

# **Flooding Wall Street: Echoes from the Future of Resistance around Climate Change**

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## **Abstract**

The global capitalist system is ravaging ecosystems at a staggering and accelerating scale as it transgresses multiple ecological planetary boundaries, from massive species extinction to climate change, radically threatening life on this planet. Through analyzing power as a network of intersecting sets of relations, we can start to appreciate capitalism and the state not as entities, but as comprised by social relationships and local operations of power. This perspective reveals how effective resistance can be conceived in the form of destituent power—not as a direct clash with constituted power but instead as the withdrawal of our energies from and obedience to the political order. This destituent approach proceeds by deactivating the subjugating relationships constituting the system, thereby opening spaces to undertake constantly evolving experiments of developing new harmonious social and ecological relationships. Actions to disrupt and delegitimize the operations of capital, like Flood Wall Street, serve as tentative glimpses of ascendant destituent forces assembling against ecological collapse. The further challenge becomes how to connect the multiplicity of resistances, thought not in terms of a unity as a homogenous movement, but through actively cultivating their transversal relations across the rhizomatic network of experiments in practices of destituent power striving to realize new worlds.

**Keywords:** Destituent power, ecological, climate change, rhizome, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari

## **Introduction**

On September 22, 2014, a flood of 3,000 people descended upon Wall Street in a disobedient tide of creativity, shared compassion, and existential terror, in order to confront capitalism, states, corporations, and financial institutions relentlessly unraveling the planet's delicate network of ecosystems. Flood Wall Street brought swelling waters forcing a necessary albeit merely itinerant disruption to the flow of capital, which acts as the pathogenic blood pumped through the planetary

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body progressively bringing about its decay, most notably through the destabilization of the earth's climate. The despairing planetary trajectory Flood attempted to confront has not meaningfully altered during the subsequent year culminating in the COP21 Paris Agreement, despite the agreement's stated aim to keep the global average temperature rise to "well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C" (UNFCCC 2015). The voluntary pledges for emissions reductions which governments submitted ahead of the COP and which serve as the primary mode for reducing emissions under the agreement, are projected to lead to 2.7-3.7°C of warming (Levin and Fransen 2015). The agreement does not require these pledges to be reexamined until 2020, which is also the year that the world is estimated to exceed the emissions limit associated with staying under 1.5°C temperature increase (Pidcock and Pearce 2014).

The gravity of the tragedy we are living defies psychological assimilation. Flood Wall Street strived to act as a harbinger of gathering waters of radical disobedience that will rise to inundate the institutions constituting this political order and the power relationships which traverse them to halt their operation. These collective waters will finally recede as a destituent power evacuating all our vital energies and support for the legitimacy and representation of the political order to the vanishing point of the state and capitalism on new horizons.

To the extent that constituent revolutionary power always establishes a new legal and political order after deposing the previous one, it effects the self-capture of its irruptive, transformative force within the paradigm of sovereignty. In contrast, destituent power consummates itself in a rejection of and subtraction from the extant political order without seeking to then institute a new one, in a withdrawal and exodus from the limits of political sovereignty. In the urgent present, it reflects the pressing need to refuse the continuous functioning of capitalism that is destroying the biosphere, while opening spaces for exploring new political forms without reproducing a similar set of power relations to those we are dismantling. Flood Wall Street exhibited aspects of this radical rejection of the state-capitalist system, but was not yet equipped to embark on a sustained exit from the existing political order.

Through adopting a micropolitical view of power that allows us to conceive of power as an acentered network of intersecting lines of relations, one can begin to comprehend capitalism and the state not as entities but as comprised of a set of social relationships and local operations of power. This analysis reveals the efficacy of destituent power as a means of exodus from these enslaving relationships and a way to open political spaces to engage in ongoing experiments to reorient our social and ecological relationships in accordance with planetary ecosystems. The pressing task then

becomes how to bring together and coordinate these heterogeneous situated spaces of freedom forged by destituent power to weave them into a complex rhizomatic web of blooming connections. This rhizomatic network—characterized by the capacity of its interchangeable elements to connect with any others in any direction without central or hierarchical coordination or ordering—can serve to strategically codify and coordinate resistances and alternative experimental political bodies and practices that foster new subjectivities and social relationships necessary to successfully dissolve the state and capital, offering hope of averting the looming planetary collapse.

### **Power and a Flood Irrigating a Fragile Earth**

The astonishing level of scientific consensus surrounding the severity and urgency of the threat of climate change, in conjunction with the almost daily barrage of further documentation of the extent of intersecting ecological crises, cannot assail or forestall the economic logic of capitalism. The penetration of neoliberal political rationality into every corner of the global social space and its generalized application to an expanding domain of social life correspond with and extend the reductionist logic of capital incessantly striving to transmogrify the dense universe of non-fungible human and ecological values into the smooth, monolithic texture of economic value. The relative imperviousness of the continuing flows of financing from Wall Street, the embodiment of global financial capital, and from governments to extractive industries, even as these businesses' activities are manifestly and directly causing the climate catastrophe, evinces this singular rapaciousness. For instance, fossil fuel corporations continued to benefit from subsidies of \$5.3 trillion in 2015 (Coady et al. 2015). This is more than all governments combined spend on health care and amounts to an astounding \$10 million every minute (Carrington 2015).

Through its univocal conception of value, capital serves to shape our actions and how we imagine our relationships with one another and the ecosystems that support us, as well as mediates how we cooperate together to reproduce our world (Haiven 2012, 7). This reconfiguration of personal and social life in strictly economic terms obliterates a whole ecosystem of values which are foundational to the continued maintenance of life on this planet. This inherent drive of capitalism to commodify ecological values, when multiplied and extended globally by its structural imperative for endless expansion, leads to the despoliation of the natural world we are ever more acutely experiencing. In its injunction to “Stop Capitalism! End the Climate Crisis!” Flood Wall Street diagnosed a critical node in the network of power relationships suffusing global society that must be resisted and dismantled in order to avert planetary disaster.

As an initial wave of disobedience, with several thousand people shutting down a large swathe of streets in and around the epicenter of global financial capital for a day, Flood Wall Street constituted an important intervention. It worked as a complement and radical counterpoint to the 400,000 people who marched loudly and politely against climate change through the streets of New York the day before. Although Flood Wall Street was not expected to precipitate a contagion of insurrectionary energy, in fostering new relationships among participants, planting inchoate seeds of new subjectivities, and sending off new radical shoots, it can be situated as one additional step in the ceaseless project of sowing a network of destituent power and disobedience that is necessary to end the countless depredations attendant with our prevailing social formations.

The simple conception of Flood Wall Street—people wearing blue flooding financial centers across the world to disrupt capital flows and reject capitalism’s role in driving climate chaos—was intentionally designed to enable this tactic to multiply, spread widely, and be adapted to local circumstances with no one exercising control or ownership over any specific implementation. This inherent potential for virality through iterating the creation of relays among resistances constitutes a crucial and increasingly prevalent feature of recent movement tactics (Day 2005, 19). The energy released from the Flood produced numerous offshoots, extending from the local with the formation of a New York City branch in the creative direct action network Rising Tide, to the global with #FloodtheSystem. The latter spawned actions in 2015 ranging from Flood Wall Street West in San Francisco’s financial district to the coal ports of Australia, to the fight against fossil fuel infrastructure across North America. The emerging network fostered by Flood also served as a medium for collectives to coalesce in Paris to take direct action during COP21, enabling the continued proliferation of connections, relationships, and practices. In this way it is incipiently displaying qualities associated with the concept of a rhizome (discussed further below), as an evolving network of non-hierarchical, heterogeneous connections in which any point can form a link with any other, which offers a fertile conceptual frame in which to think this global resistance. To actually begin to meaningfully respond to the gravity of the crisis facing us we must transversally connect hundreds of thousands of global relay points rhizomatically in sustained and escalating assaults against capitalism and the state through inhibiting their functioning, while subtracting our energies and reconfiguring our social relationships that act to perpetuate this parasitic system.

There are limitations, however, without politicizing and bringing radical struggle to our collective social reproduction in daily life. Absent this careful and constant politicization of the way we reproduce ourselves each day, actions like Flood Wall Street will happen and then dissipate as

everyone returns home while the juggernaut of capital continues churning. These actions are stifled not through affirmative suppression, but through recuperation into the social milieu “by being rendered yet another spectacle in the parade of culture,” where their meaning can be solicitously modulated and constructed (May 1995, 25). As Horkheimer and Adorno (1972, 144) observed, the objective of the cultural industry—comprised significantly by the six companies that own 90% of the media consumed in the United States (Stewart 2014)—is to furnish pleasure and amusement that is a flight; and not a flight from the misery of daily reality, as is the dominant assumption, but instead from any thoughts of resistance. In turn, John Holloway highlights how in most places, and especially in developed states, we are not prepared to jettison capitalism and the state insofar as we have not yet developed alternative ways of living sufficient to provide for our material needs to live with dignity without depending on wage labor, on capitalism (Fernández-Savater 2014). Thus, lacking fecund ground for ongoing and sustained nurturing of the radical imagination through alternative spaces and practices on a daily basis, it will remain exceedingly challenging to multiply and connect axes of resistance and experimental political practices in a manner necessary to withdraw sufficient energy from the capitalist order to render it redundant and superfluous.

As was noted, after the punctual flood many returned to their obedient everyday lives that enable this political order to persist, despite the immiseration, deracination, and chaos it engenders and on which it feeds, because of the productive nature of power and the occlusion of power’s operations that ensure we largely misapprehend its elaboration and workings. As Foucault (1978, 86) suggested, power is successful to the extent that it is able to mask its operations. Power functions to produce us as subjects who then act as accomplices in our self-enslavement through obedience to this system and the deformed set of values it fosters.

We are accustomed to the view of power as that force which is external to the actor and impinges on, constrains, or represses her actions. However, following Foucault, power crucially is productive and creative, that which also forms and formulates the subject, providing coordinates for the social positioning that she, in turn, vivifies and lives through, thereby rendering her position coextensive with her social identity and orienting the vectors of her desires (Butler 1997, 2). In this way a normative discourse, concerning, for instance, gender or heteronormativity—always and everywhere already invested with power relations—only persists as a norm to the extent that it is (re)produced through its instantiations in subjects acting out this idealization in social practice. This is how subjects are both effects and vehicles of power. The norm is reproduced through the acts of subjects that seek to approximate it, through the normalizing idealizations concretized in and

through these acts (Butler 2004, 48). Discursive regimes and normative constraints are not external to individuals, but are guaranteed by individuals subscribing to them and reproduced through being subjected by them. The operation of power through subjectification and subjects in turn self-activating these mechanisms of power effaces power relations and dominance and renders them difficult to perceive because we, in apparent freedom, participate in their (re)production in the ways we relate to and govern ourselves and each other (Lorey 2006).

Power can infuse and achieve effective control “over the entire life of the population only when it becomes an integral, vital function that every individual embraces and reactivates of his or her own accord” (Hardt and Negri 2001, 24). In this society of control, power mechanisms become immanent to the social field, enacted and reinscribed constantly through their diffusion throughout the consciousnesses and bodies of the population across the whole of social relations (24). Thus, we can view power as not merely repressive, operating on its objects (“from above”), but also as productive and creative, operating within and through them (“from below”), as not in a position of exteriority to other relationships but interior to and traversing them. In addition to bringing about that which must be resisted, power also perniciously gives rise to the forms which resistance assumes (May 1995, 73). Because power shapes and configures its own resistance, it is crucial to engage in analysis of local, specific power mechanisms to properly understand the operation of power so as to apprehend modes of resistance that do not inadvertently reinscribe and reinforce those very power relationships.

### **Destituent Power and the Unweaving of the Relationships of Capital and the State**

It is within this context that we must evaluate and situate the mode of political struggle Flood Wall Street betokens. The modern conception of political conflict has been predominantly understood in terms of “constituent power,” which is the creative energy or violence that, *ex nihilo*, is capable of creating a (new) institutional order—a new constitution and new juridical norms—whereby social relations are organized (into “constituted power”) (Laudani 2012). The peculiar and aporetic character of constituent power is revealed when considering that if constituent power succeeds in creating a new legal order, constituent power will, in following its essence, instantly threaten the same constituted power it has just created. Thus, if constituent power with this excess is not to undo the new legal order it has just constituted, “constituent power must then, at some indeterminate but decisive threshold, begin to be neutralized and contained” (Laudani 2013, xiii). It is in this dynamic that Walter Benjamin (1978, 284), in his essay “On the Critique of Violence,” identified and located

the dialectic between constituent power—as lawmaking violence—and constituted power—as law-preserving violence. The mutually constituting and reinforcing nature of security and resistance reflects this underlying dialectic between constituent power and constituted power.

The concept of destituent power (“*poder destituyente*”), on the other hand, originates from the Colectivo Situaciones’ (2011) analysis of the uprisings in Argentina on December 19 and 20, 2001. Destituent power exhibits potency similar to constituent power, but operates as a continual process of open-ended withdrawal from, or refusal of, the juridical, institutional order (Laudani 2013, 4). It functions completely outside the law—extrainstitutionally—seeking to dismantle sovereign, constituted power altogether rather than to reform it or overthrow it and then re-institute it in a different form. Destituent power undermines and erodes the obedience that is fundamental to and presupposed by the constituted order for its continued existence. However, destituent power is not a purely reactive or nihilistic force, but instead is creative—not in the sense of producing new institutions to replace the old, but through its deactivation of the legal order. This, in turn, opens new horizons of possibilities for egalitarian and holistic social and ecological relationships far exceeding what is practicable under the current destructive political order (xv, n. 23).

Benjamin (1978, 300) also envisaged this immanent creative potential within destituent power as he attempted to identify a pure violence that could “break the false dialectics of lawmaking violence and law-preserving violence.” Following this line of reasoning, he argued that “[o]n the breaking of this cycle maintained by mythical forms of law, on the suspension [destitution] of law with all the forces on which it depends as they depend on it, finally therefore on the abolition of state power, a new historical epoch is founded.” Thus, although a constituent power destroys law only to re-institute it again in a new form (merely perpetuating the cycle), insofar as destituent power dismantles and deposes the law once for all, it can function to open onto the terrain of a new epoch characterized by radically new possibilities (Agamben 2014). In deposing the political order, destituent power opens becomings, enabling experimentation with new practices and the development of new knowledges that will, in turn, themselves be de-instituted in the continual and open-ended process unfolding (Colectivo Situaciones 2011, 64, 87).

Constituent power’s direct confrontation with the state—through terrorism or revolution—simply reinforces the security apparatus and invites greater levels of repression. As destituent power, disobedience can be conceived not as a direct clash with constituted power but instead as the withdrawal of consent to the political order, as a direct negation of its legitimacy (Laudani 2013, 37). Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century German anarchist Gustav Landauer deployed a similar argument in maintaining

that all social and political institutions depend for their existence on the choices of individuals to continue to give them their support, and, thus, removal of this support and constituting ourselves apart from these institutions, thereby rendering them redundant, is the key to dissolving them. Furthermore, Landauer extended this insight concerning the extent to which our obedient practices and behaviors serve as the basis of the state, arguing that “[t]he state is a condition, a certain relationship among human beings, a mode of behavior between men; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently toward one another” (qtd. in Lunn 1973, 226).

This view of the basis of the power of the state and capitalism as sets of relations anticipates and finds consonance in the poststructuralist understanding of power articulated by Foucault (referenced above). The network of power relations forms a “dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them” (Foucault 1978, 95). Thus power is not like an object that is acquired or held, but rather it is exercised from innumerable points in a network of shifting relations. This understanding of social and political space as exhaustively comprised by a complex web of intersecting power relationships does not preclude particular lines and points in the network, like the state, from being bolder, so to speak, or more socially determinative than others; however, these points or lines do not act as a central locus from which the other lines emanate or through which they must pass (May 1995, 52-53). The state is not a “thing” exterior to us that can be seized and wielded by a dominant class or group without thereby merely reproducing the intricate network of power relations that manifests in exploitation, domination, irreducible forms of oppression (e.g. patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity etc.), and deterioration of the biosphere. We are not controlled by a state or capital as institutions apart from us, set above or outside a “civil society,” but instead “we all govern each other through a complex web of capillary relations of power” (Day 2005, 124-125).

This is not to say the state or capital are not real or do not have material effects, that the profane violence wrought by each and in tandem is an illusion, or that they can simply be wished away. Rather it is to reveal the critical foundation of their existence. Macropolitical practices or relations like the state and global capitalism are products of the manifold intersections and confluence of specific local, or micropolitical, practices, and must be understood and assayed on their basis. The intersecting local power relations and practices on which the macropolitical is founded cannot be subsumed and absorbed by the latter. This recognition is crucial to avoiding the theoretical and historical error of assuming that the destruction or replacement of dominating macropolitical arrangements will result in the dissolution of the composite power relations and the



oppressive effects reflected in them. There remains a heterogeneity between micropolitical and macropolitical practices notwithstanding their entanglement through reflexive interplay and mutual supposition and reinforcement (May 1995, 99-100). Even as the relations comprising the state and global capital are traceable to and constituted by myriad local practices and power relationships, the macropolitical is not completely reducible to these local dynamics either. Rather it is an agglomeration of different lines in the network of mobile power relations that makes it more than the sum of its parts—not a mere mechanical transposition in scale of the local practices on which it is founded—but also not separate from the microrelations, from the confluence of micropolitical practices that constitute it and on which it depends for its functioning.

In analyzing capitalism and the state form not as “things” but as particular sets of relations among subjects and the local practices yielded through the innumerable interactions of such relations, we can see how deactivating and reconceiving these relationships through the connection of experiments (even if initially small in scale) in the construction of alternative modes of social, political and economic relations and organization can offer a way to avoid both the indefinite wait for the ripening of the moment for revolution to arrive—which, in aspiring to totalizing transformation through enacting a changing of the guard at the helm of the state, will leave unaddressed the underlying power relations—and the perpetuation of existing forms of domination by injecting energy into them anew through reformist demands (Day 2005, 16). To the extent that we continue to come to the state to mediate and redress our grievances, we remain circumscribed within the horizons of state logic. We perpetuate the set of relationships constitutive of the state each time we make claims or demands upon it for the conferral of recognition, inclusion, or gifts of heretofore denied rights. This is not necessarily to maintain that struggling for reforms can never be advantageous—perhaps to achieve short-term palliatives to mitigate the most severe depravities of capitalism—but it is to accentuate the consequences of this politics of demand that both provides the state system with positive energy which could be directed towards building alternatives, and serves to relegitimize and further sediment the set of social relationships constituting the dominant global political order.

Armed with this conceptual lens for apprehending the manifold ways local power relations constitute macropolitical practices of the state and global capital, we can orient ourselves to evaluate the various molecular bonds, specific practices, psychic attachments, idealizations, investments of desire, modes of subjectification that traverse individuals and the social order as specifically contributing to the macropolitical functioning of the state and capital or, in contrast, as eroding and

undermining their operation, weaving different relationships that do not sustain those constituting capitalism and the state. Destituent power deposes the political order through withdrawing the vital energy and reconfiguring the social relationships and practices on which the system depends and which serve as its basis for perpetuation. If we are the state and capitalism and each is in all of us, then we must disentangle ourselves from this condition thereby creating openings in which we can begin to define ourselves through alternative relations (Day 2005, 188). The state and capitalism will persist only and as long as individuals continue to relinquish their autonomy to give their support to them, as their existence is sustained through psychic attachments to and co-dependency on their power, through the persistent acknowledgement and idealization of the dominant authority of each, and the local microrelations that criss-cross the social body constituting these attachments, dependencies, and idealizations (Newman 2010, 42). Change will come through individuals withdrawing their collective support and deactivating at a micropolitical level the multifarious ways in which we are bound to the prevailing organization of power at the level of our social relationships and subjectivities.

Thus, against the criticism that this approach of destituent power merely evinces an impotent allergy to state power, we can see we cannot reestablish a legal and political order without reproducing the subjectivities and power relations on which the former is predicated and from which the latter are derived in a dynamic relation of mutual codetermination. Some may also worry that embracing destituent power is naively unrealistic, that we need a legal and institutional order to functionally organize the social, especially at increasing geographic scales. While undoubtedly a critical challenge for the coming communities, this issue of administering complex systems is ultimately more a problem of imagination rather than logistics (though it is certainly that too). Destituent power pushes our collective imaginaries to develop approaches to organize political life that do not rely on establishing a legal and institutional order. Constituted power, wielding its law-preserving violence, functions as a machine for its own reproduction. Distancing itself from the historical and theoretical trappings of constituent power, destituent power operates ceaselessly to disperse power—for example, through developing mechanisms for rotating individuals who temporarily occupy a position of executing the communal will, or of “leading by obeying” (*mandar obedeciendo*), as with the Zapatistas or Aymaras in Bolivia—to prevent its accumulation, concentration, and reinstitutionalization (Zibechi 2010, 14-16). Drawing on these autonomous and indigenous communal forms can help us imagine modes of community that are non-institutional, non-legal, non-organizational, in which the ostensibly distinct domains of the economic, social,

political, cultural, etc. are not separated but woven together in the same field of the unfolding, indefinite communities-in-process. We do not yet know what a destituent body is capable of.

The concept of destitution should be understood as a “positive no” rather than a pure negation, a “no” that in rejecting representation at once “produces a ‘self-changing’ affirmation that engenders new practices and modes of subjectification, from which the ‘no’ first derives its force” (Nowotny 2007). Destituent power dissolves sovereignty, institutions, and representation, thereby expanding “the field of the thinkable” as if manipulating an aperture (Colectivo Situaciones 2011, 53). The flight from the system does not carry with it a hegemonic, universal program for constructing new social and ecological relations in destituent territories, but will be a ceaseless process of experimentation with alternatives developed through recursive (re)negotiation of common social values using participatory democratic practices.

### **Rhizomatic Affinity, Not Hegemony**

As Flood Wall Street has shown, however, for this strategy of destituent power to realize more than an ephemeral flash of autonomy on an island (in the middle of Broadway or elsewhere), and to ultimately dissipate the ruinous state and capitalist system, it must appreciate and respond to the actual dynamics of power. This has several implications. First, this destituent power will be affinitive and not hegemonic in both of its moments—in its disruption and dismantling of the political order and in its escape to open onto new terrains of alternative practices. Second, these acts of disruption and exodus must be rhizomatic and expand through connecting to other experiments in destituting the system. Finally, this will be an open-ended process without answers, only questions and the ongoing self-reflexive framing of problems as we go about creating new worlds. It will be an unfolding process of continual experimentation and warding off of the state and capitalism, one with no final end state or totalizing transformation to a transparent society all at once across the planet.

This opening act of mass disobedience must be situated within a diffuse, expansive project of disruption to deactivate capitalism’s assault on the biosphere on its many fronts. In articulating and connecting practices of destituent power it is crucial to appreciate the network character of relationships of power and the diffusion of interrelated *but irreducible* oppressions flowing across and through this network of relationships (May 1995, 54). There is no ultimately unifying privileged axis of resistance, no univocal sign under which to exhaustively capture the heteromorphous modes of resistance. That is to say, for instance, the struggle against patriarchy is not reducible to the struggle

against the capitalist economic system, despite the varied ways in which the latter and former intermix, mutually reinforce, and reproduce one another. Any hegemonic totalization of the domain of struggle, assignment of the proper revolutionary subjects, or imposition of a pre-determined political program for the coming communities risk reducing to a single front or axis a polyvalent, heterogeneous field of resistances and experiments in constructing and linking new social forms and communities.

The traditional constituent revolutionary strategy—that of a direct, targeted assault on the heart of the state and its primary nerve centers—does not fully reflect how power operates and invites ensnarement in the spiral of security. Instead, a “diffused process of disintegration” is required, a process that is indefinite and attacks power in its nodes, in appreciation of its dominant mode of expression and the reticular nature of its relations (Laudani 2013, 149). In this way, following Foucault (1978, 96), “the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities... [a]nd it is doubtless the strategic codification of these points of resistance that makes a revolution possible, somewhat similar to the way in which the state relies on the institutional integration of power relationships.” As power and oppression are decentered, resistance must be as decentered well, while still targeting points at which power agglomerates, like Wall Street, as political interventions at such points can have effects diffusing out across larger sections of political and social networks (May 1995, 54). Therefore, the multiplicity of resistances cannot be thought in terms of a unity as a homogenous movement, and their transversality must be appreciated as their echoes and resonances are felt across an interconnected network of experiments in practices of disobedience and destituent power (Colectivo Situaciones 2011, 238-239).

The key challenge, then, is how to conceptualize and achieve the strategic codification of this set of decentralized acts of destituent power through linking them rhizomatically. Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis provides an invaluable framework to contend with this issue. For them, rhizomes are conceived as “acentered systems, finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbor to any other, the stems or channels do not preexist, and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their *state* at a given moment—such that the local operations are coordinated and the final, global result synchronized without a central agency” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 17). In a rhizome connections multiply from any element to any other in a mutable, variable manner without a dominant “trunk” or hierarchy of relays or relations along which connections must pass or by which they are ordered. There is no integrating operation or signifier, so heterogeneous elements maintain their differences as singularities. This contrasts markedly with a

hierarchical model which requires “an authority or totality to which all the incorporated people or elements submit—an overarching leader, cause, organisation, idea, or some other ‘spook’” in relation to which organization is articulated and the identity or status of its constituent parts are defined (Karatzogianni and Robinson 2010, 60-61). The resultant rhizomatic network comprises a non-linear series of infinitely expanding omni-directional connections distributed in n-dimensions. It possesses self-organizing capacities arising from these mobile connectivities and enabling it to coordinate local and global actions without the addition of a structuring or unifying entity or agency. Capturing kudzu, the endless conquest of felt, birds variably flocking, fish expanding and pulsing in schools, and brains’ dense, malleable networks full of offshoots of neurons, axons, and dendrites—all operate significantly as rhizomes.

Thus, to weave the necessary federated and transversal links between multiple, diverse political struggles or conditions against the mutilation of our planetary ecosystems requires affirming and connecting at least one consequence or element from each struggle to the other. These shared elements—e.g., practices, actions, tactics, slogans, communications, etc.—operate as relays between these entities, functioning as connections from which other outgrowths may flourish. The connections are made through resonant and complementary practices, by sharing a practice or acting on or through a shared consequence of a political condition. The critical emphasis is upon action, on adopting a practice shared with another political condition through participation in the practice, not inert subscription to a principle. Moreover, to establish mobile connections in a rhizomatic fashion is crucial for experiments in destituent power because, just as with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987, 506) lines of flight, there is the persistent risk that the escape trajectory of the experiment may fail to connect with other conditions necessary for its creative development and thus may face reabsorption, withering, or implosion (Patton 1985, 66-67).

Because struggles or political bodies are singular, the links among them do not result in a new unity or total identification—incremental degrees of identity are achieved as a function of the specific number of conjunctive mutual practices (Nail 2012, 159). The political bodies and their constitutive conditions and elements remain irreducible to one another, the bridge of a shared practice holds them together while keeping them apart in their differentiation (176). Thus, the rhizomatic nature of the formation maintains its affinitive, non-hegemonic and non-identitarian character even through its sowing of subterranean and aerial connecting flows across struggles.

This can be seen nascently and to a modest degree with the numerous offshoots Flood Wall Street generated, particularly in the global actions to block the flows of carbon and capital

undertaken as part of #FloodtheSystem. Carrying along the spores of its aesthetics (wearing blue, its song, etc.) and tactics, “Flood” has transformed into a transitive verb of disruption, taking the polymorphous manifestations of capitalism sprawled across the globe as its objects. This viral diffusion is precisely the type of adoption of a shared practice or common participation in a consequence of a political condition that creates connections and generates the potential for offshoots, reinventions, and mutual transformation of practices and the conditions of the practices. And the greater the diffusion, number, and variety of the connections renders the network more robust, adaptive, and capable of producing hybrids of practices and irruptive conflagrations. Through the connection of elements with significant numbers of interacting individuals, groups, and movements comprising a dynamic open system that continually evolves, the network in turn realizes the potential for greater reflexivity and self-transformation through iterative feedback loops that can foster the development of even greater complexity among the network (Chesters and Welsh 2006, 105).

In this way the political condition and space opened up by destituent power in which connections can multiply does not subsume or represent its constitutive differentiated elements in reference to a static grounding identity or organization and has no distinct existence apart from these concrete elements it brings together. It functions as a basin of attraction that serves as a contested and mutable marker around which political grievances, problems, crises in power, or any host of other heterogeneous elements nearing escape velocity from the tentacular grasp of the state-capitalist machine can conjugate and take on consistency. The political condition thus “acts as a mobile and flexible point or proper name like ‘Zapatismo,’ ‘Peoples’ Global Action,’ or ‘Occupy,’” through which various collectives, participant-subjects, and practices, holding diverse analyses of microrelations of power, can interrelate and take collective action (Nail 2012, 121-122).

Destituent territories can thus mobilize a marker or proper name, like the French “ZADs” (*Zones À Défendre*, or “zones to be defended”) which constitute an expanding network of autonomous territories proliferating within the cracks in capitalism and the state. These heterogeneous territorial struggles—ranging from resistance against *grands projets inutiles imposés* (“big useless imposed projects”) to defending urban political squats, and to which the ascription “ZAD” is auto-applied in many cases—have mushroomed across France and into other parts of Europe (Zadist 2014). As such, the ZAD already acts as a horizon through and around which links can be forged as various political struggles (with their own conditions, elements and practices, and subjects) circulate and deploy relays fostered through their participation in this porous political space. In this

way, destituent territories can come to form a plane of multiplicities with as many dimensions as there are connections among elements, while lacking a supplementary dimension unifying them in a representation or totalization.

Seeds of an emerging rhizomatic network also can be seen in the movement towards a transnational social strike inaugurated by the call for “1<sup>st</sup> March 2016: 24 Hours Without Us! Against Borders and Precarization,” envisioned as “a day of decentralized and coordinated actions and strikes, aimed at disrupting regular production and reproduction, producing communication among different working conditions, making visible hidden situations of exploitation, targeting the border regime and the institutions that govern mobility and precarity” (Transnational Social Strike 2015). Beginning initially and very modestly as a swirling eddy, the transnational social strike could serve to precipitate a vortical political event or condition that could function not as a transcendent cause but as a basin of attraction around which dispersed, concrete-singular struggles can circulate and transform each other, as well as the political condition marked by the “transnational social strike” through which they are acting (Nail 2012, 122). It could operate as a medium from which connections can spring, overspilling not only particularized geographic circumstances but also crucially producing transversal relays across often-siloed movement milieus and issues. This attractor, and the rhizomatic interplay of multiplicities it potentially affords, could enable heterogeneous elements to pass a threshold making possible a conjunction of their energies and generating a shared acceleration of struggles (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 142). To disable the dominant statist and capitalist relations that are global in scope and penetration will require correspondingly extensive and intensive networks of destituent power coordinating and conjoining their capacities for disordering and evacuating the political order of its power and replacing it with new interdependent networks.

The coming communities born in the social wilderness onto which we walk out through the operation of destituent power will exist alongside and in the margins or cracks of the system, simultaneously subtracting their energy and rendering it redundant. Insofar as the state is characterized by its operation to create a “milieu of interiority,” to capture elements and interiorize them, a destituent power occupies the opposite pole (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 352; Patton 1985, 75). It is a process of exteriorization, of leaving behind the dual colonizing operations of interiority of the state and of the incessant axiomatic reduction of all values to exchange value by capitalism. In this way, destituent power is entropic vis-à-vis the established order, constantly degrading it and bringing about its decomposition. And from the resultant social cosmic soup, emergent

relationships, decisions, and social forms can arise from the new configurations created by political groupings in their adaptive interactions and participative self-organization. For instance, units functioning in a decentralized, highly participatory and democratic manner are recognized from a collective vantage point as providing certain strengths—capacities for expanded interconnectivity, communication, coordination, adaptation, resistance to capture, etc. The advantages afforded by these practices are then reaffirmed in a positive feedback loop and, in turn, redeployed through the reflexivity of the network, which can give rise to emergent properties (Chesters and Welsh 2006, 101-102).

Thus, from connecting the multiform practices emerges a “fractal movement space” in which modes of destituent action—resistances, subversions, participatory democracy, experiments with new forms of life and cultivating relations—interact and overflow their local borders iterating and amplifying across local-to-global levels (Chesters and Welsh 2006, 142-143). The construction of a rhizomatic movement proceeds as an experiment in fostering transitory fluctuating connections among political singularities cooperating in and through their differences to dissolve the political order. Within this network milieu, comprised of complex microrelations, interactions, and exchanges, unpredictable macro-level outcomes can arise that are historically determinate and not capable of being known in advance (102). A complex system’s capacity for generating emergent properties can have potent spontaneous, accelerating effects that exhibit the potential to manifest in plateaus, which, for Deleuze and Guattari, are confluences of circumstances that lead activities of radical disobedience or destituent power, for instance, to a sustained level of intensity that does not automatically exhaust itself in a climax. As such, the “heightening of energies is sustained long enough to leave a kind of afterimage of its dynamism that can be reactivated or injected into other activities, creating a fabric of intensive states between which any number of connecting routes could exist” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, x). Therefore, through weaving rhizomatic links among experiments in destituent power we can strategically codify the open set of a plurality of resistances to confront the productive and reticular nature of local power relations which are constitutive of the political order that is unraveling the intricate web of global ecosystems on which all life depends.

### **Conclusion**

Flooding Wall Street can be included as one of many incipient acts of disobedience, the beginning rumblings of an existential “NO!” carried on a rising destituent tide that will continue receding in a cacophonous subtraction and reciprocal production of openings onto new horizons of possibilities



for alternative forms of social relationships and harmonious relations with ecosystems. Desertion and removal of obedience and support to the institutions and representation of the constituted political order is our crucial course to chart, while simultaneously disrupting the operations and flows of capital. Additionally, we must conceive of ways in which the precarious, the excluded, the indebted, the refugees can withdraw their vital energies from the disfiguring system of capital to swell and discover outlets for escape from the climbing floodwaters and creeping famines displacing those least responsible for and least equipped to address them.

Indispensable to this endeavor's success is developing a rhizomatic network among our practices and experiments, where groups and tactics can interact, send offshoots, and create new relays giving rise to a fractal space in which self-similar destituent acts can emerge and ripple across the globe in a manner adequate to the expansive global scope of that which we confront. The many destituent projects do not promise a phantasmic totalizing liberation all at once, but seek to expand territories of freedom and to establish connections among these local spaces in which people can create the conditions of their own existence, to arrange themselves and to stop being arranged by others. These spaces will offer fertile ground for the development of alternative subjectivities and relationships consonant with individuals and multiplicities as nodes in the rhizomatic network of planetary ecosystems. This practice of politics as irreducible movement involves a permanent process of warding off the colonizing return of capital and the state, where the potential for such relationships constitutive of these modes of social organization always remain latent within social bodies. Such participatory social bodies will be created and sustained through an evolving process, the conditions of which are continually undergoing immanent transformation by and through the various practices, experimentations, and subjects constituting them, who are themselves reciprocally transformed in varying degrees through participation. Destituent power does not contemplate a static destination or final structural form but embraces the creative vitality of its open-endedness, thrives in restlessly remaking and reinventing itself to meet the situation anew. Those of us who embark on this urgent journey will begin to unfold the indefinite dimensions of these destituent territories and find we are doing the same with ourselves.

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