tactics and strategies for revolution. Drawing from chapter 5, chapter 6 will provide advice to demonstrate how the theory of Dynamic Anarchism can help revolutions succeed. These pieces of advice are meant to indicate how one can best conduct a revolution amid a state that is a complex and interconnected system composed of many moving parts. Numerous well-known revolutions—such as the American, French, Russian, Cuban, Algerian, and Chinese—will be discussed, and many revolutionary figures—Guevara, Lenin, Mao, Washington, Robespierre—will be cited. Additionally, the chapter will study practical actions and organizing. Chapter 6 will study which tactics are effective by analyzing examples of those that have worked well and those that have not. The theories motivating these revolutions will be discussed as needed to clarify how these previous revolutions and figures operated.

At the end of this investigation, it will be clear that revolutions themselves are in need of a revolution. Great strides have been made by studying how society experiences revolution, developing tactics and strategies to master it, and avoiding the various pitfalls revolutions can fall into. But over time the space set aside for revolution has been strewn with the detritus of other theories and leftovers from fetishists of revolution. To unlock the bonds holding revolution back we must find a new theory. Here in the early part of the twenty-first century, we may be at the beginning of a seismic shift. Signs show that, unless we fix the harms

of human civilization, the natural world and the vengeance of the injured of the world will, quite simply, leave us without the ability to fix much of anything. The historically low levels of faith in government reveal how dissatisfied people are with minor reforms and demonstrate the need for a movement that can create a better society from top to bottom. Within that context, I submit this analysis of revolution as a step towards an understanding of the nature of revolution, within the larger path we must follow in the creation of a free and egalitarian world.