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AESTHETIC TEMPORALITIES TODAY

Present, Presentness, Re-Presentation

[transcript] Image

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Samuel Strehle

Now-time Explosion.

The Experience of Time in Social Revolution

The following remarks are based on initial work in the subproject “Linguistic Appresentations of Material Experiences of Time: The Relationship of Object–Aesthetic and Social Sense in Temporal Metaphors,” a cooperation between the Institute of Sociology and the Seminar for Indo–European Studies at the University of Jena. We are examining metaphors of time, i.e. pictorial turns of speech, in which experiences of time and temporality are expressed. The focus on metaphors is only logical: there is no other way to speak about time other than in metaphors, for time per se is unimaginable and needs metaphors to become imaginable and presentable. As the historian Reinhart Koselleck succinctly put it: “Whoever speaks about time is dependent upon metaphors.”¹

What interests us about the time metaphors themselves are the sources and donors of the imagery, i.e. the imaginable things that ‘lend’ the unimaginable time its imaginable substance. The things play a double role in our project: on the one hand, as a source in the sense above, i.e. as a symbolic form in which experiences of time find expression and representation by and through language; on the other hand, as the objects through which the experience of time itself takes place. Precisely because time is so un-imaginable and un-sensory, it requires material things to be experienced at all.² Elementary examples of this are the rotation of the earth in the day-night rhythm or its circulation around the sun in the rhythm

1| Reinhart Koselleck, “Einleitung,” in id., *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt o.M.: Suhrkamp, 2000), 9–16, 9.

2| Cf. Michael Gamper and Helmut Hühn, *Was sind Ästhetische Eigenzeiten?* (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2014), 11f.

of the seasons, the continuous advancing hand of a clock or the rhythmic work of a factory assembly line.

Our project assumes that a (more than merely arbitrary) connection exists between the two levels, materiality and language. The choice of the source providing the imagery in a metaphor typically refers as well to qualities of the thing itself, i.e. it expresses not only experiences of time, but also of things. We speak of the flow of time because this relates to the characteristic qualities of rivers, to the structural analogies between the passing of time and the constant flowing of water. We are thus taking up the idea of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's theory of metaphor,³ according to which many of our "basic ontological metaphors,"⁴ including temporal metaphors,⁵ build on physical and bodily experiences, i.e. they have "experiential bases"⁶ in the objective structure of the world.⁷

In the following I will speak about only one of the themes we are addressing in this context: the experience of time in social revolution, i.e. those historical states of turmoil, unrest and upheaval which since 1688 and, above all, 1789 we subsume under the concept of revolution. We have selected revolution because it is a prototypical epitome of presentness [*Gegenwärtigkeit*]. Revolutions are events of radical presentness, and indeed of collective, socially shared, socially generated presentness. How are such events experienced with respect to their temporal structure? Which social experiences are embedded in speaking about revolutions—which, just like speaking about time, relies highly on metaphors—and can be reconstructed from them? At the present point in time, we would like to put up for discussion a few fundamental theoretical considerations on the experience of revolutionary time and linguistic appresentation, or in other words, the linguistic visualization of this time experience, as it occurs in German literature.

3| Cf. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago/ London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 14–21, 56–60.

4| Cf. Lakoff, Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 58.

5| Cf. Lakoff, Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 58f.

6| Cf. Lakoff, Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 19.

7| This experiential grounding of metaphors is not to be understood as determinative in the sense of an immediate, virtually automatic transposing of the structures of the world onto those of thought however (cf. Lakoff, Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 18, 22–24, 57), but rather also entail cultural experiences so that corresponding differences "can vary from culture to culture" (14).

From Cycle to New Beginning: Revolution as a Metaphor of Time

The origin of the modern concept of revolution is well known—it comes from astronomy. *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* is the original Latin title of Nicolaus Copernicus's *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* (1543).⁸ The *revolutio* (from Latin *re-volvere*, to 'roll back, to roll over, to turn back') was thus first the orbit of the planets. A thing that orbits around another thing—this is what seems to have been remembered when one reflected on political unrest and upheavals, mainly since the 18th century, but occasionally even earlier.⁹ What connected these two far-apart fields was the ancient doctrine of the cycles of constitutions, informed by Aristotle and Polybius: the purported ironclad succession of the various forms of statehood in the cycle from monarchy to tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, polity, and ochlocracy.¹⁰ In both fields, there are described cycles and cyclical repetitions, in any event an orderly course of events. It is in this sense of an orderly course that the astronomical revolution became a metaphor for the political.

At the beginning, this was still a vibrant, innovative and striking metaphor, over which one stumbled and first needed to reflect upon. Over the course of time, the word then percolated into general usage and from a lively image seen with the inner eye turned into a mere concept, its pictorial origins no longer present in everyday language usage. In turn however, this 'de-visualized' concept is now associated with new images. The 19th century, the century of revolutions, was also one of proliferating revolution metaphors. Used as terminology, synonyms like 'upheaval' or 'overthrow,' building on the literal meaning of *revolutio*, were joined by a series of secondary poetic visualizations. The most common of these are the thunderstorm ('Gewitter'), the storm, the earthquake, the flood, the volcanic eruption, the fire and the explosion; for friends of the revolution there is also birth as a symbol of the new

8 | Nicolaus Copernicus, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* [1543], trans. A.M. Duncan (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976).

9 | For this history of the concept of revolution in the modern age, see Karl Griewank, *Der neuzeitliche Revolutionsbegriff: Entstehung und Entwicklung* [1969] (Frankfurt o.M.: Suhrkamp, 1973); Reinhart Koselleck, "Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution" [1969], in id., *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 43–57; Reinhart Koselleck et al., "Revolution, Rebellion, Aufruhr, Bürgerkrieg," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 5, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 653–788, and Melvin J. Lasky, *Utopia and Revolution: On the Origins of a Metaphor* [1976] (New Brunswick/ London: Transaction Publishers, 2004).

10 | Cf. Karl-Ernst Petzold, "Kyklos und Telos im Geschichtsdenken des Polybios," *Saeculum. Jahrbuch für Universalgeschichte*, no. 28 (1977): 253–290.

beginning, for its opponents the out of control (guillotining) machine.¹¹ For Marx, there is the “gigantic broom” that “swept away all these relics of bygone times,”¹² or the famous locomotive on the journey along progress when he writes, two years after 1848, that revolutions are the “locomotives of history.”¹³

All these metaphors hit upon something that is unique to revolutions as historical events: havoc and destruction as in natural disasters, but also the rise of the new as in a birth; energetic discharges as in a thunderstorm or an explosion; acceleration like a locomotive; the buildup of enormous masses of force as in floods breaking through dams and dykes, or in a volcanic eruption; and finally, processes taking on a life of their own, slipping out of the control of their instigators, much like a machine or a fire that spreads wildly and consumes all in its path. In contrast, over the course of modernity the planets seem a less plausible means to visualize the phenomenon of revolution. New things take their place instead: phenomena of nature and catastrophic materiality, but also human-made forces and artefacts. Often connected with this visual shift is—as has been frequently noted—a shift in the meaning of revolution itself.¹⁴ It is now reversed into its very opposite—from the cyclical continuity to a radical break that creates something fundamentally new; from a rule to the exception, from repetition to event, from circle to point.

Experiences of Revolutionary Time

The history of revolutions, but so too the concept of revolution, is comparatively well researched; the same applies, albeit to a lesser degree, for its metaphorical dimensions.¹⁵ Within the framework of our research project, we are interested in the specific *experiences of time* stored in the revolution metaphors.¹⁶ As Karl Heinz

11 | An overview of revolution metaphors and the role of metaphors for history in general is to be found in Alexander Demandt, *Metaphern für Geschichte. Sprachbilder und Gleichnisse im historisch-politischen Denken* (München: C. H. Beck, 1978); for the revolutionary metaphoric specifically, see also Hans-Wolf Jäger, *Politische Metaphorik im Jakobinismus und im Vormärz* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1971), and Helmut Peitsch, “Jakobinische Metaphorik? Deutsche Reisende als ‘Zuschauer’ der Französischen Revolution,” *Literatur für Leser* 12, no. 4 (1990): 185–201.

12 | Karl Marx, “The Civil War in France. Address of the General Council of the International Working-Men’s Association” [1871], in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 22 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 307–359, 328.

13 | Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France 1848–1850* [1850], in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 22 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 45–145, 122.

14 | Cf. Griewank, *Der neuzeitliche Revolutionsbegriff*, and Koselleck et al., “Revolution, Rebellion.”

15 | Cf. Lasky, *Utopia und Revolution*, 261–315.

16 | Unlike the concept of revolution, experiences of time in revolutions are somewhat less well researched; besides Koselleck’s works on the experience of history, see the study by Ernst Wolfgang

Bohrer once put it with reference to the experience of the French Revolution, the “time of revolution” is always connected to a “revolution of time.”¹⁷ We would add, revolutionary situations are accompanied by a specific aggregation of time as such, a very specific ‘intrinsic revolutionary time.’

The sociologist Georges Gurvitch has described the phenomenon of revolution as the prototype of an “explosive time,”¹⁸ one in which the present and past dissolve, replaced by an immediately experienced future, hauled in as it were into the here and now. The course of time accelerates to such a degree in revolutions that Walter Benjamin was even enticed to describe the experience of time in revolutions as a *standing still* of time, the now-time (“Jetztzeit”) as expounded in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*.¹⁹ We wish to bring these two fundamental determinations of revolutionary time together in the concept of ‘now-time explosion,’ i.e. the explosion of the now in the present. In revolutions—so the thesis behind this concept—the directly lived singular moment of time intensifies into the experience of an immediate presence and presentness, which is so filled with rapidly synthesizing connections, erupting wishes and desires, but also fears, traumatic shock, and disorientation, that the usual order of time unravels.

The experience of time in such situations is paradoxical. Revolutions are perceived as an extreme acceleration of how time is felt, as a “temporal abbreviation”²⁰ and a shrinking of the present to a “temporal minimum.”²¹ On the other hand, this time—felt to be virtually traveling at the speed of light—leads to a slowing down and lengthening of how time is felt, culminating in the standing still of time or even the loss of time as an experiential category altogether, typical for euphoric states of intoxication.²² This timelessness or “*achrony*”²³ is the opposite of an eventless emptiness and needs to be understood rather as an *excessive fullness*—a rich mo-

Becker (*Zeit der Revolution!—Revolution der Zeit? Zeiterfahrungen in Deutschland in der Ära der Revolutionen 1789–1848/49* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), and Karl Heinz Bohrer, “Zeit der Revolution—Revolution der Zeit. Die Hermeneutik revolutionärer Gegenwart bei Friedrich Schlegel (1795–1800) und Heinrich Heine (1831–1855),” in id., *Die Ideen von 1789 in der deutschen Rezeption*, ed. Forum für Philosophie Bad Homburg (Frankfurt o.M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), 128–155.

17| Cf. Bohrer “Zeit der Revolution;” similarly Becker “Zeit der Revolution.”

18| Georges Gurvitch, “Social Structure and the Multiplicity of Times,” in *Sociological Theory, Values, and Sociocultural Change*, ed. Edward A. Tiryakian (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 171–184, 178.

19| Cf. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” [1940] in id., *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zorn (New York: Schocken 2008), 253–267, 261.

20| Koselleck, *Modern Concept of Revolution*, 50.

21| Reinhart Koselleck, “Sediments of Time,” [2000], in id., *Sediments of Time*, 3–9, 7.

22| For the influence of drug intoxication on time perception see Arnold Hinz, *Psychologie der Zeit: Umgang mit Zeit, Zeiterleben und Wohlbefinden* (Munster/New York/Munich/Berlin: Waxmann, 2000), 88–92.

23| Gamper, Hühn, *Was sind Ästhetische Eigenzeiten?*, 49.

ment extended into perpetuity, wherein revolutionary practice takes place as *temporarily ongoing presentness*.

In this temporarily ongoing presentness the revolutionary changes of a protagonist's lifeworld follow one another at breathtaking speed. People begin to act radically different, to fundamentally reorganize their lives; they sever old ties and enter new ones, engender new ways of thinking and new desires, infected by the new thoughts and new desires of others, and together there is a reciprocal ecstatic intensification of resonance.²⁴ The 'now-time explosion' is thus also a wish explosion, an explosive breaking out of collectively repressed yearnings and desires buried deep within the conventions of everyday life. An eyewitness account by a participant of the Russian February Revolution of 1917 vividly captures the outbreak of desire, looking back in grief from three years later: "When I think of the October days and the mighty enthusiasm which swept the country, I realize to what depths we have sunk. Then was liberty, indeed, and brotherhood. Why, the joy of the people was such, strangers kissed each other on the highways."²⁵ This is more than a coincidental anecdote, but an exemplary expression of the heart of the revolutionary experience: an example of the sudden and 'wild' breaking open and away from everyday norms and behavior, the practice of revolution on the micro-level of social action.

If social revolutions always imply a change in the "relational modus"²⁶ between people, then they go hand in hand with a very peculiar type of social acceleration. They are 'explosive' in how the relationships between people multiply exponentially, and with these felt to be infinitely on the increase they are to take to the streets and form a mass, ready to fight together, to passionately discuss, or just smooch. No one looks at a watch or clock, the passing of time is completely forgotten: this is another way in which revolutions are felt to be timeless while still having their own length of time, one in which, to remain with our example, the duration of a kiss is held as intrinsic time. When considered against this background, the 'intrinsic time of revolution' would be the epitome of everything that is acted out, unfolding according to its own respective rhythms, within the duration of this event and merges poly-rhythmically into the total event that is a revolution.

24 | For more on 'resonance' see the work by Hartmut Rosa, *Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016), who is primarily concerned with the 'responses of the world' to the subject, i.e. 'effective relations to the world;' for a concept of resonance that emphasizes rather the infectious, the setting alight, and reciprocal amplification, and hence the "effect-explosions," see Niklas Luhmann, *Ecological Communication* [1986], trans. John Bednarz Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 15–21, quote 21, and 115–120. A third concept of resonance would be the psychoanalytical one, which also explores phenomena of intersubjective igniting, infecting and vibrating, but focuses on the field of wishes and desires; see Samuel Strehle, *Kollektivierung der Träume. Eine Kulturtheorie der Bilder* (Weilerswist: Velbrück, 2019), 165–173.

25 | Alexander Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth (Diary 1920–1922)* (London: Hutchinson, 1925), 186; see also Bini Adamczak, *Beziehungweise Revolution: 1917, 1968 und kommende* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017), 41f.

26 | Cf. Adamczak, *Beziehungweise Revolution*, 239–257.

The Refunctioning of Things: The Materiality of the Revolution

Like all social actions, revolutionary practices and experiences are also embedded in tangible surrounds. Revolutions take place through and in people, but also through and on things as the media and framework conditions of human action. If, following Bruno Latour's Actor–Network–Theory, we can think of the social as an 'assembly,'²⁷ and if this concept, instead of simply meaning a gathering of people, encompasses the ceaseless practice of linking people and things, then revolutions are assemblies in this Latourian sense. Not only people meet each other in these assemblies, but people and things, people with things in their hand, people using things for protection, people hiding behind things, hurling them around, overturning them, or setting them alight; people fighting over things and for the power to control things, since their individual and collective existence is organized, in every conceivable way, in the medium of things and the structures of things. This begins on the street itself, the tangible arena of revolutionary clashes, their material stage and their 'carrier medium' (in the truest sense of the word as a supporting surface, bearing the weight of the fighting body), and continues through to the factories, offices, and stores, where the politico–economic order of society is directly manifest as an 'order of things.'

On this material level, the revolution appears, first and foremost, to be a more or less creative refunctioning of things and a changing of their usage.²⁸ The revolutionaries occupy squares and buildings and alter their function, turning them into assembly places; they turn vehicles or furniture into barricades, iron bars into weapons, and walls into surfaces for communicating. Like the social explosions of human gatherings, these examples of refunctioning the world of things go hand in hand with respective experiences of an intrinsic time. They are connected to a new configuration of the time intrinsic to a material thing, to new, previously never experienced durations of presentness. The barricade burns for a specific length of time; the doors of the government building withstand the onslaught for so long; the messages on the walls are urgent for a certain period of time before they are written over or become meaningless; the guillotine can carry out only so many executions an hour.

Another level of time is mediated by the symbolic things of revolution, associated with specific images and notions of present, past, and future. In revolution-

27 | Cf. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 63–86, 247–262.

28 | An interesting description of the role of things in situations of revolt is to be found in Klaus Neukrantz's novel *Barrikaden am Wedding. Der Roman einer Straße aus den Berliner Maitagen 1929* (Vienna/ Berlin/ Zurich: Internationaler Arbeiterverlag, 1931); cf. Samuel Strehle, "Barrikaden am Wedding: Revolutionäre Zeiterfahrung und die Eigenzeit der Dinge," in *Parallaxen moderner Zeitlichkeit*, ed. Patrick Eisenlohr, Stefan Kramer, Andreas Langenohl (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2020).

ary France for instance, a new zeitgeist and a changed regimen of sensuality is expressed in the medium of a more lascivious fashion; to mark the federation celebrations on the first anniversary of the revolution, highly symbolic clothing, flags, and insignia recall the triumph of the revolution the year before, while the black attire of the aristocrats articulates their grief for the loss of 'their' old order.²⁹ Onetime profane things like bread become symbols of a better future about to dawn, and it is with these symbols that social change is exemplarily manifested.³⁰

From Things to Metaphors: On the Relationship Between Language and Reality

One of the guiding ideas of our project is that there is a connection between the world of things described above and sensual experiences on the one hand, and the world of metaphors, the expression through language on the other; that the experiences with things find expression in the store of available language, i.e. as society's trove of experience. The simplest form of such an expression is when specific things 'become proverbial,' albeit this is certainly more the exception than the rule. Most of the time, the real experience of revolution translates only very indirectly into metaphoric speech. Earthquakes, thunderstorms, floods, and brooms usually play only a subordinate role in revolutions for instance. It thus seems to us all the more interesting to ask how such phenomena can nonetheless become emblems of revolution. What is it about the locomotive for example that moves Marx to equate it to a revolution? In essence, we are asking where the phenomenal affinity between the experience of a revolution and a train journey lies; or put differently: what constitutes the translation point between the two spheres?

In the case of the *locomotive*, one part of the answer undoubtedly lies in the culturally charged associations with the recent invention of the railway, perceived as a symbol of technological and social progress.³¹ With respect to Marx specifically,

29 | Cf. Jean-Paul Bertaud, *Alltagsleben während der Französischen Revolution*, trans. Christine Diefenbacher (Freiburg/ Wuerzburg: Ploetz, 1983), 2-14.

30 | Cf. Bertaud, *Alltagsleben*, 7f.

31 | For the railways as part of the "collective symbolic" of the 19th century, see Jürgen Link, "Zum Anteil der Kollektivsymbolik an der Sprachentwicklung im 19. Jahrhundert: Das Beispiel der Verkehrsmittel Kutsche und Eisenbahn," in *Sprache und bürgerliche Nation. Beiträge zur deutschen und europäischen Sprachgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Dieter Cherubim et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 384-397; in addition, there is also the railway as a "subject of the revolution," i.e. as "carrying the hopes of March" for social and technological progress, but above all as the transportation means, fiercely fought over, for moving revolutionaries and soldiers during the uprisings of 1848/49: Ralf Roth, *Das Jahrhundert der Eisenbahn. Die Herrschaft über Raum und Zeit 1800-1914* (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2005), 89-107. For a typical example of the coeval reception of the railway, see the enthusiastic report of the first German rail line

a further aspect is its suitability as an optimistic symbol of a determined course of history—a locomotive moves forward, traveling from the past into the future, and on tracks, which have set the direction of the journey and *always lead to the destination*. But perhaps a somewhat subtler key to understanding the metaphor is to be found in the material, sensory experience of a journey in a train for a person of the 19th century; the sheer physical experience of how a manmade power develops a hitherto inconceivable force, a seemingly paradoxical interaction between monumental heaviness and rapid forward movement; and finally, directly related to this, the experience of the journey itself, at once thrilling and frightening, exalting and elevating. On a train journey a person can marvel at the technological triumph of their species; and when looking admiringly at the locomotive they find the direct physical confirmation of modern man's self-perception as the rational molder of and sovereign over history. In this way, the train is not only a pictorial (iconic) analogy of progress but epitomizes the (indexical) proof that history is moving forward.³² It is not referential in the sense of pointing; rather, it *is* what it signifies, and in a way that is fully comprehensible through the senses for anyone who sees or travels on a train.

The *explosion* is also a sign of the new age; dynamite—while not the first explosive agent but the first one used on a large scale—was patented in 1867. Unlike the positively connoted railway, here the new is the source of imagery for catastrophic and cataclysmic experiences. In the explosion, acceleration is heightened into its fatal extremity and manifests as a destructive bang, occurring with unexpected suddenness, and mangling and shredding everything in its vicinity. In contrast to the many nature metaphors of revolution like thunderstorms, floods, or earthquakes, wherein the visual logic remains without a subject and the participating actors are 'cut out' of the scene,³³ the actors remain indirectly present in the image of the explosion, for explosions, in so far as they are not accidental, are *triggered*. Thus, the explosion metaphor resonates with more than the mere reference to a disastrous occurrence, creating an overwhelming sense of powerlessness, like a thunderstorm, flood, or earthquake; unlike with the natural disasters, there are always intentions at work in explosions. The explosion metaphor thus seems predestined for the field of revolution psychology as it is explained by revolutionaries and theorists of revolution. There the explosion is turned into a source image for needs, desires, affects,

between Nuremberg and Fürth: N. N., "Eröffnung der Eisenbahn zwischen Nürnberg und Fürth," *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* 101, 17.12.1835, 1201f., https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb10531711_00601.html.

32| The conceptual pairing of 'iconic' and 'indexical' stems from the classification of signs elaborated by Charles S. Peirce, "Speculative Grammar," in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 2: *Elements of Logic*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 2.219–2.444.

33| Cf. Demandt, *Metaphern für Geschichte*, 139

and wishes; it serves as a cipher for the proletarian experiences of oppression, deprivation, and humiliation, but also as the explanation—seemingly as full proof as a law of nature—for the sudden uprising of the oppressed as soon as some spark sets alight and conflagrates the highly volatile ‘powder’ of emotions.

Perhaps more emphatically than every other revolution metaphor, the metaphor of explosion has extended its reach into political thinking itself due to these implications. In the image of explosion, the political becomes political psychology, indeed a ‘political physics.’ Once we dwell on the logic of the imagery, then more emerges than just some illustration of something; a thinking model crystallizes. In this thinking model revolutions manifest as reactions, seemingly obeying the laws of physics, to irresolvable contradictions and constellations of mounting political pressure; they result from the contrariety of two forces, between one emanating from the inside outward and the other forcefully impacting from the outside inward, until finally the inside bursts the shackling bonds with a loud bang. A succinct example of this is to be found in a letter by the revolutionary and RAF terrorist Gudrun Ensslin: “the contradiction between *wanting* to live and *not being able* to live is explosive.”³⁴

This thinking model of revolution psychology suggests that the revolutionary explosion is the moment of a sudden change of state in which the oppressed ‘wanting’ asserts itself over the otherwise so overpowering ‘not-being-able-to’ and frees itself from hindrances; the moment in which the life that is possible rebels against real life; the fulfilled instant in which the not-yet-being of utopia passes into the actuality of the present, while what once was is devalued into a no-longer-existent. Revolution, in the logic of this imagery, is thus a movement of inversion: that previously kept under now turns onto the upside. In this thinking model, a part of the original sense of the revolution metaphor has been retained, as upheaval, as the inversion of above and below, as a swapping of positions between manifest order and latent disorder, or—in the image of the explosion—as a rotating of inside and outside. |

34 | Gudrun Ensslin, „reden wir von uns“ [1973], in *das info. briefe von gefangenen aus der raf. aus der diskussion 1973–1978*, ed. Pieter H. Bakker Schut (Kiel: Malik, 1987), 14–18, 17, qtd. after Gunnar Hindrichs, *Philosophie der Revolution* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017), 58.