

## As If: The End of Sovereignty, in North Africa, in the World

Stewart Motha  
s.motha@bbk.ac.uk  
Birkbeck, University of London

Revolution can be thought through the trope of the 'wheel' – as Derrida did in relation to the nature of democracy (Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*). The 'wheel' invokes turning around, return, tradition, a desire for another world, but also torture, terror, and violence. This double movement is why, in a tradition as old as Hegel's response to the events following 1789, revolution and revolt cause such excitement and consternation among philosophers. What events of revolt, rebellion, resistance, and revolution are deemed worthy of fidelity by the philosopher, the rebel, the jurist? Implicit in this question, in phenomenological terms, is the distinction and relationship between thought and action, the ontic and ontological, *techné* and being-in-the-world.

Recent events concretise these philosophical anxieties. 'What do the Arab people signify to us?', asked Jean-Luc Nancy in the wake of the military intervention in Libya in 2011. He suggested, in remarks that gave rise to a fraternal spat among European philosophers, that we cannot on the one hand announce the 'end' or dissipation of sovereignty in a globalised world (*monde mondialisé*), and then invoke it when a regime is overthrown by globalised forces. At stake in these discussions is the finite and infinite character of sovereignty in the world. One aspect of this paper is to give an account of the *in-finite* nature of sovereignty in a time of revolution and revolt.

Recent revolts and rebellions in north Africa have also seen the space of the public square, and communication through electronic social-networks placed at the centre of political transformation. This gives rise to a range of questions regarding the nature of the 'social' and the 'political' as a space of freedom. To what extent is this distinction between the social and the political, which Hannah Arendt insisted on, important? How significant is communication through new social networks? Is it a new conduit of political solidarity or a radical containment of political freedom in simulacra of commonality? Revolution and rebellion are seldom if ever an 'inheritance without testament' (René Char) or absolute rupture (Benjamin). Exploring the in-finite character of sovereignty, this paper examines how rebellion and revolution more often than not calls forth another law centered on the fictive 'As If' at the heart of a juridical order and political mobilisation.