

Sven Lütticken

Divergent States of Emergence: Remarks on Potential Possibilities, Against All Odds

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More possibilities exist than can fit into our expectations.

– Bilwet/Adilkno¹

The future may be unwritten, as Joe Strummer maintained, but at times it can seem eerily predetermined. On September 30, 2016, I sent around a draft for the editorial of the October issue of *e-flux journal*, which was to be titled “Perfect Storm.” The opening sentence read: “On November 8, 2016, Donald J. Trump will win the American presidential election.” This phrase met with opposition and was ultimately axed: his campaign was going disastrously, Hillary was clearly going to win, and so on. My line may well be a case of a broken clock being right twice a day, and in hindsight it is all too easy to fault American liberals and progressives for their bubble-bound optimism and ignorance of what was brewing in “flyover country.” If anything, the lack of negative feedback in liberal echo chambers is an effect of a more fundamental phenomenon: a *divergence in emergence*.

In the 1970s, the Marxist theorist Raymond Williams warned against treating “feudal culture” or “bourgeois culture” as monolithic blocs by focusing exclusively on their dominant features. He distinguished between residual, dominant, and emergent social/cultural forms. Vehemently opposed to a simplistic “superstructural” definition of culture, Williams discussed social and cultural forms as profoundly imbricated:

The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social and cultural institution or formation.

Beyond the residual and the dominant, “new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created.”² As a Marxist, Williams’s key historical examples of emergence were the new cultural forms generated by the rise of first the bourgeoisie and then the working class, but more broadly he notes that in any given society, “there is always other social being and consciousness which is neglected and excluded: alternative perceptions of others, in



Jeanne van Heeswijk, *Training XXII: Kitchen Atlases*, Bakudapan Food Study Group, *Trainings for the Not-Yet*, 2019. BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht. Photo: Tom Janssen.

immediate relationships; new perceptions and practices of the material world.” Some such perceptions have been bursting to the surface in recent years, which in turn has strengthened a reactionary backlash and a reemergence of fascist tropes and forms. Perhaps the crucial stages precede such public manifestations. Williams argues that emergent culture

is never only a matter of immediate practice; indeed, it depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form. Again and again what we have to observe is in effect a preemergence, active and pressing but not yet fully articulated, rather than the evident emergence which could be more confidently named.³

Historical thought needs to be attuned to such preemergence, as much as this risks lapsing into wishful thinking and projection (to which the annals of operaist and autonomist theory attest).

In the 2016 US primaries, the Sanders movement was an emergent political force that challenged the American two-party system with an alternative from the left from within the system. However, in spite of its grassroots approach the movement remained disconnected from that other merging force, Black Lives Matter, and was ultimately folded back into the Democratic Party as its loyal opposition – in 2016, and then again more swiftly in 2020. While Trumpian fascism took over the Republican Party in its entirety, symptomatically symbolized by the turning of Lindsey Graham, Sanders found himself condemned to embrace Biden, a candidate who once again trots out the promise of growth. Here Trump, the fascist liar, is the more honest politician than the neoliberal manager Biden – and it is to be feared that the Democrats will pay a heavy price for relying on an unraveling narrative. Today, to promise growth (in the US, in Europe) is to proffer a lie and to spread disaster. The promise of permanent growth and “your children being better off than you” only worked under the specific conditions of the postwar Cold War, when it was squarely aimed at an expanding white middle class in Western states under the Pax Americana, and when the fear of communism made for a strong public sector.⁴ To the satisfaction of at least the West’s own hegemonic media, this narrative glossed over the fundamental and violent inequities of the “differential inclusion” of minorities and the populations of the global south into this “free market” utopia.⁵

Growth in the West may have faltered, to be replaced by wealth redistribution from bottom and middle to the top, but on the global scale there has indeed been growth – with disastrous

ecological consequences. There has never been an energy *transition*, only energy *additions*, and there is no incentive for a true transition under the conditions of actually existing capitalism.⁶ Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s Green New Deal is a more radical proposition, focusing on climate justice even if it is still entangled with liberal dreams of “green growth.” At the very least, AOC and Sanders stand for a break with the neoliberal version of capitalism, but their emancipatory and egalitarian redistributionism is a hard sell against a more crass product: the white supremacist/fascist version of redistributionism, which promises to repel and expel migrants and strip minorities of hard-won rights while sabotaging global warming and dismantling environment protections, while exacerbating the neoliberal trickle-up toward the 0.1 percent in the process. That this objectively hurts quite a few of the right’s voters goes to prove the pull of this narrative.



Tony Cokes, *Evil.27: Selma*, 2011. Installation view, Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta, 2019. Courtesy the artist, Greene Naftali, New York, Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles, and Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

The present condition is thus marked by divergent and clashing (though occasionally reconverging) forms of emergence on the left and right, with the promises made on the right clearly being the simplest and enticing: too good to be true, better than the nightmare of reality. Against a demagogue who is an expert at racializing popular discontent, the DNC has insisted on nominating establishment figures – a strategy that ended in disaster in 2016, and in a far from resounding rejection of Trumpism in 2020. As Naomi Klein put it, responding to Democratic establishment claims that progressive activism and Black Lives Matter had scared voters away:

Biden was a risky candidate for the same reasons Hillary Clinton was a risky candidate. He was risky because of his swampy record, because he had so little to

offer so many people in such deep crisis. It seems he has secured an electoral victory by the skin of his teeth but it was a high risk gamble from the start.⁷

The DNC has won this Pyrrhic gamble, but after five years in which the rise of neofascism seemed unstoppable, the question remains: what is (still) possible? Has modern history – that extractivist Western project – exhausted all potentiality?

Potential Possibilities

Having spent a decade or so in the musical wilderness, David Byrne settled into a late-career pattern with the 2008 Brian Eno collaboration *Everything that Happens Will Happen Today*. It was the beginning of a winning formula: working with strong collaborators to produce rather decent albums with a few standout tracks, and touring them with elaborately choreographed stage shows. There is a clear continuity as well as progression from the 2008–9 *Songs of David Byrne and Brian Eno* tour to the 2012–13 *Love This Giant* tour with St. Vincent, and then to the tour that followed Byrne's 2018 album *American Utopia*, which yielded a Spike Lee concert movie in October 2020.

With its completely mobile band performing tight choreography on a stage delineated by metal chain curtains, the latest tour is a culmination of Byrne's theatrical work over the last twelve years (though the reviewers of Lee's film inevitably name-checked the 1984 Talking Heads concert film *Stop Making Sense*). The extraordinary resonance of *David Byrne's American Utopia* can be attributed at least in part to the narrative Byrne introduced to string the songs together. Whereas the 2010 *Songs of David Byrne and Brian Eno* tour documentary *Ride, Rise, Roar* focused on behind-the-scenes rehearsals and the work of the choreographers, *American Utopia* starts with Byrne holding a model of a human brain in his hand, musing on the fact that the number of neural connections decreases rapidly as people grow up, while social connections emerge in their place. In a number of affecting monologues interspersed between the songs, the self-professed autistic Byrne muses on what it takes to become human, and to become a better human in a society marked by systemic racism. In the introduction to the closing song – a rousing a cappella rendition of "One Fine Day" followed by the encore of "Road to Nowhere" – Byrne quotes James Baldwin to the effect that it is possible to turn America into "something that has not been done before," and asserts his belief that "there's still possibility, we're work in progress." In the album's press

release, he had already spoken of a "longing for possibility."⁸

In 1798, Friedrich Schlegel famously characterized the historian as "a prophet turned backwards," yet the historical culture that emerged around 1800 has always had a forward-looking side.⁹ The modern study of history has always wavered between positivism and what one could call potentialism. Whereas the academic discipline of history emerged to reconstruct "*wie es eigentlich gewesen*" ("what actually happened"), in Leopold von Ranke's words, certain philosophers and political radicals sought to side with *potential history* – with history as becoming, and as repository of un-actualized possibility and potentiality.¹⁰

In the twenty-first century, one can of course hardly theorize "potentiality" without evoking Giorgio Agamben and his political ontology of potentiality. At its core is a rereading of Aristotle's pair of *dunamis* and *energeia*, or potentiality and actuality. Aristotle had attacked the problem of substance variously by distinguishing between substance and accidents, and between form and matter; in the latter register (that of hylomorphism), form plays the part of substance. *Dunamis* and *energeia*, in turn, can be understood as Aristotle's *temporalization of substance*, as a processual interpretation of substance as contingent upon realization; building materials are a potential building, but the form must be brought out in the process of construction.¹¹ In the nineteenth century, Schelling latched onto this temporalization of ontology in his attempts to counter Hegelianism by ontologizing Hegel's dialectics. "Late Schelling" critiqued Hegelian dialectics for remaining merely logical; insofar as there was any congruence between this philosophy and reality, this was merely accidental. Strictly speaking – so Schelling avers – *being* was unnecessary for Hegel. All that mattered was thought.¹² By contrast, Schelling obsessively attacked the problem of being, that which precedes any philosophy.

When he was appointed as Hegel's successor in Berlin in 1841, Schelling's much-anticipated lectures turned into a notorious PR disaster, becoming the moment many Left Hegelians – Engels perhaps most harshly – turned against him. However, up to that point there had been a careful rapprochement between Schelling and Left Hegelians such as Ruge and Cieszkowski, and a sense of shared philosophical interests and "objective convergences" irrespective of ideological differences.¹³ Schelling and the Young Hegelians both sought an *Aufhebung* of Hegelianism, from the right and from the left, and both wanted to "put Hegel on his feet" by foregrounding the

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außerlogische Wirklichkeit, the *wirkliche Welt*, the *Tat* and *Praxis*. In his 1838 *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie*, Cieszkowski had sought to create a post-Hegelian philosophy of praxis, of the act, whose echoes can be traced from Marx to Debord.¹⁴ Schelling, meanwhile, was interested not so much in the revolutionary transformation of contemporary reality as he was intent on providing a philosophy of being – of being as an ongoing process of transformation that has its unpromising start in a state that he terms the *unvordenkliches Sein*.

How does such an “unprethinkable” and undifferentiated *being* become *becoming*? When the possibility of being an Other, of being otherwise, reveals itself within this immemorial being, it raises itself to the status of *potentia potentiae* – a potential potency that does not yet pass into actuality.¹⁵ When this finally happens, we are dealing with the first proper potency in Schelling’s triad: *das Seinkönnende*, a being (B) that differentiates itself from the inchoate *Ursein* (A). The second potentiality, the *Seinmüssende*, infuses direction and purpose into the potentially equally random and boundless creation that is B. The third potency, the *Seinsollende*, or *selbstbewusstes Können*, is a potentiality to be that never spends itself fully in being, that

always maintains an essential freedom in and from being. This is Spirit: a re-potentialization of being, a reopening of creation. In a Christian register, these three potencies become the personalities of the Trinity: the Father who creates the world by positing a being distinct from Himself, by self-othering (“*Gott ist das Andere*”); the Son who reinjects divine Logos into a fallen world; and Spirit as free subjectivity in a transformed (transfigured) creation.¹⁶ This, to be sure, is a crude CliffsNotes version of the ramshackle system that Schelling develops through a maddening series of iterations and variations.¹⁷

Though beset by construction problems and neo-Catholic scholastics, Schelling’s potentialism (as developed in the *Philosophy of Revelation* and *Philosophy of Mythology*) is nonetheless a crucial moment in modern philosophy. As the “missed encounter” between Schelling and the Left Hegelians suggests, this is a compromised and contorted philosophy of history – a partial historicization of Aristotle that remains trapped in Christian salvation history. Nonetheless, it can be of value precisely in its hesitations and its reluctance to side with a productivism of potentiality, in which any potency only exists in order to pass into actuality.

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Henrike Naumann, *Das Reich*, 2017. Detail of the installation at Belvedere 21, Vienna, 2019-20. Photo: Johannes Stoll. Courtesy Henrike Naumann and KOW Berlin.

Taking cues both from the Classical philosopher and from the German idealist, and noting that Schelling's attempt to think an immemorial being "that presupposes no potentiality" is a rare attempt "to conceive of being beyond the principle of sovereignty," Agamben emphasizes "the potentiality to not-be," which "can never consist of a simple transition *de potential ad actum*. It is, in other words, a potentiality that has as its object potentiality itself, a *potentia potentiae*."¹⁸ While Georges Didi-Huberman has rightly taken issue with the chiliastic streak in Agamben's writings, identifying it with his "Debordian" side, Agamben diverges from Debord's neo-Cieskowskian actionism by focusing on *preferring not to*, on destituting power.¹⁹

For Schelling, potentiality is power over possibility: sovereignty in the strongest possible sense. Potentiality comes into being, manifests itself in being, when the *possibility to be other* is revealed.²⁰ As one of Schelling's listeners in Berlin noted on January 17, 1842, "The substance of this process is the creation of a world in which all possibilities are actualities. The real God is the Creator."²¹ This listener was Kierkegaard, who in his own work on possibility focused not on God the Creator, but on his creature, Adam, and on all individuals since who have lived in sin, reenacting original sin. The protestant Kierkegaard is no less a Christian thinker than the Catholic Schelling, and he repeatedly references the latter (as well as Aristotle on *dunamis/energeia*). However, his focus is on psychology and ethics – on the human individual in a fallen world facing the uncertainty of conflicting or precarious possibilities. "My soul has lost possibility. If I were to wish for something, I would wish not for wealth or power but for the passion of possibility, for the eye, eternally young, eternally ardent, that sees possibility everywhere. Pleasure disappoints; possibility does not."²² Among the pathologies of possibility are anxiety, in which possibilities become a disquieting threat, and boredom, where they are elusive dreams in a humdrum world.²³

The passion for the possible returns in an anguished form in Byrne's pronouncements. After decades of There Is No Alternative ideology, we see a pathos of the possible that aims to quell fears about empty possibilities without potentiality. But what are the *potential possibilities* – as opposed to largely hypothetical ones? In Peter Osborne's characterization, the space of art is *project space*, and hence the space of the projection of possibilities and the presentation of "practices of anticipation."²⁴ And indeed, much contemporary aesthetic practice is possibilist – from speculo-accelerationist "we

were promised jetpacks" retro-Prometheanisms to various forms of social and political practice seeking to foster and form alternative forms of assembly and cooperation.

Artists organizing training camps, such as Jonas Staal with *Training for the Future* and Jeanne van Heeswijk with *Trainings for the Not-Yet*, sound out and strengthen possibilities for alternate social forms.²⁵ In the words of the Alabama collective Our Literal Speed – reused by Tony Cokes – à propos of Rosa Parks and the Selma Bus Boycott, such projects seek to "[concretize] possibility in the here and now," and to establish "rudiments for a vernacular of possibility."²⁶ Which possibilities are – or can be – invested with potentiality? How to foster the "care of the possible," in Isabelle Stengers's words?²⁷ Such are the central questions of possibilist politics and aesthetics, but in the marketplace of possibilist projects it can be hard to see the forest for the trees.

Emergence and Predictive Management

Kierkegaard's philosophy of possibility, and of anxiety as stemming from the "infinity of possibility," has recently been marshalled by Patricia de Vries to analyze "algorithmic anxiety," as manifested for instance in the fear of being replaced by machines, or in the "Black Box anxiety" triggered by the alleged unknowability of algorithms. Analyzing a number of speculative media art projects, De Vries argues that "it is neither the algorithms nor the infrastructures that cause anxiety, but the experience of a lack of possibility," an "algorithmic determinism."²⁸ While such determinism may be characteristic for certain narratives (we will all be replaced by robots), it seems that the more productive level of inquiry concerns the role played by the very concepts of possibility and probability in algorithmic culture.

Raymond Williams developed his account of dominant, residual, and emergent social forms in the late 1970s and early 1980s – at the dawn of the neoliberal era, when a different conception of emergence would come to dominate. By 1988, Ronald Reagan was in Moscow, heralding the new age being born in Silicon Valley:

Like a chrysalis, we're emerging from the economy of the Industrial Revolution – an economy confined to and limited by the Earth's physical resources – into, as one economist titled his book, "The Economy in Mind," in which there are no bounds on human imagination and the freedom to create is the most precious natural resource.²⁹

Of course, the prerequisite for this conception of

a postindustrial economy, and for the widespread belief that new technologies would be inherently liberating, was “the free market,” taken as the natural economic life-form of such freedoms. This was freedom without its old corollary, social atomization and alienation; in some ways, it was a lot like Soviet or Chinese collectivism, minus the top-down force. In March 2000, Bill Clinton sarcastically wished China’s leaders “good luck” in trying to censor the internet.³⁰ Oh, how we laughed!

One of the cheerleaders of the new economy, *Wired*’s Kevin Kelly, published a volume that jumpstarted the Silicon Valley–affiliated “hype surrounding emergent behavior,” in which notions such as the “hive mind” and “swarm intelligence” were applied to networked human (or human-machinic) behavior.³¹ For his book *Out of Control* (1994), he took inspiration from William Morton Wheeler’s “bombshell of an essay” from 1911, “The Ant Colony as an Organism” in the *Journal of Morphology*, in which he analyzed the ant colony as an organism in its own right. As Kelly wrote:

Wheeler saw “emergent properties” within the superorganism superseding the resident properties of the collective ants. Wheeler said the superorganism of the hive “emerges” from the mass of ordinary insect organisms. And he meant emergence as science – a technical, rational explanation – not mysticism or alchemy.³²

The concept of emergence is part of modern genealogies of vitalism and organicism. In her early book *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields* (1976), Donna Haraway distinguishes between the two by noting that vitalists “assert some nonphysical entity – either a nonquantifiable vital force like Driesch’s entelechy or some basic difference between ‘vital substance’ and ordinary matter,” whereas organicists “insist that wholeness, directedness, and regulation can be explained fully without such notions.”³³ Form comes to the fore precisely because as an emergent property, as a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts, life is form:

From an organismic perspective, the central and unavoidable focus of biology is form. Every other consideration of the biological sciences leads up to the task of at last stating the laws of organic form. Form is more than shape, more than static position of components in a whole. For biology the problem of form implies a study of genesis.³⁴

As Andreas Malm has argued, acknowledging the

emergent properties of aggregates does not absolve one from trying to analyze the various factors; the fact that the climate is a complex system with emergent properties does not absolve any human, political, or corporate actors of responsibility. However, for all the debates that are still raging between reductionists and emergentists, “there is one sphere into which [reductionism] seems unable to make any inroads: that of society. Properties of society cannot be derived from the atomistic aggregation of its members.”³⁵ Again, however, this does not let anyone off the hook when it comes to the question of how to live together, how to organize society. In this respect, a certain discourse on emergence has, however, done much to muddy the waters. In Jussi Parikka’s words, “Being connected in networks or in swarms does not imply an emergence of political formation with common goals, and hence addressing swarms as democratic tools in an overly straightforward way should be avoided.”³⁶

The point is not to update Gustave Le Bon’s conservative nineteenth-century account of the “unruly crowd,” seen as dangerous – as a potential mob. Critiquing neoliberal mass events is not to voice some “fear of contagion” à la Le Bon, but to question the means, ends, and forms of contemporary crowd curating.³⁷ Jodi Dean has noted that what gets called a crowd in “crowd intelligence” may be more properly called a data pool.³⁸ Here, we are not so much in the realm of Le Bon as in that of Antoine Augustin Cournot, the theorist of chance who introduced probability into economic analysis. Cournot argued that society keeps getting more organized and therefore more predictable until it operates “like a beehive, a virtually geometric pattern.”³⁹ An offline (yet networked) mass event still generates plenty of dirty data for outreach management and fundraising. Being part of a human swarm at a networked event does not necessarily mean that one is part of an emergent force in Williams’s sense. One may just be an extra in the theater of dominance.

The rhetoric of digital emergentism naturalizes emergence, and provides ways of monetizing it. Shoshana Zuboff has discussed the proliferation of “prediction products”: based on data extraction, future (consumer) behaviors can become transparent. By processing vast quantities of data, algorithms can detect patterns such as “vegetarians miss fewer flights.”⁴⁰ It is no longer merely a matter of extrapolating on the basis of past data, but of real-time data mining and pattern recognition allowing for instant feedback. Thus “a handful of now measurable personal characteristics, including the ‘need for love,’ predict the likelihood of ‘liking a brand’” – or voting for a

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fascist.⁴¹ What pattern of purchases is associated with drinking Diet Coke?⁴² Algorithmic culture is thus based on a probabilistic logic. On the macro level, forms of social emergence become probabilistic trend forecasting. However, as Louise Amoore has argued, when it comes to predicting exceptional, “low probability, high consequence events” such as terrorist attacks or pandemics, a statistical and probabilistic approach meets its limitations; blending data mining with the strategic exercises of “scenario planning,” an entire post-9/11 industry has emerged around the possibilistic logic of unlikely but disastrous events.⁴³

“Atlantic Storm” was a 2005 simulation of a bioterrorist attack that “demonstrated the weakness of international public health and security systems when dealing with a sudden outbreak of highly infectious diseases.”⁴⁴ Minus the bioterrorism element, there has been no shortage of warning voices concerning the potential for highly contagious zoonotic diseases; after the outbreak of Covid-19, media outlets listed people who “seemingly predicted the coronavirus pandemic,” from Bill Gates to Nostradamus.⁴⁵ While the threat of terrorism can be big business, the dominant economic and political forces had little immediate to gain from

the specter of a pandemic. This, of course, did not prevent the emergence of “Plandemic” and “Great Reset” conspiracy theories; such conspiracism misinterprets the probabilist and possibilist regime in terms derived from reactionary nineteenth-century models about powerful elite cabals, integrating real examples of disaster capitalism into logic-proof paranoid plots.⁴⁶

Algorithmic-financial possibilism seeks to capture the future within the ruling regime. Predictive management seeks to make potential history contiguous with the present. However, some actors have recognized the growth potential of emergent forms of fascism, and the unique suitedness of social media for fostering dark conspiracist parodies of the historicist “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*”: fake histories from creationism and flat-earthism to “the Civil War was about states’ rights” and “Hitler was a socialist,” and real-time alternate contemporary histories such as anti-vaxxer and 5G conspiracy narratives. Some of the technologies that have been at the forefront of algorithmic population management are now at the center of a battle over minds: outcries on the far right about censorship on Facebook and Twitter indicate that more centrist forces are intent on wresting back

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Photomontage announcement
for Milo Rau's *General
Assembly/Storming of the
Reichstag*, 2017.

the initiative from the Bannons and Trumps of this world. There is, however, always a more accommodating platform waiting in the wings.

For Williams, emergence “depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form.”⁴⁷ When eco-esoteric anti-vaxxers, self-identified leftists and white nationalists become one QAnon-infested unmasked crowd taking over the streets of Berlin, such a *Querfront* (“cross-front”) is a grim parody of Williams’s insistence that “new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created” – even if this is perhaps best seen as a reemergence of fascism with digital means. As with historical fascism, any new forms and relationships created in the progress are a violent reterritorialization of emancipatory movements: a white pseudo-multitude reasserting its sovereignty over possibility and probability, and ultimately over life and death. Wearing masks is an affront to the sovereign white subject, which finds itself humiliated by looking like a veiled woman or a muzzled slave: hence it cannot be admitted that wearing masks might make sense. Global warming would lead to a curbing of consumption and a shrinking of one’s options (at least when reasoning within the current paradigm), hence it cannot be admitted as fact. From this perspective, migrants and the BLM movement likewise threaten to impose limits on individual sovereignty.

This is the weaponized possibilism of fascism, whose emergence and growth was all too probable. Are there ways of intervening actively in processes of emergence – in forming them? What of truly new forms and relationships – emancipatory and redistributive forms and relationships? This returns us to the matter of potentiality as power over possibility, and thus to the question of sovereignty. As Wendy Brown has noted, sovereignty is a slippery term in political discourse, which can be identified both with the rule of law and its suspension, and with popular legislative power as well as with decisionist executive action.⁴⁸ Brown emphasizes the fundamental tension between sovereignty understood as popular legislative power, as it was conceived by Rousseau and the French Revolution, and sovereignty as decisionist or prerogative state power, as per Carl Schmidt and Agamben. Arguably, modern “popular sovereignty” never overcame the split between the *populus* and the *plebs*, between the *Volk* and the Others, and fascism uses this to wage war on *Volksschädlinge* and *volksfremde Elemente*.⁴⁹ Recent right-wing discourse tirelessly invokes the sovereignty both of the white male subject and that of the nation-state; both are seen as being under attack. The nation-state is seen as

ultimately rooted in strong, self-reliant white subjects who constitute an organic super-subject, a *Volk*, that is or should be the true sovereign; however, this *Volk* is being marginalized through “population exchange” and “white genocide.”⁵⁰

There are, however, also signs of a perverse inclusiveness of neofascism (“Blacks for Trump,” “Gays Against Islam,” Proud Boys of color), which allows for a more up-to-date image and makes for a better simulacrum of the multitude. The sovereignty of “the people” in turn legitimizes sovereign decisions by the potentate. However, even as neofascism claims to strengthen the nation-state and its borders, the status of the national territory is only becoming more problematic.

Split Nations and Dual Power

At the core of Fredric Jameson’s theory of postmodernism was the notion of a “spatial turn” and the waning of historicity, of a modern “experience of temporality.” Jameson stressed that “[the] distinction is between two forms of interrelationship between these two inseparable categories themselves,” and that spatialization refers to “the will to use and to subject time to the service of space.”⁵¹ In this sense, one can discern different regimes of spatialization in the modern era and beyond. The modern nation-state presupposes (and sets about creating) a territorial integrity connected to a more or less homogeneous people. Modern European statecraft is a process of forced homogenization: one sovereign, one language, one territory (through preferably with colonies). As the spatial conduit of Objective Spirit, for Hegel the state is an unavoidable and perhaps unsurpassable outcome of the march of history (which would become the basis for Kojève’s myth of the end of History in the form of the Universal and Homogeneous State).⁵²

In her prescient 2010 analysis of “walled states,” Wendy Brown noted a partial breakdown of the “Westphalian system” of sovereign states that each have their allotted territory. Twenty-first-century states construct costly walls and other barriers that are not so much “iterations of nation-state sovereignty” as they are “part of an ad-hoc global landscape of flows and barriers both inside nation-states and in the surrounding postnational constellations, flows and barriers that divide richer from poorer parts of the globe.”⁵³ In a 2017 preface to a new edition of her book, Brown reflects on Brexit, Trump (and his border wall), and the European response to the “refugee crisis,” which “converts whole nations into European borders” and has led to the establishment of “corridors” for semi-managed population flows.⁵⁴ A key case in her book is the

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Israeli border wall – which Eyal Weizman, in a passage quoted by Brown, characterizes as a “discontinuous and fragmented series of self-enclosed barriers that can be better understood as a prevalent ‘condition’ of segregation.”⁵⁵

With Rafi Segal, Weizman addressed this condition in the 2002 exhibition and publication “A Civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israeli Architecture,” which was later reformatted and integrated into the exhibition “Territories” at KW in Berlin and other venues (cocurated by Weizman, Segal, Anselm Franke, and Stefano Boeri). Extrapolating from the Israeli/Palestinian condition, “Territories” brought together Weizman and Segal’s work with a number of art projects to address the “massive fragmentation of the landscape and the production of hermetic spaces and territorial and legal islands,” ranging from Israeli settlements – often folded into the border wall – to various other kinds of gated communities, camps, and army bases. While Zvi Efrat and Eran Schaerf’s installation *Model State* showed projections of 1950s models for the “tabula rasa” designs of Israeli urbanism and infrastructure in a precarious setting of raised floors and walkways made from pallets, Sean Snyder was represented with his deadpan inventory of the amenities on American military bases, *A Temporary Occupation*. The catalogue also contained his *Shanghai Links*, which connects colonial-era international concessions in Shanghai to a contemporary gated community with a golf course.⁵⁶

Inevitably, in a post-9/11 context, the catalogue analyzed the camp through an Agambenian lens, in terms of the state of exception and its generalization. Antonio Negri has attempted to separate *constituent power* as the perpetual potential of human creative force from actualized *constituted power*; when it becomes formalized and detached from its popular (multitudinous) base, the latter becomes *sovereign power*.⁵⁷ Contra Negri, Agamben conceives of sovereign power as “[dividing] itself into constituting and constituted power,” and insists that the relation between these two is

just as complicated as the relation Aristotle establishes between potentiality and act, *dynamis* and *energeia*; and, in the last analysis, the relation between constituting and constituted power (perhaps like every authentic understanding of the problem of sovereignty) depends on how one thinks the existence and autonomy of potentiality.⁵⁸

In Agamben’s account of the sovereign ban structure, sovereign power is unleashed in the state of exception when constituted power suspends the law, suspends itself, chooses to

not-be.⁵⁹

If Agamben insists on the generalization of the state of exception, beyond the confines of the camp, then the new walls theorized by Brown “would seem to signify a problem usually identified with sovereignty’s external face – enmity, rather than order – and run it through the whole of society, producing pockets and islands of walled-in ‘friends’ amid walled-out ‘enemies.’” However, this is anything but a sign of the state’s health: Brown diagnoses a “detachment of sovereignty from the nation-state,” and argues that beleaguered states are increasingly non-sovereign actors – which raises the question, beyond Agambenian abstractions about the law suspending itself in the sovereign ban, of just where political sovereignty is actually located.⁶⁰ Of course, one answer is that *capital* is an “emerging *global* sovereign.”⁶¹ If for modern political theory, culminating in Schmitt, sovereignty is identified with the nation-state and is conceptualized as *indivisible*, perhaps it is time to reconceptualize sovereignty as constantly contested, renegotiated, parceled up, being *performed* variously by different actors, by various claimants – sometimes successfully and sometimes less so.⁶² The notion of a single sovereign may itself be a theoretical echo of the modern nation-state that needs to be rethought.

Pockets are proliferating, from camps and corridors to freeports. Of course, from the Paris Commune to later communes and autonomous zones, radical movements have long carved out spaces of alterity from the terrain of the nation-state. So have fascists – see, for one example, the German “*national befreite Zonen*.” Meanwhile, one splinter group of the German neo-Nazi scene, the Reichsbürger (Citizens of the Reich), maintain that the postwar Federal German Republic is illegitimate, and does not exist as a sovereign state; it is only the old Reich that still has a valid juridical existence. Held with gnostic fervor, this belief system legitimizes resistance and violence. The subject of Henrike Naumann’s installations *Das Reich* (2017) and *Anschluss '90* (2018), in which videos shown in assemblies of chintzy furniture evoke an alternate reality where the movement took over the German state in 1990, the Reichsbürger’s fixation on state sovereignty as a conduit for white supremacy make them appear like supercharged Trumpists or Brexiteers. Like them, their reactionary ideology is also enabled by social-media filter bubbles; as with many conspiracy theories, its rise coincides with that of Facebook.

On August 29, 2020, a mob of QAnon-addled Covid denialists, many of them waving the old red-white-black *Reichsflaggen* beloved by the Reichsbürger, tried to storm the Reichstag in

Berlin; the storming of the Capitol in Washington on January 6, 2021, was a more consequential remake of this event.⁶³ What happens here is the fascist appropriation of a certain left-wing imaginary. The “Storming of the Winter Palace” during the October Revolution was turned into a proper historical event through its mythifying reenactment in Nikolai Evreinov’s mass spectacle (1920) and Eisenstein’s *October* (1927). On the centenary of the “storming” on November 7, 2017, Milo Rau staged a *Storming of the Reichstag* event whose poster used a photo from the 1920 reenactment, and which took the form of a joyous mass sprint right up to the fence in front of the entrance. In conjunction with Rau’s *General Assembly* project, this sprinting towards the Reichstag aimed at restoring visibility and agency to those excluded from parliamentary representation (from refugees and migrants to bees and cyborgs, in order to ensure Latour-Harawayan theoretical street cred).⁶⁴ By contrast, the 2020–21 events at the Reichstag and the Capitol were the work of white mobs wanting to “take back our country,” which means reversing civil rights gains and intensifying exclusion and disenfranchisement. Of course, this does not prevent Agamben from becoming a farcical Carl Schmitt reenactor by associating himself with a nominally left-wing German *Querfront* weekly that praises the Capitol crowd as brave patriots trying to take back the country from the deep state (apparently, they did not get the “it was antifa” memo).⁶⁵

While the crowd storming the Capitol was (just) prevented from becoming an actual lynch mob, its theatrical aspect – with a lot of selfie-taking and posing, and with one protester sporting a striking part-Viking, part-yak look – made it a perfect event for social media, even if the platforms are now belatedly trying to put the genie back in the bottle. The crumbling nation-state is inhabited by networked communities that no longer share a remotely consensual reality. In Wendy Hui Kyong Chun’s analysis, social media generate not the “imagined communities” of print nationalism, but “imagined networks” that do not amount to “a collective entity traveling together through time, but instead a series of individuals that (cor)respond in their own time to singular, yet connected, events.”⁶⁶ The Capitol storming is such an event, and it shows that the space and time of the nation are themselves becoming increasingly divided and fractured.⁶⁷ Cases such as the Reichsbürger and QAnon show imagined networks giving rise to communities that reimagine the history of the nation, becoming parallel societies; in the process, the space of networks seeps into physical space, exacerbating the differences between city and

countryside, between liberal enclaves and conservative heartlands, between red and blue states. One early Talking Heads track absent from Byrne’s *American Utopia* might have occasioned some liberal self-reflection. “The Big Country” sees the narrator literally and figuratively looking down on flyover country from his airplane window seat: “It’s not even worth talking / about those people down there.”

Certain scenarios disconnect national sovereignty from territorial integrity altogether. Referencing a 2002 interview with Weizman, Brown speculates about a resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict through two “spatially overlapping sovereignties.”⁶⁸ In his novel *The City & The City*, China Miéville – whose doctoral thesis is on the Marxist theory of international law – creates a detective plot that takes place in two cities, Beszel and Ul Qoma, which occupy the same physical or “grosstopical” territory; children are trained from a young age to “unsee” anything and anyone belonging to the other city.⁶⁹ When reading the novel in 2020, it was hard not to think about Beszel and Ul Qoma as different Facebook networks or Telegram groups, ultimately resulting in different affective nations inhabiting the same terrain – which is literalized in American fears of a new Civil War. As there is only one state per territory, in contrast to Miéville’s fabula, the different “nations” struggle for control of the state apparatus. Many who would have preferred a Sanders/AOC ticket were forced to vote for Biden; progressives appear to have little choice but to back the status quo and its institutions, while the conservatives-turned-neofascists aim to infiltrate or take over and undermine these very institutions.

This situation complicates progressive notions of dual power. In Murray Bookchin’s definition, dual power is “a strategy for creating precisely those libertarian institutions of directly democratic assemblies that would oppose and replace the State. It intends to create a situation in which the two powers – the municipal confederations and the nation-state – cannot coexist, and one must sooner or later displace the other.”⁷⁰ Here, then, the state is the power to be opposed and ultimately replaced; however, the second step has proven a rather big hurdle – and at the moment, under the right-wing onslaught, it is often a matter of *defending* the state’s institutions even while building up popular, assemblist power.

Dual power is often discussed with reference to Rojava or Chiapas, the Zone à Défendre near Nantes in France, and various temporary autonomous zones that emerge from urban confrontations. Emancipatory “liberated zones” carved out of the territory of the globalist empire are attempts to build up bases within the

heartlands of empire. In the wake of May '68, movements such as the Dutch Kabouters and the German Spontis attempted to create counterpower from below by creating forms of self-organization and self-government. Their spectacular and mediatized exploits – the Kabouters' declaration of Amsterdam as an "Orange Free State," as in "free from the House of Orange," or the Spontis' squatting and urban warfare in Frankfurt – proved predictably short-lived under the conditions of actually existing capitalism, but for decades autonomists have been creating pockets and zones of opacity. Such desertions, however, should not be fetishized and identified with counterpower as such. They have their necessary counterpoint in activist uses of the infrastructure of the state and of the legal forms that structure relations in the decomposing states of capitalism.

Even while Agamben is busy discrediting himself, there may be residual use-value in (a critical reading of) his writings on destituent power and inoperativity – specifically, in his insistence on opening existing forms of work and activity to "a new possible use."⁷¹ In other words, it is not so much about a *creatio ex nihilo* as it is about adaptation, modification, through habits. An example is a feast, where eating is not primarily about feeding oneself, and where dance liberates the body from "utilitarian movements," instead unfolding "gestures in their pure inoperativity."⁷² Building on but going beyond the concept of "destituent power" as developed by the Argentinian autonomist left, where it referred to inchoate and disruptive popular power preceding the constituent moment,⁷³ Agamben refuses to posit a linear sequence of destituting–constituting–constituted power. He advocates a habitual use of the power to not-be or not-do, against the sovereign ban and its instrumentalism: a new "ontology of potentiality" needs to replace "the ontology founded on the primacy of actuality," and this means exploring forms of *destituent* power that resist being captured and constituted. This points beyond Agamben's own rather abstract calls for a "renunciation of the law" as "a form and a way of life," and to an *immanent desertion* that uses the rights-form against the state of exception.⁷⁴

These may be the master's tools (the tools of sovereignty), but rather than thinking of renunciation as a single dramatic gesture, it should be reconceptualized in terms of long and patient work with the legal form – including the forms of cultural and political institutions, such as parties and parliament. Forms have affordances and limitations. A decentralized network to which David Graeber belonged found out that it was legally impossible for them to

collectively own a car.⁷⁵ However, depending on national legal frameworks, forms such as cooperatives may provide means for an immanent opting-out. Fernando Garcia-Dory's INLAND cooperative would be one example that is of particular interest for the connections – the smooth space – it establishes between the metropolis and the agricultural Hinterland. Meanwhile, official trials are offset by activist tribunals that use legal protocols against the state, and groups of refugees and "illegals" who are only physically (grosstopically) in the same space as Western cultural workers, but not legally, use cultural spaces to break through into visibility.

The renunciation of the law thus leads to deeper immersion that may be a higher form of desertion. In practical terms, this ranges from work with refugees to challenging the organizational structure and *modus operandi* of museums, from creating cooperatives to joining unions to creating parties, and indeed to carving out spaces between and against known legal forms. At stake is indeed "the care of the possible." Emergence may take on unspectacular forms, barely perceptible – a slight shift, an undercommoning of institutional structures, an unforeseen use, a covert abuse of dominant forms.

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The final section of this text is related to an editorial project for BAK's online platform *Prospections*, to be released later this year.

Sven Lütticken teaches art history at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He recently coedited the volumes *Futurity Report* (with Eric de Bruyn, Sternberg Press) and *Deserting from the Culture Wars* (with Maria Hlavajova, BAK/MIT Press). His book *Objections* (*Forms of Abstraction*, Part 1) will be published later this year by Sternberg Press.

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- 1
Adilkno, *Cracking the Movement: Squatting Beyond the Media*, trans. Laura Martz (Autonomedia, 1994), 230.
- 2
Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), 122, 123.
- 3
Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 126.
- 4
On a related note, see Bini Adamczak, "The Promises of the Present," in *Deserting from the Culture Wars*, ed. Maria Hlavajova and Sven Lütticken (BAK/MIT Press, 2020), 95–105.
- 5
On differential inclusion, see Ariella Aisha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso, 2019), 34–37, 132–33.
- 6
Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, trans. David Fernbach (Verso, 2016), 101.
- 7
Naomi Klein, "We Were Told Joe Biden Was the 'Safe Choice.' But It Was Risky to Offer So Little," *The Guardian*, November 8, 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/nov/08/joe-biden-risky-candidate-us-election>.
- 8
See <http://davidbyrne.com/exploration/american-utopia/about>.
- 9
"Der Historiker ist ein rückwärts gekehrter Prophet." Friedrich Schlegel, "Fragments," in *Athenäum*, vol. I.1 (1798), 20.
- 10
Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1535*, vol. I (Reimer, 1824), vi. "Potential history" is of course also the title of Ariella Azoulay's magisterial recent study. While Azoulay drives home the importance of "unlearning imperialism" with great force, I have some issues with her notion of historical reversibility, as well as her unwillingness to consider that within the culture of Western imperialism, there may be forms of difference and dissensus worth taking seriously. This is not, however, the place for the kind of extensive discussion that Azoulay's work deserves.
- 11
It should be noted, however, that Aristotle's terms have proven ambiguous, with *dunamis* having been interpreted variously as logical possibility and as capacity. Both Schelling and Agamben fall into the latter camp. See Kevin Attell, "Potentiality, Actuality, Constituent Power," in *Diacritics* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 39.
- 12
F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, ed. Manfred Frank (Suhrkamp, 1977), 127–35. The majority of this volume consists of the so-called Paulus-Nachschrift, a transcript of the lectures published (against Schelling's will) in 1843. An official version of Schelling's "positive philosophy," as manifested in the *Philosophie der Mythologie* and *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, would only be published posthumously by his sons.
- 13
Manfred Frank, "Einleitung des Herausgebers," in Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, 22.
- 14
Gérard Lebovici's Champ Libre published Cieszkowski's *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie* (1838) in a French translation in 1973, the book having been recommended by Debord. See Debord's letter to Lebovici, April 16, 1976 <http://www.notbored.org/debord-16April1972.html>.
- 15
Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, 156–64.
- 16
Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, 165–83, 194–96.
- 17
In this respect, the posthumous 1858 version of the *Philosophie der Offenbarung* is arguably worse than the pirated Paulus-Nachschrift, which I'm following here.
- 18
Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Raezen (Stanford University Press, 1998), 48; Giorgio Agamben, "Bartleby," chap. 9 in *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (University of Minneapolis Press, 1993), 35–36.
- 19
Georges Didi-Huberman, *Survival of the Fireflies*, trans. Lia Swope Mitchell (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 33–45.
- 20
Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, 162.
- 21
"Der Inhalt des Prozesses ist die Hervorbringung von einer Welt, wo alle Möglichkeiten Wirklichkeiten seien. Der wirkliche Gott ist der, der Schöpfer ist." Kierkegaard's transcript of Schelling's lecture of January 17, 1842, in *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, 440, my translation.
- 22
Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part I* (1843), in *Kierkegaard's Writings*, III, ed. and trans.

Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1987), 41.

23

See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Oriented Deliberation in View of the Dogmatic Problem of Hereditary Sin* (1844), in Kierkegaard's Writings, VIII, ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (Princeton University Press, 1980).

24

Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (Verso, 2013), 175–76.

25

See <https://trainingforthefuture.org/> and <https://www.bakonline.org/program-item/trainings-for-the-not-yet/>.

26

Our Literal Speed, “Notes from Selma: On Non-Visibility” <http://ourliteralspeed.com/about>; text used by Tony Cokes in his work *Evil.27: Selma* (2011).

27

Isabelle Stengers, “The Care of the Possible,” interviewed by Erik Bordeleau, *Scapegoat*, no. 1 (2011): 12–17, 27. In 2019, this interview provided the point of departure and title for the exhibition “Le Soir des Possibles/The Care of the Possible” at 1.1 in Basel.

28

Patricia de Vries, *Algorithmic Anxiety in Contemporary Art: A Kierkegaardian Inquiry into the Imaginary of Possibility* (Institute of Network Cultures, 2019), 33, 92.

29

Ronald Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with the Students and Faculty at Moscow State University” (May 31, 1988), in *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 24, no. 22 (June 6, 1988), 704.

30

Bill Clinton, “Remarks at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies” (March 8, 2000), in *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 36, no. 10 (March 13, 2000), 492.

31

Jussi Parikka, *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 51.

32

Kevin Kelly, *Out of Control: The New Biology of Machines, Social Systems, and the Economic World* (Basic Books, 1994). Quoted from the updated 2009 edition, 11, 14. Available at <https://kk.org/books/other-editions-of-out-of-control>.

33

Donna Jean Haraway, *Crystals*,

Fabrics, and Fields: Metaphors of Organicism in Twentieth-Century Developmental Biology (Yale University Press, 1976), 34.

34

Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields*, 39.

35

Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (Verso, 2018), 69.

36

Parikka, *Insect Media*, 56.

37

Nor, indeed, is it a matter of arguing that “performance is in the wrong place when it’s in the museum, it would seem, because there are lots of people there” – which is the bizarre position that Catherine Wood ascribes to me in “From the Institution of Performance to the Performance of Institutions,” in *The Methuen Companion to Performance Art*, ed. Bertie Feldman and Jovana Stokic (Methuen, 2020), 223. It is never about performance as such, or the mass, the crowd, or the museum, but about specific crowds and performances and museums. Tate Modern is not the museum, nor do its practices always manage to be both “responsively heteronomous and responsibly autonomous.”

38

Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party* (Verso, 2016), 11.

39

Antoine Augustin Cournot, *Traité de l'enchaînement des idées fondamentales dans les sciences et dans l'histoire*, vol. 2 (Hachette, 1861), 342. Quoted and discussed in Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement* (Verso, 1992), 300–301.

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Elena Esposito, “Blindness and the Power of Algorithmic Prediction,” lecture at Maerzmusik in Berlin, 2016 <https://voicerepublic.com/talks/blindness-and-power-of-an-algorithmic-prediction>.

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Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (Profile Books, 2019), 277.

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Louise Amoore, *The Politics of Possibility: Risk and Security Beyond Probability* (Duke University Press, 2013), 40.

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Amoore, *The Politics of Possibility*, 8–10.

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Daniel S. Hamilton and Bradley T. Smith, “Atlantic Storm,” *EMBO Reports*, no. 7 (2006) <https://www.embopress.org/doi/full/10.1038/sj.embor.7400606>. For video documentation of the exercise, see

https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/events-archive/2005_atlantic_storm/flash/index.htm.

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Hillary Hoffer, “Bill Gates Has Been Warning of a Global Health Threat for Years. Here Are 12 People Who Seemingly Predicted the Coronavirus Pandemic,” *Business Insider*, December 15, 2020 <https://www.businessinsider.com/people-who-seemingly-predicted-the-coronavirus-pandemic-2020-3>.

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Naomi Klein, “The Great Reset Conspiracy Smoothie,” in *The Intercept*, December 8, 2020 <https://theintercept.com/2020/12/08/great-reset-conspiracy/>.

47

Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 126.

48

Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Zone Books, 2010/2017), 60.

49

Mikael Spång, *Constituent Power and Constitutional Order: Above, Within and Beside the Constitution* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 128.

50

See my essays “Abdicating Sovereignty,” in *Propositions for Non-Fascist Living: Tentative and Urgent*, ed. Maria Hlavajova and Wietske Maas (BAK/MIT Press, 2019), 81–94, and “Performing Culture Otherwise,” in *Deserting from the Culture Wars*, 21–52.

51

Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1991), 154.

52

See also my essay “Posthuman Prehistory,” in *Cultural Revolution: Aesthetic Practice after Autonomy* (Sternberg Press, 2017), 115–46.

53

Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 36.

54

Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 13. See also Krystian Woznicki, *Undeclared Movements* (b_books, 2020).

55

Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 42.

56

Territories, ed. Klaus Biesenbach, Anselm Franke, Rafi Segal, and Eyal Weizman (KW/Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2003), 38–41.

57

Summarized in Attell, “Potentiality, Actuality, Constituent Power,” 45.

58

Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 41, 44.

59

Attell, “Potentiality, Actuality, Constituent Power,” 45–46.

60

Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 59–64, 98.

61

Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 76. On capital as sovereign, see also Joshua Clover, “The Rise and Fall of Biopolitics: A Response to Bruno Latour,” *Critical Inquiry* blog, March 29, 2020 <https://critinq.wordpress.com/2020/03/29/the-rise-and-fall-of-biopolitics-a-response-to-bruno-latour/>.

62

Tellingly, Brown likens Schmitt to the “quintessential owl of Minerva flying at dusk.” *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 95.

63

See (in German) https://www.rbb24.de/politik/thema/2020/coronavirus/beit-raege_neu/2020/08/berlin-reaktionen-reichsflaggen-absper-rungen-durchbrochen-reichs.html.

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See Milo Rau/IIPM, *General Assembly* (Merve Verlag, 2017). On the “Storming of the Winter Palace,” see Nikolai Evreinov & andere: *Sturm auf den Winterpalast*, ed. Inke Arns, Igor Chubarov, and Sylvia Sasse (Diaphanes, 2017). This publication accompanied an exhibition in the Hartware MedienKunstVerein Dortmund that included documentation of Rau’s *Storming*.

65

The weekly in question is *Demokratischer Widerstand* <https://demokratischerwiderstand.de/>, which to this day lists “Prof. Giorgio Agamben” as the copublisher on its front page. The editors stage themselves as an antifascist resistance movement that is the equivalent of Star Wars’ Rebel Alliance, systematically turning a blind eye to the far-right elements in *Querdenker* and *Querfront* milieus, and collaborating with the conspiracist publicist Ken Jebsen and his KenFM platform. *Demokratischer Widerstand* published one of Agamben’s Corona screeds in issue no. 15 (August 8, 2020), and an interview in which the Covid state of exception is characterized as the most dreadful totalitarian apparatus ever created in no. 23 (October 17). Issues no. 32 (January 9, 2021), 32 (January 16), and 34 (January 32) contain obscurantist justifications for the attack on the Capitol – with Agamben’s name still on the masthead.

66

Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*:

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Habitual New Media (MIT Press, 2016), 27.

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Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Methods, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Duke University Press, 2013), 158–59.

68

Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 40. Brown references Jeffrey Kastner, Sina Najafi, and Eyal Weizman, “The Wall and the Eye,” in *Cabinet*, no. 9 (Winter 2002–03): 31, though I see no direct source for her remark in the online version at https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/9/kastner_najafi.php.

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China Miéville, *The City & The City* (Pan Macmillan, 2009).

70

Murray Bookchin, “Thoughts on Libertarian Municipalism,” 1999 <https://social-ecology.org/wp/1999/08/thoughts-on-libertarian-municipalism/>.

71

Giorgio Agamben, “What Is a Destituent Power?” trans. Stephanie Wakefield, in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, no. 32 (2014): 69.

72

Agamben, “What Is a Destituent Power?” 69–70.

73

Verónica Gago, “Intellectuals, Experiences, and Militant Investigation: Avatars of a Tense Relation,” *Viewpoint Magazine*, June 6, 2017 <https://viewpointmag.com/2017/06/06/intellectuals-experiences-and-militant-investigation/>. For the early articulation of this notion by Colectivo Situaciones (of which Gago was a member), see 19 & 20: *Notes for a New Social Protagonism*, trans. Nate Holdren and Sebastián Touza (Minor Compositions, 2011), 51–53.

74

Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford University Press, 2013), 142.

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David Graeber, *Revolutions in Reverse: Essays on Politics, Violence, Art, and Imagination* (Minor Compositions, 2011), 43–44.

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