

Revolution, Transition, Going on in the Same Way

“Revolution” is one of the most complex and, at the same time, central concepts of the modern period. The centrality of the concept points towards a necessary engagement, but the complexity justifies a certain reluctance to do so. More than this the concept of revolution appears to come and go as a legitimate designator. What was once a revolution becomes, with changing social, political and linguistic conventions, a civil war, a war of independence, or even a mere transition. The resuscitation of the concept generally comes at a price. What was revolutionary is displaced such that the revolution now takes place elsewhere, even within a completely distinct “realm of being”. Moreover this displacement is both historical and geographic. The revolution over there is revolutionary, if at all, for completely different reasons from its being revolutionary over here, reasons which often indicate the naivety of those “over there” or “back then”. The recent re-emergence of the term, if not the concept, of revolution in advertizing, promotional campaigns and in (even academic) discourse concerning “new technologies” can be understood as either another move in a constantly shifting semantic field or, as I will argue, ideology (in the sense given the term by Marx). This paper will attempt to trace the genealogy of the concept of revolution in order to indicate the multiple ways in which the concept has been appropriated or denigrated in order to legitimate a certain status quo, a certain move within a prolonged state of going on in the same way, a way which may, from another perspective, be understood as being precisely revolutionary. The paper will draw on sources from both the Marxist and liberal traditions, as well as from the history of science, and from recent attempts to legitimate the term with respect to new technologies.

Keywords: revolution, transition, modernity, *anakyklosis*, new technologies, ideology.