



CHAPTER 1

Preface

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It was the Russian artist and writer Julia Kissina who—during a public discussion that took place at the Literaturhaus in Zurich in October 2017—expressed what would become the *Leitmotif* of this volume. When asked to give an account of why the Russian Revolution keeps inspiring her nowadays, she gave the following instinctive and unabashed utterance: “Because we are all children of the French and the Russian Revolution. Everything that we now have in our culture, the way we behave, the way our societies function, the values that we all share, are the products of both the French and the Russian Revolution, the products of this last successful revolution that the Russian Revolution was.” Officially, the revolutionary events that took place in Russia were

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declared accomplished after the mythologized storming of the Winter Palace at 2.10 a.m. on Thursday, October 25, 1917, as the mantle clock in the Hermitage's "White Dining Room" indicates to this day. Yet, due to the global changes these events set in motion, the Russian Revolution continues to loom large in intellectual debates one hundred years later. This book is about this dialectic: the dialectic that unfolds necessarily amidst the ideal of a revolution, its practical realization and how it keeps living through the events, struggles, theories, and effects it prompted; a dialectic that is inherent not only in the Russian Revolution but in every revolutionary process. By taking the Russian Revolution as the prime example of revolutionary processes, the articles of this volume attempt to acknowledge the legacy of the Russian Revolution, come to terms with its failures and sketch the future of revolutionary thinking and practice in its aftermath.

The different names that were attributed throughout the years to the Russian Revolution bear witness to the different contours that it acquired and help us to better understand the multiperspectivism that accompanies all revolutionary moments. This diversity is indicative not only of the aspirations that the Russian Revolution brought about. It is also indicative of the impact that the different moments and phases the Russian Revolution as a process of events comprise of had on its opponents both in its country of origin and—more importantly—on a global scale. Seen this way and whether in the form of the October Revolution, or in the form of the more bureaucratic Great October Socialist Revolution (as this event was recorded in the Soviet literature), or in the form of the more common Bolshevik Revolution, or the October Uprising, or the Bolshevik Coup, the Russian Revolution remained the proof stone of every revolutionary event and the measure par excellence for generations of perspective revolutionaries all over the world in the years that followed it. Its failures were instrumentalized as furnishing proof of the insufficiency of any attempted revolution and became the knock-out argument against the ideal of change through revolution in general. Its successes were hailed as the self-evidence of revolutionary tactics and as the confirmation of why it is worthy to go against established regimes and ways of thinking. At the same time though, the Russian Revolution's both successes and failures resulted to the Russian Revolution becoming every revolution's sword of Damocles. Henceforth, every subsequent revolution would have to measure itself with it, finding itself always either deficient or already one step ahead.

Caught between imitation, optimization, continuation, or rejection, Lenin's Bolsheviks became the scapegoat, the ground and the projection screen that legitimized mistakes, suppression, and interventionism, just as they instigated utopias, hopes, and political change that dominate the political stage until today.

The ambivalence concerning the reception and legacy of the Russian Revolution could not be made more palpable than in the different commemorations that took place or were deafeningly absent on the event's centennial anniversary. Unlike the broadly celebrated commemorations to, for example, Karl Marx's 200th birthday or the 50th anniversary of May '68, the events dedicated—no matter how favorably—to the centennial of the Russian Revolution could be counted on one hand. Though Marx, as the father of modern critique, and May '68, as the umbrella movement that irreversibly changed everyday life, apparently receive the well-deserved unconditional support for their pivotal historical role, a lacuna is to be observed concerning the Russian Revolution; a lacuna pertaining to the ongoing discomfort of how to address it as an event. Seen this way, it is not just an epistemological gap which is at play here and which forces us to question how we should observe past historical facts, events, or narratives. It is also a matter of self-realization that the events we choose to shed light upon, revisit, and commemorate, come back to us by making us aware of our own socio-political and ideological shifts. From this perspective and in a move that turns the tables, the absence of the Russian revolution from the agendas of universities, galleries, city celebrations, blogs etc. is not to be considered solely as proof of the withering away or always inexistent role of the Russian Revolution. Rather, this absence ought to be regarded, as Karl Schlögel in an apologetic and very personal outcry points out directly at the beginning of this volume, as the missing proof of our own growing disinterest to engage in passionate controversies. To be sure, it is not just us, the ones supposedly living in the revolution's aftermath, who see ourselves confronted with such an excruciating question. What the Russian Revolution really was, is a question with which even its protagonists just a couple of years after its accomplishment were concerned, since the very legitimization of the revolution depended on answering this question. Given that what really happened and what was thought to have happened was not necessarily in accordance with one another, the revolution, as it supposedly had happened, had to be restaged or—as Sylvia Sasse also in this volume argues—reenacted. Only then could the

Revolution forfeit its contingent characteristics, invest in its post facto uniqueness, present itself as the realization of avant-gardist theories and claim its true and designated role: to be(come) the deliberate and not coincidental beginning of a new world inhabited by a new (Hu)man. As ambiguous, problematic, instrumental, ideological, authoritarian, and manipulative as such reenactment(s) might be, for generations of revolutionaries in Russia and abroad it was not the reenacted but, on the contrary, the *need* for reenactment that was a myth. For what they, the ones living in the revolution or the ones awaiting or preparing the next one, already experienced was not a myth that had to be transformed to reality, but a previously unknown reality. Whether this new reality took on the form of finally belonging somewhere, of being able to experience each one's sexuality, of feeling awake for the first time, or of freedom and equality as deliverance from domination and exploitation (as authors of this volume argue), the Russian revolution was not a scission that needed to be legitimized. On the contrary, its discrediting was part of a propaganda that needed to be successfully substantiated; a propaganda which became reality when taking into account the subsequent juridicization or habitualization of the revolution as the Soviet state. As such, as the disenchantment of a propaganda being none anymore, the Russian Revolution needed to be eradicated from collective memory and outcasted to a historical limbo from where it could not endanger political history anymore. The difficult situation in which contemporary Russia found itself in regard to the commemoration of this event illustrates the tragicity concerning the reception of (not only) the Russian Revolution.

Given the last considerations, it would appear reasonable—when attempting to retell or reconsider the Russian Revolution—to try to do it in a collective manner. After all, the Russian Revolution, like any revolution, was a collective event. Unlike any other revolution before it, the Russian Revolution developed and broadened the notion of the collective, brought new collectives to light, granted them with right(s), and epitomized collectives, collective action and collective processes as the sole core element and touchstone of (any) revolution. Nevertheless, there is a character to which a paramount role in the course of those events has always been accorded to; a character, who is apparent in every attempt to reconstruct the Russian Revolution or to think of any future ones. This person is none other than Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known as Lenin, a person that, just like the revolution he helped to accomplish, still plays a determining role when theorizing the events that

he set in motion. Seen this way, it is not surprising that a series of articles in this volume occupy themselves with him, his deeds, his writings, his role in the course that the revolution took, his influence during his absolute reign, the debates concerning his success, the role he played in forging the Marxism-Leninism doctrine, and, last but not least, how this doctrine was shaped to find the next revolutions and how Lenin, as the revolutionary person par excellence, influenced any later understanding of what a charismatic figure is. In the articles of this volume, Lenin may appear as the main interlocutor of radical feminists trying to implement communist sexual ethics as opposed to a conservative bourgeois morality; as though he brought the law to its conceptual limits by instituting the state as a collective form, thereby rupturing the individualist foundations of conventional bourgeois law; or as having cast an everlasting shadow over generations of critical thinking from the Frankfurt School to Hannah Arendt who fought ardently to keep the revolutionary utopia alive. At the same time though, Lenin is held responsible for putting an end to any discussion concerning how the revolution could be alternatively founded; for betraying the revolution he completed by putting it to sleep; for being so paradoxically optimistic so as to become almost blind concerning authoritarian power structures that congealed the revolution back to what it was supposed to abolish; for universalizing the proletariat and thus undermining its diverse-collectivist revolutionary potential: last but not least, for functioning *contra eo* as the necessary and missing inspiration for fascists and national-socialists to achieve their goals.

Given the ambivalences observed not only during the actual course of events, but also in its reception, its commemoration and, in the legacy of its leading figure, it would not be farfetched to argue that a gravestone lays heavy over the revolution and the bodies of the revolutionaries buried with it. Did the secret discussions between Lenin and the *Left Socialist Revolutionaries* during the ten days that shook the world and that would later lead to revoking the peasants' *Nakaz* in the context of the New Economic Policy already lay the gravestone of the revolution? Or did the death of the revolution occur later? Or is rather Trotzki responsible for the revolution's entombment as soon as he ordered Mikhail Tukhachevsky to attack the sailors in Kronstadt on the 5th of March 1921? Were the remnants of the party structure responsible for embalming the already dead revolution when they stood by Stalin during the 1937–1938 trials? Or did Stalin kill the revolution on the 7th of March 1934,

when he allowed for Art 121 to be added to the criminal code for the entire Soviet Union that recriminalized and prohibited (male) homosexuality with up to five years of hard labor in prison? Was the *Decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Council of 11.23.1955 on the abolition of the prohibition of abortion* that was revoking Stalin's 1936 law banning the right to abortion that the Bolsheviks had legalized for the first time worldwide in October 1920 with their *Decree on Women's Healthcare* a revival of the revolutionary process or the awakening of a zombie that was to die again and again a few months later when by 02:00 on October 24, 1956 and under the command of Georgy Zhukov Soviet tanks entered Budapest? Or were—to stay in Soviet Union's interventions—Budapest, Prague and Warsaw further gravestones of a revolution that continued to be revived in Cuba, Angola, South Africa, the Middle East, etc.? The list could be continued ad infinitum, yet maybe the sheer facts are not necessarily the best or only place to look for the results or consequences of a revolution—especially considering how susceptible the facts are to instrumentalized interpretation and political manipulation. Philosophical contemplation, theoretical differentiation, political-engaged thinking are also loci of revolutionary practices, processes, and action. The revolt against the metaphysically dominated nineteenth century; the insurgency of contingency against prescribed teleology and quietist messianism; the dialectization of theory and practice against the primacy of either theoretical contemplation or practical decisionism; the upheaval of immanence against transcendence; the uprising of new subjects like the working class, the women, the people of color, the (de-, post-)colonialized, the LGBTQA+, or the antihuman actants; the abolishment of the integral and sovereign (supra-)individual agent as a motor of history; the demolition of the “revolution or transformation” dualism; the realization that different forms of revolution are to be accepted alongside the most conventional and traditional forms of a sudden and violent rupture since the form a revolution has to acquire depends at the end on what has to be revolutionized; the visibilization of the invisible, the misrepresented, the underrepresented; the incorporation of the global and the supplementation of the individual with the global etc.; all these developments in theory are forms of revolution and were set in motion exactly thanks to the ambivalences and the failures of the revolutionary thinking that was put into action in St. Petersburg and was monumentalized and domesticated as Leningrad. Furthermore, when nowadays “Leningrad” is conjured neither the Russian, nor the

Bolshevik, nor the Great October Socialist Revolution is evoked, but rather the possibility to realize the infinite project of an already commenced but never accomplished revolution. Samuel Beckett's liberating and unregrettable "Fail again Fail Better" is still accurate and maybe even more relevant in our current anti-revolutionary times, which are dominated by a politics of appeasement. It is in this spirit that the contributions concluding this volume have to be understood. Condoning the powerlessness of both the practical subject and the ideal subject of the revolution the authors of this section attempt to reenact revolutionary practices that are henceforth to be found maybe also beyond the authoritative ideal of a radical transformation qua revolution. Here, revolution lies in grasping its unmediated, unprepared, urgent, and intrusive realization *hic et nunc*; in the repetition of every day practices that carry within themselves the possibility to change their own course and through that the context within which they occur(ed); in realizing that revolution can only be a holistic, horizontal, inclusive project where communism is to be associated less with the secretive decision-making processes of a politburo but rather with the social-ontological production of a revolutionary subjectivity.

Surely, there are innumerable things to say regarding the Russian Revolution. Nevertheless, the aforementioned makes it plausible to frame a book considering the failures, the legacies, and the future of (the Russian) revolution based on following three phenomenological and somewhat descriptive, rather than normative prescriptive, notions in order to avoid politically colored and emotionally heated debates: reconsidering, retelling, and reenabling.

In the first section, we wish to go back and **reconsider** the Russian revolution through the eyes of its actors, its agents, its theorists, and its propagandists. The first question to arise is if it is at all possible to reconsider the Russian revolution. As already mentioned, KARL SCHLÖGEL asks in his article "Beyond the Horizon: The Russian Revolution Seen from Afar" if the October revolution is drifting away into a past that is can no longer possible be grasped. Taking into account that history takes place not only sequentially, but also simultaneously, we see ourselves—according to Schlögel—challenged to rethink the forms of narration. We must question the linear process of historic development and cope with Ernst Bloch's "simultaneity of dissimultaneity." For only then can we get rid of the linearity and sequentiality of the historic processes and admit contingency as the center of all things happening. From this follows the

challenge to develop a narrative adequate to the complexity of the historical process: the simultaneity of shocks and repercussions, the staccato of events and the continuity of *longue durée*, the take-off and decadence, the military mobilization and destabilization, the apocalyptic nightmares and bright utopias, the discipline of professional revolutionaries and the chaotic events out of control.

With this problematic as a backbone, the articles of this chapter attempt to scrutinize the ambivalences of revolution in four distinctive phenomena that pertain to the revolution's historicity: forms of sexuality that transgress the conventional sexual practices dictated by bourgeois morality; religion as on the one hand obfuscating and on the other hand as a necessary vector of transformative critique; forms of law that probe whether law could be normatively binding without reverting to oppressive or disciplinary practices; and, last but not least, revolution as a life form and to which extent there can be a continuous temporality inherent to this life form after its establishment.

Concerning the revolution's historicity, what is at stake here is whether there is a way to differentiate between what really happened, what was thought to have occurred—and what was staged as having happened. As SYLVIA SASSE argues in her article “Reenacting the Revolution? Theater and Politics of Repetition” the Bolsheviks found it paramount to create a narrative that was as “realistic” and “documentative” as possible. But—and these are the crucial questions—what is to be done when realism and the document cannot refer to an original? How do you deal with the fact, that when the historical event that is supposed to be repeated never occurred in a manner suitable for remembrance? Starting with Alexander Blok, Yuri Lotman, and Vladimir Mayakovski and by taking similar aesthetic endeavors like Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Konec Peterburga* (*The End of St. Petersburg*), Sergei Eisenstein's *Oktjabr'* (*Oktober*), and Sergei Bondarchuk's *Krasnye kolokola* (*Red Bells*) into account the article focuses on the work of Nikolai Evreinov. As Sasse argues, the “Storming of the Winter Palace” is not a reenactment but rather an as if reenactment, a staged production that only pretends to be a repetition of a historical event.

Concerning sexual ethics, the economic goals of the dictatorship of the proletariat were pervaded by the reform efforts of communist intellectuals and leftist activists, which were apparently successful in the Soviet Union and focused on the human body as a biopolitical factor. As ENIKŐ DARABOS argues in her article entitled “Revolution in Sexual Ethics:

Communism and the ‘Sex Problem’ (1920–1930),” the emancipatory proposals of Alexandra Kollontai, Elfriede Friedländer (pen-name: Ruth Fischer), or Wilhelm Reich constituted a progressive sexual ethical system that required a harsh reformist attitude on behalf of the communist believers, politicians, and activists of the time. By deciphering the ambivalence pervading the progressive initiations, they meant to rearrange the social matrix of marriage, sexual relations, gender roles, sexual morality, prostitution, and parenting. Yet the review of the theoretical assumptions regarding sexual ethics and the socialist/communist parties’ attitudes toward the setting up of a proletarian sexual morality brought to light and furnished proof of the often inconsistent and in many aspects obscure party ideology of the Russian Bolsheviks, the Austrian Socialists, and the German Communists, who thwarted the development of a new sexual political directive as much as they promoted it.

Concerning religion, the suspicion that a theological framework informs the leftist revolutionary projects was used to denounce them as crypto-religious movements with otherworldly objectives. Evidence from the protocols recorded by Svetlana Aleksievich suggests that the post-soviet experience is indeed characterized by a feeling of lost faith in some transcendent goal. In his article “Revolution and Salvation” CHRISTIAN SCHMIDT argues that the Russian Revolution inherited theological conceptions from the Hegelian concept of history. Contrary to widespread diagnosis, however, such a heritage draws more on the political expertise present in the theological tradition than by establishing a transcendent knowledge about the course of history. Hegel and the Marxists knew rather well that an historical project such as a revolution presupposes a goal that is present in the actual world but aims at the profound transformation of this very actuality. Ideas as freedom and equality evoke the vision of a world that is liberated from domination and exploitation. As the religious movements before them, the revolutionaries had to create a community that was devoted to their historical aim in order to reach deliverance from the existing ills. Therefore, so the argument, the communist party was the failed attempt to create a militant organization with such universal pretensions.

In the case of law, the dominant question was how to understand the legal character not of any dictatorship, but of the dictatorship of the proletariat. As NAVEEN KANALU argues in his “Law, Absolute Will, and the ‘Withering of the State’: Sovereignty at the Limits of Lenin’s ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat’,” Lenin formulated the Dictatorship of

the Proletariat as a phase of transition from the capitalist state-system to a communist society. Therefore, and since the dictatorship was not invested in the legal form of the state that eventually was to be overcome, the dictatorship was neither legal nor illegal, but extra-legal in nature. The latter posed a series of questions to the early Soviet thinkers who tried fervently to provide this quasi-state structure with the necessary juridical foundations. Kanalu traces the idea of the imposition of the proletariat's absolute will back to the political concept of "despotism" in Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois*. Montesquieu's despotism is of course a limiting concept of government, which is marked by an absence of legal institutions and the absolute force of the "prince's" will, which is unhindered by law. This idea, which remained obscure in nineteenth-century theories of socialism, was however resurrected by Lenin in the 1917 work, *The State and Revolution*. Lenin's marxist assumption according to which the state had to wither away is regarded as underpinning the extra-legal form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Through the latter and by revisiting Soviet legal thinkers like Evgeny Pashukanis, the essay argues for a dialectical understanding of the paradox of law under dictatorship: the rule by decrees in the post-revolutionary context, the role of the Soviets in decision-making, and the gradual juridicization of the Soviet state. Through these historical issues, Kanalu illustrates the difficulties in conceiving the relation between sovereignty and law in post-revolutionary transitions.

The last phenomenon at which revolution's paradoxality becomes apparent is thematized by DIETER THOMÄ in his "What Is Life Like After Revolution? Administration, Habit, and Democracy in Lenin's *The State and Revolution*—and Beyond." In his paper, Thomä analyzes the scenario for a post-revolutionary society as developed in Lenin's *The State and Revolution*. Lenin heavily relies on Marx and Engels's metaphors of waking up and falling asleep: Post-revolutionary society is marked by a grand awakening and a conversion of dreams into reality, while the state is said to fall asleep or wither away. Lenin applies these metaphors yet applies them in a strangely inverted manner. Instead of embracing agency, he argues for a new regime of "habit," which has sedating effects on humans, while the state survives its demise and returns under the title of "administration." Lenin's plea for "habit" and "administration" is discussed in a broader context of other philosophical accounts reaching

from Kant to Hegel, Max Weber, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hannah Arendt, and beyond. These critical considerations lead to some general findings on the status of moral agency in revolutionary change whereby Trotsky's account of permanent revolution with its experimentalist and theatrical implications is a case in point here. The paper concludes by discussing the intricate relation between revolution, democracy, and the state.

The second section of the volume concentrates on how the revolution was **retold** in the aftermath of its accomplishment not only by its sympathizers but also its opponents. What is important here is to observe not only what kind of radical, but also reactionary politics was thereby inspired and how it legitimized conservative theoretical undertakings. In contrast to this, the section analyzes how the revolution triggered critical theorists to pave new paths of radical thinking that were conceived as methods to overcome the revolution's failures and impasses. Last but not least, this section discusses how the revolution still casts a shadow over its country of origin and how even its commemoration still poses a threat to every well-established political order.

In his provocative intervention "German and Jewish Conspiracies: The October Revolution from the perspective of the Italian Fascists and the German National Socialists," ULRICH SCHMID traces the reception of the October revolution in Italian Fascism and German National-Socialism. The leaders of both movements were quick to denounce the Bolshevik coup as a foreign conspiracy. Hitler highlighted the Jewish origin of the Russian revolutionaries. While for Mussolini, the October revolution was a German plot—Mussolini mistook the Jewish last names for German ones and even mixed up Lenin with the Menshevik leader Tserdobaum. Even though Fascists and Nazis fiercely opposed the Leninist ideology, they were deeply impressed with the effective seizure of political power in Russia. Both Mussolini and Hitler were not eager to accept the fact that they were appointed as heads of governments by the king or the president, respectively. Rather, they actually stressed the revolutionary character of their new political systems. As the article concludes, however, there were clear differences in the concepts of the state that was to be produced by the self-declared revolutions in the three countries: While in Soviet Russia, the state was supposed to wither away, in Italy the state was conceived as the ultimate goal of the Fascist society, and in Nazi Germany the state was expected to transform itself eventually into an eternal "Reich."

In the next intervention “A Narrative Theory for the October Revolution (From Maugham to Benjamin and Back),” TATJANA JUKIĆ argues, by taking Somerset Maugham’s *Ashenden* as a point of departure, how the October Revolution fails to consolidate in the discourses of history and philosophy. Instead, its intellectual consolidation seems, according to Jukić, to hinge on narrative theory—a proposition implicit in Maugham’s account of the October Revolution. Interestingly, Jukić also finds this idea in Carl Schmitt’s writing, who suggests by analyzing the figures of Hamlet or Hecuba that political modernity may be premised on a relation forged between narration and revolution. Tellingly, Walter Benjamin identifies a similar configuration in Maugham’s *Ashenden* with a tacit invitation to examine it against his own narrative theory (of modernity) presented in *The Storyteller*. Rather than revealing the October Revolution to be a somewhat disappointing heiress to the French Revolution and to its dazzling effect on modern history and philosophy, this examination shows that the October Revolution confronts twentieth-century modernity with the prerogatives of the English Revolution, as expounded by Schmitt, and possibly exhausts the logic of modernity and of revolution.

A different approach is to be observed in the works and writings of theorists engaged in critical thought and proposing a radical transformation of society. MARIE-JOSÉE LAVALLÉE’s paper “October and the Prospects for Revolution. The Views of Arendt, Adorno, and Marcuse” explores the theoretical positions of Hannah Arendt, Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse on revolution and the issue of social and political change. A close reading of their main writings and of a selection of posthumously published materials, including conferences, discussions, drafts, and letters, testifies that their reflections on revolution must be read as a “dialogue” with the experience of the October Revolution. As it is argued, these thinkers offer a comprehensive analysis of the reasons for the failure of the first successful revolution of the twentieth century to bring about social justice, equality, and freedom. On the one hand, they consider the empirical conditions in which the seizure of power occurred and that also determined the subsequent development of the Soviet state. On the other hand, they reflect the role of theory and the weight of ideology, whose roots are to be found in Marxian, Marxist, and Leninist precepts and ideas. The article is divided in two sections. The first part of the paper is devoted to the shadow that the October Revolution continued to cast over Arendt’s, Adorno’s, and Marcuse’s

pondering of the prospects for revolution, and how it reshaped their thinking on new empirical and theoretical bases in hope to avoid the repetition of similar pitfalls. In turn, the second part explores their modified conceptions of revolution, which—as Lavallée plausibly argues—still remain enlightening today.

In a similar vein, TORA LANE lets the radicalization of theory encounter the problematic of remembrance in her article “Memory politics and the ‘politics of memory’.” In opposition to the memory politics that seeks to frame the historical narrative of Communism and the revolution, this article discusses the possibility of a different memory of the Russian Revolution. With reference to Derrida’s notion of “politics of memory” in *Spectres of Marx* and Nancy’s existentialist reconfiguration of communality in *The Inoperative Community*, Lane proposes to understand the Russian Revolution as an idea that could retrieve a memory of the common as being-in-common. Although this idea was not prominent in official Bolshevik propaganda, Lane shows in close readings how this idea can be found in the literary works of the Soviet writer Andrey Platonov.

The last comment on the consequences of retelling the Russian Revolution is provided by STEPHAN RINDLIBACHER in his article “Into Historical Limbo: The Legacy of the October Revolution in Russia.” As he diagnoses, the commemoration of the October Revolution last autumn in Russia was highly ambivalent. On the one hand, symbols of the revolutionary past were visible everywhere. On the other hand, the authorities were only half-heartedly engaged in the commemoration of the event. The focus of the current commemoration was—as Rindlibacher argues—to reconcile the heterogeneous narratives of Russian history and to emphasize the need for a strong state. Based on media reports, official communications and his own observations, Rindlibacher takes a closer look at the forms of commemoration or non-commemoration in different social fields (public spaces, museums, academia, and educational internet platforms) and analyzes how the complex interaction between silencing and performance evokes this kind of blurring. His verdict after this analysis is following: the memory of Red October is still pushed into historical limbo, into a no-man’s-land, from where it cannot endanger current politics.

Picking up this strain of thought, the third and last section of this volume is dedicated to the question whether the Russian Revolution is thought to hinder or inspire current revolutionary theory and politics—and what kind of political thought and action can be **reenabled** through

those considerations. In his article “The Concepts of Revolution,” GEOFFROY DE LAGASNERIE commences from the assumption that previous ways of experiencing politics were structured by a feeling of revolutionary hope, while post-revolutionary politics is increasingly marked by an experience of powerlessness. For Lagasnerie, this feeling of disempowerment and the subsequent questioning of the effectiveness of radical transformative practices is linked to the manner in which the revolutionary ideal functions today, and the way in which it regulates our political practices. As he argues, the image or idea of the revolution we adhere to (and the diagnosis of the present and future upon which it is based) actually prevents us from acting radically and from perceiving and participating in the struggles that are unfolding as we speak. In a nutshell, the ongoing search and imperative for a transformation *qua* revolution does not allow us to act and generates feelings of powerlessness in us. This brings him to reconsider the interconnections of politics, action, and radicality today. Finally, he suggests that a systemless Marcusism and “general leaking” might provide us with a theoretical framework and radical praxis that is capable to readdress this complex.

For CHRISTOPH MENKE, the question that urgently demands an answer is much more fundamental and pertains to asking what makes a revolution possible. In his contribution “The Possibility of the Revolution,” this question coincides with the question of the subject that is able to bring a revolution about. As he argues, any attempt to answer this question is faced with the following aporia: The subject of the revolution can neither be identified with its historically produced social form, nor can it be the subject “as such,” as the power of negativity prior to history and society. The way out of this aporia is—for Menke—to be found in the idea of a transcendental turn of subjectivity. As the article argues, the revolution is the transcendental usage of the subject’s historically acquired and socially formed capacities. The possibility of the revolution lies solely in the revolutionizing of one’s possibilities (as abilities).

The next chapter attempts to provide some practical insights concerning the revolutionizing of possibilities and how revolutions are brought about. DONATELLA DELLA PORTA’s “Time intensification in revolutionary dynamics” makes a case of how protest campaigns linked to episodes of democratization are often described as sudden events: surprise, excitement, and innovation are terms often used to describe the eventful process of democratization, as the times are perceived as exceptional. She suggests that one major transformation during those events is what we

can conceptualize as “time intensification” and that relevant reflections on this topic can be found in different branches of the social sciences that have addressed critical junctures at the macro level, eventful protest at the meso level, and signaling mechanisms at the micro level. Bridging those three levels, della Porta argues that important changes are produced at the meso level, where eventful protest interrupts routines. Acting collectively, social movements can be seen as producing critical junctures at the macro level, where structures become more liquid. The implication at the micro level is that actors look for signals of others’ thoughts and behaviors that might guide their own choices. In order to demonstrate this, della Porta analyzes activists’ perception of time by means of in-depth interviews carried out with activists from two Central Eastern European countries that can be considered as being paradigmatic for such sudden events (Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic [GDR]). As already shown in her recent *Where did the Revolution go?* published in 2017, this immanent and performative unraveling of revolutionary processes is not western or Eurocentric, but ought to be considered as being inherent to every revolutionary process since the same findings can be observed as being applicable—after a cross-area and cross-time comparison—at two (more troubled) episodes of eventful democratization like the ones that took place in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011. Furthering her previous work, the quintessence of della Porta’s article included in this volume lies in realizing that revolutionary temporality is depending on endogenous dynamics that unfold in a series of contingent choices that in their turn result in unexpected, abrupt and open-ended change.

The book ends with THOMAS TELIOS’ “Postscript: Communist Subjectivity and the Politics of Collectiversalism.” After acknowledging the legacy of both the French and the Russian Revolution in establishing collectivity as the core element of revolutionary process par excellence, Telios argues that both ‘the people’ and “the party” were paradigmatic collectivities brought forward by the French and the Russian Revolution yet failed to implement the totality of their goals. The reason for this, was, according to Telios, the fact that in the course of the revolutions they instantiated, those collectives were universalized, thereby forfeiting their collective and diverse character and, ultimately, falling back onto mere supra-individual entities. Though this can be easily attributed to adhering to a notion of subjectivity that bestows both the individual and the supra-individual subject with a metaphysically grounded

revolutionary agency, the decentering of the subject that was pursued in the aftermath of May '68 as a remedy to this problem is deemed by Telios as equally insufficient. He argues that as soon as there is no subject, there is also no revolutionary subject and as soon as there is no revolutionary subject, there can be no revolution. With this framework, the paper maintains that an alternative understanding of the subject as a socially constructed collective subjectivity can serve as an alternative to this conundrum; an understanding of subjectivity that can be traced back to Marx's understanding of the subject in which one's "individual existence [...] is at the same time a social being." By taking into account similar notions (such as the assemblic identity, the plural body, the being-in-common) that can be found in intersectionality studies, the work of Judith Butler and Jean-Luc Nancy, Telios argues for the need to rethink the subject as a socially produced collective entity. Henceforth, this communist subjectivity is being rendered capable of engaging in collective practices due to its social-ontological production as a collective. In the last part of the article, practices are sketched that derive from such an understanding of subjectivity. The point is that revolutionary politics need not be normative, i.e. they do not need to share a same goal, pursue the same interests, or demand a common identity. In contrast to such a normative understanding of collective revolutionary practices, Telios' argument is that revolutionary and collective action is inherent to every subject due to the process of its collective, social-ontological structuration.

Coming to the end of this introduction, it should be mentioned that the opening discussion with Julia Kissina and all of the contributions of this volume document the conference "One Hundred Years That Shook The World: Failures, Legacies, And The Futures of The Russian Revolution," which took place from the 3rd to the 5th of October, 2017, and was organized by the University of St. Gallen in collaboration with the Literaturhaus, Zurich, and the Cinema Palace, St. Gallen. We greatly appreciate and sincerely thank the Research Office of the University of St. Gallen and the Swiss National Science Foundation for financing and thus granting us the possibility to organize this conference. Furthermore, and coming to the book, we are indebted to Stephen Eric Bronner for including the book in the Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice Series of Palgrave Macmillan and we would like to thank our in-house editor Michelle Chen and assistant editor John Stegner

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