



Is This the Rhizome? Thinking Together with Fleur Johns

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On the heavily polluted soil of De Ceugel—a former shipyard in Amsterdam turned into an eco-tech playground—the Sovereign Nature Initiative (SNI) recently convened its first Experimental Zone: a ‘celebration of ecology, art, theory and emerging technologies’ (Sovereign Nature Initiative 2022a). Bringing together crypto-poets, eco-philosophers, blockchain developers and tech start-up investors, the gathering sought to spark ‘radical approaches toward sustainability’. How could the non-human speak for and sustain itself when seen, sensed, mediated and multiplied through new technological tools or interventions? Which worlds can be crafted where ‘trees, hyenas, snails, rivers, elk and algae preserve their own value’ and ‘humans ... have a stake in their thriving’ (Sovereign Nature Initiative 2022b)? How can one govern with and through the sky and subterranean? Situated at the ‘intersection of ecology, economy and emerging web3 technologies’, SNI nurtures ‘radical approaches’ that aspire to ‘reconfigur[e] nature’s value’ and to enact a ‘non-exploitative, non-consumerist’ relation between ‘nature, humans and technology’. De Ceugel in Amsterdam Noord proved a perfect place for this experimental exploration. Built on the site’s toxic soil, creative workspaces nested in old houseboats are tied together with natural surroundings through a winding wooden jetty. Phytoremediation plants labor (and die) to clean the polluted earth—a process that is measured, mapped and materialized into a vibrant, hybrid and digitally mediated ecology. De Ceugel describes itself as ‘never finished’—in a ‘perpetual state of development’ (De Ceugel 2022). It does not only strive for specific sustainability solutions but also for a ‘cultural transition’, claiming that ‘people have to learn new modes of thought and how to apply new techniques and technologies’.

Operating on this ‘cleantech playground’ of De Ceugel, Metabolic—a technology development and consultancy organisation—developed a ‘sensor network’ to provide

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circular, cybernetic solutions to the sustainability problems of this specific urban space (Metabolic 2022).¹ At the site we learn that.

the sensor network allows us to collect real-time information about resource flow and patterns of behavior ... how it changes over time and what affects it. This data can help us better understand user behavior in the context of sustainable urban environments and allow us to test the impact of different interventions and technologies over time (Metabolic 2022).

For those studying contemporary practices of global security governance, this ‘radical approach’ to sustainability will feel eerily familiar. The recently created Border Risking and Targeting Capability (BRTC) of the UK Home Office, for example, prides itself on having developed enhanced sensing and intelligence capacities to ‘bring[] together and analyse[] diverse data in real time’, which would help at finding ‘patterns’ of ‘suspicious behavior’ and ‘identify[ing] hidden relationships in the data’ to target their interventions more effectively (Home Office 2022; Say 2022). The ambition to ‘ingest large volumes of data’ and ‘identify patterns not observed (as “strange”) before’ is also at the heart of the EU’s 2020 strategy on the use of AI in border control, migration and security—a strategy that equally recognizes the iterative process of trialling and testing, of playing and prototyping, that such a shift in governance routines would entail (European Commission 2020).² It is hard not to be struck by the conceptual and material threads that tie together these very different sites of political practice and imagination: the radical experiments in Amsterdam Noord seem strangely aligned with the ways in which surveillance practices are redesigned and borderlines redrawn—both built around a sensory, cybernetic net, a mapping of emergent and correlational patterns, an open architecture of adaptation. Perspectives and postures often associated with heterodoxy or critique (multiplicity, decentralisation, bottom-up adaptation, disruption or experimentation) are appropriated, mediated and re-signified in emerging practices of global governance as well as in—awkwardly proximate—modes of radical re-imagination. The rhizome has rooted in new rationalities of rule, the swarm nested in the sovereign.³

This special issue emerges from a shared sense that remarkable and troubling resonances of this kind—resonances that signal a profound and prevalent reorientation of contemporary governance practice—can meaningfully be understood, evaluated and engaged by thinking through the account developed by Fleur Johns in her ‘From Planning to Prototypes: New Ways of Seeing Like a State’ (2019). Visiting two locales in Indonesia (BAPPENAS and Pulse Lab Jakarta), Johns explores the changing routines, rhythms and styles of development practice—a change, she argues, that

¹ On its website, Metabolic promises to ‘use systems thinking to tackle global sustainability challenges’. The page further states: ‘we crunch data, provide strategies and tools, build pilots, and create new ventures that develop scalable solutions to critical problems. Core to achieving our mission is the transition to an economy that is regenerative and ‘circular’ by design’ (Metabolic 2022).

² On the ‘mobile’ border that thereby emerges, see Amoore 2013 and Van Den Meerssche 2022.

³ Cf. Weizman 2006 (providing a fascinating account of how the concepts developed by Deleuze and Guattari are adopted by the Israeli Defense Forces); Povinelli 2021 (on how the ‘liberal frontier’ has become ‘holey, spiralistic, rhizomatic’).

should particularly trouble those working within the ‘critical’ genre still indebted to James C. Scott’s account on the violence of state planning (a genre concerned with modernist practices of legibility and reform, and the associated assumptions of universality, causality and objective reason).⁴ Anticipating a shift in socio-technical practices, epistemologies and governance strategies that connect the very different sites describes above, Johns observed that ‘seeing like a state’ is perhaps not ‘what it once was’:

In seeking to make use of unstructured, digital data in immense volumes, from a diversity of sources, passed through a range of proprietary filters and metrics, the state no longer aspires to make its own maps, or direct its own monocular gaze from on high [...] Rather, a succession of rapid-fire snapshots resulting from automated dives into vast and shifting oceans of data: this seems to be what the state and many international institutions seek, to sate their appetite for contact with the Real. (Johns 2019, p. 848-849)

As both Metabolic and the UK Home Office indeed express, this appetite entails an ‘attentiveness to emergent patterns of all kinds’—an ‘open-ended, opportunistic, now-oriented disposition’ that Johns links with a ‘lean start-up mentality’ (2019: p. 849; 855). Giving ‘pause to the ceaseless churn of contemporary governance practice’, Johns thinks through the unscripted practices of legibility (and their longer liberal lineages), the inferential forms of analysis, the prototypical temporalities, and the specific modes of subject-making that are invested in these ‘new ways of seeing like a state’. These observations, in our view, capture a set of crucial transformations in contemporary global governance and go to the heart of the ‘cultural transition’ referred to above. The account also contains a warning: it is ‘quite possible’, Johns argues, that, by picking up these new ‘rhythms and routines’, institutions have ‘blunted or outrun the standard tools of critical, progressive and reform-minded international lawyers’ (2019: p. 834). The mainstream critical orientation towards ‘localism, practical know-how, historical specificity and grassroots insight’ (2019: p. 857), she notes, might be ‘reaffirming, rather than proposing any alternative to, the way that states and international institutions now aspire to see and govern’ (2019: p. 862). ‘[W]hat might once have seemed quite radical, hard-hitting projects of critique ... may now come across as projects of minimal optimisation’, Johns concludes, ‘leaving the conditions and inequities that precipitated that critique quite undisturbed (and, indeed, potentially reproduced)’ (2019: p. 836).

In this special issue, we invited scholars working on different empirical and theoretical terrain to think together with the argument in ‘From Planning to Prototypes’ (P2P). Has ‘the mainstream of global governance’ indeed ‘changed course’, and how can this redirection be contextualized and understood in legal, political and onto-epistemological terms? Does the advent of ‘governance by data’ indeed signal a ‘crisis of critique’, and what are the tenets of the critical repertoire presupposed in this dire diagnosis? Do the new rationalities and routines of global governance

⁴ Other useful concepts capturing similar phenomena have been developed by Chandler 2018 and Desai and Lang 2020.

open space for different forms of political labour or critical intervention, and which tools and theoretical commitments could guide and sustain such projects? While some stay close to the terrain surveyed by Johns in thinking through these questions (Chandler 2022; Desai and Lang 2022), others use the signposts in P2P to explore different sites of global governance and institutional innovation: the ‘Tech for Our Planet’ challenge showcased at COP26 (Leiter and Petersmann 2022), the UN counterterrorism agenda (Roelle 2022a, b), and the (outer)worlds of extropist experiments in competitive crypto-governance (Gandorfer 2022). Across these multiple sites, new styles and scales, matters and metaphors, designs and discourses of governing are traced—new genealogies and dreamscapes: from the twentieth century UN sanctions regimes that Johns identifies as one site where prototypical governance has been prefigured (Johns 2022) to the realm of seasteading and cryptostatecraft (Gandorfer 2022; see also Ranganathan 2019).

One productive way of weaving together these dialogues, empirical extensions, hesitations and new analytical interventions is the attunement in the inquiry of P2P to questions of style. It is on the terrain of style that Johns makes legible the new ways of seeing like a state, and, likewise, critique must find new purchase on the changing terrain of style. Johns’s focus on style relies analytically on sensitivity to a variety of conditions that are not reducible to either agent or structure, subject or object. They are broad enough to open up the analytical terrain, in P2P, at the level of institutions, but they ‘tend to be elastic and inconstant’ (Johns 2019: p. 839). They help the observer to negotiate an incommensurability between critical theory and structuralism, the former occupied with the responsibility of agents and the latter occupied with the ways in which social systems exceed and determine individual agency (Johns 2019: pp. 838–839). To get beyond that impasse, style may encompass an unconventional and unstable array of material and discursive conditions that make governance practices legible as professional routines. Put differently, style directs us to an interplay of contemporaneous dispositions (material, intellectual, ideological), which inflect the way opportunities for action are perceived (or not perceived). We refer to this interplay and the array of dispositions that it encompasses as style points. Because style points act as a sort of lens to make new governance practices legible, both for institutional application and critical attention, they are also useful to help us introduce this special issue.

In her contribution, Isobel Roelle focuses on the ‘affective questions of ambivalence, aspiration, and anxiety’ that the concept of style evokes—an exploration that traces the visual imaginaries, metaphors and mantras, rhythms and managerial routines that shape and sustain UN Counterterrorism practices. Inspired by Roelle’s account of the UN’s stylised self-narration and the composition of its ‘convening power’, we find it useful to refer back to P2P’s prior examples of style as a subject of legal research. We find there still another treatment of style: Berman’s ‘Modernism, Nationalism, and the Rhetoric of Reconstruction’ (1992). In this piece, style guides attention to cultural dynamics associated with early twentieth century Modernism, which connect up with broader transformations in international legal thought (Berman 1992: p. 352). Berman’s example highlights the imbrication of legal sensibility with other social currents, which together modulate the scope of action and plausibility in situational practices. Berman, for instance, associates formal innovations

in legal practice with Modernist causes such as anti-representationalism, technical and cross-disciplinary experimentation, and a celebration of primitivism, which was both a racist trope and a celebration of explosive energies conceived as multiplicities (1992: pp. 354–357). These are themes that we, the editors and some of our contributors, explore both in this special issue and elsewhere—100 years after Berman’s subjects and 30 years after his text. This raises provocative questions for us, especially as we and our contributors attempt to measure institutional changes away from traditional modes of governmental practice, and to identify adequate critical responses to any such change. How do we delimit style? How do we observe styles change?

Consider two problematics in relation to delimiting style and observing change: scale and temporality. The question of scale can be put in crude terms: how extensive is the locus of style points? Berman’s text describes a style, Modernism, that appears vast in scale. P2P, on the other hand, specifies by institution, comparing two different institutional styles, old guard (BAPPENAS) and new (Pulse Lab Jakarta). But each of these institutions are treated more or less as synecdoche, begging the question as to the limits of the styles that frame their respective practices, and by which these are made legible. In this context, Roele’s contribution (and her book, from which she draws her contribution) helpfully offers a tight focus on a particular example of institutional style, albeit with respect to a sprawling institution, namely the UN (Roele 2022a, b). Yet, even here, there is a question of scope: is the style that Roele describes specific to the UN, or specific to the offices of the UN dealing with counterterrorism, or do these instantiations of style extend beyond the offices and institutions that she analyzes? Style points refer to conditions that make one set of institutional routines plausible as a practical matter. They direct analysis to the situatedness of the organization and its personnel in something like their vernacular specificity. But how specific must the analysis be for adequate analytical purchase? The UN as a whole can be analyzed for conformance with generational practices, or UN practices can be analyzed according to peculiar styles particular to subagencies and the employees who staff them.

The other set of questions concern temporality. When does a style cease to apply, or cease to hold explanatory value? Leiter and Petersmann’s contribution is helpful here, observing the apparent limits of techniques associated with ‘new ways of seeing’. They explore another UN-related site of data technology-driven innovation, namely the Tech for Our Planet Challenge, a hackathon organized by the British government together with private partners to explore technological solutions to climate change in the run up to COP26 in Glasgow (Leiter and Petersmann 2022). They see the hackathon as a prototyping exercise par excellence, in keeping with the move Johns observes towards prototyping and away from planning as a mode of governmental practice—but Leiter and Petersmann also observe its limitations, and, by implication, the limitations of prototyping as a mode of governance. They trace limitations to arise from two pressures in particular: replicability and scale-ability. Prototyping, as they observe it in the Tech for Our Planet Challenge, is only a finite step towards a solutionism that must be replicable and scale-able, which requires something like commodification of the prototyped solution. Commodification and commensuration, however, returns the governmental practice to the attributes associated

with planning: a rationalized and disciplined mode attaining to control at scale. On that basis, the style points that support prototyping appear to do so only within the limited temporal domain of an early phase in a larger governmental production.

We can also pose the temporal question somewhat differently: when are style points active? Desai and Lang's article, which revisits Pulse Lab Jakarta—and its differentiation from BAPPENAS—is instructive in this sense. Shifting their analytical focus away from a synecdochal contrast of distinct governmental practices across distinguished institutions, they observe a modular intermixing of new and old practices engaged in Pulse Lab Jakarta (Desai and Lang 2022). The pick-and-choose character of multiple governmental modalities, novel and familiar, suggests different style points, established at different historical times, continuously at work but in different moments. Desai and Lang argue, accordingly, that the practices represented in P2P by Pulse Lab Jakarta and BAPPENAS may best be understood 'through their ongoing relationships and entanglements'. To illustrate, they focus on a series of projects to do with financial inclusion. Across projects, they observe a number of innovations that comport with prototyping in P2P, such as 'data dives', interactive mapping tools, and targeted social media practices. But these innovations appear to supplement rather than replace established governmental conditions. Thus, 'PLJ's practices of visibilisation are evidently mediated by the ways in which the problem of "financial inclusion" has already been made visible, and measured'. The style points that supported a mandate for financial inclusion in the past remain active, though such past practices no longer hold exclusive purchase on the problematic that they made visible. Put the other way around, disruptive innovation has become attractive as a complement to some old ways of seeing. The analytical take-away furthers the ambition in P2P, to grasp how new ways of seeing produce and reproduce hierarchies: '[t]he result is a mode of visibilisation of the user which is attentive to some matters, but not others'. As style points and mundane modes of governing shift fluidly across temporal registers, attention for what matters and what is excluded from mattering remains crucial.⁵

The reproduction of hierarchies brings us to another issue of temporality, but one which appears to take us beyond the novelty of new governmental practices, however they may be delimited. Already in P2P, Johns acknowledges that despite changing styles and shifting practices, social and distributive outcomes remain globally consistent over time. Johns asked:

[W]hat exactly are the trade-offs that a commitment to iterative innovation demands? And where are the Faustian bargains being newly struck in this context? What should we make of the fact that marginalized bearers of practical intelligence—the constituency that Scott championed as key to doing development better in the future—now seem more or less central to the development enterprise without (arguably) much apparent change in its politics or material effects? (2019, p. 859)

⁵ This attention for material practices of 'mattering'—of enacting and worlding differently—resonates in the contribution by Gandorfer and her work on 'matterphorics' more generally (see Gandorfer 2023).

And in her new contribution to this special issue, Johns points out that ‘P2P highlighted the extent to which global governance practices among states and international organizations have metabolized critiques frequently levelled at them [by practically and reiteratively engaging in prototyping at a granular level], without any associated diminution or redistribution of legacy power’ (Johns 2022).

If practices change only to keep outcomes constant, this raises a question about the drivers of that consistency. In temporal terms, what is it besides the outcomes that persists even as the styles and practices change? In this sense, the project announced with P2P reminds of Susan Marks’s argument (in her review essay prompted by China Miéville’s *Between Equal Rights*), though in the perhaps incongruous register of ideology critique:

International law is not reformable; there can be no expectation that it will one day be placed beyond ideology or made ideology-proof. Miéville writes that [‘i]f a space for using international law [to further systematic social change] is opened up, it is at the same time always already closing’ (at 301), and he is absolutely right. The work of critique is never done. (Marks 2007)

This brings us to the problematic of critique under constantly changing circumstances, in spaces that are always already closing. In P2P, Johns portrays this problematic of critique in the following terms:

Whether as a scholar or as a practitioner of law and development, international law, or global governance, one cannot assume a posture of critical sanctimony, or lay claim to being uncompromised or beyond complicity. Neither immersion in history nor investment in futurist innovation promises such a way out. Instead, it is down in the detail of particular practices, in the midst of mundane socio-technical work (including scholarly work), that developmental futures are being made, and remade. It is by observing and engaging assembly line personnel in the development project—people such as the staff of BAPPENAS and Pulse Lab Jakarta, as diverse as they are—and understanding what they are doing and how, that we come to understand how we are seeing now, and what new blind spots we are cultivating and with what effects. (2019, p. 863)

These reflections on the indeterminacy and complicity of critique are central to several contributions to this special issue. With reference to and in dialogue with Weizman, Gandorfer observes how ‘there is no pure retreat in critique that is not already operational, already in the world, already in friction with other forces—and continuously so’ (Weizman and Gandorfer 2021: p. 407; cited in Gandorfer 2022). The ever-present risk signalled by Johns and Gandorfer that ‘critical’ moves or tropes become metabolized in the existing workings of toxic liberalism resonates with Povinelli’s call to stay attuned to the ‘social tense of critical thought’—attuned to the worlds that ‘critical’ concepts enact and enable (Povinelli 2021: p. 10).⁶

⁶ Povinelli is particularly concerned about the current tendency in ‘critical’ thought to start from the axiom of ontological entanglement—an axiom with ‘no political relevance in and of itself [that] may well function as an antipolitical diversion’ (Povinelli 2021: p. 2). See also *supra* n. 5.

Chandler, in this sense, traces how the gradual (yet also always fragmented, incomplete, uneven) absorption of critique in the field of global development sparked a shift from ‘top-down’ to ‘bottom-up’ approaches and, subsequently, to practices striving for an ‘open-ended ethical encounter with alterity or otherness’ (Chandler 2022). Yet, the ‘reframing of development assistance’ in these ‘discourses of post-epistemology’, Chandler notes, ‘further legitimizes the reduction and dismissal of race’: it entails ‘a reproduction and extension “to a planetary level”, of the global colour line’ (Chandler 2022, with reference to Leong 2016). ‘[F]or these ethical, positive capacities [of mutual, open-ended encounter] to be affirmed’, Chandler argues, ‘there must necessarily be a disavowed underside from which these figures and their capacities are cut’. Gandorfer equally lingers with the ‘cut’—the ‘binary code on which the social-material fabric runs’—to think through the deeply rooted resonance between critique (in its antagonistic, dialectic, oppositional form) and the registers of politics and power: ‘[t]he complicity’, Gandorfer notes, ‘lies in the shared romantic loyalty to the sovereign decision, the binary cut that determines and separates, friend from enemy, inside and outside, and renders non-existent (and killable) what is unrepresented or defies representation’ (Gandorfer 2022, with reference to Harney and Moten 2013). The problem, then, might not be that critique has ‘run out of steam’ in its confrontation with new modes of governance (as P2P argues), but that critique—‘allegian[t] [to] the old categories of the Negative’—might appear as entangled and ‘enamored with power’ (Foucault in Deleuze and Guattari 1983, cited in Gandorfer 2022). These themes touch upon contemporary strands of post-critical thought: a dissatisfaction with critique-as-enlightenment-methodology, with critical diagrams of thought-as-power-as-emancipation (a relation to thought as ‘one of force’), with dialectic negation, with a hermeneutics of suspicion, with judgmental reason, with critique that ‘actively seeks to prevail over, triumph, defeat, and destroy its object of study’—critique as unveiling and unmasking, as closure and comfort (Austin 2022, with reference to Latour 2004, Felski 2012, Sutter and Laurent 2019).

Yet, if the contributions follow the call in P2P to place critique within the world—aware of the many troubling associations or outworn attitudes that this might entail—this also creates new openings, new alliances and modes of intervention. Reconfiguring critique in ‘modular’ terms, Desai and Lang see spaces of engagement in the ‘imaginative and practical preparatory work’ of rendering infrastructures interoperable, in working with the ‘reflexivity and empathy within modular forms’, in reformatting, realigning or jettisoning material elements in the modular architectures of data-driven governance, in engaging with the politics of provisionality itself (Desai and Lang, 2022). Johns, in a similar direction, prolongs the path into the ‘midst of mundane socio-technical work’, arguing that ‘[f]ar from glancing off prototypes or doubling down on the power relations that they presuppose, as some other critical moves seem to do ... use-as-internal-critique might enter into the logic of prototyping and make its politics leverageable’ (Johns 2022). We find a related distance from critical ‘god-tricks’ with Leiter and Petersmann, who attend to the practices of ‘scalability and replicability’ at the interface between planning and prototypes as an entry point for critical interventions that actively participate in modes of mattering and worlding—a critique coming from ‘inside the phenomenon

that is being evaluated' (Leiter and Petersmann 2022). Importantly, for Leiter and Petersmann, this does not preclude critical engagement with 'structural' hierarchies and power relations—with the 'iterative (re)production of ... material-discursive boundaries' (Barad 2007: p. 240)—but this engagement aspires to (re)draw or (re)compose such boundaries from within the 'situated and material context from which ... prototypes emerge', rather than from a critical distance. The situated, affirmative register of critique that emerges in these different accounts also resonates with Gandorfer's argument. 'Critical scholarship', she notes, must engage 'affirmatively with indeterminacy' without 'falling back into dialectic negation or binary logic'. It must go 'all the way down'—'to make what is unrepresented and unrepresentable thinkable and different modes or relationality sense-able, to invent an affirmative politics of indeterminacy, and to creatively get down and dirty in the field of play' (Gandorfer 2022).

Practices of going closer, reformatting, using, hacking, drilling down and getting dirty, however, can also provide their own sanctimonious and safe horizon—a critical mode 'enamored with complicity', indifferntiable from late liberal experimentalism or capitalist jouissance. This concern links to more general hesitations regarding the purchase of critical discourses based on indeterminacy, immanence or relational entanglement. As Chandler notes, indeed, development practices that aspire for a mutual encounter with alterity, for open-ended interactions on the plane of immanence, are inevitably faced with differences that are disavowed: with a binary between the deck and the hold, where the 'fragility and violence constitutive of a relational imaginary is exposed' (Chandler 2022). This 'binary' cannot be confronted, arguably, from within the prototypical play but only by accounting for longer lineages of primitive accumulation, extractivism and colonialism. Povinelli, in a similar vein, problematizes critical projects that start from axioms of entanglement and indeterminacy rather than ancestral forms of violence (Povinelli 2021: 23). The 'toxicity of late liberalism', she further argues, is sustained by how it metabolizes, absorbs and redeploys critical moves and gestures—an observation (at the core of P2P) that speaks directly to the awkward alignment between the 'radical approaches' to 'ecological sustainability' and the contemporary practices of border control signalled at the start of this article.⁷ This also recalls Hohmann's observation—quoting Pellizonni—that there is an 'unhappy link between the openness of new materialist approaches to the world', and the 'embrace of risk, randomness, and volatility' in 'neo-liberal ideology' (Hohmann 2021: 17; Pellizonni 2011). Roele, from another angle, points out how the power of a generative style can also produce self-deception, which raises different dilemmas of complicity (Roele 2022a, b). So, when does critical complicity amount to complete capture and absorption? When does (re)modulation itself become a trope of managerial optimisation? When does rhizomatic rooting—the play of openness and multiplicity—imply the disavowal of difference?⁸

⁷ Povinelli, interestingly, explicitly focuses on this 'rhizomatic imaginary of frontiers' in late liberalism (47).

⁸ As Chandler observes: 'King also highlights the disavowal implicit in Deleuze and Guattari's ... rhizomic and nomadic imaginaries of self-actualisation in open-ended relations of becoming: "Therefore, their own and others' self-actualizing, free-form whiteness can proceed unhindered. The rhizomatic

Of the myriad routes that run from P2P, one calls for ever-closer attention to the mundane practices of governance, and on their own terms, as they occupy more and more of the everyday. Another calls to intervene directly in the terrain of contemporary governance, to engage in productive practices that seek to displace, pervert, reroute or occupy the material forms and spaces of power. The former calls for analytical labor ever more attuned to heterogenous practices that impose hierarchies and order relations among people and things. The latter for appropriating the matters and means of governance. These possibilities are challenging and fraught, and they are not necessarily aligned. In that light, the work that we explore here remains new, and we hope that the special issue contributes to further these lines of dialogue, critical and collaborative. Just as emergent modes of governance call for scrutiny, so too the emergent critical and post-critical interventions that are developed alongside them. The contributions gathered here build on, think and engage with various other contemporary interventions in (post-)critical scholarship. We see connections here to further develop with experimental practices of ‘Designing-With/In World Politics’ (Austin and Leander 2021); with activist initiatives of counter-forensics that work with/in new technologies of sensing and counter-surveillance—of spatial or visual analysis—to expose violence in its many, multiplying modes (as developed by Forensic Architecture, Forensic Oceanography and Border Forensics)⁹; with those thinking infrastructurally about how law and authority are enacted (and could be channelled differently) (Sullivan 2022); those tinkering with algorithmic thresholds (*cf.* Amoores 2020) or building architectures of ‘active form’ (Easterling 2012); those thinking technically about a form of ‘political subjectivity that does not organize at the threshold of existing perceptions of difference’ (Amaro and Khan 2020); those reconfiguring responsibility and power through the ‘vibrant matters’ that compose our worlds and mediate our politics (Bennett 2009).

These are the kinds of collaborations and interventions that P2P has, in our view, opened up to and enriched from within a particular tradition of critical (international) legal scholarship (a tradition that requires, Johns argued, continuous questioning in relation to new styles of governance). The pieces in this special issue take this invitation in various different directions—providing new diagnoses of how governance is exercised, and proposing new pathways for a critical practice that is not safe and sanctimonious but that opens and leaves open. With such spaces and complexities before us, we hope to be contributing to ongoing ‘possibilities for struggle, survival and collective action’ (Johns 2022).

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Footnote 8 (continued)

West—*terra nullius*—is without a people, history, or a cosmology to navigate”. Chandler 2022, with reference to King 2017: 171.

⁹ See <https://forensic-architecture.org/>; <https://www.borderforensics.org/>.

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