Introduction

Toward a Politics of Withdrawal?

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"To flee is not to renounce action: nothing is more active than a flight."

—Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II* (2007, 36)

We would like to open this book with the minor yet significant gesture of adding a question mark to its title. This question mark, in fact, generates more than a single question. On the one hand it asks: are we indeed witnessing the emergence of something like a "politics of withdrawal," as the title of this volume suggests? Is "withdrawal" a specifically contemporary phenomenon, a form of politics, or a certain type of political practice? On the other hand, the question mark invites us to ask: if, and if so, to what extend can there be something like a "*politics* of withdrawal." At first glance, a "politics of withdrawal" appears to be somewhat of an oxymoron, as withdrawal entails non-action, inoperativity, dis-engagement. Doesn't this place withdrawal at the opposite end of politics—generally understood to be all about engagement, intervention in real-life issues, a struggle over the manifold ways in which to organize society, about agency and direct action? Indeed, in the last few decades, Euro-Atlantic political philosophy has worked hard to (re)define "the political" precisely "as a space of power, conflict and antagonism"[1]—a conception of the political that is now perfectly in line with both neoliberal and far-right forms of social Darwinism, in the context of which to withdraw would seem to be a-political, apathic even: to avoid conflict, to retreat, to disengage.

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1. Mouffe 2005, 9. In the wake of the demise of Marxism as both a political practice and theory since the late 1980s, Euro-Atlantic political philosophy (e.g., the work of Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière) has been seeking for ways to reinvigorate antagonistic—in Laclau and Mouffe's terms: "agonistic" (Mouffe 2013; Laclau and Mouffe 2014)—political practice, a (democratically regulated) space where new friend/foe distinctions may be at play and in conflict.

In his book *Together*, sociologist Richard Sennett (2013), for example, identifies withdrawal as one of three forces that weaken cooperation in modern society (the other two being structural inequality and new forms of labor). Modern society, Sennett claims, has given rise to the *uncooperative self*, a distinctive character type whom he defines as the person who loses interest in cooperation because they "can't manage demanding, complex forms of social engagement, and so withdraws" (179). Driven by the "desire to reduce anxiety, particularly, the anxiety of addressing needs other than one's own" (190), the "uncooperative self" retreats into narcissism or complacency.[2] For a person dwelling in the self-absorbed state of narcissism, Sennett states, withdrawal is prompted by the intrusion of social reality: the presence of others invokes a sense of loss of self, triggering anxiety that is often "reduced by resorting to feelings of being in control" at which point "social cooperation diminishes" (184). In the case of complacency, Sennett writes, "you take for granted people like yourself and simply don't care about those who aren't like you; more, whatever their problems are, it's their problem" (188). In withdrawal, thus, it would seem, there is no "conflict," no oppositional divide to overcome: one of the parties simply retreats from the scene, logs off, disconnects, drops the mic.

In this book we argue to the contrary. Withdrawal means anything but depoliticization: to withdraw is not to retreat into passivity. Withdrawal emphasizes and increases antagonisms, but it does so, as we claim in this introduction, by displacing the terms in which antagonism is conceived—that is to say: no longer in terms of the struggle for recognition in the public arena. As a political gesture, withdrawal is often "unexceptional" (Apter 2018) insofar as it is, as yet, without rubric or concept in political philosophy or cultural theory to think or act with. The contributions in this volume are an attempt to compensate for this lack, and to assemble what Emily Apter calls a "micro-phenomenology" of withdrawal.

Taking our cue from Roland Barthes' *How to Live Together* (2012) and *The Neutral* (2007), this volume departs from classical goal-oriented methods that proceed from "a protocol of operations with a view to achieving an end" (2012, 3), and instead offers an attentiveness to *emerging* discourses and practices of "withdrawal" that signal the advent of a *potential* that resonates in a variety of cultural, social, and political texts and practices (some of which are probed in this book, while others—for the lack of space—are not).[3] To-

gether, the essays in this volume seek to *assemble* withdrawal as a concept that, in turn, may help us to identify, regroup, and understand apparently diverging political and socio-cultural phenomena ranging from the digital detox and its pharmaco-logic addressed by Stiegler and Moore, to the im/possibility of dis/connection and fugitive planning touched upon by Birchall, Sprenger, and Bordeleau; from anarcho-autonomist manifestos examined by Loizidou and Horsman, to the "subtractive politics" of refusal, sabotage, and suspension ruminated by Barney; from the "melancholic retreat" of the radical left unpacked by de Bloois, to the retreat from academia weathered by Hesselberth and, again, Stiegler and Moore; and finally, from the "playlist capitalism" queered in Hogan and "presentist democracy" hailed by Lorey, to the Trumpian/Muskian fantasies of intergalactic colonization disenchanted by Sharma in the coda to this book.[4]

As the essays in this volume amply demonstrate, a politics of withdrawal constitutes something of a double-bind: to withdraw means to renounce in order to reconnect and reconstruct. It is for this reason, we suspect, that the gesture of withdrawal lends itself to both (micropolitical) self-care, and the (macropolitical) reconstitution of national greatness. Withdrawal's double-bind has been effectively addressed by Michel Foucault (1988) in his *Technologies of the Self*. To take care of oneself, Foucault argues there, is to withdraw from the current state of politics at the appropriate moment—to him, it is a moment in a life devoted to politics—to gain a deeper understanding of both oneself and the world. While being highly attentive to the political and military-strategic metaphors used by Greco-Roman authors to describe the ethics of caring-for-oneself, Foucault observes how the gesture of retreat forms the prerequisite for action of a different type: an *ethos* based on a deeper understanding of the true nature of the world, through a deeper understanding of the true nature of ourselves.[5] The withdrawal from politics becomes the precondition for a radical overhaul *of* politics: it paves the way for a politics that concerns both self and society. As we will see throughout this volume, withdrawal hinges on a notion of politics that gravitates around a certain *ethos*, certain forms of life.

As Bernard Stiegler and Gerald Moore point out in their contribution to this volume, in contemporary thought, at least since Heidegger, withdrawal has come to be entangled with issues of truthfulness and forms of being. In

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2. Or in obsession, in particular, the obsession to "prove oneself" (188) through one's work. We will return to this character type of social incooperativeness below.

3. Here, one could think of the discourses on the boycott and refusal of, or withdrawal and retreat from, the dominant institutions of the arts addressed in, for example, Ciric and Cai's *Active Withdrawals* (2016), Herbert's *Tell Them I Said No* (2016), Warsza's *I Can't Work Like This* (2017), and Bolt Rasmussen's *After the Great Refusal* (2018).

4. We may argue that withdrawal is *the* defining gesture of Trump's presidency: there is the systematic undoing of Obama's politics; the equally systematic unraveling of institutional democracy; the withdrawal from the post-1989 globalized world order; the withdrawal of human rights (abortion, asylum); and ultimately, the withdrawal of the 1% into space.

5. Writing about the Stoics, for example, Foucault observes: "A retreat into the country becomes a spiritual retreat into oneself. It is a general attitude and also a precise act every day; you retire into the self to discover but not to discover faults and deep feelings, only to remember rules of action, the main laws of behavior" (34).

withdrawal, truth becomes the unconcealment of being. In a similar vein, as De Bloois and Loizidou argue in this volume (albeit to different ends), Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's (1997) "retreat of the political" brings us back to the essence of the political. To withdraw is to ponder one's truth and that of one's world.[6] Despite appearances, such a view entails that withdrawal is not a solitary gesture, at least not by definition. Quite to the contrary, as the essays in this volume show, withdrawal is primarily about *re*affirming relations, rather than about cutting ties.

It is in this light, that the book's chapters devise a particular response to our contemporary late-capitalist predicament. For if, as Mark Fisher (2009, 9) argues in *Capitalist Realism*, contemporary capitalism reigns supreme by means of *precorporation*[7]—that is, "the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture"—then the only possible way out of this conundrum is through forms of *disidentification* that are not reducible to "dejected apathy" (30). Withdrawal, in this context, may be seen as a form of *disinvestment* from a capitalism that demands that we constantly invest (in) ourselves by producing, optimizing, exploiting our *selves*. To withdraw, here, means to take one's distance, to disinvest in the status quo—that is, to pierce an overture toward alternative modes of being, not by facing the status quo head-on, but rather by removing oneself from it. Withdrawal, in this sense, is resolutely undiplomatic, in the sense that it puts an end to the exchange of social, political (but also professional and affective) formalities.[8]

Withdrawal strongly resonates with how Roland Barthes theorizes the Neutral (2007, 8), defined as "that which outplays [or baffles] the paradigm." The desire for the neutral, Barthes states, is a desire for:

—first: suspension (*epoché*) of orders, laws, summons, arrogances, terrorisms, puttings on notice, the will-to-possess.
—then, by way of deepening, refusal of pure discourse of opposition. Suspension of narcissism: no longer to be afraid of images (*imago*): to dissolve one's own image (a wish that borders on the negative mystical discourse, or Zen or Tao). (12)

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6. This is particularly visible in current discourses in political ecology. "This is not a drill, we declare the state of emergency," as Extinction Rebellion, for example, proclaims. Their rhetoric heavily depends on tropes of withdrawal: a caesura is identified (and also enforced through blockades and direct action) in the everyday; it is in our subsequent distancing from this profoundly compromised everyday that we are envisioned to be able to speak the truth about our ecological predicament.

7 Fisher is not along in this observation. A similar argument is made in, for example, Félix Guattari (1984), Gilles Deleuze (1992; also see 2011), Maurizio Lazzarato (2014).

8 In this, withdrawal resembles, without being identical to what Apter (2018, 83–96) calls "the impolitic" (not to be confused with Roberto Esposito's "impolitical," to which we will return below): political gestures that are opposed to (politics-as-)policy; inexpedient, unwise and undiplomatic gestures.

Barthes' assertion seems vital to any understanding of withdrawal and its political significance: to withdraw is not primarily an act of aggression or confrontation that merely reinforces the existing distribution of subjectivities ("I" against "you," friend against foe). Rather, it signals a longing for a different way of living together, a longing that does not necessarily materialize in or as language, or any other representational form, but that rather transpires in and as silence, in experiment and (in)action, and in the many alternate ways of being-with that the gesture of withdrawal arguably affords, enables, or envisions—however singular, however momentarily.

Seen in this way, withdrawal constitutes a significant break with modern and contemporary conceptions of what counts as "(the) political" in Euro-Atlantic thought.[9] Withdrawal is not polemical, it does not engage in the zero-sum game that defines modern politics—i.e., conflict—where politics is understood as the set of stratagems through which two opposing parties seek to annul one another in order to preserve themselves. As Roberto Esposito argues in *Politics and Negation* (2019, 182–87), in such conception of politics and the political, affirmation and negation are merely two sides of the same coin, perpetually engaged in a ruinous dynamic of action and reaction. Withdrawal interrupts this binary and downwardly spiraling logic and, as such, opposes the logic of the zero-sum game—the logic of neo-Darwinian discourses of struggle and survival, of "ethnic" and "national" identities, of winners and losers.

With "withdrawal" as a concept, the essays in this volume seek to think what Esposito calls an "affirmative figure of the negative" (199), a seeming paradox that engages in difference rather than opposition. We may withdraw in total disagreement with the present moment, but in withdrawing, at the very least, the hope is expressed that another present *is* possible, that the *present* is not yet exhausted, even if we are weary of *this* particular present, *this* status quo. To withdraw is neither polemical nor reactionary: it is not a retreat from actuality per se, but from certain of its aspects: from our present-day "always-on" culture, from surveillance capitalism, from neoliberal management, and so on. Withdrawal disrupts actuality to show—or at least it assumes—that there is more than a single present, that there is a potentiality not yet tapped into, not yet actualized. The gesture interrupts the forward motion of late-capitalism, as withdrawal is not oriented toward the future but rather invested in the possibilities of a different way of life, here and now (Berlant 2011). Its temporality is that of the "meanwhile" (Berlant 2011, 41). Withdrawal means: to bring to a halt, to stop, and by stopping, to

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9. Withdrawal is also a characteristic of specific anti-modern politics, a certain primitivism (Zerzan 2012) even: to retreat in solitary walks on a desert island (Rousseau 1980 [orig. 1776–1778]), into the woods of Massachusetts (Thoreau 2012 [orig. 1854]) or Montana (Kaszynski 1995), or to attend one's sheep in the Pyrenees (Zerzan 2012) As the essays in this volume make clear, however, withdrawal cannot simply be equated with the desire for archaisms, for seclusion and the wilderness.

reveal what could be, but has been thwarted (Esposito 2019, 207). It is this particular quality of withdrawal as a form of empty affirmation—a return and promise at once—that makes the gesture so adaptable to both the radical left (re-assembling oneself) and the (alt-)right ("Make America Great Again").

Roberto Esposito (2015) uses the term "impolitical" for "the inclination to *withdraw from action*" (xxvii; emphasis ours). Esposito sharply distinguishes the "impolitical" from the anti-political. To withdraw from the antics of politics, he states, is not merely anti-political posturing. The anti-political—be it technocracy, neoliberal free-marketeering, or populist anti-elitism (the Berlusconian burlesque, the Trumpian grotesque)—is simply the continuation of politics with different rhetorical and/or theatrical means. In contrast, the impolitical is neither the (impossible) negation of the political, nor its unapologetic supposition. Rather, Esposito writes, the impolitical constitutes a radical "non-opposition" (xv). The "non," here, does not imply a static divide between the untainted sphere of anti-politics pitted against a world of political corruption. Rather, it indicates a withdrawal precisely from such a binary logic—again, a logic of conflict—by way of which the very limits of what counts as "politics" are exposed. The impolitical, in other words, is not a form of eschatology: it is not the completion, end, or overcoming of politics, but a non-oppositional—neither fully affirmative nor fully negative—category that exposes the limits, the *saturation*, of the status quo. Withdrawal, in this context, signifies a suspension of entrenchment, and a certain weariness of the status quo. "Withdrawing from action" means demonstrating that another potential still lingers at the heart of the political by rejecting the logic of the conflict that suffocates it. To phrase it differently, withdrawal is neither the assault on power nor a flat rejection of it: it does not herald the end of politics, but rather *relocates* politics as we know it.

In his book on the yellow vests movement, sociologist Laurent Jeanpierre (2019), uses exactly this phrasing, "the relocalization of politics." The *gilets jaunes*, he argues, have shifted—if only momentarily—the epicenter of political debate from parliaments and councils, to suburban and rural roundabouts, thus opening up "a new agora" (97). For Marielle Macé (2019, 48), "the cabin" fulfills a similar function: it signifies the acknowledgment that we inhabit a damaged world. The cabin, insofar as expresses the desire for shelter, symbolizes the withdrawal from the loci of conventional politics. To withdraw is to acknowledge that one's environment—be it physical, social, economic, or political—is damaged, that oneself is damaged. To withdraw, in this context, is not to foster the fantasy that we may escape the world we inhabit once and for all, but rather, to seek refuge in order to re-orient ourselves in this damaged world.

Withdrawal, thus, needs to be thought beyond the dualisms of inside-outside, individual-collective, seclusion-utopia. Although withdrawal cannot be completely seen apart from fantasy—insofar as fantasy implies a dimension, marginal though it may be, of hope and desire—it does not follow a utopian (future-oriented) scenario. Instead, it feeds on "weariness" (Barthes 2007, 16), and on the desire to reconnect with desire itself. Withdrawal is not the outright rejection of "living together"—or, as Sennett claimed "narcissism and complacency"—but rather signals a search for a different rhythm of living-together, one that makes the latter desirable again. Central to Barthes' lectures on the myriad forms of withdrawal as "problem-space"—as the locus of the Neutral—is the Greek-orthodox term "idiorrhythmy," designating of form of retreat, or rather, of living-together-in-retreat that oscillates in between the singular and the collective, ermitage and monastery. For Barthes, power is inextricably linked to rhythm: "Before anything else the first thing that power imposes is a rhythm (to everything: a rhythm of life, of time, of thought, of speech)" (Barthes 2012, 35). To the power of dictating the rhythm of social life—with its two-step of work/leisure, public life/private life, worldly affairs/holidays—Barthes opposes idiorrhythmy, or the oscillation between collective (monastic) and individual (secluded) living as "a means of safeguarding *rhutmos*, that is to say a flexible, free, mobile rhythm; a transitory, fleeting form, but a form nonetheless" (35). To withdraw, in this context, does not mean to isolate oneself and/or to transcend into a purely intellectual, truthful meta-position. Instead, far from retreating into the hyper-enclosed sphere of individuality, withdrawal anticipates finding new forms of collectivity.[10]

Certainly, withdrawal can be a strategic maneuver, but it is a peculiar one: a momentary suspension of action, a moment of disappearance, neither attack not defense. Crucial in such a maneuver is the *re*positioning it affords: to reconsider strategy, to re(dis)cover one's potential. A politics of withdrawal often requires bonds being severed, social identities and subjectivities, livelihoods and feelings of physical and mental security being put at risk. To withdraw is to escape the very institutions and dispositifs that provide us with a sense of self—for many, it is a double work of mourning: we are weary of society and of ourselves insofar as we are constituted by the former. To withdraw is to retreat into that part of life that we desire to salvage from the expropriation by late-capitalism. For this, one does not even have to leave the *polis*. To withdraw means to take one's distance from the split between public and private, history and biography, to retreat into a singular life that by this very gesture is "clandestine" (see Agamben 2016, prologue).

Withdrawal, we claim in this volume, needs to be understood, first and foremost, as *gesture*. It is as gesture—in the meaning that Giorgio Agamben gives to the term—that withdrawal can be understood as a political action that

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10. In the "idiorrhythmic cluster," Barthes writes, each subject "lives according to his own rhythm" (2012, 7), but does, intermittently, reconnect with collective life.

is not simply a means to an end. For Agamben, the gesture is a "pure means." Gesture, he claims, exposes the human being as irreducible to any end, as being foremost a "carrier of potentiality" (Ruprecht 2017, 7). The gesture reveals—liberates—the fundamental ethical being of the human figure. Politics, for Agamben, is a "sphere of pure means" (2000b, 60) where the fundamental potentiality of the human figure is relentlessly reactivated. Withdrawal, as gesture, signifies such a return or retreat into potentiality: it returns its performer into being a carrier of potentiality rather than a being that is socially and politically predisposed. "Politics," with Agamben, thus becomes an "act of de-creation" (2009, 318): not to destroy, but to render destitute in order to return what exists—including oneself—to its full potential. The politics that proceeds from such destitutive power, is not a politics of affirmative acts, but one that renders the status quo *inoperative* by deactivating any kind of social relationality—be it "a power, a function, a human operation" (2016, 273)—that suffocates us. A politics of withdrawal, the essays in this volume show, needs to be understood with Agamben's understanding of "politics," that is: as a politics of destituent potential that seeks to break through the circle of revolutions and new constitutions by rendering constituted modes of social relationality inoperative.

Crucially, to render inoperative does not entail (or at least not exclusively) an admission of impotence or defeat. Rather, it proclaims the determination to regain one's language and body—one's dwelling, one's own rhythm in the world—as potentiality against the language and practice of everyday politics, the office, academia, or any of the new social Darwinisms. As gesture, withdrawal typically signifies a retreat into silence, a certain speechlessness that by no means equals numbness, and does not necessarily keep quiet. The gesture of withdrawal demands a certain theatricality, even if the purpose of withdrawal is eventually to disappear, to become invisible, *not* to be accounted for. That is, even when withdrawal is discrete, it has to be noticed as such—be it in a "quit Facebook day" or other testimonies of deleting one's social media account, in public accounts of those who feel pressed to leave academia, in narratives of retreat and off-grid living into newly-knit communities, in political tracts, and so on. "Gesture is always the gesture of being at a loss in language," Agamben claims (2000a, 78). In this sense, to withdraw sends us back to our very capacity for expression, linguistic or otherwise.

The affect that underpins withdrawal is rarely anger or discontent, the essays in this volume show, but often exhaustion and subsequent disinvestment—exhaustion in the physical sense, but also: the exhaustion of practical sovereignty, the sense of having exhausted all possibilities to relate to something or someone in productive way. Barthes refers to this—the exhaustion and subsequent disinvestment—as "weariness." Withdrawal, we maintain, signals such weariness: we withdraw—from professional, emotional, or

political investments—due to the "exhausting claim of the individual body that demands the right to social repose (*that sociality rest in me a moment* [...])" (2007, 18; emphasis ours). Significantly, "weariness" is not a grand movement but a gradual disinvestment—it cannot be identified with "crisis" or "event," but extends over time, often considerably; it does not so much propel into action as it gradually exhausts; it is not limited to a supposedly "decisive" moment, but rather crystallizes in (or beyond) tipping points; it constitutes what Berlant calls "crisis ordinariness" (2011, 4). To be weary is not to stand still: "[n]ew things are born out of lassitude—from being fed up," Barthes pointedly observes (2007, 21).

In his reflections on the "uncooperative self" Sennett identifies a third root of social withdrawal: obsession—in particular: the obsession to "prove oneself" as "worthy" through one's work.[11] Today's era, however, Byung-Chul Han and Pascal Chabot argue, is the era of burnout. Burnout, as a psycho-social and political phenomenon as well as philosophical concept, can (must) be read as withdrawal out of weariness, exhaustion, or saturation. Crucially, for both Han and Chabot, burnout means not so much active opposition to a society of overachievement and hyperstimulation (since we are called to action 24/7 already), and not even an *immunitary rejection* of a foreign body or external stimuli, but rather: a *disinvestment*, a distancing, a retreat. For Chabot in *Global Burnout* (2018, 15), burnout is the modern-day *acedia*: a weariness in matters of faith that often results from excessive zealousness, the erosion of the work ethic. As Han argues in *The Burnout Society* (2015), in a context of overachievement and hyperstimulation, immunology no longer offers adequate metaphors: "rejection occurring in response to excess positivity does not amount to immunological defense, but to digestive-neuronal abreaction and refusal" (2015, 5). In other words, immunological negativity fails to deliver when we attempt to conceptualize burnout.

Crucially for this book, the phenomena of withdrawal resist and call into question still dominant political imaginaries (of immunity, struggle, and enmity). Withdrawal is a response to the overdose of positivity that is late-capitalism, and not a defense mechanism against outside intrusion that seeks to negate us. It is a form of resistance that involves the disarticulation between a hyper-active society and the subject that finds itself trapped within it—a resistance that aims to recreate the bonds between self and world. As a concept for cultural and political theory, withdrawal thus prompts us to challenge, if not replace, the biopolitical paradigm that underpins much of the critical work done today.

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11. This is Max Weber's protestant work ethic transferred to secular labor (Sennett 2013, 192)—a form of worldly asceticism and severe self-discipline that results in the abstention from (social) indulgences based on self-competition and an intensified anxiety about self-worth (193). For the workaholic, Sennett claims, "invidious comparison" is "turned against the self."

Shoshana Zuboff (2019) shows how fundamental "withdrawal" is in a context of our present-day "surveillance capitalism," where the right to withdraw—from the all-seeing eye of digital moguls such as Google or Facebook—does not just entail the right to be forgotten, the right to disconnect, and the right to be protected from the arbitrariness of contemporary power (not to be reduced to a relentlessly divided data set). It also acknowledges that withdrawal is fundamental to our mode of being: the looming threat of never being able to find sanctuary, of never being in-retreat anywhere and anyhow, greatly affects our ways of being: our subjectivity, our behavior, our relation to the world and others around us. With "no exit" (from the digital and globally networked Big Other) ever more pervasively becoming the dictum of our times, withdrawal obviously becomes imminently political, whether this means withdrawal in the mundane sense—of deleting one's social media accounts, ditching one's smartphone, or booking a silent retreat—or withdrawal of a more radical kind—of going off-the-grid into the woods (into a "cabin" of sorts) or building one's own eco-autarchy. In fact, with the condition of "no exit" becoming ever more universal in the Global West, we argue, exiting, desertion, dis-connecting, and fugitivity become *the* political gesture.

As we are finalizing the introduction to this book, early March 2020, CO-VID-19, commonly known as "the corona virus," rages across the globe. In their struggle to contain the virus, governments worldwide are modulating the rhythm of social life by imposing various forms of quarantine (affecting whole cities, regions, and countries). We are riveted by these measures, in both senses of the word: fastened (working from home, isolated from students and peers) and fascinated (in the sense that it makes us think, and think again, about the overall concern with withdrawal we aim to address in this book). On the one hand, quarantine seems diametrically opposed to withdrawal: quarantine suspends the frenzy of everyday life in late-capitalism only to keep its rhythm beating at a later stage. Quarantine, as such, matches the immunitary logic of (self-)preservation, not in the least, of the socio-economic and political status quo. On the other hand, we cannot help but note the ardor with which, despite the obvious concerns and fears, the initial quarantine measures, especially in our field, were hailed as a form of involuntary retreat, a much longed for interruption of the generally overloaded workflow of everyday life, ridded of all unnecessary appointments, meetings, and administrative tasks that are felt to keep us from what matters most, both in our jobs (e.g., to do research, to coach, to offer care), and lives (to be in solidarity with and take care of one another). Whereas political theory offers ways to conceptualize the former, immunitary, logic, to date it has yet to come up with ways of conceptualizing the latter logic, which is the logic of withdrawal. With this book, we aim to gesture toward, or at least in, this direction.

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Chapter One

Can the Internet Be Turned Off?

Infrastructures of Dis-Disconnectivity

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Around 8:00pm CET on April 9, 2018, the *Deutscher* Commercial Internet Exchange (DE-CIX) in Frankfurt am Main went offline for several hours.[1] Even though the outage affected the largest Internet exchange point of the world's largest network, its effect on the regular functioning of the Internet was minimal.[2] Its relatively minor impact, especially negligible if compared to the major chain of global events to be set in motion were (for example) the world's largest airport to shut down, reveals something specific and essential about the Internet's infrastructure. Through built-in redundancy and its overall resilience to disruption, the global network of networks can absorb damage, outages, and disasters in a very short span, so that even the world's largest node can go off the grid without seriously affecting the Internet's overall operation.

In other words, this technical accident, though it may have disrupted certain services, did not result in a "disconnection" of the Internet. On the contrary, the Internet proved that its infrastructure maintains uninterrupted operations in the face of temporary outages within the system. Intentional measures of control and censorship (the regulation of DNS servers, the exploitation of protocols, the shutting down of providers, or the cutting of cables; see Maughan 2019) can have enormous effects on accessibility and availability, as for example during the Arab Spring, but so far such attempts at restriction have remained localized. The focus of the present chapter is on the network's architecture and its principles of security rather than on the politics of censorship, which targets certain regions or websites but not the Internet's infrastructure as such.

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1. Currently, there are around 350 IXPs (Internet Exchange Points) worldwide (see Richter et al.). On their operation, see Chatzis et al. (2013).

2. DE-CIX is the Internet's largest node in terms of data throughput, with a maximum volume of