



SANDRO MEZZADRA & BRETT NEILSON

THE

P O L I T I C S O F
O P E R A T I O N S

EXCAVATING CONTEMPORARY CAPITALISM

THE POLITICS OF OPERATIONS



**THE
POLITICS
Excavating Contemporary Capitalism **OF**
OPERATIONS**

SANDRO MEZZADRA & BRETT NEILSON

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The State of Capitalist Globalization

The State's Unity in Dispute

As the previous chapter demonstrates, the operations of contemporary capital are surrounded and contested by a huge array of struggles, which confront the interaction of these operations with diverse forms of society and life, as well as their concatenation into wider assemblages of capitalism. These struggles take multifarious forms, are characterized by highly heterogeneous dynamics as far as their social and political composition is concerned, and enter different relations with capital and state apparatuses. Our snapshots and analyses have combined industrial labor struggles and conflicts crisscrossing the development of cutting-edge sectors of capitalist activity. They have included new forms of social unionism, metropolitan uprisings, and disputes that can be grouped around the general topic of the right to the city, as well as struggles along the extractive frontier that relate to questions of Indigeneity, landed property, and environment. Moreover, writing about the “spirit of struggle and insurgency” that permeates the “hustle economy” (Thieme 2013), we have tested the boundary between what is usually acknowledged as a struggle and mundane practices of resistance connected to the reproduction of subaltern lives in many parts of the world (and once again, there is a need to add, well beyond the global

South). This is a particularly important point for us that becomes even clearer, considering daily fights against patriarchy and racism. Struggles of migration are an obvious instance in this regard (see De Genova et al. 2015, 80–83). In previous writings, we have taken inspiration from the daily practices by which migrants challenge, confront, and negotiate borders to forge the notion of “border struggles” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013a, 264–70). The deeply political and even subversive nature of such border struggles was perhaps nowhere so apparent as in Europe in the summer of 2015, in what is aptly called the long summer of migration (Bojadžijev and Mezzadra 2015; De Genova 2017; Hess et al. 2017; Kasperek and Speer 2015).

Some of the struggles that we mention and analyze are seemingly related in only indirect ways to the operations of capital. This is even more the case if we consider other forms of mobilization and political activism, such as the crucially important new wave of feminist struggles that are sweeping many world regions and found a provisional culmination in late 2016 in the organization of impressive “women’s strikes” in countries as diverse as Poland and Argentina—strikes which continued to spread transnationally in 2017 and 2018 as part of the March 8 celebration of International Women’s Day. By pointing to links among these heterogeneous forms of struggle, mobilization, and activism to the contemporary workings of capitalism, we are far from proposing an “economistic” reduction of their meanings, implications, and potentialities. Our discussion of class and class politics in chapter 5 has, instead, made clear that we decidedly refuse to take race and gender, for instance, as “secondary aspects” of some fundamental contradiction between labor and capital. What we want to stress is that the production of subjectivity, which means the field within which gender and race operate as both productive and destructive, is increasingly placed under duress by the extractive logics of contemporary capitalism writ large. Our insistence on the relations and tensions between living labor and social cooperation as a general field of struggle is a way to conceptually register this. Such an insistence allows us to acknowledge the limits of specific struggles, pointing to the need for a political labor of translation to connect them with other struggles. It also cautions against the risk of taking social cooperation as an already constituted political subject. Boundary struggles, where capital confronts the multiple outsides that the expansion of its frontiers encounters and continually produces, become strategically important under such conditions.

The state is always involved in the struggles we describe, whether it is through its repressive action and apparatuses (as it is most often the case), as an addressee of more or less radical contestation or claims, as complicit with operations of capital, or as a negotiating and mediating actor. It is from the point of view of such struggles that we undertake an investigation of the contemporary transformations and roles of the state in this chapter. Our analysis of the state is framed within a more general interrogation of the political nowadays, which we think is important if we are to think of struggles beyond mere resistance—if we are to contribute to opening up, against the background of really existing struggles, a horizon of life beyond capitalism. What can the role of the state be in such efforts? And even more generally, what is the position of the state within a politics of emancipation and liberation? Needless to say, this is not a new question. But it takes new forms today as the rich, contradictory, and complex experiences of “progressive” governments in Latin America over the last long decade (and much more briefly in a European country such as Greece) demonstrate. A realistic analysis of the contemporary state and its multiple entanglements with the operations of capital is particularly urgent from this perspective.

As we mentioned at the end of chapter 1, such a realistic analysis cannot take the unity of its object as given. This is a crucial methodological caution that should characterize contemporary discussions of the state. While we have dwelled on the question of the unity of capital, on its elusive and complex character, an emphasis on the unity of the modern state has been characteristic of mainstream political and legal theories since the early formulations of sovereignty by Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes. This remains true even if the constitutional articulation of this unity, including federal arrangements and various degrees of decentralization, has been a prominent topic of discussion in the history of those theories, particularly in the wake of the “Atlantic revolutions” that shook the Americas and Europe in the late eighteenth century (Klooster 2009). The contemporary situation is significantly new in this regard. This is not to say that it is completely unprecedented. We have hinted at some uncanny elements of continuity with the political and legal histories of modern empires, which seem to us more intriguing than the widespread parallel with the European Middle Ages. We hint again at this point later in the chapter. For now, we want to stress the relevance of analyses that point to increasing processes of governmentalization of the state to demonstrate that its institutional unity is placed under duress by contemporary developments. Independently of

their different genealogies, the notions of governance and governmentality have provided many scholars (critical and mainstream) with a privileged analytical perspective on the transformations of political processes and institutions within a neoliberal framework (see, e.g., Dardot and Laval 2014; Ives 2015; Jardim 2013; Walters 2012). Considering the prominent roles played in the analytical scope of such notions by risk management, “human capital,” and public-private partnerships, it is easy to understand that operations of capital haunt the transformations they help us to grasp and describe. The very boundary between the political and the economic, between state and capital, becomes blurred in such a framework, as is apparent in the “anticipatory” governmental patterns that prevail in the field of security (see Amoore 2013). State agencies, institutional structures, and administrative branches are powerfully reshaped and often even fragmented by such processes, which are at the root of a multiplication of gaps, tensions, and conflicts within and among them.

Anthropologists and ethnographers have made important contributions to a grounded study of such processes of governmentalization (see Ferguson and Gupta 2002). “All claims about the state [today],” writes Akhil Gupta in *Red Tape* (2012, 52), an impressive work on the governance of poverty and structural violence in India, “should be countered with the question, Which state?” Sure, Gupta refers here specifically to India and the confounding proliferation of different levels of government; heterogeneous agencies and bureaus; and the various policies, programs, and people that constitute the state in that context. But his question also has relevance beyond that particular case. Not only does it remind us of the wide array and heterogeneity of states that populate the present global landscape, but it also encourages, and even compels, an investigation of how the unity of all these different kinds of states, as we contend, cannot be taken for granted. A spatial take on the transformations of the state further entrenches this point, shedding even more light on severe challenges to the unity of the state. More than ten years ago, the urban theorist Neil Brenner began to carefully map processes of “rescaling” state space. These processes have been under way since the 1970s and disrupt the “project of national territorial equalization” that ran parallel to the development of industrial capitalism. “It is no longer capital,” Brenner (2004, 16) writes, “that is to be molded into the (territorially) geography of state space, but state space that is to be molded into the (territorially differentiated) geography of capital.” This general point retains its validity, even beyond Brenner’s theoretical framework. When one considers the multiple, heterogeneous,

and fuzzy array of spatial arrangements that we have often mentioned in this book—from special economic zones to infrastructural and industrial corridors, from supply chains to extractive enclaves—the implications of the geographical variegation of contemporary capitalism for state space become even clearer. The notion of “extrastatecraft,” recently elaborated by Keller Easterling (2014, 15) to grasp a set of spaces and “often undisclosed activities outside of, in addition to, and sometimes even in partnership with statecraft,” nicely captures these implications, while at the same time highlighting the overlapping and collisions among jurisdictions, orders, and actors that characterize sites such as special economic zones.

Looking at contemporary debates on the state and sovereignty, the emphasis on states of exception that shape another series of arguments epitomized by the work of Giorgio Agamben (see, esp., Agamben 1998, 2005) seems, by contrast, to take the unity of the state for granted—although always on the verge of its renewed foundation through the moment of sovereign decision. We do not need to rehearse here our critique of such arguments (see Mezzadra and Neilson 2013a, 147–48, 189; Neilson 2010), which ultimately rely on a Schmittian understanding of the relation between norm and exception that is not able to grasp the contemporary operation of exception “through the norm itself, or more precisely, via the movements of a mobile norm” (Amoore 2013, 17). While this is a strategically important point, which has to do with the very meaning of “norm” and “normality” in the present, the emphasis on sovereignty in arguments surrounding states of exception is nevertheless important insofar as it registers the need to counterbalance the vanishing of sovereignty itself in many studies of governance and governmentality.

We suggest there is a need to grasp both the salience of processes of governmentalization and the persistence of sovereignty, as well as their mutations beyond the state to understand the evolution of political processes and institutions in the world today. Such an effort must take into account new formations of “legal pluralism” and the emergence of a fragmentary but no less effective “global law” along sectoral and functional lines, whose best-known and most discussed example is the *lex mercatoria* (see Teubner 2012). From a different theoretical angle, which effectively emphasizes the relation between law and boundaries, as well as between legal order and its constitutive outside, a recent book by Hans Lindahl (2013) takes the investigation of legal spaces of globalization a step further, pointing to the manifold “sharply demarcated spatial boundaries and other, more or less fuzzy boundary zones and borderlands” that proliferate within, across,

and beyond states (Lindahl 2013, 75; see also Menga 2014). We could even say—to produce resonances with our conceptual language—that these boundaries and borderlands are produced by the multiple ways in which legal orders such as *lex mercatoria*, *lex constructionis*, and *lex digitalis* hit the ground. Within these border zones, struggles proliferate, often through practices of literal trespassing, as Lindahl is keen to show in his discussions of Indigenous resistance to oil drilling in Colombia and land occupations by Brazil’s Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra (Landless Workers’ Movement; Lindahl 2013, 53, 60–64). These struggles, for Lindahl, take on crucial constitutive characters also from a legal point of view.

Lindahl argues that “spatial closure” defines not only legal orders constructed around political and legal borders (state law and international law) but also those that apply within operative spaces established by infrastructural and commercial connections. He gives the example of multinational corporations, which extend their operations across multiple state territories and whose “internal regulations,” a number of legal theorists have found, constitute “legal orders which resist accommodation on either side of the correlation between municipal and international law” (Lindahl 2013, 56). Putting aside the issue of the private character of multinationals, Lindahl accepts that they challenge understandings of law based exclusively on state territoriality. But he also resists the notion that they produce forms of “global law,” indicating that they “do not claim to regulate the whole face of the earth” and operate “more like movable enclaves” (Lindahl 2013, 57). The oil multinational Royal Dutch Shell, for instance, maintains buildings, laboratories, computer facilities, oil extraction rigs, refineries, service stations, and other infrastructure across many different global sites. Again employing our conceptual idiom, we can say that this disjointed territorial arrangement specifies the sites where the operations of capital that enable the company’s extractive activities hit the ground, even if the effects of these activities can spiral beyond the point of impact. Shell is free to move its activities to different sites, but in legal terms it constitutes a “(more or less movable) spatial unity” linked to “a first-person plural perspective in terms of the normative point guiding its various activities” and “limited in terms of the inside/outside distinction” (Lindahl 2013, 57). Thus, when environmental activists occupied the Brent Spar oil platform operated by Shell in the North Sea, they disrupted this spatial unity, creating a “limit” among sites that come under the company’s jurisdiction and a “strange outside” (Lindahl 2013, 58). Moreover, this outside “is not merely ‘figura-

tive' or 'metaphorical'" (Lindahl 2013, 74). It marks the "spatial limit" of legal order, even if such demarcation calls "forth altogether different sorts of scales of preciseness and impreciseness of legal boundaries" from those "governing state borders" (Lindahl 2013, 75–76).

It is tempting, but too easy, to correlate this constitutive legal "outside" with the multiple outsides we have associated with the prospective and extractive operations of capital. Although legal principles and actions can be understood in an operative sense, and operations can be limited by or transgress legal orders, these discrepant outsides cannot be consigned to some pure space of externality because they are always generated by boundary and border struggles in which the very difference between inclusion and exclusion is at stake (Mezzadra and Neilson 2012). As much as it would be a mistake to suggest that the movable "spatial unity" of a multinational corporation is more operative than legal in nature, so it would be wrong to emphasize the legal unity of the state at the expense of its operative capacities. Michael Mann's discussion of the state's "infrastructural power," which he describes as "the capacity to actually penetrate society and implement logistically political decisions" (Mann 1984, 170), is only one register of this. In her fascinating study of the Ghanaian customs authority, the anthropologist Brenda Chalfin (2010, 24–25) cites the state's capacity to extract revenue through taxation as a crucial instance of such infrastructural power. She quotes the economic historian Gabriel Ardant (see Chalfin 2010, 25), who stresses the financial basis of modern statehood and argues that "the fiscal system was the transformer of the economic infrastructure into political structure." Today this situation seems reversed, even in the midst of protracted financial crisis. Writing about the privatization of "public" finances, Wolfgang Streeck (2014) argues that the *Steuerstaat* (tax state) has been transformed into a *Schuldenstaat* (debt state). Financial institutions have become at once moneylenders for states, which rely more on credit than taxation to balance their budgets, and beneficiaries of state (public) money that prevents them from collapsing. As Étienne Balibar (2013) writes, these institutions "have an almost absolute command over the government *both* because they are creditors and because they are debtors." Understanding the changing position of the state in contemporary globalization means interrogating this command.

In chapter 2, we discussed how operations of capital increasingly collapse economic and political power. The question of how financial markets and institutions transform and limit the powers of the state challenges us

to further specify the nature of this power. A key difficulty here is to register the manipulative and seemingly coercive qualities of this power while remaining attentive to the volatility and vulnerability of financial markets. Although governed by different kinds of institutions (some of them state apparatuses) and algorithmic processes, these markets are given to patterns of speculation and appropriation that are inherently unstable and, as we have seen in the instance of flash crashes, increasingly detached from cyclical rhythms of crisis and recovery. Balibar (2013, part 3) attempts to capture the “*conflictual*” and “*disseminated*” power of finance by describing it as a form of “*quasi-sovereignty*.” Working in analogy with the power exercised by modern empires over dependencies and protectorates—which we discussed in chapter 3—he suggests that the “new sovereignty” of the global financial market “substitutes (or subordinates) the old imperialist structures of the world-economy, and in this sense it could be called an Empire (or *imperium*) that—much more than any military power today (i.e., with less possibilities of resistance)—has restricted the independence of states and nations” (Balibar 2013, part 3). Yet Balibar (2013, part 2) also recognizes that sovereignty requires the “legitimation of power,” which is a process undergoing “profound ideological transformation” in a situation where “credit mechanisms . . . have become in practice the ‘regulators’ of society.” The production and stakes of legitimacy shift when states apply rules and strategies imposed by financial markets, instituting austerity, privatization, and welfare rollback measures that exacerbate inequalities and accelerate the general precariousness of populations. The “*decomposition of the people*” that results from the “*paradoxical organization, by the State itself, of its incapacity to resist pressures from the financial sector*” affects “not only the independence of the nation but also the legitimacy of the state” (Balibar 2013, part 3). At the same time, it illustrates how the quasi-sovereignty of finance capital is “negatively defined” rather than offering a “unified or effective power dictating positive behaviors to its ‘subjects’” (Balibar 2013, part 3). This negative and paradoxical power characterizes what we call the state of capitalist globalization, a phrase that registers both the global condition pertaining under the rule of contemporary capital and the particular qualities and transformations of the state within this configuration. To further analyze the workings of this quasi-sovereign form of power, it is necessary not only to consider how it reaches beyond the operations of finance, but also to investigate how it multiplies and explodes the state form, creating new and hybrid experiences of state and extra-statehood that make even the post–World II state seem unfamiliar.

Figures of the Contemporary State

Globalization affects not only capitalism but also the state. We may be suspicious about the use of globalization as a portmanteau concept and aware of the uneven dynamics of denationalization and renationalization that have accompanied its unfolding, but as soon as one recognizes that the state itself has been transformed by globalization, it is necessary to take stock of its effects not only on economic processes but also on political institutions and environments. In other words, it is insufficient to approach the state as a stable entity defined within the parameters of territory, community, and legitimacy, which is then either augmented or diminished by globalizing forces. Such an approach has been a dominant tendency over the past few decades, leading to a series of prognostications concerning the decline or withering away of the state, on one hand, or its continued relevance and unchanged form, on the other. We do not find either of these prognoses convincing, since the interaction between state and capital is not a zero-sum game. Globalizing processes erode the borders between economics and politics, state and capital. Although it would seem otherwise from mainstream debates, this erosion occurs not simply because globalization is about more than the forging of free trade deals, the growth of direct foreign investment, the deregulation of financial markets, and the cross-border mobility of people. As discussed in chapter 2, the fabrication of the world market is inherent within operations of capital and is not a process that was initiated in the late twentieth century alone. To speak of the political dimensions of these operations requires something more than the identification of a sphere of political globalization, which sits alongside economic, cultural, and social globalization and is usually identified with the formation and influence of supranational and nongovernmental organizations. Working from the description of quasi-sovereignty offered earlier, we can begin to investigate mutations in the workings and articulation of power that reshape the very form of the state and multiply the different figures that it assumes on the world stage. Once the global history of the modern state is taken into consideration, uncanny continuities and mutations of older institutional arrangements abound.

One way to explain the political effects of globalization, especially during its most recent phase, is to say that it involves a defeat of politics by economics. Such a proposition captures something of the transformations that have accompanied a burgeoning but heterogeneous neoliberalism. However, it fails to recognize the political nature of the depoliticization that

many critical thinkers associate with the increasing dominance of technical and managerial modes of governance (see, e.g., Bourdieu 2002; Swynedouw 2016; Wang 2003). Depoliticization names the requirement for a political force and form capable of instituting and preserving the conditions for an ascendancy of the economic. We might say that the state, under globalization, has provided such a force and form or that it has provided the political conditions under which the capacity for politics to resist or restrain the operations of capital has been diminished. But, again, this does not imply an exclusively negative process by which the state is stripped of powers it once possessed, or, inversely the possibility that the restoration of such powers might reverse or tame the capacity for capital itself to act politically. We are arguing not for the autonomy of the political under the powers of the state but, rather, for recognition that the state is not the only seat of politics and the need for an alternative radical politics capable of confronting capital to arise from political practices that mingle with economic, social, and cultural forms of life.

More than a decade ago, Saskia Sassen (2006) coined the term “denationalization” to describe how much of the global is constituted from within the national. Although the term sounds like it addresses a winding back in the communal dimension of national belonging—or the “decomposition of the people” (Balibar 2013, part 3) that we referred to earlier—its range of reference is actually wider. Sassen (2006, 22) uses it to describe multivalent dynamics that change “what is ‘national’ in . . . institutional components of states linked to the implementation and regulation of economic globalization.” Denationalization “can function as a creative force rather than simply as a negative consequence of overwhelming external global power” (23) and affects realms as diverse as “policies, capital, political subjectivities, urban spaces, [and] temporal frames” (1). Furthermore, it has partial effects and can “feed nationalizing dynamics in separate though at times connected domains—for example, the denationalizing of certain components of our economy and the renationalizing in certain components of our immigration policy” (2). This is why renationalizing dynamics—evident, for instance, in the reintroduction of border controls in Europe’s Schengen Area, Brexit, Donald Trump’s policy preferences regarding tariffs and travel bans, the burgeoning of “mercantilism” in many parts of the world, and the promotion of return migration by Asian states—should be seen not as an undoing of globalization but, rather, as part of its uneven and multivalent effects. As Sassen writes, “What was bundled up and experienced as a unitary condition,” the “national assemblage” of ter-

ritory, authority and rights, reveals “itself to be a distinct set of elements, with variable capacities for becoming denationalized” (6)—and, we would add, renationalized.

Again, the unity of the state is at stake in its interactions with and internalization of globalizing dynamics. The effects of these processes are myriad and kaleidoscopic. Following Sassen, however, some tendencies can be identified. First is the reorganization of power within states, usually involving the shifting of power to the executive branch of government. Second is the emergence of privatized realms of authority for the governance of specialized domains, displacing and sitting alongside *raison d'état* in much the same way as the normative realms sketched out, although from different theoretical angles, by thinkers such as Gunther Teubner (2012) and Hans Lindahl (2013). Third is the circulation of the logics of global capital within state public spheres and their integration into policy. These tendencies may not necessarily dissolve the formal unity of statehood, but they disarticulate it internally. We think the observation and recognition of these changes is a matter of political realism. In so doing, we seek to steal the mantle of realism from those versions of international relations that posit the state as the fundamental unit of global politics—a rational actor within a field of power.

Ever since the publication of Rob Walker's *Inside/Outside* (1993), the problems with assuming a bounded state sovereignty have dominated critical debate in international studies. In debates about security, for instance, it is no longer possible to posit separate internal and external spheres of security—social security and national security—that come together in the post-World War II “welfare-warfare” state (Neocleous 2006). Didier Bigo (2001, 2016) uses the topological figure of the Möbius strip to illustrate how lines of internal and external state security and sovereignty have merged and become difficult to differentiate. The internal disarticulation of the state, which was always linked to its negotiation and incorporation of external factors, thus becomes increasingly hard to distinguish from its outward relations, whether they exist with states, markets, corporations, electronic networks, large-scale infrastructural installations, or other kinds of institutional bodies. The idea of an international order, whether rules-based or anarchic, is displaced or relativized by a complex set of power dynamics that are no longer strictly international in the sense that they are not exclusively articulated among states. But to recognize this is not yet to account for the changing role of the state, and, in particular—if we are always to ask, “Which state?”—the way in which the political form

of the state has fragmented into many different figures, none of which seem able to supply a general theory or baseline model to inform theoretical arguments about the state's position in capitalist globalization.

Speaking of figures of the contemporary state, we cannot follow the same path as we did in chapter 3, where we provided a general typology composed of three prevailing figures of the state after World War II. Certainly, the historical gaze makes such typological exercises easier. But there is something more at stake here. To put it briefly, the blurring of the boundaries of the state and the powerful challenges to its unity hinder a clear identification of the main features that define it across different geographical, economic, and cultural settings. It is important to stress that we employ the word “boundaries” here in a very general sense, referring both to geopolitical borders and to the internal demarcations that distinguish the domain of the state from other domains—most notably, from those of capital's operations. One of the implications of such a conceptual predicament is the proliferation of labels, prefixes, and adjectives that populate discussions about the transformations of the state form today. Even in debates that are mainly focused on the West, such definitions as the ones we mentioned—from the debt to the security and surveillance state, from the workfare to the entrepreneurial state—point to relevant aspects of the contemporary state, but they are unable to grasp its “figure” in a unitary way.

Interestingly, and consistently with the point we made earlier discussing Walker and Bigo, analyses that attempt to bridge the securitization and neoliberalization of the state—for instance, in the United States—point to the fact that “the contemporary spatialization of security increasingly blurs notions of ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ such that domestic and foreign policy might be seen to operate in a continuum rather than as discrete moments of policy” (MacLeavy and Peoples 2010, 740). This blurring of boundaries between the inside and the outside is even more evident if we consider other conceptual labels that circulate in the current critical discussion. Take the notion of a “logistical state,” which has been proposed by several authors, often on the basis of Henri Lefebvre's work on the state in the 1970s (see, e.g., Grappi 2016, 25–28; Toscano 2014). In his elaboration of this concept, Ned Rossiter emphasizes the enmeshment of the logistical state within global networks of supply chains and its “fusing” with finance (Rossiter 2016, 170–71). He concludes that the “territorial imaginary of the logistical state is constituted through network topologies and infrastructures of extraction in ways that do not necessarily conform to the territorial logic of the nation-state” (Rossiter 2016, 173). We are again confronted with

the blurring of the boundary between inside and outside, which means the blurring of a founding conceptual and political feature of the modern state.

Widening the analytical scope and taking a global perspective—as we try to do throughout this book—the multiplication of labels and the variegation of the state landscape they signal become more puzzling and confusing. Although their heyday seems to have passed, the use of terms such as “failed state”—to aggregate instances as diverse as Colombia, Haiti, Somalia, and Tajikistan (Call 2010)—and “rogue state” marked an important period of political debate and history in the 1990s and 2000s. Critical analyses of discourses of state failure effectively demonstrate their implication within colonial and postcolonial assemblages of power (Figueroa Hella and Borg 2014), while the notion of rogue states to denounce so-called state-sponsored terrorism has been part and parcel of US political strategies, justifying wars that—to say the least and to put in a sober way—have not been particularly successful. Writing in the early 2000s, Jacques Derrida was keen to shift attention from states designated rogue to those that claimed the monopoly of making this designation, noting that the latter—“namely, the United States and its allied states”—in “taking the initiative of war, of police or peacekeeping because they have the force to do so . . . are themselves, as sovereign, the first rogue states” (Derrida 2005, 102). Sure, one can think of a certain irony of history reading today, with the “Islamic State” in mind, Derrida’s statement about the “overwhelming and all-too-obvious fact” that “after the Cold War, the absolute threat no longer took a state form” (Derrida 2005, 104). His *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* is nevertheless a remarkable piece of political analysis, especially for its emphasis on the need to read the intensified use of the notion of rogue states, which had its roots in the Cold War, as a symptom of growing anxiety in the face of the blurring of political concepts that hitherto had built the scaffolding of the state form and of international relations.

Turning our attention to definitions of the state that are tailored to specific instances or regions, we encounter a wide array of developmental (in the mainstream sense that we discussed in chapter 3) and post-developmental (in a critical sense, which is closer to our conceptual language) state formations. These range from the “petro-modernist state” in the Persian Gulf—which balances the persistent privilege of royal families against its positioning in the global capitalist system through the exploitation of a huge mass of migrant workers (AlShebabi 2015, 10)—to the various instantiations of a “post-neoliberal” state over recent years in Latin America (Grugel and Riggirozzi 2012; for a critique, see Dávalos 2010).

In war-torn regions, “militia states” and “warlord politics” (Reno 1998) proliferate, with characteristics that resonate with the securitization of globally connected “extraction enclaves” in African “oil states” (Ferguson 2006, 204). As the case of Darfur, along the border between Sudan and Chad, tragically demonstrates, even when oil is just a rumor about a future possibility, it spurs conflicts and has socially and spatially disintegrative consequences (Behrends 2008). Needless to say, more variants should be taken into consideration when exploring the globally variegated state landscape of the present—for instance, religion, which plays crucial roles in state formation not merely in “extreme” (although completely different) cases such as the “theocratic republic” of Iran and the Islamic State but also in many other places, from Nigeria to Israel, India to the United States, the Middle East to Indonesia. Such a questionable notion as the “civilizational state” also circulates in analyses of India and China (Wei 2012, 24; Zhang 2012), while both of these countries can also be analyzed from a more interesting and productive angle as instances of “continental states,” a category that also fits the United States.

Questions of democracy, authoritarianism, and even “totalitarianism” have also been tested by recent developments—for instance, in debates surrounding the rise of China. On this point we follow the position elaborated by Wang Hui, who has brilliantly analyzed the transformation of the relations between China’s Communist Party and the state from the “party-state” to the “state-party” model (Wang 2009). He understands this transformation as a result of the interrelated dynamics of “bureaucratization of the party” in the wake of the failure of the cultural revolution and “the marriage of the party and capital in the process of the corporatization of government during market reform” (Wang 2016, 155). What makes Wang Hui’s analysis particularly interesting for us is the fact that he takes the state-party model as a specific instantiation in China of a more general crisis of political representation and “statification” of parties, which are “common to all political systems” as “a product of neoliberalism in the political sphere” and as a consequence of ensuing depoliticization (Wang 2016, 296). From this point of view, while discussions of “post-democracy” (Crouch 2004) and “deconstitutionalization” (Amendola 2016) abound in the West, the whole question of a “democratic transition” in China is productively displaced from the realm of supposedly normative models of representative democracy to the search for new forms of “autonomy,” social mobilization, and working-class politics that cannot be contained within “the model of traditional socialism based on the nation-state as a unit” (Wang 2016, 296).

What interests us here are precisely the kind of resonances produced by an analysis such as that offered by Wang Hui of the state party in China. We have pointed to Balibar's use of the notion of quasi-sovereignty to come to terms with the power of finance. As we show in chapter 3, this is a category that has its own history in colonialism and colonial law. It is closely connected with the notion of the "quasi-state," widely employed to refer to unrecognized "de facto states," "para-states," or "pseudo-states" often linked with the efforts of secessionist movements (Kolstø 2006) or to such entities as the Kurdistan Regional Government in post-Saddam Iraq (Natali 2010). It is interesting to note that the same label is also used in Europe, where several scholars define the European Union as an "unfinished federal quasi-state" (see, e.g., Pelinka 2011), while at the same time member states could be defined as quasi-states, given their enmeshment within an assemblage of power that radically limits their formal sovereignty in such crucial fields as monetary and fiscal politics. A final example that cannot go unanalyzed is the concept of the "gatekeeper state," whose origins can be traced back to the work of the Marxist and Pan-Africanist writer Walter Rodney (1972) and that was later formalized by Frederick Cooper in *Africa since 1940* (2002; see also Chari 2015). In the wake of incomplete decolonization in Africa, this notion was meant to emphasize the continuity between colonial administrations and postcolonial states on that continent, shedding light on their strategic roles in controlling and organizing the junctures between domestic economies and the world market. While carefully keeping in mind the peculiarity of African conditions after decolonization, we think there is something to be gained analytically by using the notion in different and unexpected contexts—for instance, by approaching the United Kingdom as a gatekeeper state, at least since the City of London situated itself in the Thatcher years "as a strategic refueling stop on the migration routes that the world's capital took to reach New York" (Varoufakis 2011, 139). More generally, we can even ask whether all contemporary states (although in crucially different ways) are not in some way gatekeeper states.

Reckoning with the State

As we have argued, powerful transformations are disrupting and reshaping each of the three constitutive elements of the state identified by traditional political and legal theories: territory, people, and sovereignty. While heterogeneous factors come into play in these transformations, operations of

capital play prominent roles in prompting and orchestrating them. One has only to think about the many limits placed on the independence (and therefore the sovereignty) of states by a fabric of 24/7 global financial operations to get an intuitive image of these roles. As we amply demonstrated in earlier chapters, logistical operations both work the boundaries of the geopolitical borders of states, traversing their territories, and “seam” together sites that are unevenly distributed across the globe. The legal construct of territoriality characteristic of the state is increasingly placed under duress by such operations and by the related emergence of heterogeneous spatial formations—including the space of the “cloud,” whose *nomos* is no less compelling for being named in such an ethereal way (Bratton 2015). As far as the “people” are concerned, processes of differential inclusion and exclusion connected to the neoliberalization and governmentalization of the state—which means the infiltration of the operative logic of capital into state apparatuses—profoundly alter the shape of citizenship, while migratory movements continue to challenge the boundaries of citizenship itself. What we have described as the disarticulation of the dyadic figure of the “citizen-worker” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013a, 243–51) is particularly relevant here.

Nevertheless, states continue to exist and to perform important tasks in the global present. There is therefore a need to go beyond the boundaries of traditional state theory and its normative assumptions, as well as its baseline models. What we need to undertake is a more “positive” description (positive in analytical terms) of what states are actually doing today without presuming to know already what the state is or might be. In the previous section of this chapter we have outlined some general tendencies following Sassen (2006), but what we have in mind here is a less integrative approach. Take Sassen’s discussion of the increase in executive power within states over past decades. This, again, is a tendency that is not completely new, since its manifestations can be traced at least back to the early twentieth century and figured prominently in debates on the incipient crisis of the modern state that we recalled in chapter 3. Sassen’s observation is nonetheless acute and timely, based as it is on an analysis of the internal state reorganization of power in the United States, particularly during the presidency of George W. Bush. She notes that “elements of this shift are evident in a growing number of states around the world” (Sassen 2006, 168), but the absence of a wider investigation limits her understanding of some of the more striking manifestations of this trend, including those that have occurred in the decade since her intervention. The capitalist crisis

of 2007–2008 has accelerated and mutated these changes by increasing social and economic polarization and displacing working populations in ways that have opened political opportunities for “populist” leaders and ideologies—not least, those revolving around race, gender, and migration. This is not the occasion to interrogate the suitability of the term “populism” to describe these developments, although it is interesting to note that most accounts of populism (see, e.g., Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Laclau 2005; Oudenampsen 2010) do not contemplate changes to the state form. If we consider the augmentations to executive power occurring in the world today, however, it is possible to discern a shift in the way states formally distribute power—internal changes that are often driven by attempts to reverse or deny the blurring of inside and outside that is such a prominent feature of the contemporary state.

Take, for example, Russia, where Vladimir Putin has extended the presidential pyramid, or *vertikal*, established by Boris Yeltsin with the constitutional crisis of 1993 to establish “a distinct form of state populism that is a response to the expectations of the majority of the population who self-identify as ‘the people’ by way of its leader” (Clément 2015). Or consider the administration of Narendra Modi in India, which operates under the slogan “Minimum Government, Maximum Governance.” In this case, executive power has been bolstered by limiting parliamentary government, political transparency, and social dissent (Ruparelia 2015). In the case of Egypt’s General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who seized power in a coup after the electoral victory of the Muslim Brotherhood following the uprisings of 2011, legislative power has been regularly bypassed—including on the occasion of the secretly negotiated ceding of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia, an arrangement that has led one commentator to suggest that in Egypt there exists an “island of executive power” (Kaldas 2016). The chase for an “executive presidency” on the part of Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, by contrast, has been reinforced by the failed coup of July 2016, an event that has buttressed rule by decree, imprisonment of political opponents, and attacks on the independent press (Cizre 2016). In Hungary, the constitution has already changed to limit the judiciary’s power, and further anti-migrant amendments are under way, cementing the country’s transition to what Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has called an “illiberal state” (Tóth 2014). Meanwhile, in the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte’s “war on drugs” provides a platform on which extensions to executive power achieved under the presidency of Benigno Aquino can be furthered (Curato 2017). Needless to say, these situations are diverse, and it is always possible

to find counterexamples. In Brazil, for instance, the “parliamentary coup” against Dilma Rousseff has exposed limits to executive power in a state where the presidency is traditionally quite strong, although the right-wing mobilization in play has resonances with the dynamics observable in the situations noted earlier (Santos and Guarnieri 2016). The election of Donald Trump as president of the United States in November 2016, with the ensuing multiplication of conflicts with the judicial system, adds further and crucial nuances to this global political landscape. The point is that a vast undercurrent is reorganizing the institutional arrangement of power within states, and while it is possible to point to instances where it is less pronounced, this shift needs to be noted in any “positive” description of what states are doing in contemporary times.

In investigating this shift as a question of state form, we distance ourselves both from liberal outrage at the upsetting of balanced powers and its grotesque inversion in celebratory authoritarianism or bear-baiting accusations such as the charge of “judicial activism” that emerges when courts attempt to curb executive prerogative. Instances of the latter point abound, from Italy to Brazil, to mention just two cases. The question for us is how these changes relate to the operations of capital, and this means interrogating not the relation between national markets and individual states, but, as Bob Jessop put it in a recent interview, “the relation between the *Weltmarkt* (world market) and *Staatenswelt* (world of states)” (Flohr and Harrison 2016, 309). Notions such as the “transnational network state” (Demirović 2011) and the “global state” (Ricciardi 2013) point in the same direction. At stake here are not only the differences among states or the different figures they assume but also, as Jessop puts it, the need to analyze “how *variegation* in the world of states relates to the possibilities of capital accumulation on a world scale” (Flohr and Harrison 2016, 309). In this regard power differentials among states remain as important as interdependencies—such as the economic and financial links between the United States and China that we discussed in chapter 1. Although variegated capitalism also works off differences that exist above and below the level of the state, as well as off relations between states and non-state institutions, Jessop’s approach is useful for thinking about what states are doing in the contemporary world. His observation registers both how states provide opportunities for capital to pursue its interests across different territories, spaces, and scales, and how, in turn, this pursuit rearranges state actions and forms. The role of the state in organizing its own incapacity to resist pressures exerted by the operations of capital is certainly a factor here and must register prominently

in any account of what states are doing. The example of Greece looms large in this regard, particularly considering how, in July 2015, the country's government and Parliament were forced by the "institutions" of the troika to pass austerity measures that directly flouted the will of the people as expressed in a referendum result that had mobilized around political energies and enthusiasm in and beyond Greece. But it is also important to note that a limited number of states, primarily the United States and the United Kingdom, are producing "the design for the new standards and legalities needed to ensure protections and guarantees for global firms and markets" (Sassen 2007, 55). These standards and legalities, in turn, are "produced through the particular institutional and political structures of other states" (Sassen 2007, 55) within the framework of a general transformation of the meaning of "rule of law," which is increasingly reduced to the protection and implementation of "market rights" (Mattei and Nader 2008). This dynamic by which the world market mandates and relies for its own generation on protocols that are mediated by the uneven relations, policy transfers, and power expressions that compose the contemporary *Staatenwelt* is crucial to understanding the role of the state today.

A simple and inadequate way to explain what states are doing today is thus to say that they are doing what other states are doing. In stating this, we are only partially joking, since mimetic behavior has long been a feature of how states have organized their policy and political environments. Think about the historical spread of the welfare state policies from Otto von Bismarck's German Reich; the circulation of knowledge and technologies of domination and exploitation through "colonial conferences" in the late nineteenth century; and the prevalence of planning across the post-World War II socialist, developmental, and welfare states, which we discussed in chapter 3. Today, the movement of policies around the world is a much quicker affair, involving a complex array of actors, the development of best practice models, compressed times for design and experimentation, and increased referencing among sites. In our previous writings on migration and borders, we joined several other scholars in demonstrating how these trends are powerfully reshaping one of the essential sovereign "competences" that states still claim in the most jealous way—that is, the control of borders (see Mezzadra and Neilson 2013a, chap. 6). The literature on the "migration industry" further contributes to these analyses, shedding light on the roles played by a variety of commercial actors within the heterogeneous assemblage of power that facilitates, controls, and limits mobility across borders (see, e.g., Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg Sørensen

2013). “Migration management” is more generally a crucial field for the investigation of processes of outsourcing to private actors of formerly public functions, as is particularly apparent if one considers the prominence of a panoply of agencies and brokers in the intermediation of labor migration in such diverse sites as China, Indonesia, and Germany (see Altenried et al. 2017; Lindquist and Xiang 2014).

In *Fast Policy* (2015), Jamie Peck and Nick Theodore take a different although no less important approach by following policy diffusion networks linked to the spread of conditional cash transfers and participatory budgeting models. Both of these policy currents find their origins in the global South—the former in Mexico, and the latter in Porto Alegre, Brazil—but are now encountered all over the world. Peck and Theodore (2015, 223) emphasize that “fast policy cannot be reduced to some measurement of the elapsed time between the occurrence of a policy at site A and its emulation at site B.” Rather, they study the “inescapably social nature of those *continuous* processes of translation, intermediation, and contextualization/decontextualization/recontextualization, through which various forms of policy mobility are realized” (Peck and Theodore 2015, xxv). What they discover is the political malleability of policy as it adapts to various polity conditions. In its Brazilian context, for instance, participatory budgeting—a process by which community members contribute to decisions about how to allocate part of a public budget—was envisioned as a way to reclaim and repurpose the state while augmenting the capacities of social movements. When it traveled to cities in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada, it became more about “customer satisfaction” and the augmentation of a “consultative approach consistent with the drive to reduce the scope of the state through the mechanisms of accountability, austerity, and restraint” (Peck and Theodore 2015, 216). Conditional cash transfers—where cash payments are paid to poor households on the basis of certain conditions being met (e.g., school attendance, health checkups)—have also had a politically ambiguous trajectory. Some see in them the potential for the transcendence of neoliberal forms of governance (see, notably, the account of the South African experience in Ferguson 2015), while others approach them as a means for achieving the financialization of poverty (see Lavinas 2013).

What interests us about the fast policy perspective is less the process of policy diffusion per se than the way in which Peck and Theodore understand it as a form of “experimental statecraft” at the “thresholds of neoliberalism” (a phrase present in the subtitle of their book but not developed at all in their analysis). The statecraft at stake might equally be conceptualized

as a form of extrastatecraft (to recall the term from Easterling 2014), given the various non-state agencies, experts, and networks involved in such diffusion. More important, the placement of this statecraft at the thresholds of neoliberalism chimes with our analysis of the frontiers of capital and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that are always at stake when capital hits the ground. Whether these dynamics are analyzed with respect to the processes of differential inclusion at work in border politics or in relation to what Sassen (2014, 211) calls the “systemic edge” of capital’s expansion—which involves tensions between “incorporation” and “expulsion” (for a discussion, see Mezzadra and Neilson 2015)—matters less, in our estimation, than its implications for an analysis of the contemporary state’s role in the reproduction of labor power and the representation of aggregate capital. In chapter 3, we argued that the state’s role in both of these respects has been fractured, and an analysis of the contemporary state needs to take into account how operations of capital today coalesce and interact with one another in ways that parallel, rival, and act in partnership with state powers. The rise of public-private partnerships as a governance model is one register of how this process is being actively reshaped. This is not the occasion to catalogue the myriad forms that such partnerships have assumed or the domains in which they have operated (from border control to the making of infrastructure and smart city initiatives). Nor do we seek empirical confirmation for the scandal that everyone knows to be true of these arrangements: that they allocate risk to the public and profit to the private. Rather, we are interested in public-private partnerships as indices of changes to the state form that reach well beyond questions of monetary flow and organizational structure.

Consider an example: the issuance by African states such as Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa of electronic identity cards in partnership with Mastercard. Apart from serving for regular purposes of personal and official identification, these biometric cards enroll the body as a site of authentication for access to money and credit through Mastercard’s payment systems. Such initiatives are thus celebrated as efforts of “financial inclusion,” which incorporate subjects who are otherwise excluded from the global financial system into its circuits (see Cobbett 2015). Part of their purpose is to execute conditional cash transfers of the type discussed by Peck and Theodore (2015), but by outsourcing the management of public funds to a global financial services company, these states also create new relationships between the body of their populations and the operations of finance. Certainly, there are precedents in initiatives such as the establishment

of privately administered biobanks for the storage of genetic information extracted from the populations of countries such as Estonia and Iceland (Gottweis and Petersen 2008). The use of biometric data to monitor and control electronic payments is also a technique employed by non-state agencies, as illustrated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' EyeCloud system, which facilitates direct cash payments to refugees (Lee 2016). But the partnership that merges the state identity card with the credit card poses a series of data-protection and sovereignty issues that involve a meshing of capital's financial and logistical operations. Where are the biometric data stored? How are they correlated with financial data generated by use of the card? In what territory are such financial data stored? What are the jurisdictional issues regarding protection of these data? Writing about the Nigerian case, Lukman Adebisi Abdulrauf (2014) worries that private organizations involved in this initiative collect personal information "without accountability" (181) and finds that the country's legal framework allows the transfer of "personhood to the control of others, usually governments and corporations" (188). More profoundly, the state's jurisdictional reach is challenged and paralleled by the nomos of the cloud, raising questions not only about the relation between sovereignty and law but also about the slippage between legal regimes of territoriality and state territorial control. This slippage can also take more "positive" and interesting forms—as, for instance, in the "constitutional dialogues" between South African and Indian courts to impose low-cost medicine against Big Pharma's claim to property rights and copyright (see Lollini 2009).

We have discussed how logistical spaces such as zones and corridors disarticulate the territory of the state and establish global connections that have political significance in their own right, establishing operative spaces of capital that intersect and articulate to processes of formal regional integration (such as the heterogeneous ones associated with the acronyms ASEAN, APEC, EU, and NAFTA) but also exceed them. The example of the Port of Piraeus in Greece, mentioned in chapter 2, is instructive in this regard, since the granting of a concession to operate the port to a subsidiary of the Chinese state-owned enterprise Cosco not only is mandated by the powers of the troika that exercises control over Greece's economic sovereignty but has also allowed the development of a strategic node in the Chinese program of global logistical and infrastructural expansion known as the Belt and Road Initiative (see Hatzopoulos et al. 2014). Whether one reads this China-led globalization as the party state's debt-funded response to economic crisis, the establishment of a new Bandung allowing coopera-

tion among states from the global South, or the extension of a new mercantilist ethos, it suggests a changing role for the state within processes of regional integration, shifting patterns of trade, and strategic alignments of economic and political power (Neilson et al. 2018; for the reference to a “new Bandung” see, e.g., Paik 2016). At stake is nothing less than a reorientation of the Staatenwelt in relation to changes in the workings of the world market. It would be possible to offer further examples of what states are doing in this regard. The delegation of the state’s monopoly on violence to private military and security companies, for instance, provides another mechanism by which state powers cede the possibility to control or regulate the nexus of capital and politics. The existence of nonbinding norms, such as the Montreux Document, which provides standards and best practices for the activities of these companies (Cockayne 2008), testifies to the presence of a layer of governance that seeks to step in or compensate for the state’s abdication of one of its characteristic modern powers. In this instance, as in the others discussed earlier, it is important to affirm that what is at play is not a waning of the state or its powers but a reorganization of the way in which states compose the world of politics in the face of capital’s operations.

What we witness is a melding, tension, and consonance between state and capital that in many ways has historical precedents in the workings of the chartered companies we examined in chapter 3. Reckoning with these transformations means not only reassessing the state’s ability to reproduce labor power and represent aggregate capital but also assessing its capacity to provide a front of resistance and regulation in struggles against capitalism. We do not disavow, as we further show later, the prospect that the state can be “occupied” for a politics of transformation or that some of its structures can be mobilized for anti-capitalist politics. It should be clear that we do not offer a reactive state phobia or seek to romanticize the position of social movements that pit themselves, sometimes hopelessly and at other times effectively, against both state and capital. Rather, in keeping with our ambition to offer a realistic analysis of what states are doing today, we extend a line of argument established in an earlier article: that “the state is not powerful enough to confront contemporary capitalism; in order to reopen politically a perspective of radical transformation, something else, a *different source of power*, is absolutely necessary” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2014, 787). In the next section, we explore the need for the making of “a ‘collective power’ and ‘institutions’ outside (although not necessarily against) the state as the condition even for a project of transformation that

aims at using the state” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2014, 787). We then close the book by asking how a *different source of power* for opposing capitalism might be conceived and practiced, a task that requires us to revisit the political meanings and potential of the concept of operations.

The State as a Field of Struggle

While an emphasis on its unity, as we have often remarked, has always characterized debates on the modern state, there is no shortage of arguments that point to the existence of more or less pronounced or even structural contradictions within its constitution. In a series of essays written before World War I, for instance, the German constitutional historian Otto Hintze ([1902] 1975; Schiera 1974) focused on multiple tensions and conflicts arising from the fact that the constitutional state combined its working as an apparatus of domination and command (*Herrschaft*) with the embodiment of a communitarian element (*Genossenschaft*). This very general conceptual framework has inspired important historical reconstructions, including the one by Gianfranco Poggi (1978) that we discussed in chapter 3 (see also Negri 1977). It also opens a productive angle of inquiry for the study of the multiple figures, crises, and transformations of the state in the twentieth century—for instance, in the case of the democratic welfare and social state that took shape in the West after World War II. From a theoretical point of view, a focus on contradictions, tensions, and conflicts within the state has characterized the work of a huge variety of thinkers and schools of thought. Take Pierre Bourdieu, to limit ourselves to just one important example. He understands the state as “the culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital,” ranging from “capital of physical force” to “economic capital, cultural . . . and symbolic capital,” which leads to “the emergence of a specific, properly statist capital.” This results in the “construction of a field of power, defined as the space of play within which the holders of capital (of different species) struggle in particular for power over the state” (Bourdieu 1994, 4–5).

In Marxist debates, the name Nicos Poulantzas is particularly redolent when it comes to the analysis of contradictions within the state (see, e.g., Aronowitz and Bratsis 2002; Jessop 1985). His work from the 1970s continues to inspire several scholarly and political debates, which affirm, for instance, his emphasis on the need to go beyond a unilateral focus on repression in the study of the state, a point that Poulantzas shares with Michel

Foucault, notwithstanding his bitter criticism of Foucault (see Hall 1980). Combining his reading of Antonio Gramsci and the notion of “ideological apparatuses” forged by Louis Althusser (2008), Poulantzas insists on the strategic relevance of hegemonic struggle (see, e.g., Poulantzas 2008, 182–85)—an argument that nowadays echoes across heterogeneous landscapes of political action and elaboration, from Latin America to Spain. More important for the analysis we pursue in this chapter is Poulantzas’s emphasis on “the primacy of struggles over the state,” since struggles (which means primarily but not exclusively class struggles) *constitute* the state while constantly going beyond its “apparatuses and institutions” (Poulantzas 1980, 45). Famously defined as “the material condensation” of a “relationship of forces” among “classes and class fractions” (Poulantzas 1980, 128), the state, in Poulantzas’s view, is structurally traversed by “popular struggles,” which bear on “its strategic field without necessarily being ‘integrated’ into the power of the dominant classes” (Poulantzas 1980, 151).

We are not interested here in rehearsing a criticism of Poulantzas’s notion of the “relative autonomy” of the state and its political translation into a proposal for a “democratic road to socialism” in the 1970s (see Negri, in Hardt and Negri 1994, 148–50). Instead, we want to extrapolate from his writings the conceptual image of the state as a field of struggle, which also figures in the title of an important book published in 2010 by the Bolivian Comuna collective (see García Linera et al. 2010). Definitely one of the most important theoretical and political experiences in Latin America over recent years, Comuna has been very influential in Bolivian debates since the early 2000s, combining heterogeneous influences in an original way—from several strands of Latin American critical, Indigenous, and revolutionary thinking to the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and autonomist Marxism (see Stefanoni 2015). Amazing reconstructions of recent Indigenous and social mobilizations and uprisings in Bolivia, such as the one provided by Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar (2014), emerged against the background of this collective endeavor. The book *El estado: Campo de lucha* (The State: A Field of Struggle; García Linera et al. 2010) can be considered one of Comuna’s final outcomes, as political developments in Bolivia (including such conflicts as the one surrounding road building in the Isiboro Sécuré National Park and Indigenous Territory that we discussed in the previous chapter) successively led to the dissolution of the collective and to bitter polemics about the role of that country’s Vice-President Álvaro García Linera, one of the founding members of Comuna. *El estado: Campo de lucha* can also be read for this reason as an important instance of the intense and theoretically

sophisticated debates that shaped the long decade of so-called progressive governments in Latin America from the early 2000s. It is important to emphasize that within these heterogeneous and complex experiences (which include instances as diverse as Chavism in Venezuela, Lula's governments in Brazil, Kirchnerism in Argentina, and the Frente Amplio [Broad Front] in Uruguay), the state has *actually* been a field of struggle, with results that deserve much more detailed scrutiny than we can offer here.

García Linera squarely poses the issue at the center of his reflections as the question of “the state in times of transition” (García Linera et al. 2010, 7). By doing so he clearly harks back to older Marxist debates, but at the same time he addresses the main problem looming behind much more recent political developments and disputes about the state in Latin America and elsewhere. Just think of the Greek experience over the past few years (and particularly during the first government led by Syriza [the Coalition of the Radical Left], from January 2015 until the “deal” with the creditors on July 13 of the same year), or of the lively discussions that have surrounded the rise of the Podemos political party in Spain since 2013. With an abundance of references to Latin American experiences (above all in Spain, while in Greece Poulantzas's writings have often been invoked), these European instances have also raised vexed questions regarding the role of the state in processes of social, and even socialist, transformation under completely new conditions. Not surprisingly, the alternative between reform and revolution, which is strictly connected to Marxist discussions of the state, has also been rehearsed. We must confess that we do not find this alternative, with the reciprocal accusations of “betrayal” and “infantile disorder” it necessarily entails, particularly inspiring. We are more interested in analyses that stress, even within a theoretical framework very different from ours, the need to investigate the current predicament of socialist politics, connecting it to the crisis of the labor movement we discussed in chapter 5 (see, e.g., Honneth 2017, 40–41). There is a need to historicize the very juxtaposition between reform and revolution within the history of the international labor movement. We tend to agree with David Harvey, who recently advocated a reshuffling of the cards and the forging of an agenda of substantial radical reforms that “can become the cutting edge for revolutionary transformation” (Harvey 2014, 181). Interestingly, this position echoes the one articulated by Rosa Luxemburg in 1899, at the heyday of the historical debate on “revisionism” (see Luxemburg 2004, 129), as part of what she once called *revolutionäre Realpolitik*, or “revolutionary political realism” (Haug 2009).

Needless to say, this is just a hint at a political project and practice haunted by severe difficulties and pitfalls. Harvey himself speaks of the predicament of having to choose “between an impossible reform and an improbable revolution” (Harvey 2014, 130). The very notion of reform has been successfully appropriated by neoliberalism, as it is painfully clear in a country such as Greece. The various and politically heterogeneous attempts to reformulate a Keynesian framework for a consistent reformist politics (taking the notion of Keynesianism in a very wide and even loose sense to include the works of such diverse thinkers as Paul Krugman (2009), Thomas Piketty (2014), Joseph Stiglitz (2015), and Yanis Varoufakis (2016) face an economic, social, and political environment so radically transformed that old recipes need to be completely rethought, a task that actually may seem to verge on the impossible (see, e.g., De Nicola and Quattrocchi 2016; Marazzi 2010). “Taming” and “embedding” the extractive operations of capital, particularly as far as financial capital is concerned, requires a huge amount of political experimentation—and, above all, a huge number of struggles to make such experimentation effective and even possible. From this point of view, it is worth briefly coming back to Latin America. As in Greece and in Spain, in Latin America it was a formidable cycle of struggles—concatenating at the regional scale and often taking on an insurrectional character (e.g., in Ecuador following the Indigenous *levantamiento* [uprising] in 1990; in Bolivia, in 2000 and 2003; and in Argentina, in 2001)—that declared the end of the Washington Consensus and opened up the political space for the new progressive governments (see Mezzadra and Sztulwark 2015; on the uprising in Argentina specifically, see Colectivo Situaciones 2011). What resulted from this opening and “destitution” (or dismantling of existing political arrangements and depriving their foundations of power and legitimacy) were constituent processes, which in several cases (including Bolivia) led to innovative new constitutions (see, e.g., Clavero 2012; Gargarella 2015; Nolte and Schilling-Vacaflor 2012) but were concretely tangible even in countries such as Brazil and Argentina, where no new constitutions were issued. Powerful challenges to entrenched structures of racism and exclusion of the poor were raised both by the continued action of social movements and struggles and in many cases—although in different and often contradictory ways—by progressive governments.

Much discussion about the relations between social movements and the new governments in Latin America has revolved around a choice between confrontation and cooptation (Prevost et al. 2012). While this descriptively

grasps some of the processes and stakes in Latin American politics of recent years, we do not find the confrontation-cooptation binary to be particularly politically enabling (Gago and Mezzadra 2017b; see also Brighenti and Mezzadra 2012). The autonomy of social movements has continued to express itself in many Latin American countries following the emergence of progressive governments, nurturing experiences that, at least in some cases, have taken the form of real counterpowers. The novelty of social policies, particularly in the first phase of many Latin American progressive governments, lay precisely in an attempt to root those policies within a field of tension between the action of the state and new forms of social mobilization and struggle. This is a very important question that, for us, displaces the simple binary of confrontation and cooptation. It also points to the need to reframe the whole question of the relations among governments, struggles, and movements, going beyond the prevailing model of a linear translation of movements' claims and demands into the construction of or actions by governments.

Such a crucial challenge certainly does not apply only to Latin American experiences, although these experiences enable us to materially instantiate and politically qualify the difficulties at hand. There are many factors behind the multiple crises and defeats of progressive governments in Latin America over the past few years, including the underestimation of the effects of the global economic crisis, which was initially perceived simply as an “opportunity” (see, e.g., Piqué 2008). It is no surprise, given the high degree of integration within the global market we mentioned in chapter 4 when discussing the critical notion of neo-extractivism (see also Cocco and Negri 2006), that the variegated mutations of the crisis eventually hit countries such as Argentina and Brazil. Moreover neo-developmentalism and the politics of social inclusion—the hallmarks of progressive governments—did not take into serious consideration the persistence and the constitutive role of processes of financialization (see Gago and Sztulwark 2016). Under these conditions, the weakening of efforts toward regional integration (which were particularly important in the 2000s) was a serious problem for national progressive governments. While processes of social transformation came increasingly to be centered on the state, the most original features of government action were also weakened, and the source of the state's power was steadily drained.

There is no need for us to discuss here the important work of Ernesto Laclau, which continues to be a significant reference in Latin American (as well as in Spanish) political debates (see Mezzadra and Neilson 2013a,

284–91). Nor can we dwell on other important aspects of the current crisis of progressive governments, which has led many commentators to speak of the end of their political cycle—including the role played by new forms of popular consumption and by the new middle classes that progressive policies of redistribution helped to create. Rather, it is important to note that Latin America in recent years has also witnessed processes of fracturing and disarticulation of the unity of the state (see Gago et al. 2014), which take extreme forms in the “dualization” of the state and in the emergence in many countries of a kind of “second state” connected to rentier dynamics; undeclared and illegal operations of capital; and old and new forms of patriarchy (Segato 2016). In her analysis of “femicides” in Ciudad Juárez, the anthropologist Rita Laura Segato undertakes a breathtaking investigation of the mutations of the structural nexus between sovereignty and violence in Mexico, where a “second,” or “parallel” state (Segato 2013, 42–43) enters multiple relations with criminal actors to manage processes of securitization through the spread of fear. A specific form of “expressive violence” (which Segato [2013, 21–22] carefully distinguishes from “instrumental violence” because it aims to produce and express the effectiveness of implicit rules), inscribes itself onto women’s bodies, reproducing and at the same time brutally altering the patriarchal norm historically connected with the state. If one thinks of the multiple roles played by this parallel state in the management of transit migration across what critical scholars and activists in Mexico call the “vertical border” (Aquino et al. 2012; Varela, forthcoming), it is possible to understand why a notion such as neoropolitics (Mbembe 2003) continues to spark lively debates in that country (see, e.g., Fuentes Díaz 2012).

It is important to keep in mind such instances in which extreme violence is intertwined with state apparatuses. Far from being limited to Mexico, they multiply elsewhere in Latin America and the world, giving rise to new forms of social conflict and to peculiar and terrifying forms of private-public partnership. While such forms of governmental violence tend to produce their own territories and thus deserve careful investigation from the theoretical angle of the disarticulation of the state’s unity, this disarticulation also takes on different and more promising shapes. Struggles for the right to the city, of which we gave some examples in chapter 5, are taking metropolitan territories in many parts of the world as a privileged scale of political action. While they confront the urban roots of the capitalist crisis, such struggles for urban commons often work within and against a set of processes that, as emphasized from the time of sociological debates

on global cities in the early 1990s, tend to extrapolate metropolitan territories from national frameworks and to connect them into wider assemblages of power and production. Needless to say, this has completely different implications and potentialities in different cities. Nonetheless, “rebel cities” (Harvey 2012) proliferate across diverse geographical scales. Such a label circulates widely in Europe, where, particularly in the wake of the election of Ada Colau (a prominent figure within the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca*, the transversal social union for housing rights we analyzed in the previous chapter) as mayor of Barcelona in May 2015, there is a lively debate on the prospects for a new municipalism. What is important to observe is that this debate (and the related political experiences, which are not limited to Barcelona but include other cities, from Madrid to Naples) registers a situation in which, within the framework of European crisis management over the past few years, cities have been steadily deprived of powers and budgetary autonomy (see Caccia 2016).

These debates and experiences are undoubtedly interesting and inspiring. Far from providing a model or pointing at an exclusive field of struggle and political experimentation, they are for us part of a more general and articulated collective effort to forge a politics of radical social transformation capable of effectively confronting the extractive operations of contemporary capital. We do not deny that the state can play a role, in specific and grounded situations, within this effort. Even a discredited concept such as planning deserves new consideration—for instance, in initiatives that strive to meet the challenges of the ecological crisis, as Naomi Klein (2014) contends. But the important experiences of Latin American progressive governments demonstrate the limits of the state—and particularly of a politics centered on the state as its privileged field and actor. We repeat once again what we wrote at the end of the previous section: it is a matter of political realism to acknowledge that, today, the state is not powerful enough to confront established and emergent formations of capitalism. From this perspective, the resurgence of “left nationalism” we are currently witnessing in many parts of the world, often connected with the invocation of some form of “left populism,” appears as highly problematic. While there is no doubt that, in Spain, the use of populist rhetoric by part of Podemos initially contributed to opening new political space, taking populism as a strategic notion ends up nurturing a political imaginary that reproduces the trap of nationalism, overestimates the range of action of the state, and obscures behind the ghostly figure of a homogeneous people the powerful transformations that have reshaped the composition of living labor.

Moreover, as we suggested in chapter 2, there is a need to take stock of a long history of socialist, communist, and anticolonial politics within which the state has been conceived and practically constructed as the main actor of social transformation. Needless to say, this history is populated by a legion of “heresies”—from council communism to the multiple shades of autonomist Marxism, from the politics of autonomy within Indian anticolonialism to several instances of communal organizing in the Black Power Movement and Zapatismo, to mention just a few. These theoretical and political experiences provide a rich archive for contemporary efforts and struggles. But this does not mean that the mainstream of socialist, communist, and anticolonial politics can simply be obliterated, as is too often the case, for instance, within recent philosophical debates on communism (see Mezzadra and Neilson 2014). On the one hand, this is so because some of the problems that haunt that mainstream continue to be our problems, although under completely different conditions. On the other hand, the fact that socialism and communism were extreme instances of a politics centered on the state, with eventually questionable, if not disastrous results, in the twentieth century, and remain so in the popular imaginary in many parts of the world, requires a rigorous historical and political criticism. It is not by accident, for instance, as David Harvey (2014, 180) notes, that poll data in the United States show remarkable support for an egalitarian reform movement, “even as it demands that the state not be the vehicle to accomplish this.” Combining this criticism of the legacy of past experiences and a realistic assessment of the role of the state within global capitalism, we understand the search for a communist politics today as part of a collective search for a politics of radical transformation not centered on the state (see also Gutiérrez Aguilar, in Brighenti 2013). We want to say once again that this does not mean discarding the persistence of the state and even the possibility to occupy and use it (or part of its apparatuses) for the sake of such a politics. But this can happen only within projects and practices that point at the establishment of a system of social counterpowers and, at the same time, are part and parcel of wider, transnational attempts to seize or create new political spaces.

Tinnabulation

Do you remember those crazy days in September 2008 when the failure of Lehman Brothers spurred the collapse of Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley? Did you watch those ironic videos on YouTube showing bankers

packing their stuff, going out to Main Street, and having to compete with Latino migrants offering their labor power to gang masters who contract daily workers for the construction sector? Did those videos offer you a kind of stamina and powerful antidote to the vexed question of “left melancholy” (Traverso 2017)? Well, they did for us. A bit of *Schadenfreude*—why not? But while this is a topic that, at least since Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, has attracted philosophical reflections, poetic and literary exercises, and, later, psychoanalytical ruminations, the tricky nature of *Schadenfreude* has also often been emphasized. In a book dedicated to the Lucretian founding figure of this motif, the spectator witnessing a shipwreck at sea, Hans Blumenberg (1996) has traced a line of thought—stretching from Pascal to Nietzsche—in which the security of the point of observation (i.e., the safe haven on dry land) is itself unmasked as a fraudulent illusion. We had no illusion, to be honest, in those September days. It should be clear from this book that we are quite skeptical regarding the identification and scapegoating of specific actors for the workings of capitalism and aggregate capital (although specific actors do have specific and often even lethal responsibilities and should be held accountable for them). Nevertheless, we were impressed by the way in which Goldman Sachs, clearly one of the main parties responsible for the mortgage crisis and excoriated in a famous *Rolling Stone* article as “a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity” (Taibi 2010)—passed through investigations by the US Congress, Justice Department, and Securities and Exchange Commission eventually to emerge as one of the winners of the crisis. Hugely profiting from the loan facilities issued by the Federal Reserve in 2008, Goldman Sachs continues to rule the world, and its elite bankers continue to regard themselves as masters of the universe, as the saying goes.

To pick up a question we discussed in chapter 1, it is clear that in the wake of the crisis of 2007–2008, we have witnessed a further entrenchment of neoliberalism, and of the kind of extractive logics we analyzed as characteristic of contemporary operations of capital. Looking back at the past decade, one is reminded of Macbeth’s words: “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, / Creeps in this petty pace from day to day, / To the last syllable of recorded time” (Shakespeare [1623] 2015, 287). The entrenchment and even radicalization of neoliberalism has run parallel to its mutations and adaptations, including multiple combinations with nationalism and the politics of anxiety and fear nationalism has generated. These developments have spurred a global political cycle characterized by the rise of heterogeneous forces of the right, often verging on fascism—from Europe

to Japan, from Latin America to India, from Turkey to Egypt and the United States. At the same time, the crisis continues to circulate through the conduits of the capitalist world system and has itself provided a peculiar and particularly harsh form of governmentality. In this frame, neoliberal language and policies have cast off their promissory and seductive tones, announcing a “new spirit of capitalism” (Boltanski and Chiapello 2006), and in full light have begun to deploy disciplinary and even punitive measures (see also Lazzarato 2012). In this regard, the invocation of a strong state is far from being merely rhetorical. So, to play with the title of a recent book by Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2016), we can ask: How do we put an end to this “nightmare that does not want to end”?

We have no plain answer to this question. But we agree with Dardot and Laval that it is misleading to reduce neoliberalism to a set of doctrines or even economic policies. Confronting neoliberalism means confronting the extractive logics of contemporary operations of capital that loom behind it. It also means taking seriously neoliberalism’s rooting in the social fabric of life—as signaled by Verónica Gago’s (2017) notion of “neoliberalism from below.” Under these conditions, we have argued, a politics of radical transformation cannot be centered on the state. While there is a need to occupy, imagine, and invent new political spaces beyond the nation, it is also necessary to work toward the building of a system of counterpowers that can confront neoliberalism and operations of capital at the level of daily life. In the history of the communist movement, dualism of power has always been conceived of as a transitory situation, to be overcome through revolutionary rupture (Guastini 1978; Zavaleta Mercado 1974). In April 1917, in the peculiar Russian situation of war and revolution, Lenin spoke about a “dual power,” referring to the existence, “alongside the Provisional government, the government of *bourgeoisie*,” of “*another government*”—that of the “Soviets of Workers and Soldiers’ Deputies” (Lenin [1917] 1999). His political wager, which was quite successful, at least at first, was to wait for the occasion to *overthrow* the provisional government and then to establish the dictatorship of the Soviets. Independently of how one retrospectively considers the history of the regime that emerged out of the October Revolution, what is needed today is something quite different: a rethinking of the problematic of dual power in terms of a stable political framework that is capable of articulating a political dynamics of struggle, transformation, and government through the establishment of a stable system of counterpowers.

This means reflecting on and reinventing the soviet, well beyond its instantiation in the October Revolution and its mutations in the following

years in Russia, as an institution of self-organization and self-government while rethinking its relations with formal political institutions (see Hardt and Mezzadra 2017). The global history of social and political struggles in the twentieth century and up to the present provides a rich and heterogeneous archive of experiences analogous to the organization of soviets, most often without any reference to the October Revolution. From communal forms of peasant and Indigenous organization to workers' councils, from neighborhood assemblies in Argentina in the wake of the uprising of 2001 to the exercise of territorial counterpower by the Black Panthers in the United States or by the autonomous movement in Italy, we can see how the "spirit of the soviet" has remained alive and traveled across the globe in various mutations. Furthermore, the movements that seized and occupied the squares of major cities in several countries from 2011 to 2013 presented powerful though incipient instantiations of the soviet under contemporary conditions (see Hardt and Negri 2017). Many of these movements have now taken the form of metropolitan assemblies in which widely heterogeneous sets of social subjects gather to deliberate and forge institutions of self-government on the basis of social cooperation and struggle against dispossession and exploitation. Thus far, these assemblies have not risen to the level of dual power, as their critics and their participants will quickly affirm. Key, however, is the fact that these experiences have gone beyond the level of protest and resistance against the dominant power structure to create, even if only briefly, an autonomous counterpower. The potential articulation of such counterpowers alludes to the potential of a strategy of dual power.

This potential becomes apparent once the various axes of social struggle today and the problem of the temporal duration of their effects are considered from the angle of a theory of organization. A relatively stable political framework that articulates dynamics of struggle, transformation, and governance, establishing a lasting assemblage of counterpowers, may indeed be the most effective means of strengthening the existing movements. Moreover, a rethinking of dual power along the lines we are suggesting tackles the question of the state without ignoring the powerful transformations that have altered its structure and even challenged its institutional unity. The dualism of power that we have in mind thus requires a notion of governance that is rooted within a fabric of counterpowers from which it draws its force without putting into question their autonomy. It aims at politicizing social cooperation through institutions that are capable of organizing struggles, enabling their confluence and mutual empowerment, and

foreshadowing different forms of life that combine social and economic emancipation with political liberation, as was originally the case for the institution of the soviet (see Negri 2017).

It should be clear that when we write about dual power, the two powers in question are not, and cannot be, homologous. Even when the state is seized by political forces engaged in a project of radical transformation, as we discussed in the case of Latin American progressive governments, the wide array of political forms and institutions that compose the “second” power must retain their autonomy and continue to work according to logics different from the ones permeating the ruling institutions—from representation to bureaucracy. This difference is key to the political productivity of the dualism of power, which allows it to be considered “a thoroughly expansive political form,” to quote Marx’s description of the Paris Commune, which, in his assessment, was different from “all the previous forms of government [that] had been emphatically repressive” (Marx 1988, 60). We think of the development, rooting, and entrenchment of a second power, instituted through struggles and social mobilization, as the crucial political element that can make a political form “expansive,” holding in check the repressive aspects of established state institutions. But far from being limited to this control function, this second power plays a leading role in developing the strategy, as well as in prompting and deepening the process, of social transformation.

Such a political framework needs to come to grips with the continued presence of the state and the international system of states without conceiving this presence as the sole horizon of political struggle. Indeed, a dual-power approach allows for radical contestation of state institutions (and their entanglement with the operations of capital) even as it implies making demands of these same institutions or even redirecting their resources to oppositional ends. At the same time, it requires the building of self-organized or autonomous institutions and infrastructures outside and beyond the state from which the project of fabricating the common can begin. Such an approach, however, cannot constitute a retreat of struggles to the local—as much as strategies of occupation, encampment, social unionism, or even new municipalism can provide credible bases on which to build counterpower. It also requires grappling with the difficulties of building coalitional ties beyond national and local frames to reach, translate, and politically act across and against the variegated landscapes of contemporary capitalism. There should be no delusions as to the difficulty of this task, but such a strategy is the only one we see as viable in the face of

competing proposals—for example, the “let it rip” attitude of accelerationism or the quietude of postcapitalist economic experiments, which labor under the hope of reaching an eventual tipping point where capital begins to crumble without ever having been subjected to a direct political challenge. At stake for us is nothing less than a reframing of the political. This means not only reconceiving the political outside the frame of established or constituted power but also moving away from a viewpoint that automatically and unreflexively celebrates the resistance, the destitution of power—or, for that matter, the constituent power of insurrectionary movements. Believe us: we have experienced enough episodes of backbiting, trolling, baiting, accusation, and *ressentiment* in activist circles to know they are no more free of antipathy and protagonism than official state institutions. But our argument is not driven by such petty episodes. Rather, by rethinking the political in the conceptual and practical frame of operations, we seek to derive a politics capable of effectively opposing capital at a time that its operations tend to mask its unity and remove its aggregate effects from the institutional scaffolding of the state.

A politics of operations is necessarily involved in the world. When we write about the devastating effects of capital hitting the ground, we are conscious that the politics of capital’s operations is necessarily messed up with dirt, extraction, and exploitation. A rethinking of politics with respect to operations cannot maintain the fantasy of “pure politics”—to recall a phrase introduced by Slavoj Žižek (2006, 55–56)—removed from the materiality of operations or enjoying the perch on the high moral ground. Politics in this regard cannot be separated from economy—or, for that matter, from culture and society. This is a perspective that makes sense once the material practices and struggles of those subjects who produce the world and its tissues of being are taken into account. As much as a politics of operations draws attention to the ways in which capital rearranges social relations on the ground, it also highlights how collective projects of liberation are played out on this same ground, where the world is fabricated and life is endured and enjoyed. The connection between operations and subjectivity emerges in this nexus.

In chapter 2, we briefly discussed the perspective that understands subjectivity as the “real abstraction” at the center of contemporary capitalist production. This viewpoint corresponds with an emphasis on the double genitive in the phrase “production of subjectivity,” registering at once the “constitution of subjectivity” within and against capitalism and “the productive power of subjectivity, its capacity to produce wealth” (Read 2003,

102). The concept of operations allows us to add something more. For a start, it provides a way to chart the relations between subjectivity as produced with respect to the multiple operations that compose capitalism and the emergence of subjectivity in and through specific operations of capital. This gives us another axis along which to analyze the production of subjectivity, aside from the tug of subjection and subjectivation emphasized by Foucault (2014; for a useful collection of essays on this tension, see Cremonesi et al. 2016). In addition, it allows us to extend an analysis of a particular dimension of the production of subjectivity—that which Félix Guattari (1995, 2) identifies with “machinic productions of subjectivity.” Although Guattari has in mind the production of subjectivity through computing, data banks, media, and other “non-human pre-personal” elements, he emphasizes how these transformations open possibilities of “heterogenesis” (9), which are “multi-componential” and have a “collective character” (24). Our analysis crosses this approach but adds caution around the way in which contemporary capitalism can make such heterogenesis into a device of extraction—for instance, through the action and work of subjects who recursively generate data sets through which they come to be known, governed, and exploited. This is one reason that we have reservations about a politics that seeks its subject in the citizen, as if the dynamics of differentiation, inclusion, and exclusion that shape this figure were sufficient to offset their own entanglement with the operations of capital. It is equally why we find the figure of the waged worker, whose contractual “freedom” is vouchsafed by a presumed coincidence between the unity of capital and the unity of the state, incapable of furnishing a subject who can politically contrast the differential workings and specific interventions of capital today. We continue to think that the debates around class and multitude offer a more fertile ground on which to discern and produce a political subject adequate to the times.

Our emphasis on operations flies in the face of a powerful and erudite line of analysis that finds political possibility in the deactivation of operative forms of power or an ontologically prior “inoperativity” (see, e.g., Agamben 2014). This is not the occasion to rehearse a full critique of this approach, its celebration of a potentiality that does not issue in action, or its theological derivation from the works of Paul of Tarsus (although see Neilson 2004). Suffice it to say that the concept of inoperativity, in its etymology but also in its philosophical elaboration, rests on the notion of operations. Not accidentally does Giorgio Agamben write that “inoperativity does not mean inertia, but names *an operation* that deactivates and renders

works (of economy, of religion, of language, etc.) inoperative” (Agamben 2014, 69, emphasis added). The recognition that inoperativity can “be deployed only through a work,” that it manifests itself as an “inoperative operation” (70), is surely sufficient to register the ontological relations at stake. The maneuvers Agamben makes to wrestle the priority of the inoperative from this paradoxical or chiasmatic arrangement are worthy of a circus contortionist. But whatever the virtuosity on display, his efforts “to define the truly human activity” (69) do not encompass a wide investigation of what operations can do (both within and beyond the realm of human action). This is surprising for a thinker who has engaged closely with the work of Hannah Arendt, who, in elaborating her famous distinction between work and labor, was well aware of the etymological nexus surrounding the Latin *opus*. It is worth probing the nuances and implications of this distinction further, since they have important consequences for our understanding of operations.

In *The Human Condition* (1998), Arendt relates labor to the life or biologically necessitated dimensions of human metabolism and reproduction. By contrast, “work” is inherently connected with the fabrication of an “artificial’ world of things” that endures beyond the act of creation (Arendt 1998, 7). While Arendt associates the rise of industrial modernity with the encroachment of labor on work and its consequent effects of alienation, we register the continuing role of the operation in the global present. For us, an operation is connected with the fabrication of an artificial world but does not necessarily produce a “work” or material “thing.” In our understanding—and this is important when it comes to operations of capital—an operation produces a set of links or relations among things, or the framework or skeleton of a world. The term “operation,” then, refers to the fabrication of the world; to the production of the connections, chains, and networks that materially envelop the planet, enabling and framing the labor and action of subjects well beyond those directly involved in the execution of the operation itself. What the operations of contemporary capital reveal is a blurring of the boundary between labor and work, which is to say that labor has become increasingly implicated in making the rules, parameters, protocols, standards, infrastructures, and codes that constitute the world. At the same time, we have to recognize that some of the key features of “action,” the third concept discussed by Arendt, play an important role in the operations of capital, making them politically pregnant. In other words, these operations increasingly confront the elusiveness, plurality, and unpredictability of the “human condition,” which for Arendt constituted

the domain of action (see also Virno 2004, 49–71). It thus makes sense to speak of a politics of operations, taking into account both its structuring effect on relations among humans and the ways in which work, labor, and action are combined in the execution of specific tasks and in the social cooperation of different subjects that make operations possible.

The intertwining and blurring of boundaries among work, labor, and action is a distinguishing feature of what we might call the material constitution of contemporary operations of capital. Both in their workings and in the ways in which they hit the ground, these operations have powerful implications for the production of subjectivity, continually reframing and reinstating relations of exploitation and domination. They also work the boundary between the human and the nonhuman (the “machinic” no less than nature) in unprecedented ways. As we show in this book, these operations also challenge, limit, and incite transformations of the state, as well as a range of other political and social institutions. In the face of this material constitution of operations of capital, we must ask again the question regarding the kind of politics that can effectively confront them, opening up new prospects of liberation beyond capital’s rule. Looking at contemporary theoretical debates on this question, we discern two prevailing approaches that seem to us at the same time challenging and limited. The first centers on the notion of *performativity*. Since the publication of *Gender Trouble* ([1990] 1999), Judith Butler has engaged in a rigorous and politically committed exploration of the potentialities of this concept for a radically democratic politics. As she explained in the preface to a new edition of the book in 1999, her first reference for “reading the performativity of gender” was Jacques Derrida’s ([1987] 1992) work on Kafka’s “Before the Law.” She adds, “It is difficult to say what performativity is not only because my own views . . . have changed over time . . . but because so many others have taken it up and given it their own formulations” (Butler [1990] 1999, xiv).

Butler’s *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015) can be considered the provisional point of arrival of her theoretical elaborations on the topic of performativity within the framework of an engaged intervention into the debates surrounding social movements in many parts of the world since the occupation of squares in 2011. There are many points that we share and even admire in this book—for instance, Butler’s take on precarity as the main motif running through a huge variety of movements (Butler 2015, 17). At the same time, we take a sympathetic distance from her claim of a primacy of ethics over politics (see, e.g., Butler 2015, 192, on non-violence). While we acknowledge the relevance of Butler’s reflections on

“the interdependency of living creatures,” as well as on the ensuing “ethical and political obligations” (Butler 2015, 208), and recognize that the notion of performativity can definitely shed light on important political moments and dynamics, we think that it is unable to adequately grasp and effectively confront the radical challenges posed by contemporary operations of capital. This is so because the performative, by definition, is self-contained, even if its affective and embodied dimensions can trouble this containment. The performative is self-referring—which is to say that it constitutes that which it enunciates. The politics of performativity can thus be very effective in describing and theoretically understanding the dynamics at stake in processes of collective subject formation, as Butler shows in her discussion of “we the people” as “an assembly in the act of designating and forming itself” (Butler 2015, 179). But it remains silent about the ways in which this collective subject can confront its multiple outsides and others, which include both existing political institutions and what we might call, with an intentionally provocative Schmittian twist, its “enemy.”

The language of enmity abundantly circulates, posing specific problems for the second approach to radical politics we want to discuss briefly here. This approach is centered on the notion of *event*. The most sophisticated philosophical version of this notion is found in the work of Alain Badiou, particularly in *Being and Event* (2005). Other important thinkers could be mentioned here, including, for instance, Jacques Rancière, who in *Disagreement* (1998) develops and invests hope in the political and the temporal primacy of the event. However, we want to focus here on a different instantiation of this primacy, which is manifest in the work of the Invisible Committee. Since the publication of *The Coming Insurrection* (2009), the Invisible Committee has combined a reading of Agamben’s philosophy with heterogeneous theoretical influences, including the legacy of the Situationist International. In *To Our Friends* (Invisible Committee 2015), readers can find an attempt to take stock of the cycle of struggles and revolts since 2011 along with emphatic statements concerning the “global action of our party” (Invisible Committee 2015, 129)—although the committee is quick to add that “the only party to be built is the one that’s already there” (16). There is no need to dwell critically here on the committee’s political analysis of “what makes *irreversible*” the upheaval of Gezi Park in Istanbul (219) or of the “exemplary case” of Tahrir Square in Cairo (72), which looks quite questionable once the current situation in both countries is considered. Hazard is part of political theory and practice, and we have also paid a price for it in the past. What concerns us more is the politics of “*pure destitution*”

(74) articulated and proposed by the Invisible Committee. The moment of destitution, as well as other “negative” moments (negative in a descriptive sense) such as sabotage and blockade, which they emphasize in a conjuncture in which “power is logistic” (81), undoubtedly have important roles to play in specific struggles and movements. But to reduce radical and even revolutionary politics to the *event* of destitution nurtures an aesthetics—and eventually a nihilistic praise—of riots that confine the building and imagination of a different world to more or less small “communes,” as well as to the multiplication of paths “leading to other communes” and connecting the “political territories” they create (229). Although the Invisible Committee is keen to stress that “the commune is not preoccupied with its self-definition,” with its “identity” (204), the more general problems of “identity politics” haunt its emphasis on the meshing of the “physical” and “existential” meanings of territory of the commune (202). At the same time, the committee’s celebration of riots, besides attracting the critique of “tailism” that we recalled in chapter 5, does not take into consideration the field of operations of an important fraction of contemporary aggregate capital—that is, insurance companies.

Taking a more theoretical angle, and going back to our notion of operations, we could say that the notions of performativity and event (even independently of the ways in which they are elaborated, related, stretched, used, and misused in contemporary critical and radical debates) can illuminate important aspects of the operation. “Performativity” can be taken as a good description of what we might call the operation’s “trigger” and of its tendency to fabricate its own world, while “event” points at its creative capacities, at its “outcome.” Without disregarding these moments, which need to be taken into account in radical political theory and practice, we stressed in chapter 2 the relevance of the uneven and broken pattering of opening and closure that is constitutive of the “interval” between the trigger and outcome of an operation. This is nothing more than an abstract, metaphorical, and heuristically useful point of view. But it allows us not only to elaborate a critique of contemporary capital’s operations but also to gain a sense of the temporality, rhythm, and subjective composition of radical politics that is quite different from those projected by the notions of performativity and event. What we have in mind, and what we share with many scholars and activists in different parts of the world, is the theoretical search for and practical experimentation with a politics capable of confronting the operations of capital at the level of their encroachment on variegated fabrics of daily life. Such a politics must be effective at local sites

of production, reproduction, and cooperation, opening up spaces liberated from exploitation at the same time that it builds connections, translations, and even institutions within wider geographies beyond the local and the national. It must also be capable of realistically confronting and negotiating the state's action, in its representative as well as postrepresentative logics, without ever giving up the unending task of a radical critique of representation and continuing to develop institutions of counterpower within a dual-power approach.

We want to repeat that we are aware of the difficulties and pitfalls of such a politics. But we also need to state once again that we are supported by the awareness that we are not alone in working along these lines. An extraordinary historical archive of revolutionary thought and practice, of struggles and uprisings, continues to be an essential source of inspiration. We thus close this book by conjuring subversive echoes and whispers from a distant past. In 1378 the Republic of Florence was swept by a huge proletarian revolt. The *ciompi* (cloth workers, and wool carders in particular), who were not part of the guild system and had therefore no voice in government, had been striking and demonstrating in May and June. They had shown and exercised their power on the streets of Florence. Some of the patrician palaces had gone up in flames. In July, the revolt took the form of a proper (and briefly successful) insurrection, which was bloodily repressed only at the end of August by the militias led by Michele di Lando, a former leader of the *ciompi* who turned against them. The insurrection thus was eventually defeated, but what is striking in a retrospective gaze is the amazing institutional creativity of the *ciompi* during the few months in which they actually ruled Florence. They did not limit themselves to taking control of existing institutions. They created new, autonomous ones—most notably, a self-governing organ located in the central district of Santa Maria Novella (see Lester 2015; Stella 1993).

In an article written in 1934, the young philosopher Simone Weil (who by that time had grown close to revolutionary syndicalist and Trotskyist circles) commented on the *ciompi* revolt. The proletariat, she noted, was not satisfied with the formal achievements it had been able to win; it continued to petition and, above all, gathered in Santa Maria Novella. “From that moment the city had two governments, one at the Palace, according to the new legality [which means the one established by the revolt], the other, not legal, in Santa Maria Novella,” she wrote. “This extralegal government curiously resembles a soviet; and for some time we see the emergence, through

the action of a newly formed proletariat, of the essential phenomenon of great workers' insurrections—dualism of power" (Weil [1934] 1960, 90–91; see also Lester 2015, 156–57). The *ciompi* revolt was not a marginal episode in the history of modern capitalism, since it happened at an important conjuncture of early financialization, characterized by pioneering technical innovations in the banking system (such as *contratti di cambio*; bills of exchange) that enabled the House of Medici to become "the leading organization in European high finance" (Arrighi 1994, 105). The revolt took place in the middle of this conjuncture, within which financialization meshed with massive investments of Florentine surplus capital to fund "warfare in the Italian inter-city-system and in the European world-economy at large" (Arrighi 1994, 105). The predicament and impoverishment of the *ciompi* that brought about the revolt was part of these powerful shifts within capitalism, which rapidly led to declining returns in the production of coarser cloth in which they were employed. As Giovanni Arrighi notes, this early episode in modern class struggle and the defeat of the *ciompi* point to a problem that would recur in the following centuries—that is, to "the fact that capital was endowed with a much greater flexibility and mobility than its opponents" (Arrighi 1994, 104). Taking note of this important observation, we also want to stress, in a more positive sense, the institutional creativity of the Florentine proletariat that led to the anticipation of "dualism of power" described by Weil.

Although in his *Istorie fiorentine* he celebrated the repression of the *ciompi* and the figure of Michele di Lando, we owe to Niccolò Machiavelli the realistic invention of a talk by one of the leaders of the *ciompi*, an extraordinary manifesto of proletarian class struggle at the dawn of capitalism. This speech has attracted the attention of several critical and radical thinkers, from Max Horkheimer (1930) to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2009, 52). Machiavelli's anonymous rebel says, "Be not deceived about that antiquity of blood by which they [the noble and the rich] exalt themselves above us; for all men having had one common origin, are all equally ancient, and nature has made us all after one fashion. Strip us naked, and we shall all be found alike. Dress us in their clothing, and they in ours, we shall appear noble, they ignoble—for poverty and riches make all the difference" (Machiavelli 1988, 122–23). This powerful claim to a radical equality crosses the centuries and continues to echo in our present. It resonates wherever the poor, the exploited, and the dominated refuse subordination and stand up against oppression. As the story goes, on the night of August 31,

1378, the day the ciompi were defeated, the silence was broken by the bells of the Church of Sant'Ambrogio, one of the strongholds of the rebellion, ringing the tocsin. Since these church bells on the periphery of the city had been a tool for calling the poor to mobilization and insurgency over the preceding months, panic spread among Florence's ruling classes (Stella 1993, 69–73). The ciompi's counteroffensive did not happen that night. But those bells did not stop ringing.