

CHAPTER 2

Platform Politics and a World Beyond Catastrophe

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Platform Politics

Platforms pattern the grammar of this world. Across the political spectrum, from #BLM, #StopTheSteal or #GameStop, three core pillars of US society provide the institutional points of reference for the latest round of organised critique: the police, democracy and finance capital (see Stalder 2021). Rolling these distinct movements into a mashup manifesto against nihilistic fatalism is Inhabit, a distinctively North American formation cultivating attention to build a movement of the disaffected.¹ Seeking to galvanise millennials in search of a cause, Inhabit sets out 'Path B', a political tract with something for everyone: climate justice, collective care, autonomous infrastructures, planning hubs, food supply chains and networks of fight clubs recuperating a depleted masculinity ('learn to hunt, to code, to heal'). Its default platforms? Twitter, Instagram and imageboards, all infiltrated by the alt-right who seed further confusion and political disorientation into the signal of widespread alienation and despair.

Despite whatever 'platform fatigue' appears to have set in, and a growing sense of fatalism regarding the governing role played by a handful of players that continue to dominate the platform economy, no matter what the activist or

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regulatory effort, we are convinced that the discussion about the future design of socio-technological systems has just begun. By no means is this a Silicon Valley ‘problem,’ certainly not in any exclusive sense. The geoeconomic contest of predominantly digital platforms is also one of geopolitical variance. Alibaba and Huawei are among the chief platform and tech hegemonies in the scramble for markets and the production of a new geopolitical order that goes beyond the modern territorial assertion of sovereign power by nation-states (see Lindtner 2020; Wen 2020; Zhang 2020). Certainly the world-shaping capacity of these Chinese firms depends on their complicated bind to the political and economic agendas of state authority (see Woo and Strumpf 2021). But adhering too rigidly to such a nexus diminishes the ways in which platforms hold specific technical, infrastructural and business logics that produce social relations and economic practices in ways distinct from the patterning of populations and management of the economy by national governments in partnerships with corporate actors. In other words, there is an assertive force about digital platforms able to transform the world in ways specific to their logics of operation. Political analysis of such tendencies can, if it likes, take refuge in info-political debates concerning rights, access, surveillance, privacy and so forth. These remain important battles. But we also see a need to attend to a platform politics on the brink of ecological catastrophe.

Our focus in this chapter is not on the peculiarities of these dynamics, but simply to note that the story of platforms does not unfold from Silicon Valley and out to the rest of the world. We are currently in the midst of a series of social-technological shifts underwriting a recomposition of global economies and modalities of power. Finding our bearings within these emergent coordinates requires more than a critique of the usual suspects. If platform politics orbits around the struggle for orientation, casting hope through new stories of the world, there is a tragic irony that it does so by advancing the business interests of the tech sector and surveillance industries whose data and computational infrastructures provide the architecture of connection. When culture and economy, politics and society are organised through platforms, do we lose sight of their conditions of possibility? Are the scenes of confrontation, of the political, precisely disavowed in the flat ontology of platforms, where the hegemony of standards ensures analysable user-generated data for platform economies?

In this chapter we set out some of the stakes of platform politics at the current conjuncture. Data governance issues concerning the social production of value, data rights in automated markets, data surveillance motivated by pervasive paranoia and a general ideological intolerance against off-message articulations of disaffection. These are just some of the prevailing discursive and governmental tendencies that define the horizon of our platform present. Yet there is more. Much more. We write our way through crisis to find some bearing and orientation in a world of real-time updates and automated injunctions. The

machinic signalling of pervasive despair is wrought by contagion, climate and a future at once forestalled and bearing down upon us.

In ways we have come to accept as obvious, platforms are technological, socially driven and motivated by business models intent on maximum data extraction translated into stratospheric profit margins. There is a sense that critics can do little more than tinker around the edges, add local case study details, sketch out design features and describe variations in user bases and market specialisation. But that is basically it. We seek to shift the optics, to reorient scale and plot out a less immediate point of departure in framing a debate on platform politics, subjectivity, technology, economy and environment. Across these core elements of capital and life we find scenes of confrontation that manifest the political and illuminate a platform politics not reducible to the political economy of Meta, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon and Alphabet (MAMAA) and its variations. The rise of platform capitalism signals a nexus that is quite literally a far cry from what used to be 'the West', an imperial geopolitical configuration stabilised by a set of overlapping crises whose catastrophic serialisation instantiates not only the imaginary of streaming giants. More importantly, the infrastructural legacies (e.g. the SWIFT payment system) of this earlier configuration remind us that the stacks of the platform economy have geopolitical layers whose depths a mere critique of the political economy of data extractivism won't reach.² Indeed, the stakes are more substantial than whatever wind-fall might benefit the few in the next IPO hype or corporate acquisition on the geoeconomic stage of the tech sector. Our task here, as authors and readers of this collection, is to identify the contours of platform politics in the context of a world on the edge.

Planetary Perspectives

As we delineate horizons of collective action beyond pandemic politics, we begin to take stock of what has changed. The way we do democracy, for one. Rediscovering the spatial and temporal scales of our agency shrunk by lockdowns and an awkward neo-cybernetic politics of real-time governance, we are still waiting for convincing approaches to address the antagonism between decisionism and democracy that such a crisis tends to throw into relief.³ Awkwardness prevails, in part, because the actuality of decision-making serves as a stark reminder of the vast gap between invocations of individualised data-driven and intelligent futures and the distinctly generic and low-tech responses that lack precisely the kind of differentiation such data intelligence is supposed to enable. Adding to such sobering self-exposure of states unable to wield their high-tech tools to deliver the kind of transparent and trustworthy solutions promised by narratives of public sector innovation ever since 'smart' was introduced as a feature of governance, experiences of collective and unevenly

distributed struggle remind us that, no matter who gets to enter the empty stage of democracy, putting on an engaging show is the requisite theatrical trope designed to keep our faith in a fair division of labour between constituent and constituted power.⁴ But things are not fair. From Belarus to Hong Kong, Myanmar or Uganda, grassroots democracy is taking a beating across the world. Throughout the Euro-American ‘West,’ widely shared feelings of disenfranchisement aggregate wafts of righteous populism and rancid paranoia into the imaginary of a perfect storm (see National Terrorism Advisory System Bulletin 2021). Far from seeing ‘the end of neoliberalism’ in the arrival of state-sponsored crisis relief efforts, mobilising public debt on a scale unthinkable only a few years ago, neoliberal politics appears to have affirmed its adoption of the complexity of life as a positive promise rather than a limit to governance.⁵ And as we prepare to exit not into a ‘new normal’ but the next iteration of crisis politics addressing the climate emergency, cutting edge public health approaches (mRNA!, tracking apps!) mesh with planetary perspectives inherited from the 1970s.

Fifty years after images of the blue planet reached us from a sky no longer beyond our reach as a human species, and NASA engineer James Lovelock suggested we embrace Gaia as the conceptual core of a neo-cybernetic imaginary matching such newly found awareness, Gaia is now part of the *mise-en-scène* of the empty stage of crisis politics. Only this time she presents herself as a massively distributed goddess of planetary health, a quasi-panteistic collective intelligence whose capacity for self-organisation is bolstered by a growing scientific acceptance of Lynn Margulis’ (1998) work on symbiogenesis.⁶ A bit too soon, perhaps, advocates in the garden of Gaia celebrate the return of the political as ‘critical zones’ of the earth (Latour and Weibel 2020). But there might be reason for hope as a new politics of care takes shape, grounded in social-political movements, climate change and essential workers on the frontlines of crisis (Ross 2021; Morse 2021; Dowling 2021).

Regardless of whether or not one joins the chorus of Gaia as a revived neo-Enlightenment trope of salvation, the *realpolitik* of sovereign power, which is in fact far from divorced of ideological imaginaries and ethno-political horizons, is in pursuit of remaking the planet as an operating system cut across geopolitical divisions forged by infrastructural and technical protocols and standards. Here, the politics of borders are recalibrated as parametric politics constituted by data sovereignty, data security, interoperability (albeit with multiple constraints and underscored by inoperability), value extraction, population management, agri-business and finance capitalism. The standout example here is China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which attracts huge swathes of business, policy, academic and news media attention (see Narins and Agnew 2020; Grant 2020). And in Europe, significant policy momentum is gathering around the European Commission’s GAIA-X initiative, which seeks to build and make the case for a ‘federated data infrastructure’ as an ‘ecosystem’ that recruits

states, companies and citizens into a new united geopolitical and geoeconomic front of 'digital sovereignty' able to withstand and indeed offer an alternative universe of value (economic, social, political and supposedly environmental) to its geopolitical competitors.⁷ Such an agenda, driven by the hope of another iteration of the 'Brussels effect', is predicated not only on ensuring the economic and political security of a European future, but is indeed imbued with a Messianic conviction of platform solutionism on a planetary scale.⁸

The Web 3 vision of a 'creator economy' serves as a dark mirror of the soft-powerism of the Brussels effect, the 'metaverse' techno-dystopianism of a world where every act of communication is always already financialised, where becoming-finance is the new horizon of collective self-determination and where the infrastructuralism of distributed ledger systems driven by venture capital narrows the vision of the social production of value to a stateless system of temporary token-based economic empowerment, a shadow economy beyond the regulatory reach of sovereignty claiming to carve out a series of safe spaces for the economically and geopolitically disenfranchised. It is in this sense that we understand the current conjuncture as one to critically probe in terms of platform politics.

But what of forms of power not reducible to the modern idiom of the sovereign state, which is not easily fused or reconciled with the cybernetic contingencies and computational complexities of the planet as platform? What are some of the operative dimensions and social-ecological tendencies coincident at the conjuncture of a planet on the edge? Can we attribute a modality of power as a transformative force not beholden to the out-of-time routines peculiar to the sovereign state and its exercise of power? There is latent power in the everyday, power in gestures without formal consequence, expressions that are never acknowledged yet seep through and course within the social-ecological organism. We might as well give this power a name, no matter that it persists in improper ways, and call it out as a non-sovereign power (see Deseriis 2015; Wark 2013, 193).

Perhaps not surprisingly given renewed interest in the 'performative power of assembly' (Butler 2018), theatre has assumed responsibility for shifting conversations in ways that expand the conventionalised horizons of community organising.⁹ Reflecting on the relationship between art and democracy, Oskar Eustis of New York's Public Theater recalls the separation in 1970s counter-culture between artistic experiments expanding our sense of the public and social justice work focusing on inequality.¹⁰ We find similar expressions of a politics subsisting in and rubbing up against the rules of the ruling classes in the tactics and strategies of *détournement* associated with the Situationists during the same epoch, in another country across the Atlantic divide of ocean that is also a logistical medium of history and passage of connection, labour and violence in the form of the Atlantic slave trade (Gilroy 1995; Harney and Moten 2013). And, more recently, in the years closing out the twentieth

century and into the twenty-first century, collective practices of political assembly, Occupy, the movement of the squares, the yellow vests and the Umbrella Movement again register the nexus of politics and performance manifest as power with the potential to resonate across time and space in ways that signal a transversal and transgenerational politics that does not submit or forget. Indeed, we might conceive such incipient power, often galvanised by the urgency and stakes of the singular event, as a form of political articulation that codes a platform politics not beholden to proprietary infrastructures of communication, even if movements increasingly organise using the infrastructural media of big tech corporations.

While we are fully aware that lumping these dynamics together makes little sense sociologically, we invoke them as indicators of a ‘non-sovereign power’ exercised and performed across time and space. As a banality held in common, the technical and historical seriality of connection between movements holds a political potency and imaginary that, we believe, is worth recalling in times of crisis. To be sure, the current pandemic rejuvenates the authority of the platform state and its declaration to decide. As much as the Googles, Amazons, Alibabas, Tencents, Baidus, ByteDances and all the rest go bananas with their massive accumulation of data – the fuel of automation machines – a nagging doubt will always persist and announce the inevitability of their decline and demise: the movement of people, of masses whose attention gravitates to whatever the next best media turn out to be. Underscoring this immanent deficit of commitment to any particular platform media are forms of sociality and desire that find expression through elusive gestures and the cultivation of atmospheres.¹¹ Such attributes are at once performative and theatrical while belonging also to public life imagined by play and performance more generally.

Infrastructural Memories of the Future

The turn to the platform as a figure of socio-technological systems design brings back core episodes from the archives of governance, both in the narrow sense of techniques of organisation and in a much broader sense of modes of relation. If infrastructure is always relational, what are the relationalities available for infrastructure design?¹² As we have written elsewhere, ‘To analyse the transformation of sovereign power through the optic of infrastructure requires more than attention to infrastructural relationalities. Or rather, the relational will not suffice as the end point in thinking infrastructural arrangements within and through which economy and society, labour and life are governed. Instead, this requires attention to various registers of material constitution – from the design of infrastructures to the legal frameworks governing their operation’ (Rossiter and Zehle 2017). The reflexive invocation of ‘participation’ may not yet have run its course as a panacea to make-things-public, but the concept has been overburdened with expectations of empowerment that have distracted

from its weaknesses as a concept of fairly limited analytical reach and hence the impossibility of delivering us from the systems that structure and sustain such relationalities. Sadly, the injunction to participate more often instantiates a depoliticising directive in the form of feedback surveys, breakout groups in online meetings or joining climate change initiatives by sorting out your trash. Doing nothing is not fuel for data economies and increasingly confers a nihilistic social status equivalent to the great unwashed who bring Team Euphoria down. Not unlike the discourses of openness and making-things-visible that struggle to translate the language of the Enlightenment to an era of white-boxing intelligent systems, the language of participation has only been so successful in fighting off the subsumption of gestures into the extractivist dynamics of the platform economy.

At a time when ‘you are the product’ is no longer indicative of a rare awakening of critical awareness but the default design strategy of everyone and everything ‘participatory’, it has also become more urgent to come up with a conceptual idiom that does not simply tell us something about differences in ownership (proprietary = bad, free software = good, markets versus commons, etc.) but modes of subjectivation. Of whether, for example, the production of citizenship and consumer agency actually differs. And if so, then how? The rush of politics toward the people machines of social media suggests that we no longer care to make that distinction. Instead, we have elevated ‘the market’ to be our collective teacher of things relational: identity, community, story – if you need any of these, shop around.¹³ At least as far as we can tell, the ‘old’ distinctions between publics and markets have given way to concurrent and competing dynamics of valorisation across a topology that makes such simple distinctions look naive.

Which is why, of course, this is old news. The shift toward the machinic was always tied less to an uncritical embrace of the power of distributed systems as future backbone and base infrastructure of the multitude (it was that too, and as white nationalism embraces the logics of federation we have yet to delineate the shifting boundaries between such anonymity and more progressive visions of the political). Instead, theorists invoking the political concept of the machinic were intrigued, perhaps even entranced, by the sense that affect, the corporeality of how we put first things and then stories of the world together, is what literally matters.

So what is it that is being subverted, what happened to the visions of exodus, of a power that constitutes itself through disengagement? Among the most recent flag bearers of such *degagisme*, the *gilet jaunes* were too exhausted to tell us where they wanted to go from here, only that ‘here’ – the world of competitive self-optimisation, of the number of unicorns as a measure of societal progress, of forms of mobility and urban development that leave those on the margin with even fewer means to move to the centre – was not a place they wanted to be. Tempting as it may be to declare yet again the failure of movements to scale and sustain in ways that demonstrate political cohesion, discipline and a

strategic plan, what such undulations of insurgency demonstrate above all else is that social-political heterogeneity cannot easily be mapped onto the left-right axis of movement analysis.

At the same time, it became clear that the roundabouts where activists would gather and stage the slow down of the system as a form of critique was itself symptomatic of the difficulty of federating such micro-political initiatives. Yet these efforts did not scale on the level of organisational infrastructures, and sympathetic media enforcing the logic of representation in its search for 'spokespeople' folded events back into conventional dynamics of politics as usual. Perhaps this is too sober an assessment, potentially discounting the less than tangible 'atmospheric' effects such examples of self-organising have far beyond the event – insights into the status quo, imaginaries of change, inspirational narratives. But short-termism at the grassroots level offers no alternative to the short-termism of elites. On the contrary, it limits further the return on whatever collective investments in 'decentralisation' we may or may not want to continue to make. We do not need more peripheries, neither economic nor technological. But how do we cultivate a politics that is more futural, beyond the horizon of self-exploitation and scarcity management that may only be considered exemplary of 'resilience' if we continue to ignore how weak the infrastructures of relation have become? (see Walker and Cooper 2011; Halpern 2017).

Beyond Catastrophe as Calculation

To be sure, logics of systemic reason are always-already accompanied by catastrophe, by the laws of the accident (Virilio 2007). The sensation of nature as sublime is but a surface for carnage, destruction and the technics of contingency (see Hui 2015). In returning to the suggestion in the title of this chapter of a world beyond catastrophe, we seek to depart from a tendency in critical theory to embrace the drama of doom even when such critique presents as meta-reason transcendent from cultures of performance (catastrophe as tragic theatre). Similarly, as much as the mathematics of democracy invites tampering with the machine, accompanied by outcries of calculated interference and the manipulation of public perception, we prefer instead to probe further the conjunctural epoch in which the world transitions from carbon economies and attendant cultures of consumption to renewables and the politics of energy distribution.

As Timothy Mitchell observes, the spectrum of politics and projects surrounding renewable forms of energy 'indicate not that forms of energy determine modes of politics, but that energy is a field of technical uncertainty rather than determinism, and that the building of solutions to future energy needs is also the building of new forms of collective life' (Mitchell 2011, 238). Less an occasion to celebrate the arrival of supposedly low-impact regenerative

economies, the shift underway reaffirms the power of markets to drive systemic change. Witness, for instance, the stratospheric returns on stocks in environmental futures markets over the past year. Our interest here is less on blaming the woeful condition of the planet and its fragile support of life on predatory capitalism, as if there might be other options for the taking, and instead envisaging how political intervention might engage in the design of regenerative economies. Such work is necessarily collective, bringing together the social lives of people and things with disciplines knowledgeable of quantum mechanics, environmental humanities, earth sciences, heterodox economics and systems design. Widely shared, the hope that the climate crisis will end up reconstituting the atmospheres of democratic life has already inspired a wide array of organising efforts on all levels of government – from massive public investments in ‘green deals’ to facilitate state-driven low-carbon neo-industrialisation to low-tech community-based solutions that build on rich traditions of self-organisation and mutual care.

In her critique of financialisation, extraction and resilience combined with ‘smart’ technologies that turn the planet into a ‘massive medium’ – a planet as platform – Orit Halpern (2017) suggests forms of futurity not prone to nihilistic submission: ‘Making ourselves indebted in new ways to the many Others that occupy the earth might open to not merely a negative speculation on catastrophic futures but to forms of care, which are increasingly becoming imperative. A close examination of finance, environment and habitat might become the bedrock by which to begin envisioning and creating new futures. We cannot dream of creative destruction, since we have indeed already destroyed the world, but nor can we continue to embrace a world without futures.’ How, then, to design platforms of care that address and organise differently the future-present of labour, the environment and economies not predicated on exploitation?¹⁴ Such is the collective work of platform politics not beholden to or dependent on the monetisation of social desire that fuels the reign of the tech sector, trickling down in delayed fashion to the sad imaginaries of the state. Let us instead craft a platform politics on the edge.

Perhaps searching for new ancestors and becoming ‘good’ ancestors will go hand in hand here (Krznaric 2021). Collective archives of knowledge open forgotten perspectives allowing us to frame shared futures in heterogeneous ways, expanding the temporal horizon of our agency to anticipate its long-term effects on future generations. This is not to say that politics will be all fuzzy from now on as we embrace Gaian cosmopolitics. On the contrary, the environmentalisation of politics requires close attention as it reframes and reconfigures existing dynamics, introduces new tensions and gives rise to new constellations of actors. This will affect how we approach the constitution of political subjectivity. The green tent is as wide as it gets, so self-identification as an ‘environmentalist’ does little to help sort the field of individual, collective and institutional agency and its respective implications here. But what is already apparent is that a politics of information and infrastructure that decouples the exercise of our

communicative capacity from the material contexts sustaining such agency will not lead us very far.

The new sense of articulation that comes with the cosmopolitical terrain harbours ambivalences and conflicts that may have to be renegotiated. Witness, for instance, the willingness of eco-activists to embrace nuclear power to address the climate crisis or the use of intelligent systems to reduce the resource footprint of existing infrastructures, all the while attending to the tremendous resource cost of such architectures. Such predicaments prompt us to take a systems view of how what we do affects the multiple ecologies of which we are a part, once again arguing about not only what is best for us but about the spatial and temporal scope of this collective pursuit. As localism and globalism mesh in old and new ways, the ‘structures of feeling’ that have helped us negotiate these tensions in the past do so again, from the narrow socialities of many populisms to a wider politics of solidarity that includes future generations.

But of course old politics of control and surveillance may reappear as the royal road to environmental governance and resource efficiency. The narrow view of markets as master allocators (‘everything has its price’) leads to an expansion of ecosystem accounting that does little to help us understand the cultural and social registers of ecosystem use. Proposals and activist declarations to reduce the carbon footprint of artificial intelligence are symptomatic of the now-consensual emphasis on an environmentalisation of innovation discourses and corresponding adjustments in engineering practices. But a focus on ‘green IT’ itself can’t critically address the advance of automated decision-making or the algorithmic bias in the data used to train intelligent systems. To the extent that platform politics is here to stay, its narratives are already being transformed by a climate crisis that urges us to take a wider view, beyond the socio-technological systems built to extract value from the very processes of collective constitution, and into a wider view of collectivities for which we are still struggling to define empowering concepts of collective agency and intelligence.

Notes

¹ See <https://inhabit.global>.

² Part of our comprehension of the conjunctural is that any one moment may irrupt into another. A case in point would be the relapse into patterns of economic and geopolitical analysis that cut across whatever multipolar imaginaries have emerged since the ‘end’ of the Cold War. The platform economy and the foundations of an older communications, energy and military infrastructure overlap like architectonic plates shifting, sometimes violently, according to temporalities that offer sudden and surprising synchronicities.

³ The amnesia regarding the existence of an archive of such governance experiments is stunning. Among the few cybernetics projects that continue

to attract attention is Chile's CyberSyn. See Medina (2011); see also Peters (2016). The current interest among policy makers in systemic design has, however, led to a revisiting of cybernetic frameworks of analysis. See, for example, Snowden and Rancati (2021) or the work of the OECD's Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (<https://oecd-opsi.org>). One of the aims of the *anticipate* research network is to retrieve such approaches into the current conversation on collective intelligence design, which really only make sense if these resonances of cybernetics are taken into account. See <https://anticipate.network>.

- ⁴ 'The locus of power becomes an empty place. There is no need to dwell on the details of the institutional apparatus. The important point is that this apparatus prevents governments from appropriating power for their own ends, from incorporating it into themselves. The exercise of power is subject to the procedures of periodical redistributions. It represents the outcome of a controlled contest with permanent rules. This phenomenon implies an institutionalisation of conflict. The locus of power is an empty place, it cannot be occupied – it is such that no individual and no group can be consubstantial with it – and it cannot be represented. Only the mechanisms of the exercise of power are visible, or only the men, the mere mortals, who hold political authority. We would be wrong to conclude that power now resides in society on the grounds that it emanates from popular suffrage; it remains the agency by virtue of which society apprehends itself in its unity and relates to itself in time and space. But this agency is no longer referred to an unconditional pole; and in that sense, it marks a division between the inside and the outside of the social, institutes relations between those dimensions, and is tacitly recognised as being purely symbolic' (Lefort 1988, 18).
- ⁵ 'Neoliberalism, as a body of theory, which in an age of liberal state interventionism articulated the need to respect complex life as the limit to governance, has therefore undergone a transformation via reflections upon the problems of actually existing neoliberalism, rearticulating complex life as the positive promise of transformative possibilities' (Chandler 2014, 63). See also the OECD's 'brain capital' initiative, <https://www.oecd.org/naec/brain-capital>.
- ⁶ Margulis credited as her main inspiration the work of Russian biologists like Konstantin Merezhkovsky and Boris Mikhailovich Kozo-Polyansky. See Khakhina (1992). The republication of Khakhina's 1979 book in English was edited by Robert Coalson, Lynn Margulis and Mark McMenamin. Such efforts to 'set straight' the scientific record put the current rediscovery of cooperation in explorations of the human in perspective. For an overview of the state of the scientific debate, see Clark (2020).
- ⁷ GAIA-X: A Federated Data Infrastructure for Europe, <https://www.data-infrastructure.eu>. Accompanied by a data governance framework for the platform economy, GAIA-X is one of several initiatives in the context of the EU's first-ever strategic foresight agenda. See <https://ec.europa.eu/info>

/strategy/priorities-2019–2024/new-push-european-democracy/strategic-foresight_en.

- ⁸ Analysing policy initiatives of the European Union to identify how ‘market size, regulatory capacity, stringent standards, inelastic targets, and non-divisibility ... are generic conditions for unilateral regulatory power, capable of explaining any jurisdiction’s ability (or inability) to regulate global markets alone’, Bradford finds that the EU has been particularly effective and ‘has built an institutional architecture that has converted its market size into a tangible regulatory influence’, driving a ‘passive externalization’ of many of its regulatory approaches as the European Commission has strategically stepped into the vacuum left since ‘[t]he WTO has become increasingly dysfunctional since the closing of the Uruguay Round in 1995’ (Bradford 2020, 24–26). Wherever access to the common market matters less, however, such exercises of soft power has been significantly less effective.
- ⁹ See <https://publictheater.org/programs/public-forum>.
- ¹⁰ *New York Icon Oskar Eustis: How Theater Sustains Democracy*, PBS, 29 May 2020. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/amanpour-and-company/video/new-york-icon-oskar-eustis-how-theater-sustains-democracy>.
- ¹¹ This ephemeral dynamic is something British cultural studies scholar Raymond Williams (1977, 121–127) attempted to conceptually encapsulate through his elliptical yet compelling idea of a ‘structure of feeling’ and the philosopher Gernot Böhme (2018) explored in his reflections on atmospheres.
- ¹² For Susan Leigh Star and Karen Ruhleder, ‘infrastructure is a fundamentally relational concept’ manifesting as ‘organized practices’ (1996, 113).
- ¹³ Jill Lepore (2020) has recently recalled the largely forgotten history of the ‘people machine’ built by the Simulmatics Corporation as the mother of contemporary platform corporations driven by data analytics.
- ¹⁴ This task of social production has gained noticeable momentum in recent years, drawing insights from earlier civil rights, anti-racism, women’s and environmental social movements. Among current iterations, see Hansen and Zechner (2020).

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