

Hannah Arendt's Revolutionary Leadership

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The Year of the Protestor

Rather than choose a particular person of the year, Time Magazine called 2011 the “Year of the Protestor.”¹ The choice was both obvious and revealing. First the obvious: Beginning in Tunisia in December 2010, and fueled by widespread economic frustration and political disaffection felt throughout the authoritarian states of North Africa and the Middle East, by the end of 2011 a colossal wave of revolutionary protests had shaken, in one form or another, virtually every state in the Arab world. And by summer 2011 mass-based resistance movements—typically more radical than revolutionary (traditionally understood), but born of similar socioeconomic frustrations and democratic aspirations—broke out in cities throughout the liberal-industrialized West. From the occupiers of Egypt’s Tahrir Square, to *Los Indignados* in Madrid, to public sector workers in Madison and the global *Occupy* movement in North America, Europe, Asia and elsewhere, 2011 saw a “global spirit of protest” not witnessed since the spirit of 1968.²

Although the Arab Spring began in Tunisia, Egypt’s Tahrir Square came to symbolize both the spirit and tactics of the revolutionary moment.³ And Tahrir Square’s symbolic importance helped forge an unlikely alliance between the Arab revolutions and the Western democratic protests.⁴ As Time reported, “The stakes are very different in different

1 Kurt Anderson, “The Protestor,” *Time Magazine*, December 14, 2011.

2 Immanuel Wallerstein, “The Contradictions of the Arab Spring,” posted at www.aljazeera.com, November 14, 2011.

3 On tactics and strategy see Gene Sharp’s *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2012). The book is said to have been consulted by Egyptian rebels as early as 2005, and Sharp has been touted as “the man now credited with the strategy behind the toppling of the Egyptian government.” Quote from “Gene Sharp: Author of the nonviolent revolution rulebook,” by Ruairidh Arrow, director of the documentary film *Gene Sharp: How to Start a Revolution*. On the 2011 tactic of “bodies in alliance” in a struggle to constitute political space, see Judith Butler, “Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street,” accessible at <http://www.ejcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en>. For an alternative to understanding the 2011 protests as a series of *moments*, but rather as potential *beginnings* (or continuations) of something new and *enduring*, see Patchen Markell, “The Moment has Passed: Power After Arendt,” in *Radical Future Pasts: Untimely Essays in Political Theory*, forthcoming from University of Kentucky Press, 2013.

4 Michael Scherer writes that *Occupy* began when “the editors of the Vancouver-based, anticonglomerate magazine *Adbusters*...called for a Tahrir Square ‘moment’ on Sept. 17, in lower Manhattan[.]” On its website *Occupy Wall Street* declared itself “using the revolutionary Arab Spring tactic to achieve our ends and encourage the use of nonviolence to maximize the safety of all participants.” Some months earlier Spain’s *Los Indignados* had already adopted these tactics, where the BBC reports that in “another echo of the Cairo rallies...the Spanish protestors have set up citizens’ committees to handle communications, food, cleaning, protest actions and legal matters.”

In *spirit* too, sympathy was palpable, as indicated in a famous February 2011 photo of an Egyptian poster reading “Egypt supports Wisconsin workers: One World, One Pain!” Wisconsin workers responded, with one poster reading “Walk like an Egyptian!!!” See Michael Scherer, “Introduction: Taking it to the Streets,” in *What is Occupy?* New York: Time Books, 2011, pp. 5-12, p. 5-6; “Spanish youth rally in Madrid echoes Egypt protests,” May 18, 2011, www.bbc.co.uk; and Seyla Benhabib, “The Arab Spring: Religion, Revolution and the Public Sphere,” *Eurozine*, May 10, 2011.

places...The protestors in the Middle East and North Africa are literally dying to get political systems that roughly resemble the ones that seem intolerably undemocratic to protestors in Madrid, Athens, London, and New York City.”⁵ But connecting these movements was a shared frustration with normal politics that—whether in liberal capitalist or authoritarian contexts—reeked of cronyism, corruption, and gross socio-political inequality.⁶ Accordingly, on the ground revolutionary sloganeering often resembled that of the 1960s New Left, as protestors challenged existing authority structures using democratic tactics bent specifically “against vertical decision-making and in favor of horizontal decision making: participatory and therefore popular.”⁷

2011 in the process became the year of the so-called “Facebook-” and “Twitter Revolution.” Social media sites and mobile communication devices both catalyzed and facilitated revolutionary movements to unprecedented effect. Protestors used these platforms to publicize local grievances, build information networks, and coordinate decentralized mass action in real time. Indicative of technology’s role was Tawakkol Karman, the Yemeni activist for women’s rights and democracy who became the first Arab woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, who specifically thanked “the rapid and astonishing development of information technology and the communications revolution” in her Nobel Lecture.⁸ Here it was ironic that, as one July 2011 commentary observed, “the recent protest ignitions seem to have occurred *without recognizable leaders*,” but this was a natural effect of diffuse mobilization. After the rapid success of Tunisia and Egypt, “The rest of the region followed as scenes of demonstrators and fleeing dictators went out over *al Jazeera* and social-media networks...Activists used Facebook, Twitter, and other sites to communicate plans for civic action, at times playing cat-and-mouse games with officials[.]”⁹ This diffuse and leaderless mobilization model was remarkably effective at generating spontaneous mass action and, in Tunisia and Egypt at least, helping bring about regime change—after decades of stable authoritarian rule—in a matter of weeks.¹⁰

5 Kurt Anderson, “The Protestor.”

6 Hardt and Negri link the 2011 protests in a “common global struggle.” See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Declaration*. Hardt and Negri, 2012, e.g. pg. 4: “Each of these struggles is singular and oriented toward specific local conditions. The first thing to notice, though, is that they did, in fact, speak to one another. The Egyptians, of course, clearly moved down paths traveled by the Tunisians and adopted their slogans, but the occupiers of Puerta del Sol also thought of their struggle as carrying on the experiences of those in Tahrir. In turn, the eyes of those in Athens and Tel Aviv were focused on the experiences of Madrid and Cairo. The Wall Street occupiers had them all in view, translating, for instance, the struggle against the tyrant into a struggle against the tyranny of finance. You may think they were just deluded and forgot or ignored the differences in their situations and demands. We believe, however, that they have a clearer vision than those outside the struggle, and they can hold together without contradiction their singular conditions and local battles with the common global struggle.”

7 Wallerstein, “The Contradictions of the Arab Spring,” only highlights Tunisia and Egypt in this regard and says “To be sure, there was not much of a true ‘1968 current’ in Libya.” But see also Hardt and Negri, *Declarations*.

8 Tawakkol Karman, “Nobel Lecture,” Oslo, December 10, 2011; posted at <http://www.nobelprize.org>. Cited in R.L. Soto, “Barack Obama’s Arendtian Arab Spring,” posted at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/94146549/R-L-Sotos-Obama-s-Arendtian-Arab-Spring>.

9 Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, “The Role of Digital Media,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 22, No. 3, July 2011, p. 35-48, p. 43, emphasis added.

10 While most attention has focused on the moment of mass mobilization, social media and communications technologies may also be important for the long-term sustainability of movements that are initially suppressed. In Egypt, for example, the 2011 Revolution was preceded by almost three years of Internet activism by the April 6 Movement. In this sense the Revolution represented both a new beginning mobilized online, and the continuation of something that had long been sustained through decentralized networks. On the long-term “sustainability of the #Occupy movements in a posteviction phase,” see Jeffrey S. Juris, “Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: social media, public space, and emerging logics of

Throughout the Arab Spring, but especially prominent in the case of Egypt, the leaderless model was not only tactically effective, but normatively touted amongst protestors, theorists, and many in the media. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argued that “These movements are powerful not despite their lack of leaders but because of it. They are organized horizontally as multitudes, and their insistence on democracy at all levels is more than a virtue but a key to their power.”¹¹ Concerning Egypt, a *Huffington Post* editorial published the day of Hosni Mubarak’s resignation rebuked those who, in broaching the topic of post-revolutionary leadership, “revealed the same type of inter-generational misunderstandings that cost Hosni Mubarak his presidency.” The writers affirmed that in fact “The revolution was successful because it had no leaders, only coordinators of bottom up energy,” and that “One of the first celebrities to emerge from the uprising, **Wael Ghonim**, made this point as emphatically as he could to CNN in the midst of the celebrations. ‘I am not a leader. The leaders are in Tahrir Square.’”¹² Some months later “leaderlessness” again took global center stage, this time in the *Occupy* movement that adopted the “revolutionary Arab Spring tactic” and defined itself as a “leaderless resistance movement.” As if to hammer the point, various local Occupy groups applied the principle ad absurdum in spite of what some members deemed a lack of common sense.¹³

Thus Time’s choice of “Year of the Protestor” also reflected, albeit subtly, the anti-leadership ethic of the year’s most influential resistance movements. In the Arab world in particular, “The lack of individual leaders made it hard for authorities to know whom to arrest,”¹⁴ and the combined technical savvy of youth protestors and efficiency of diffuse mobilization and coordination techniques via social media accomplished, in mere weeks, what might otherwise have taken more traditional, protracted models of grassroots resistance years. At the same time, “leaderlessness” in all cases spoke to a radically democratic ideal born of political frustration, and a profound enthusiasm for genuine political freedom and social and political equality.

In this approach there was much that inspired and much to wonder about, not the least being the extent to which the ideal of “leaderless” resistance, or revolution, constituted a viable model of political action and freedom in the long term. Reasonable concern stems not only from the challenge this model poses to traditional understanding of revolution and political organization, but also given how the ideal of “leaderlessness” has interacted with technology, in a manner that on one hand suggests an altogether new form of public sphere,¹⁵ and on another a form of mass resistance that is at once spontaneous and de-

aggregation,” *American Ethnologist*. Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 259-79.

11 Hardt and Negri, *Declaration*, p. 107.

12 Michael Hais and Morley Winograd, “Victory for Egypt’s Leaderless Revolution,” *Huffington Post*, February 11, 2011.

13 Gitlin tells how in November 2011 Occupy Denver elected a border collie dog as its leader. He also tells how “when a committee in Occupy Philadelphia proposed formation of a negotiating committee made up of rotating members of a working group,” one frustrated member expressed that “a sizeable portion of the [General Assembly] sniffs vanguardism, and proposes instead that the city [government leaders] come down to the GA—an amendment so insane that I begin to doubt the capacity of my fellow assemblymen and women to govern themselves.” Todd Gitlin, *Occupy Nation: The Roots, the Spirit, and the Promise of Occupy Wall Street*. New York: Harper Collins, 2012, p. 100-101.

14 Howard and Hussain (2011), p. 43.

15 As one illustration of this problem, see Judith Butler, “Bodies in Alliance”: “Although some may wager that the exercise of rights now takes place quite at the expense of bodies in the street, that twitter and other virtual technologies have led to a disembodiment of the public sphere, I disagree. The media requires those bodies on the street to have an event, even as the street requires the media to exist in a global arena...Not only must someone’s hand tap and send, but somebody’s body is on the line if that tapping and sending gets traced.”

centralized, but nonetheless coordinated—emerging in some instances like a flash mob,¹⁶ while hardly being one.

To pursue the point, if coordinated mobs come and go quite quickly, and are hardly able (or compelled) to generate an enduring political space, then participants in recent political movements have stuck around to “occupy” public spaces and generate what Hannah Arendt called a public “space of appearances” in which citizens act and make public claims about justice, injustice, and what ought to be done, that they expect others to recognize. Space itself is utilized as a political symbol, a physical location of public gathering and expression, and a shared venue for face-to-face action in concert.¹⁷ To borrow Judith Butler’s language, the linking of bodies through social networks, and the gathering of bodies in space, has in turn effected expansive forms of what Hannah Arendt called political “power” derived from “action in concert”—*acting* as a form of participatory freedom. As one observer wrote, “Arendt’s significance as the preeminent theorist of participatory freedom...becomes clearer...as her political phenomenology, written over 50 years ago, preternaturally anticipates the revolutionary implications of contemporary social media. A half century before anyone was ‘friended’ or sent a ‘tweet,’ Arendt explains the ‘boundless’ dynamics of popular power manifest in virtual reality, the intangible ‘web’ of human relations, ‘the space of appearances.’”¹⁸

But despite these conclusions, it may be misleading to wrap Arendt so snugly around emerging norms of “leaderlessness” and “people power,” and dangerous to depict social networking as simply a *quantitative advance* in our efficient pursuit of given political ends, rather than also as a potentially *qualitative shift* in the technological relation of means and end. Arendt herself offers provocative insights on this point. In *The Human Condition* Arendt says with respect to *fabrication* that the question of technology today “is not so much whether we are the masters or the slaves of our machines, but whether machines still serve the world and its things, or if, on the contrary, they and the automatic motion of their processes have begun to rule and even destroy world and things.”¹⁹ Arendt’s concern with the determining (and potentially destructive) capacities of technology might also be applied to political phenomena: To what extent do new technologies “rule” and determine not only the products of our *work*, but the substance and character of our *action*? What are the unanticipated, qualitative effects of technology on the grassroots exercise of political freedom and political organization?

Scholars have rejected the notion that communications technologies have meaningfully shaped the preferences of protestors or the character of their resistance, positing for example that “In each country, people have used digital media to build a political response to a local experience of unjust rule. They were not inspired by Facebook; they were in-

16 Josh Halliday, “London riots: how Blackberry Messenger played a key role,” at www.theguardian.com, August 8, 2011.

17 On the symbolic, tactical, and political importance of “space” in the Arab Spring protests, see Jillian Schwedler, “Spatial Dynamics of the Arab Uprisings,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (April 2013), pp. 230-234.

18 R.L. Soto, “Barack Obama’s Arendtian Arab Spring”; citing phrases from various pages of Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, Ch. V. Action.

19 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 151. Recent anxieties over the fate of the old-fashioned “book” and book culture in an era of electronic text represent a case in point. See e.g. Sven Birkert, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*. Winchester, MA: Faher and Faher, 2006 [1994]; Christine Rosen, “People of the Screen,” *The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology & Society*, No. 22, Fall 2008, pp. 20-32; Jonathan Brent, “Daydreamings and the Book,” *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (April 2012), pp. 209-212.

spired by the real tragedies *documented* on Facebook.”²⁰ About Egypt in particular, observers have rejected the notion that an absence of leadership entails a lack of revolutionary organization, boldly comparing Egypt’s 2011 revolution to an institutionalized electoral process: “In the same way that the 2008 Obama campaign used a social media site to provide a way for millions of its American millennial generation supporters to organize the on-the-ground voter interactions that propelled it to victory, these young Egyptians knew both the value and the limitations of social networking technology to effect huge social change.”²¹

But the question of leadership in a context of decentralized mass mobilization and revolution cannot be dismissed so hastily—and not the least, of course, in Egypt. If “leaderlessness” has become a normative principle and a matter of popular practice, what have been its implications on the ground? To what extent, if any, have the absence of leadership and of legitimate political representation during revolutionary situations contributed to the more problematic revolutionary legacies of 2011? If at the heart of the “leaderless” movement of 2011 stood Egypt, which since February 2011 has been witness to constitutional instability, a failed democracy, and disturbing episodes of political violence,²² then to what extent, we should ask, has the absence of revolutionary leadership and representation contributed to the instability of Egyptian democracy and the perpetuation of military rule in the years immediately following the February revolution?

Hannah Arendt, Revolution, and Representation

In thinking through these problems, we would do well to revisit the political theory of Hannah Arendt. The suggestion is not novel—from the beginning of the Arab Spring and Occupy protests, probably no political theorist has been more widely (among scholars

²⁰ Howard and Hussain (2011), p. 48.

²¹ Michael Hais and Morley Winograd (2011).

²² In early 2011 after Mubarak’s ouster, the fallout left unclear to most observers what authority would fill the vacuum left in the dictator’s wake and unite a suddenly fragmented country. The revolution itself was determined by force of arms—a military coup that, despite the initial support of the people, lacked a clear basis of long-term legitimacy. Outcries against military rule arose almost immediately, and by the revolution’s second anniversary the process of assembling a legitimate *constitutional committee*, let alone drafting and ratifying a new and legitimate constitution, had proven to be illusive amongst a divided civil society, continued mass demonstrations, and a perpetually scrambling and blurry concatenation of executive-judicial-military government. The political situation bordered on chaos, including clashes between protestors and security forces at the entrance of the Presidential palace on February 1, 2013. At the time a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations offered the following diagnosis: “The continued attacks suggest a real breakdown in central power, we’re coming close to that...None of the political forces have control over the people in the streets.” In late June, mass protests called for the ouster of democratically elected President Mohamed Morsi, and on July 3, 2013 the military responded to these demands via a military coup. This was followed, in turn, by mass protests among Morsi supporters, a significant portion being members or supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, and a military crackdown on August 14 in which over 800 people were killed and thousands wounded. The quoted passage is from Ben Wedeman, “Protestors attack presidential palace in Cairo, one person dies in clashes,” February 2, 2013, cnn.com.

and actors) and enthusiastically (and critically) evoked to help understand these events,²³ and this was especially notable in real time responses to proceedings on the ground.

On February 3, 2011, for example, eight days prior to Mubarak's resignation, Jonathan Schell in *The Nation* cited passages from Arendt's *On Violence* to depict the imminent collapse of authoritarian power in Egypt, writing that when "A people long overawed by state violence throws off fear, and in a flash begins to act courageously...In Hannah Arendt's words, "The situation changes abruptly. Not only is the rebellion not put down but the arms themselves change hands—sometimes, as in the Hungarian revolution, within a few hours...The sudden dramatic breakdown of power that ushers in revolution reveals in a flash how civil disobedience—to laws, to rulers, to institutions—is but the outward manifestation of support and consent.'... By January, Egypt had clearly arrived at this moment." On the future of Egyptian politics, Schell used distinctly Arendtian language: "Power is disintegrating. It is in the streets. Someone will pick it up."²⁴

A month later, with the military in power (Did *they* pick it up?) and uncertainty hovering about its next move, Andrew Arato highlighted Arendt's distinction between "*liberation* or the removal of authorities, and *constitution*, or the construction of a new, free regime," saying that "In line with what we are seeing in Egypt, [Arendt] thought that liberation proceeds often, but constitution very seldom. There is however a constituent process in Egypt and it is instructive to see why as it is currently organized it falls under Arendt's strictures."²⁵

And more recently in April 2012 Chad Kautzer, a philosophy professor and member of *Occupy* Denver's Education Committee and Foreclosure Resistance Coalition, gave a talk using Hannah Arendt to "make explicit principles that I see operating in *Occupy*," particularly "her notion of the sociality of action and speech and also her notion of an associative form of power or democratic power." In his talk Kautzer explains *Occupy's* explicit "principle of non-representation" in favor of "horizontalism," and ends by comparing *Occupy's* modern "polis" or "space of appearances" to Arendt's lauded but ephemeral *council system*, citing her famous remark that "if you ask me now what prospect [a council state] has of being realized, then I must say to you: Very slight, if at all. And yet perhaps, after all—in the wake of the next revolution."²⁶

23 See Patchen Markell, "Power, Arrest, Dispersal," *HA: The Journal of the Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and Humanities at Bard College*. Volume 1 (2013), pp. 171-3, and Patchen Markell, "The Moment has Passed"; Jonathan Schell, "The Revolutionary Moment," *The Nation*. February 3, 2011; Andrew Arato, "The Return of Revolutions," March 7, 2011, posted at www.deliberatelyconsidered.com; R.L. Soto, "Barack Obama's Arendtian Arab Spring," posted at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/94146549/R-L-Sotos-Obama-s-Arendtian-Arab-Spring>; Hamid Dabashi, "Revolution: The pursuit of public happiness-Can using Hannah Arendt's prism of viewing the American Revolution help us understand the Arab spring?" <http://www.aljazeera.com>, June 18, 2012; Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism*. London and New York: Zed Books, 2012; and Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance." See also the Hannah Arendt Center at Bard's "Quote of the Week" catalog found at www.bard.edu/hannaharendtcenter, where many scholars have discussed Arendt's political theory in relation to *Occupy* and the Arab Spring.

24 Schell, "The Revolutionary Moment."

25 Arato, "The Return of Revolutions." To consider both Schell's and Arato's comments with hindsight, see the detailed revolutionary timeline posted at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Egyptian_revolution. Was June 3, 2013 the end of this constituent process? a temporary halt? the beginning of a new constituent process?

26 Final quote from Hannah Arendt, "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution," in *Crises of the Republic*, pp. 199-233, p. 233. The talk was posted on YouTube on April 7, 2012 under the title "Arendt, Occupy and the Challenge to Political Liberalism": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLuZYM3r6hI>. Let me thank Professor Kautzer for making this presentation available and my engagement with it possible.

Power, political foundation, and democratic freedom, as manifest in revolutionary protests, public occupations, and “horizontal” assemblies, have defined popular Arendtian discourse in the 2011 revolutionary context. Here I want to challenge two appropriations of Arendt that have emerged—namely, the normative appropriation of Arendt’s political theory to unequivocally endorse willful revolutionary campaigns grounded in “people power,” and the use of Arendt to validate the idea of “leaderless revolution” in the revolutions of 2011. Arendt does *not* believe that revolutions can be “made” even by people power, for “Revolutions, as a rule, are not made but happen[.]”²⁷ And when a “revolutionary situation” does emerge, Arendt explains why leadership is necessary to begin the process of institutionalizing power and laying the foundations of constitutional authority. Hardly glorifying leaderlessness, Arendt exposes it as politically irresponsible. The suggestion that Arendtian-style democratic power is inconsistent with leadership and representation is a debilitating misreading of her thought that, among other things, conflates her ideas of the *space of appearances* and the *polis*, and embraces the very pathologies of Greek politics that Arendt, in her turn to Rome, sought to avoid.²⁸

In *On Revolution* Arendt writes that “The role the professional revolutionists played in all modern revolutions...did not consist in the preparation of revolutions. They watched and analysed the progressing disintegration in state and society; they hardly did, or were in a position to do, much to advance and direct it.” Citing the ultimate test case, “Not even Lenin’s party of professional revolutionists would ever have been able to ‘make’ a revolution; the best they could do was to be around, or to hurry home, at the right moment, that is, at the moment of collapse.”²⁹ Revolutions are thus “not the result of conspiracies or the propaganda of revolutionary parties but the almost automatic outcome of processes of disintegration in the powers-that-be, of their loss of authority[.]”³⁰ Arendt repeats this point on several occasions, and it is arguably her most consistent statement on the character of modern revolution.³¹

On the surface, however, these remarks seem to contradict Arendt’s otherwise highly voluntarist account of “political power” and the manner in which people power might challenge existing political authorities. In the essay *On Violence*, for example, Arendt writes famously that “Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is ‘in power’ we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment a group, from which the power originated to begin with...dis-

27 Hannah Arendt, “Comment by Hannah Arendt on ‘The Uses of Revolution’ by Adam Ulam,” in Richard Pipes, ed. *Revolutionary Russia*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969, pp.440-449, p. 441.

28 My discussion of Arendt’s turn to Rome draws much from Jacques Taminiaux, “Athens and Rome,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*. Ed. Dana Villa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 165-177, esp. p. 171-177.

29 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 251-2.

30 Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 443.

31 See e.g. Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” in *Crises of the Republic*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972, pp. 103-198, p. 147: “Textbook instructions on ‘how to make a revolution’ in a step-by-step progression from dissent to conspiracy, from resistance to armed uprising, are all based on a mistaken notion that revolutions are ‘made.’”; and p. 114: Quoting Engels that “revolutions are not made intentionally and arbitrarily, but...were always and everywhere the necessary result of circumstances entirely independent of the will and guidance of particular parties and whole classes.” Similar language is found at Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” p. 206; and Hannah Arendt, “Rosa Luxemburg,” in *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1968, pp. 33-56, p. 53.

appears, 'his power' also vanishes."³² Understandably, radical democrats and revolutionary enthusiasts have grasped onto this language, often to give normative force and descriptive clarity to grassroots democratic movements.

A recent presentation by Occupy Denver's Chad Kautzer is indicative of this move. Using Arendt's words to describe Occupy's *modus operandi*, Kautzer says:

"The *polis*," writes Arendt, "is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be." The physical and spatial components of the polis are essential. The polis is not abstract. It "can find its proper location almost anytime and anywhere...(but) it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being," says Arendt. The polis dissipates when people disperse or when they're no longer acting and speaking in common cause... Arendt's idea here is that the polis emerges when people congregate and speak and act together, towards some common cause. And it disperses when those people disperse...so there is no building, there is no law, there is no container to somehow hold the power or practices of the polis. It is fully in the moment of participation, it is only actualized then; and when people disperse, so does the polis...Arendt has a very, I would say very beautiful understanding of power that's connected to this idea of the polis. The kind of power produced by the polis, which I'm saying here obviously is what Occupy is, cannot be stored up or saved or alienated in order to transfer.³³

Here Kautzer suggests that Arendt's unique notion of *power* applies strictly to the "physical" (or "not abstract") space of appearances that exists between face-to-face acting and speaking persons. But close reading belies this characterization. Consider the opening sentence of the above-quoted passage: In his citing of Arendt, Kautzer conspicuously omits Arendt's words that contradict his ensuing statement that "The physical and spatial components of the polis are essential. The polis is not abstract." Placing only the omitted words in italics, Arendt's complete sentence says the following: "*The polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location*; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be." Arendt further elaborates: "Wherever you go, you will be a polis': these famous words became not merely the watchword of Greek colonization, they expressed the conviction that action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost anytime and anywhere."³⁴

Thus, contrary to Kautzer's representation, Arendt's Greek *polis* is conceptually distinct from the physical *space of appearances*. For if the latter naturally "disappears with the dispersal of men,"³⁵ the polis developed precisely in response to this problem of transi-

³² Hannah Arendt, "On Violence," p. 143. See also Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Section 28: "Power and the Space of Appearances," pp. 199-207.

³³ Chad Kautzer, "Arendt, Occupy and the Challenge to Political Liberalism," citing from Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 198-9. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLuZYM3r6hI>; specifically from 16:00 to 19:00.

³⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 198.

³⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 199.

ence. Its purpose, Arendt says, was to “make permanent the space of action”³⁶ in a twofold manner: to “multiply the occasions to win ‘immortal fame,’”—that is, “to enable men to do permanently...what otherwise had been possible only as an extraordinary and infrequent enterprise for which they had to leave their households”; and “to offer a remedy for the futility of action and speech; for the chances that a deed deserving fame would not be forgotten[.]”³⁷

When Kautzer says that for Arendt “there is no building, there is no law, there is no container to somehow hold the power or practices of the polis,” he implicitly conflates the *polis*, *public realm*, and *space of appearances*, terms that Arendt differentiates with intent. This is important for Kautzer, because it helps establish his subsequent claim that Arendt’s political theory adds normative and theoretical weight to Occupy’s principle of non-representation: Thus he says, “The kind of power produced by the polis, which I’m saying here obviously is what Occupy is, cannot be stored up or saved or alienated in order to transfer.”

But this conclusion cannot hold. Arendt does not write that power exists *only* at the moment of gathering in the physical space of appearances; nor does she dissociate power from parliamentary representation. To the contrary, the meaningful existence of a *public realm* requires that power be reified into legitimate laws and political institutions: Yes, “Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert,” Arendt writes in *On Violence*, “but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together.” Legitimacy then “bases itself on an appeal to the past,”³⁸ and legitimate laws and institutions are “manifestations and materializations of power; they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them.”³⁹ Power manifests not only when people gather; it is also “what keeps the public realm, the *potential* space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence.”⁴⁰

A viable *public realm*, in turn, requires a viable *polis* or *constitution*—i.e. laws—that offer it security and give meaning to action by embedding it a political history linking the present to the past and extending it into the future.⁴¹ And while the polis may have been fit for this task in ancient times, having been “physically secured by the wall around the

36 “It is as though the wall of the *polis* and the boundaries of the law were drawn around an already existing public space which, however, without such stabilizing protection could not endure, could not survive the moment of action and speech itself.” Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 198.

37 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 197; and pg. 198: “Not historically, of course, but speaking metaphorically and theoretically, it is as though the men who returned from the Trojan War had wished to make permanent the space of action which had arisen from their deeds and sufferings, to prevent its perishing with their dispersal and return to their isolated homesteads.”

38 Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 151.

39 Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 140.

40 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 200, emphasis added.

41 Roy Tsao compares the English and German editions of *The Human Condition* and finds a key addition to the latter that sheds light on Arendt’s understanding of the important difference between Greek and Roman political attitudes towards time. Tsao translates the following from the German version of Section 27: The Greek Solution: “The organization of the polis, founded and secured in its physical condition by means of the city wall, and in its spiritual character by means of the law... is in essence a kind of organized remembrance, in which, however—*unlike in what we, following the Romans, understand as memory*—the past is not to be remembered through the continuity of time as the past, with the awareness of temporal distance, but instead *is to be directly maintained in a perpetual present, in a temporally unchanged form.*” The resemblance here between the Greek conception of time, and Occupy’s narrow focus on power in the present, is uncanny. Roy T. Tsao, “Arendt Against Athens: Rereading the Human Condition,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (February 2002), pp. 97-123, p. 114, Tsao’s italics.

city and physiognomically guaranteed by its laws,"⁴² Arendt is skeptical that Greek thought can ground such a project today, for "the Greeks," she says, "in distinction from all later developments, did not count legislating among the political activities...To them, the laws, like the wall around the city, were not results of action but products of making."⁴³ It was the Romans, Arendt says, and not the Greeks, who were "perhaps the most political people we have known"⁴⁴—for it was Rome whose "political genius" was "legislation and foundation."⁴⁵ Where the Greek word for law, *nomos*, combined "law and hedge," the Roman word for law, *lex*, "has an entirely different meaning; it indicates a formal relationship between people[.]"⁴⁶ Roman law embraced a spirit of alliance and the use of promises and covenants to create durable relationships and a common world. Not only covenant, but the law itself related men to one another. In Rome one no longer encountered only a *polis* of remembrance in which law served only to secure action's requisite space, but rather a *res publica*—a public thing—manifest in the law itself, that stood between men, relating and separated them at the same time. Law was a public thing for which all citizens were responsible—to judge, protect, and augment.

In light of Arendt's turn to Rome, at stake in the freedom exercised in the public realm is not simply the continuous being together of bodies in a public space. It is, rather, the securing of a public realm within which the words and deeds of political actors achieve real meaning and permanence, and in which, if this is to be possible in modern time, political actors must both embrace and *assume responsibility* for a public thing and a common world. This move, in turn, requires the courageous—call it revolutionary—transition from power's initial getting together to either (a) a project of founding or constitution; or (b) a project of entering into (or "augmenting") an existing body politic. (Notably, *Occupy* elects to do neither.)

We can now see how Arendt's normative and voluntarist theory of power—the democratic power of bodies "acting in concert"—involves not only the materialization of power in public laws and institutions, but also the representation of power in democratic parliamentary bodies. Arendt is clear in her recognition that power *can* be represented, for "When we say of somebody that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name." And she settles the question of her own thoughts when she describes her beloved council state as a pyramidal structure which "begins from below, continues upward, and finally leads to a parliament."⁴⁷ Representation allows the public realm to extend beyond a single, physical space of appearances. It is precisely what makes new alliances and the genuine sharing of a world (which entails a sharing of responsibility for that world) between plural sources of power possible.

Recognizing power's embedded-ness (or lack thereof) in political institutions is subsequently critical for understanding when revolutions are possible, and when not. Arendt argues repeatedly that no group (what we might call a *people power movement*) can

42 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 198, emphasis added. See also p. 194, "Before men began to act, a definite space had to be secured and a structure built where all subsequent actions could take place, the space being the public realm of the *polis* and its structure the law."

43 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 194.

44 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 7.

45 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 195.

46 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 63, nt. 62. See also Taminioux, "Athens and Rome," p. 172.

47 Hannah Arendt, "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution," p. 232.

“make” a revolution or “revolutionary situation.” What they can do, however, is “test” the power of existing institutions to see if a revolutionary situation is revealed. The test may turn up negative—governing bodies may prove powerful after all, and any continued attempt to overthrow them would be foolish. Or the test may prove positive—as is often the case under modern dictatorships, and is increasingly likely under the parochial representative bodies and bureaucratic machines of modern liberal democracies, indicative of the late 1960s to which Arendt responds.⁴⁸ It is “this state of affairs,” she writes—a world increasingly composed either of tyrannies on one hand, or “bureaucracy” or “rule by Nobody...in which no men...can be held responsible,” on the other—that “is among the most potent causes of the current worldwide rebellious unrest, its chaotic nature, and its dangerous tendency to get out of control and to run amuck.”⁴⁹

In these times, what distinguishes the “real revolutionaries” from mere masqueraders is not only the clear vision “to know when power is lying in the street and when they can pick it up,”⁵⁰ but the willingness, and moral courage, which Arendt observed in de Gaulle in 1968 (rather than the rebellious French students), and so wonderfully admired in Lenin in 1917, to “seize power” when it is lying there, and “assume responsibility for the revolution after it had happened.”⁵¹

Lenin, Luxemburg, and Revolutionary Statesmanship

It is perhaps noteworthy that Lenin, unlike Hitler and Stalin, has not yet found his definitive biographer, although he was not merely a ‘better’ but an incomparably simpler man; it may be because his role in twentieth-century history is so much more equivocal and difficult to understand.

Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*⁵²

It was a stroke of genius...to choose the life of Rosa Luxemburg, the most unlikely candidate, as a proper subject for a genre that seems suitable only for the lives of great statesmen and other persons of the world. She certainly was nothing of the kind...For it was precisely success—success even in her own world of revolutionaries—which was withheld from Rosa Luxemburg in her life, death, and after death. Can it be that the failure of all her efforts as far as official recognition is concerned

48 Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 125. Arendt writes that Western representative democracy “is about to lose even its merely representative function to the huge party machines that ‘represent’ not the party membership but its functionaries.”

49 Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 137-8

50 Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” p. 206.

51 On de Gaulle, see Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 149; on Lenin, see Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 444.

52 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 55.

is somehow connected with the dismal failure of revolution in our century?

Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg 1871-1919"⁵³

In her review of J.P. Nettl's two volume "definitive biography" of Rosa Luxemburg, Hannah Arendt writes that "The definitive biography, English-style, is among the most admirable genres of historiography," because it "tells more, and more vividly, about the historical period in question than all but the most outstanding history books." If in "other biographies, history is...treated as the inevitable background of a famous person's life span," then in "definitive biographies" it is "as though the colorless light of historical time were forced through and refracted by the prism of a great character so that in the resulting spectrum a complete unity of life and world is achieved. This may be why it has become the classical genre for the lives of great statesmen."⁵⁴ Of Nettl's own work, Arendt writes that "I know no book that sheds more light on the crucial period of European socialism from the last decades of the nineteenth century to the fateful day in January 1919 when Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the two leaders of the *Spartakusbund*...were murdered in Berlin[.]"⁵⁵

One wonders, then, what the implications are that Lenin's volume—the definitive biography of the most important revolutionary figure of the twentieth century—has not been written? Why would Arendt draw our attention to this? What does Arendt think Lenin's "definitive biography" would reveal about the twentieth century?

As the passage that opens this section anticipates, there is hardly a moment in Arendt's writings on Lenin that is not ambivalent. Arendt writes that Lenin had "great gifts as a statesman" and "great instincts for statesmanship," but these at pivotal moments succumbed to his "Marxist training and ideological convictions."⁵⁶ Lenin's relation to the revolutionary state and council system was "more complicated [than Marx's]. Still, it was Lenin who emasculated the *soviets* and gave all power to the party."⁵⁷ Lenin "had great talent for organization and leadership," but was not obviously superior to the forgotten Marxist Leo Jogiches.⁵⁸ And Lenin's "one-party dictatorship" was an anti-political "form of domination," but unlike tyranny, whose binding principle is fear,⁵⁹ was dictated by an

53 Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 34. In a footnote beginning on the previous page, Arendt deplores the fact that Hitler and Stalin (whom she calls "non-persons") actually *do* have "definitive" biographies, and writes that history is better served by their "less well documented and factually incomplete" biographies. A different formulation of this point occurs in Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973)—Cf. Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 33-34, nt. 1, and Arendt, *Origins*, p. xxix; see also *Origins*, p. 306, nt. 4; and Hannah Arendt, "At Table with Hitler," in *Essays in Understanding*, New York: Schocken, 1994, pp. 285-296.

54 Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 33.

55 Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 34-5.

56 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 56; see also Hannah Arendt, *Origins*, p. 319.

57 Hannah Arendt, "On Violence," p. 124, nt. 38.

58 Jogiches, who only "failed [in Germany in 1918] where Lenin succeeded [in Russia in 1917]...as much a consequence of circumstances...as of lesser stature." Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 46.

59 See esp. Hannah Arendt, "Montesquieu's Revision of the Tradition," in *The Promise of Politics*. Jerome Kohn, ed. New York: Schocken Books, 2005, pp. 63-69.

understanding of power sustained by plural political association and social and political differentiation.⁶⁰

On at least one point, however, Hannah Arendt gave Lenin unequivocal credit: “Wars and revolutions—,” she opens *On Revolution*, “as though events had only hurried to fulfill Lenin’s early prediction—have thus far determined the physiognomy of the twentieth century...[and] still constitute its two central political issues.”⁶¹ The point appears in almost identical language in the first lines of *On Violence*,⁶² the first paragraph of the concluding section of *Introduction into Politics*,⁶³ and later in Arendt’s “Comment” on Adam Ulam’s “The Uses of Revolution”, presented at a Harvard conference commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution.⁶⁴ Both the frequency and placement of the point betray a special importance.⁶⁵

A telling moment occurs in Arendt’s “Comment on Ulam.” There and on many other occasions Arendt highlights the fact that under modern conditions of war—meaning since the Franco-Prussian war in 1870-71—“we almost automatically expect that no government, and no state or form of government, will be strong enough to survive a defeat in war.”⁶⁶ Revolutionary situations, Arendt tells us, are “not made intentionally and arbitrarily, but...were always and everywhere the necessary result of circumstances entirely independent of the will and guidance of particular parties and whole classes,”⁶⁷ and the most reliable of such “independent” circumstances is war. Lenin recognized this more plainly than anyone of his time, and soon after the outbreak of World War I he “began to think of

60 Arendt writes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that to consolidate the October Revolution Lenin “seized at once upon all the possible differentiations, social, national, professional, that might bring some structure into the population, and he seemed convinced that in such stratification lay the salvation of the revolution. He legalized the anarchic expropriation of the landowners by the rural masses...tried to strengthen the working class by encouraging independent trade unions. He tolerated the timid appearance of a new middle class which resulted from the NEP...[and] introduced further distinguishing features by organizing, and sometimes inventing, as many nationalities as possible[.]” Hannah Arendt, *Origins*, p. 318-319.

Andrew Arato (“Dictatorship Before and After Totalitarianism,” *Social Research*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 473-503) offers a rich discussion of Arendt’s concepts of “dictatorship” (attached to Lenin) and “totalitarianism” (attached to Hitler and Stalin), and (p. 475) criticizes strongly Arendt’s characterization of Lenin’s policies prior to and during the New Economic Policy, which “either did not mean what Arendt thinks (the trade union policy), were reversed by Lenin himself (the consequences of the land reform during War Communism), were understood as necessary and temporary concessions to be reversed later (the NEP and especially private trade), or were seen by Lenin as hated side effects of inevitable statist policies (the rise of a bureaucracy).” On Arendt and Lenin see also Robert C. Mayer, “Hannah Arendt, Leninism, & the Disappearance of Authority,” *Polity*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Spring 1992), pp. 399-416.

61 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 1.

62 “These reflections were provoked by the events and debates of the last few years as seen against the background of the twentieth century, which has become indeed, as Lenin predicted, a century of wars and revolutions, hence a century of that violence which is currently believed to be their common denominator.” Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 105.

63 “The age of wars and revolutions which Lenin predicted for this century and in which we are in fact living has, indeed on an unprecedented scale, made what happens in politics a basic factor in the personal fate of all people.” The section is called *Does Politics Still have any Meaning at All?* See Hannah Arendt, “Introduction into Politics,” in *The Promise of Politics*, pp. 93-200, p. 191. This essay was written in spurts some years before *On Revolution* but published posthumously. See Jerome Kohn’s Introduction to the same volume, esp. pp. xvi-xix.

64 Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 444. The same language attaching Lenin to wars and revolutions appears parenthetically in Hannah Arendt, “Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought,” *Social Research*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 273-319, p. 290-1.

65 Speculatively, Cf. Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 204-6, where Arendt favorably quotes Plato, Polybius, and James Harrington on the pivotal importance of “the beginning,” albeit in a different context than a book, essay, or section of an essay.

66 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 5; and see below.

67 See nt. 31 above.

the twentieth century as a 'century of wars and revolutions,'"⁶⁸ where Arendt's emphasis stresses that Lenin, "alone among the revolutionaries, understood the modern *interconnection* between war and revolution"—or what was "the lesson of the first Russian Revolution of 1905, and perhaps of the French Commune as well, when defeat in war had touched off events in which the weakness of the regime, which otherwise might have lived on for considerable periods, suddenly stood exposed."⁶⁹ Armed with this understanding, Lenin "hoped for revolutions in all defeated countries in Europe," and "began very early to associate the notion of a 'world war' with that of a world revolution."⁷⁰ Lenin's 1916 critique of Rosa Luxemburg's *Junius Pamphlet*, for example, posits a program using *world war* as a catalyst of *civil war* quite bluntly: "Junius quite rightly says that a revolution cannot be 'made.' Revolution was on the order of the day in the 1914-16 period, it was hidden in the depths of the war, was *emerging* out of the war. This should have been '*proclaimed*' in the name of the revolutionary class, and its program should have been fearlessly and fully announced; socialism is impossible in a time of war without civil war against the arch-reactionary, criminal bourgeoisie[.]" Lenin proceeds to outline several basic measures to follow "in line with the maturing revolution" (including, ironically, voting against war credits), and writes conclusively that "the success of all these steps *inevitably* leads to civil war."⁷¹

Arendt's appreciation of this insight is hard to overestimate. Towards the end of her "Rosa Luxemburg" essay, for example, Arendt contrasts Lenin's political understanding with Luxemburg's in these very terms:

There were, however, two aspects of the 1905 prelude which entirely escaped [Rosa Luxemburg]. There was, after all, the surprising fact that the revolution had broken out not only in a non-industrialized, backward country, but in a territory where no strong socialist movement with mass support existed at all. And there was, second, the equally undeniable fact that the revolution had been the consequence of the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. These were the two facts Lenin never forgot and from which he drew two conclusions. First, one did not need a large organization; a small, tightly organized group with a leader who knew what he wanted was enough to pick up the power once the authority of the old regime had

68 Arendt does not provide her source. Interestingly, Arendt gives Lenin much less credit for his analysis of *imperialism*, to which he attributed this state of affairs. In *Origins* Lenin barely appears in "Part II: Imperialism," and when he does, Arendt conspicuously ranks his *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) beneath Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913). Hannah Arendt, *Origins*, p. 148 (nt. 45).

69 Hannah Arendt, "Comment on Ulam," p. 444, emphasis added. See indicatively, Lenin's remarks in *Socialism and War: The Attitude of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party Towards the War* (1915): "The [Basle] manifesto openly declares that war is dangerous 'for the governments' (all without exception), notes their fear of 'a proletarian revolution,' and very definitely points to the example of the Commune of 1871, and of October-December 1905, *i.e.*, to the examples of revolution and civil war. Thus, the Basle Manifesto lays down, precisely for the present war, the tactics of revolutionary struggle by the workers on an international scale against their governments, the tactics of proletarian revolution." *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 21 (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1970), pp. 295-338; cited from www.marxists.org.

70 Hannah Arendt, "Comment on Ulam," p. 444.

71 V.I. Lenin, "On the Junius Pamphlet," in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, Ed. Mary-Alice Waters. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970, pp. 428-439, p. 438, emphasis in original. See also Rosa Luxemburg, "The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in the German Social Democracy," in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, pp. 257-331.

been swept away...And second, since revolutions were not 'made' but the result of circumstances and events beyond anybody's power, wars were welcome.⁷²

Here Arendt gives not only substantial positive credit to Leninist principles of revolutionary organization(!); she also praises what in the 1953 essay "Understanding Communism" she tellingly calls his revolutionary *tactics*. Citing "to my knowledge, the best analytical history of Bolshevism," Arendt records "An unbroken line of thought and political attitude [that] runs from Marx to Lenin to Stalin. Marx is the discoverer and formulator of a theory which Lenin translated into practical terms and which Stalin put into effect. Strategy (Marx) is followed by the development of tactical means (Lenin) and ends with the development of a preconceived plan (Stalin). [...] There is no doubt that Lenin understood himself as a mere tactician, faithfully applying the revolutionary strategy of Marx to changing and changed circumstances."⁷³ These statements are, if anything, an apology for Lenin, for in Arendt's unique vocabulary the distance separating "faithfully applying revolutionary strategy," and "development of a preconceived plan," is profound. It means that whatever Lenin's political error, it was *not* "the substitution of making for acting," or the pursuit of "a utopian political system...construed in accordance with a model by somebody who has mastered the techniques of human affairs,"⁷⁴ and within which (and for whom) humans can be broken for political ends like eggs for an omelet. This distinguished Lenin morally and politically from Stalin.⁷⁵ Instead, Lenin's important failure was what Arendt in *On Revolution* calls a "surrender of political freedom to economic necessity" following the October Revolution:

It has become customary to view all these surrenders, and especially the last one through Lenin, as foregone conclusions, chiefly because we find it difficult to judge any of these men, and again most of all Lenin, in their own right...Yet even Lenin, despite his dogmatic Marxism, might perhaps have been capable of avoiding the surrender; it was after all the same man who once, when asked to state in one sentence the essence and aims of the October Revolution, gave the curious and long-forgotten formula: 'Electrification plus soviets.' This answer is remarkable for what it omits: the role of the party, on one side, the building of socialism on the other. In their stead, we are given an entirely un-Marxist separation of economics and politics, a differentiation between electrification as the solution to Russia's social question, and the soviet system as her new body politic that had emerged during the revolution outside all parties...This was one of the not infrequent instances when Lenin's gifts as a statesman overruled his Marxist training and ideological convictions.⁷⁶

⁷² Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 53.

⁷³ Hannah Arendt, "Understanding Communism" (1953), in *Essays in Understanding*, pp. 363-367, p. 363-4, 365.

⁷⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 227.

⁷⁵ Hannah Arendt, "The Eggs Speak Up," in *Essays in Understanding*, pp. 270-284, p. 275-77. See also Hannah Arendt, "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought," p. 276 on "the decisive transformation by Stalin of both Marxism and Leninism into a totalitarian ideology"; and for the same in more detail, Hannah Arendt, *Origins*, p. 318-323.

⁷⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 55-56, emphasis added.

Arendt's meaning here is difficult to parse, but can be reconstructed from several texts. At times her political judgment of Lenin paints a kind of Janus face—one-half defined by his “gifts as a statesman,” the other half accenting his “Marxist training and ideological convictions.” Lenin's statesmanship comes through, for example, in his post-October project of Soviet state-building and social and political “stratification,” his attempt to establish various forms “differentiation” within the Soviet state, and his willingness to admit and reverse his own errors.⁷⁷ Meanwhile his “Marxist training” drove the Bolsheviks' notorious dictatorial turn following the October coup, when Lenin between 1918-21 “dissolved the Constituent Assembly, emasculated the soviets, and liquidated the Kronstadt rebellion.” At these moments “precisely the Marxist in Lenin [rather than the statesman] ...prevailed.”⁷⁸

But the justifications for Lenin's dictatorial turn belie any strict separation of these political and ideological tendencies. Lenin applied revolutionary dictatorship for many reasons—broadly to consolidate the Bolshevik revolution following the October coup, but specifically to meet the necessities of War Communism during the Civil War, and to save the nation via the New Economic Policy from economic collapse. With the NEP Lenin pursued capitalist measures despite rigorous ideological objections within his Party. In the process, he “probably surrendered his earlier position [on the separation of economics and politics] for economic rather than political reasons, less for the sake of the party's power than for the sake of electrification.”⁷⁹ Like any true statesman, his ultimate political goal was to “found freedom” in the *soviets*.⁸⁰ But this goal was postponed by the necessity, and necessities, of civil war and by Lenin's Marxist belief in the economic requisites of political freedom, which he presumed was simply not possible in a poor and backwards country.

Thus in *Origins*, Arendt practically absolves Lenin from culpability for the political consequences of War Communism: “There is no doubt that Lenin suffered his greatest defeat when, with the outbreak of the civil war, the supreme power that he originally planned to concentrate in the Soviets definitely passed into the hands of the party bureaucracy[.]” And even *that* polity, she argues, was such that by the time of the New Economic Policy in 1921, “Agriculture could still be developed on a collective, co-operative, or private basis, and the national economy was still free to follow a socialist, state-capitalist, or free-enterprise pattern. None of these alternatives would have automatically destroyed the new structure of the country.”⁸¹ Thus none of Lenin's political programs before 1921 precluded the founding of a free republic—and indicatively, they made Stalin's goal of establishing a totalitarian state far more difficult. Provocatively, Arendt places Lenin in the company of Machiavelli, Robespierre, and the *American Founding Fathers* in the pantheon of “great revolutionaries,” statesmen who “wished nothing more passionately than to initiate a new order of things.”⁸²

⁷⁷ See nt. 60 above.

⁷⁸ Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 445.

⁷⁹ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 56.

⁸⁰ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 56.

⁸¹ Hannah Arendt, *Origins*, p. 319.

⁸² Hannah Arendt, “What is Authority?” in *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin, 1993, pp. 91-141, p. 141.

In the last analysis, Lenin represents for Arendt the greatest exemplar of what she calls a “real revolutionary,” a term rarely discussed by Arendt scholars, but a distinctly “Arendtian” archetype proffered by her in the interview “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution.” Lenin’s virtues as a “real revolutionary” are two-fold. First is his ability, a combination of political genius and ethical maturity, to “conduct real analysis of the existing situation”⁸³ and respond to circumstances realistically rather than idealistically. Lenin possessed unrivaled political vision, an ability to see and foresee *revolutionary situations when power is lying in the streets waiting to be picked up*. And he had the strength and discipline to respond accordingly. He anticipated the “revolutionary situation” that world war would provoke.⁸⁴ He showed patience after the February revolution by *not* supporting Bolshevik involvement in the abortive July Days uprisings.⁸⁵ And when the time was ripe for the Bolsheviks to seize power, he initiated the October coup, which succeeded with hardly any bloodshed.⁸⁶

Lenin’s status as a “real revolutionary” is also defined by his singular willingness, seeing power lying in the streets, “to pick it up’ *and* to keep it—which is only another way of saying that Lenin was the only man willing to assume responsibility for the revolution after it had happened and without the help of anybody[.]”⁸⁷ The October coup, Arendt agrees, would never have happened without him. And remarkably, it was this *assumption of responsibility* by Lenin—the moral authority of his *act and initiative*—which Arendt says “is the explanation of Lenin’s ascendancy over all his opponents inside as well as outside his party.”⁸⁸ To assume responsibility entailed not only playing a leadership role, whereby the aura of authority of Lenin’s actions and persona might lay the foundations of a new re-

83 Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” p. 206.

84 “I think that it was this insight, not to be found in Marxism, that gave [Lenin] the necessary confidence for the *s’engage et puis on voit*. He had been *prepared* where others were not.” Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 347.

85 Gregory Zinoviev of the Bolshevik Central Committee recalled the following in 1918: “You know the part played by Lenin in the July days of 1917. For him the question of the necessity of the seizure of power by the proletariat had been settled from the first moment of our revolution, and the question was only about the choice of a suitable opportunity. In the July days our entire Central Committee was opposed to the immediate seizure of power, Lenin was of the same opinion. But when on July 16 the wave of popular revolt rose high, Lenin became alert, and here, upstairs in the refreshment room of the Tauride Palace, a small conference took place at which Trotsky, Lenin, and myself were present. Lenin laughingly asked us, ‘Shall we not attempt now?’ and added: ‘No, it would not do to take power now, as nothing will come out of it, the soldiers at the front being largely on the other side would come as the dupes of the Lieber-Dans to massacre the Petrograd workers.’” See “Speech to the Petrograd Soviet by Gregory Zinoviev Celebrating Lenin’s Recovery from Wounds Received in the Attempt Made on his Life on August 30, 1918,” <http://www.marxists.org/archive/zinoviev/works/1918/lenin/ch17.htm>

86 On this see Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003, Ch. 6: “The Mass Minority in Action: France in Russia,” p. 164-185.

87 Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 444.

88 Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 443. A key to deciphering Arendt’s connection of “assuming responsibility” with “ascendancy over...opponents” might be found in Rosa Luxemburg’s 1918 essay on the Russian Revolution, which Arendt read closely when preparing her Luxemburg essay. Here Luxemburg supports the Bolsheviks’ October coup: “The same, they say, applies to revolution: first let’s become a ‘majority.’ The true dialectic of revolutions, however, stands this wisdom of parliamentary moles on its head: not through a majority to revolutionary tactics, but through revolutionary tactics to a majority – that is the way the road runs. [] Only a party which knows how to lead, that is, to advance things, wins support in stormy times. The determination with which, at the decisive moment, Lenin and his comrades offered the only solution which could advance things (‘all power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry’), transformed them almost overnight from a persecuted, slandered, outlawed minority whose leader had to hide like Marat in cellars, into the absolute master of the situation.” Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Revolution,” in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, pp. 365-395, p. 374-5. Cf. Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis in Education,” in *Between Past and Future*, pp. 173-196, p. 190, where the loss of adult authority in the classroom “can mean only one thing: that the adults refuse to assume responsibility for the world into which they have brought the children.”

public, but also assuming the political *burden* of responsibility for the revolution—being no less willing than the American Revolutionaries, for example, to bear the personal and moral burdens of sacrifice, violence, and even war necessary to ensure the revolution's success.

In Arendt's understanding of the world, Lenin's stature as a revolutionary statesman is colossal. And yet, in the last analysis it is not Lenin, but *Rosa Luxemburg* on whom Arendt unequivocally hangs her revolutionary hat—Luxemburg, whose own revolutionary attempt in 1919 failed disastrously for herself, the Spartacus League, and the German socialist revolution, and who was hardly loath to condone revolutionary violence. On its face, Arendt's judgment of Luxemburg vis-à-vis Lenin is puzzling, for as Georg Lukács points out in his incisive analysis of Luxemburg's 1918 critique of Lenin's Russian Revolution, "Rosa Luxemburg does not deny the necessity of violence in connection with the Russian Revolution. She declares: 'Socialism presupposes a series of acts of violence – against property, etc.' And later, in the Spartacus Programme it is recognized that 'the violence of the bourgeois counter-revolution must be opposed by the revolutionary violence of the proletariat.'"⁸⁹ Even in her critique of Lenin, Luxemburg rejects moderation in times of revolution in terms that explicitly justify violence. "The 'golden mean,'" she says, "cannot be maintained in any revolution," such that "without the uprising of the 'immoderate' Jacobins, even the first, timid and halfhearted achievements of the Girondin phase would soon have been buried under the ruins of the revolution...[T]he real alternative to Jacobin dictatorship...[was] restoration of the Bourbons!" and "The party of Lenin was the only one which grasped the mandate and duty of a truly revolutionary party...Only a party which knows how to lead, that is, to advance things, wins support in stormy times."⁹⁰

But two crucial differences steer Arendt's judgment away from Lenin and towards Luxemburg. First, says Arendt, Luxemburg unlike Lenin "refused categorically, from beginning to end, to see in war anything but the most terrible disaster, no matter what its eventual outcome[.]" And second, "with respect to the issue of organization, she did not believe in a victory in which the people at large had no part and no voice...she 'was far more afraid of a deformed revolution than an unsuccessful one'—this was, in fact, 'the major difference between her' and the Bolsheviks."⁹¹ And "[H]aven't events proved her right? Isn't the history of the Soviet Union one long demonstration of the frightful dangers of 'deformed revolutions'?... Wasn't it true that Lenin was 'completely mistaken' in the means he employed, that the only way to salvation was the 'school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion,' and that terror 'demoralized' everybody and destroyed everything?"⁹²

Given what we know about the degree to which Arendt faults Stalin, rather than Lenin, for the turn towards totalitarian terror in the Soviet Union, Arendt's criticism of Lenin here is at least curious: What is really at stake in her rejection of Lenin's welcoming of war for tactical purposes? What did Arendt admire in Luxemburg's, rather than Lenin's, re-

89 Georg Lukács, "Critical Observations on Rosa Luxemburg's 'Critique of the Russian Revolution,'" in *History and Class Consciousness*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971, pp. 272-294, p.277-278.

90 Rosa Luxemburg, "The Russian Revolution," p. 374.

91 Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 53.

92 Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 53-4.

volutionary organization? And what does it mean for Rosa Luxemburg to have been “right,” as opposed to Lenin? In what way is the “school of public life itself” the “only way to salvation”?⁹³ At the heart of these problems, I want to suggest, is a contrast Arendt posits between Lenin’s superior revolutionary *tactics*, and Luxemburg’s superior revolutionary strategy respecting the use of *violence*—and the moral and political priority Arendt affords the latter.

Any approach to Arendtian revolutionary “strategy” begins and ends at her distinction between *power* and *violence*. “Power,” Arendt writes in *On Violence*, “needs no justification... what it does need is legitimacy”; whereas “Violence can be justifiable, but it will never be legitimate.”⁹⁴ Here in the context of Lenin and Luxemburg, two things are notable about the First World War: First, it displayed a “hitherto unknown scale” of violence—total war; second, this unprecedented violence “was justified and propagated.”⁹⁵ The moral implication of these two facts together is devastating—for if the violence of WWI was justifiable, and justifiable in the name of *freedom*, then the moral precedent of the First World War was that, in practice, *anything*—even the most abhorrent and inconceivable violence—is justifiable in the name of *freedom*.⁹⁶ But what follows from that?

This was precisely the door that Lenin opened and exploited. Although Lenin did not condone the “imperialist” war in itself, and indeed agreed with Luxemburg that, “The ‘epoch of imperialism’ made the present war an imperialist one and it inevitably engenders new imperialist wars (until the triumph of socialism),” he also thought this “by no means precludes national wars on the part of, say, small (annexed or nationally-oppressed) countries against the imperialist powers, just as it does not preclude large-scale national movements in Eastern Europe.”⁹⁷ To iterate, “the success of *all* these steps [‘in line with the maturing revolution’] *inevitably* leads to civil war.” In the “Junius Pamphlet” Luxemburg had argued on the contrary that “In the era of the unleashing of this imperialism [through wars], national wars are no longer possible,”⁹⁸ and a standard interpretation of this dispute centers on Lenin’s and Luxemburg’s differing views on the relation between national wars, class struggle, and the immediate possibility of a European proletarian revolution.⁹⁹ But Luxemburg’s objection drives much deeper. “The final goal of socialism,” she writes, “will be realized by the international proletariat only if it makes the issue ‘war against war’ the guiding line of its practical policy; and on condition that it deploys all its forces and shows itself ready, by its courage to the point of extreme sacrifice, to do this.” And “The activity of the proletariat of all countries as a class, in peace time as in wartime, must be geared to the fight against imperialism and

93 For very insightful discussion around this latter question, see Sidonia Blättler and Irene M. Marti, “Rosa Luxemburg and Hannah Arendt: Against the Destruction of Political Spheres of Freedom,” *Trans. Senem Saner. Hypatia*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Spring 2005), pp. 88-101. Useful comparison can also be found in Paul Mattick, “Luxemburg versus Lenin,” (1935) in *Anti-Bolshevik Communism*, Merlin Press, 1978; Max Schachtman, “Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg,” *New International*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (March 1935), pp. 30-64; Walter Held, “The German Left and Bolshevism,” *New International* (February 1939); and Walter Held, “Once Again Lenin and Luxemburg,” *Fourth International*, June 1940, pp. 47-52.

94 Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 151.

95 Blättler and Marti (2005), p. 97.

96 The point sheds light on Arendt’s political anxieties over the atomic bomb—if *this* responsibility is the burden of modern politics, is it any wonder that most people seek freedom outside of politics?

97 Lenin, “On the Junius Pamphlet,” p. 433.

98 Rosa Luxemburg, “The Junius Pamphlet,” p. 329.

99 See, e.g. Mattick, “Luxemburg versus Lenin,” esp. the section “On the National Question.”

war as its supreme goal." The class struggle is both "against imperialism *and* against war."¹⁰⁰

Ironically, then, what made for Lenin's greatest gift as a leader also made him exceptionally dangerous as a revolutionary. For Lenin's willingness to even entertain *world war*, and to actively provoke *civil war*, as a means to a revolutionary end—that end being revolutionary freedom¹⁰¹—meant that no boundary remained to distinguish the *political essence of revolution* from the *violent nature of war*. War itself—world war, national war, civil war—became an inextricable part of the revolution. And subsequently for the twentieth century, the enthusiasm generated by the success of the Bolshevik revolution meant that the political line that once distinguished *revolution* from *war* had been shattered into oblivion, and would remain in hiding until the miraculous events of 1989. If the twentieth century became, as Lenin predicted, a century of wars *and* revolutions, in which violence was believed to be their common denominator, it was in part because Lenin himself, through the brilliance of his tactics and the inspiration of his achievement, obliterated the distinction between them.

It was Rosa Luxemburg's genius to have seen the insidious long-term effects of any form of politically justified violence which would not only blur the line between wars and revolutions, but in the process destroy the very idea of revolution as a distinctly political phenomenon. Luxemburg believed that "*wars of liberation*" sowed in themselves "the seeds of new conflicts" and deformity, for any "justifiable" use of violence—either at the point of foundation, or to consolidate the revolution—sets a spiraling precedent for more violence, and this at the long-term expense of persuasion and mass political power.¹⁰² And yet Luxemburg for her part hardly rejected the use of revolutionary violence in the name of freedom. She, like Arendt, acknowledged that power might wield violence for political purposes, that violence might indeed be justifiable in the name of freedom, and that in practice, violence and revolution often go hand in hand. How does one square all this?

Here we might profitably turn to Arendt's paradoxical interpretation of the American Revolution. Stunningly, Arendt calls it the only "successful" modern revolution, the "only one" that "founded a completely new body politic without violence and with the help of a constitution." "It seems certain," she says, "that the relatively nonviolent character of the American Revolution, where violence was more or less restricted to regular warfare, is an important factor in this success,"¹⁰³ where success here means "the surprising stability [in America] of a political structure under the onslaught of the most vehement and shattering social instability."¹⁰⁴

Without ignoring the violence of the American Revolutionary War—and by all accounts Arendt justifies power's use of violence on this occasion—Arendt appreciates that the American Founders, unlike Lenin's Bolsheviks, distinguished from the outset between the *politics of revolution*—the "unanimous Declaration" and "[mutual] pledge to each other

¹⁰⁰ Rosa Luxemburg, "The Junius Pamphlet," p. 330-1, emphasis added.

¹⁰¹ Provocatively, in *On Revolution* (p. 1) Arendt calls freedom "the only cause left" to justify war and revolutions under conditions modern technologies of violence.

¹⁰² Cf. Arendt's otherwise inconspicuous quote of Polybius in *On Revolution*: "The beginning is not merely half of the whole but reaches out towards the end." Arendt, *On Revolution*, pg. 205.

¹⁰³ Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority?" p. 140.

¹⁰⁴ Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority?" p. 140.

our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor” by the colonies and their representatives¹⁰⁵—and the *war of liberation*, fought to make free self-government possible. The Founders’ genius was to separate power and violence, war and revolution, conceptually, even as in practice they overlapped substantially. Having been maintained even amidst the violent process of liberation, these distinctions were subsequently ingrained, built-in through a trial of fire, into the “*spirit of American laws*” at the moment of founding. And thus, where in “deformed” revolutions, like the Bolshevik Revolution, the brutal suppression of dissent followed directly and necessarily from a constitutional inability to distinguish between political acts of protest and violent acts of civil war; in America, two centuries after the revolution, Arendt found the one state where even “civil disobedience” might find a snug constitutional home.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

In *On Revolution* Hannah Arendt wrote that “if we don’t perish altogether, it seems more than likely that revolution, in distinction to war, will stay with us into the foreseeable future,” and this while revolution, like war, remains “not even conceivable outside the domain of violence.”¹⁰⁷ The miraculous political events of 1989-1991 suggested that even if the first of Arendt’s conditions holds in the twenty-first century, the latter may not. The Revolutions of 1989 and the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union seemed to demonstrate, among other things, the high capacity for spontaneous demonstrations and mass “people power” movements that explicitly reject violence to rapidly and peacefully eliminate tyranny around the world, all without succumbing to the rampant lawlessness, brutality, and dictatorship so stubbornly attached to the idea of revolution since 1789, and especially characteristic of revolution in the twentieth century. In lieu of traditional “1789-style” revolution, a new “1989-style” model took global center stage and became normative.¹⁰⁸ Since 1989, of course, not all attempts at “people power,” or “1989-style” revolution have succeeded (nor did they in 1989, nor was the revolutionary fallout of 1989 nearly as peaceful as is often depicted), but all so-called “non-violent” or “velvet” revolutions that have arisen in years since—from the post-Soviet “color revolutions” in the early 2000s, to the suppressed “Saffron” and “Green” revolutions in Burma (2007) and Iran (2009-10), to the Arab Spring and many others—have done so in the ineluctable shadow of the Eastern European Revolutions of 1989.¹⁰⁹

It is hardly a coincidence that, for many of the same reasons that Hannah Arendt has been positively associated with the Arab Spring and the Occupy movements, her visibility in political theory rose substantially with the fall of European communism and the rise of

¹⁰⁵ *Declaration of Independence* (1776), http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html

¹⁰⁶ Hannah Arendt, “Civil Disobedience,” in *Crises of the Republic*, pp. 49-102, esp. p. 99-102.

¹⁰⁷ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ Timothy Garton Ash writes that if “1789-style” revolutions are “violent, utopian, professedly class-based, and characterized by a progressive radicalization, culminating in terror,” then “1989-style” revolutions are “nonviolent, anti-utopian, based not on a single class but on broad social coalitions, and characterized by the application of mass social pressure – ‘people power’ – to bring the current powerholders to negotiate. It culminates not in terror but in compromise.” Timothy Garton Ash, “Velvet Revolution: The Prospects,” *The New York Review of Books*, December 3, 2009.

non-violent models of political resistance.¹¹⁰ Indicatively in 1992 Bruce Ackerman wrote that before 1989 “Only Hannah Arendt raised a powerful protest against [the Marxist-Leninist] usurpation” of revolution in the 20th century.¹¹¹ That same year Margaret Canovan wrote that “Arendt’s reputation has been growing again,” in part because the “East European revolutions” “seemed to offer some confirmation of her claim that power is less a matter of weapons and resources than of people acting in concert.”¹¹² And Seyla Benhabib wrote that “It is as if the revolutions of 1989 in the heart of Europe have placed her analyses of revolutions...once more on the world historical agenda. When in the joyous last days of 1989 the communist regimes of central and eastern Europe started to topple like a house of cards, and in country after country citizens’ initiatives and forums, with varying degrees of success, began to ‘do politics,’ the categories of Arendt’s analyses of revolutions came alive again.”¹¹³

But importantly, the Revolutions of 1989 exhibited significant differences from the protests of 2011 and the Arab Spring revolutions, differences that Arendt would have been acutely aware of and, there is good reason to believe, quick to point out.¹¹⁴ Not least among them was the fact that *political power* in the Eastern European revolutions *did* have responsible leadership—leaders like Lech Walesa in Poland and Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia—who represented *power* legitimately through organizations like Solidarity, Civic Forum, and a variety of other civil society associations throughout the Eastern bloc, and who were in fact *willing* to pick up the power (even when they had to negotiate with, and for it) when it was lying on the streets. This moral and strategic willingness was most indicative in Poland and Czechoslovakia, where leading figures of the most powerful

109 Thus describing the Egyptian Revolution Jonathan Schell (“The Revolutionary Moment”) writes that the Egyptians’ “courage and sacrifice have given new life to the spirit of the nonviolent democratic resistance to dictatorship symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.” For a wide variety of related cases, pre- and post-1989, see the very useful collection by Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, eds. *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

110 See Jonathan Schell, “Introduction,” in Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 2006, pp. xi-xxix. Schell calls “Arendtian Revolutions” virtually the entire “Third Wave” of democratization and more, beginning with Portugal’s 1974 Carnation Revolution, and including the democratic transitions in Southern Europe in the 1970s, South America and East Asia in the 1980’s, the Eastern European Revolutions of 1989, and the post-Soviet “color revolutions.” See also Stefan Auer, “Power and Violence: 1989, Ukraine, and the Idea of Revolution Free of Violence,” *Osteuropa*, Vol. 55, No. 9 (2005), pp. 3-19; Stefan Auer, “Violence and the End of Revolution After 1989,” *Thesis Eleven*, No. 97 (May 2009), pp. 6-25; Stefan Auer, “The Paradoxes of the Revolutions of 1989 in Central Europe,” *Critical Horizons*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2004), pp. 361-390; and Dick Howard, “Keeping the Republic: Reading Arendt’s On Revolution after the Fall of the Wall,” *Democratija* 9 (Summer 2007), pp. 122-140. The journal *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, published in German by the Hannah Arendt Institute in Dresden, recently devoted an issue (Vol. 5, No. 1, 2008) to “Color Revolutions in Eurasia.”

111 Bruce Ackerman, *The Future of Liberal Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, p. 1.

112 Margaret Canovan. *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 1-2.

113 Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, p. xlv.

114 A point worth considering when comparing 1989 and 2011 and Arendt’s contention that revolutions are not “made,” is Krishan Kumar’s argument that the acquiescence of political elites both prior to and during 1989—and not mass popular uprisings—was *the* pivotal factor in the revolutions’ success. Kumar writes that “The evidence for direct (indirect is self-evident) Soviet involvement in the deposition of East European leaders is not always clear or complete, but overall appears pretty conclusive,” and “Even if the ‘Gorbachev factor’ is discounted, for purposes of argument, the extent to which the 1989 revolutions remained an affair of competing elites, rather than of mass popular uprisings, is still remarkable.” See Krishan Kumar, “The Revolutions of 1989: Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Jun., 1992), pp. 309-56, esp. nt. 50 for case by case analysis. See also Krishan Kumar, *1989: Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, Ch. 4, nt. 98 for several sources that attribute minimal importance to mass involvement in 1989.

dissident groups became the first Presidents elected by popular vote. As representatives of power, their public persona forged an important link in the transition from power in the streets to constitutional foundations of freedom.¹¹⁵

At the same time, and no less importantly, these leaders recognized (as Walesa did even before the December 1981 crackdown, which he desperately tried to avoid through moderation and conciliation) when sovereign power was *not* lying there to be picked up. Popular Eastern European dissident ideas like “antipolitics,” Adam Michnik’s “new evolutionism,” and Václav Benda’s “parallel polis”¹¹⁶ reflected an understanding among dissidents, in the wake of a series of failed revolutionary episodes (most recently in Poland in 1980-81 and Czechoslovakia in 1968), that the “revolutionary situation” was not yet ripe, and that “In a head-on clash between violence and power, the outcome is hardly in doubt.” These leaders not simply rejected, but understood violence. Like Arendt (and Luxemburg), they understood that, for themselves as much as the existing authorities, “To substitute violence for power can bring victory, but the price is very high; for it is not only paid by the vanquished, it is also paid by the victor in terms of his own power.”¹¹⁷ Rather than attempt to “make” a revolution through force and violence, dissident leaders employed a long-term strategy centered on the expansion of political activity, political education, and coordinated actions designed at different points to “test” the “revolutionary situation” and gauge the proper moment to act. When the situation finally ripened in 1989 dissident leaders, organizations, and their legitimate representatives were—like Lenin—both willing and prepared to seize upon it.¹¹⁸

“In our times,” writes John McGowan, “politics has been asked to carry so great a burden because politics has also been the site of the greatest evils.”¹¹⁹ We are not surprised today by the violence committed by evil and, after Arendt, thoughtlessness of so-called

115 This discussion does not address concerns raised after 1989, mostly from the radical left, about the limited meaning of democracy wherever there were liberal-democratic-capitalist outcomes in Eastern Europe, concerns with which contemporary *Occupiers* (among others) would likely sympathize. This problem is important, but beyond the essay’s scope.

116 For discussion of these ideas in relation to Arendt, see Jeffrey Isaac’s, “Oases in the Desert: Hannah Arendt on Democratic Politics,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (Mar., 1994), pp. 156-168; and “The Meanings of 1989,” *Social Research*, Vol 63, No. 2 (Summer 1996), pp. 291-344. See also Adam Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays*. Trans. Maya Latynski. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985; and Václav Benda et. al., “Parallel Polis, or An Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe: An Inquiry,” *Social Research*, Vol. 55, No. 1/2, Central and East European Social Research—Part 2 (Spring/Summer 1988), pp. 211-246.

117 Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” pg. 152. See esp. Vaclav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990*. New York: Vintage, 1992, pp. 125-214.

118 This argument begets serious questions about how to interpret Arendt’s glorification of the failed 1956 Hungarian Revolution in the Epilogue to the second edition of her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, which she later removed because, in her words, it had “become obsolete in many details.” Did the Hungarians try to “make” a revolution? Or did they seize upon a true “revolutionary situation”? Why did she insert, and later remove, the Epilogue from *Origins*? In a recent talk delivered to the Hannah Arendt Center at Bard College, the late Christopher Hitchens suggested that the reasons Arendt removed the Epilogue (as recounted by Roger Berkowitz) “had to do with the antisemitism of many of the Hungarian revolutionaries. As she became aware of the dark side of the revolution, she rethought her initial optimism, and simply withdrew the epilogue.” Here I would only add that, in light of Arendt’s insistence that revolutions are not “made,” and that a “real revolutionary” must conduct “real analysis of the existing situation,” the Hungarian Revolution (in light of the real threat of Soviet intervention at the time) may have posed thornier problems for Arendt than at first appeared. See Roger Berkowitz, “Christopher Hitchens on Antisemitism,” posted at <http://www.hannaharendtcenter.org/?tag=hungarian-revolution>.

119 John McGowan, “Must Politics Be Violent? Arendt’s Utopian Vision,” in Craig Calhoun and John McGowan, eds. *Hannah Arendt & the Meaning of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 263-296, p. 270.

“non-persons” like Hitler, Stalin, and Eichmann. But the scale of violence enabled by modern technology and attached even to “legitimate” political decisions, grotesquely manifest in the wars and revolutions of the twentieth century, provokes a more difficult question—namely of who among us “conversant with the basic political experience of our times are capable of bearing the burden of risks” that have become part and parcel of modern politics.¹²⁰

In the posthumous essay “Introduction *into* Politics” Arendt refers ironically to “those people who, as best they can, go about the business of government and regulate human affairs between catastrophes...like the horseman who rode across Lake Constance[.]” These horsemen are the experts and politicians of our time only “capable of bearing the burden of risks about which they know as little as the rider knew about the state of the frozen lake under his horse’s feet,” the “problem solvers” and “image-makers” who are “rational,” “eager to find formulas, preferably expressed in pseudo-mathematical language...eager to discover laws by which to explain and predict political and historical facts as though they were...necessary.”¹²¹ Arendt summons this story in the context of Lenin’s now familiar insight that “Wars and revolutions, not the functioning of parliamentary governments and democratic party apparatuses, have shaped the basic political experiences of the twentieth century,” such that, “To ignore them” and “the hard realities that such incursions have visited on our world and to which we can still bear witness every day” is “tantamount to not living in the world in which in fact we live.”¹²²

Arendt uses these examples to thrust upon us the most important ethical and political question of our time—namely whether we, as potential actors in the world, can not only bear the burden of responsibility for modern politics, but do so *without turning away* from its hard realities. And here Arendt’s ethical political theory dovetails movingly with that of Max Weber.

As is well known, Arendt’s distinction between *power* and *violence* is a direct challenge to Weber’s influential definition of politics in terms of the modern state that wields a “*monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a particular territory.”¹²³ For Weber, because entering politics entails entering the conditions of violence attached to the modern state, to act politically is to necessarily entangle one’s self in that violence; and one who cannot accept this is not fit for responsible political action. Arendt rejects Weber’s definitional move in order to maintain a meaningful distinction between political action and violence.¹²⁴ But she accepts, even articulates in the strongest terms, Weber’s central ethical thesis—for Arendt, like Weber, acknowledges the *factual* entanglement of politics and violence in modern times: Yes, “Power and violence are opposites,” Arendt says, but “[N]othing...is more common than the combination of violence and power, nothing less frequent than to find them in their pure and therefore extreme form.” Though power and violence are “distinct phenomena, [they] usually appear together.” And “Wherever they are combined, power...is the primary and predominant factor.”¹²⁵

120 Hannah Arendt, “Introduction *into* Politics,” p. 192.

121 Hannah Arendt, “Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers,” in *Crises of the Republic*, pp. 1-47, p. 11.

122 Where not otherwise cited, quotes in this paragraph are from Arendt, “Introduction *into* Politics,” p. 191-192.

123 See Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*. Ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004, p. 33.

124 See Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 134-141.

125 Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 155, 145-6, 151.

Political power that takes freedom seriously must often wield violence on its own behalf, on behalf of freedom. And the results of action are notoriously unpredictable. This is why Arendt begins the “Action” chapter of *The Human Condition* by preparing us to shoulder action’s ethical burden, quoting Isak Dinesen: “All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.”¹²⁶ But the passage’s meaning, as we have seen, can be turned on its head—stories and narratives, when designed to obscure and distract from reality, can also *release* us from the tragedy and sorrow of action, and liberate us blithely from responsibility. There is virtue in our sorrow, an acknowledgment of the enormous burden of political responsibility in a world in which the political atrocities witnessed in the twentieth century are possible and, apparently, justifiable. But there is a corresponding danger that this same sorrow, or acknowledgment, will turn us away, if not from political reality, then from political action altogether, if only to eschew personal responsibility for consequences we cannot control, and for violence we do not wish to ourselves employ. The fateful consequence is that, too often, we cede the initiative to those who *do* choose to act, if only because their thoughtless and immature rejection of reality relieves their own burden of conscience.

On the heels of 1989, what a tragedy it would be if, in a world where reasonable hope exists that the inextricability of revolutions from wars and violence might come to an end—where “non-violent” revolution may indeed prove possible—the burden of responsibility *still* proved too much to bear. Our most recent history, however, from America’s war in Iraq, to the violent revolutionary fallout in places like Libya, Mali, and Syria, suggests that the question is moot—that the relationship between war and revolution remains as inextricable and unpredictable as ever. If so, then all the more reason to be wary of revolutionary programs that conduce or trivialize the absence of genuine political responsibility.

¹²⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 175.