Articulating the Cracks in the Worlds of Power
16 Beaver Group talking with Brian Holmes

Between Us, Demilitarized Zone, Korea

16 Beaver: *When we started thinking about doing something like a seminar together, a few ideas emerged:*

A. We didn't want it to be a seminar in the ordinary sense, nor a workshop, nor a conference, nor a convergence, nor even a "model" for others.
B. We wanted to organize it with the minimum amount of money and without relying on any outside organizations, grants, or institutions.
C. We wanted it to be the beginning of a collaboration, between 16beaver and Tangent University and Brian Holmes and other colleagues ... to explore a new way of working together and sharing our know-what and know-how.
D. We wanted to bring people together who have been associated with our respective efforts to engage over a longer term in actually influencing one another.
E. To combine together, even more than our past collective efforts, our research interests and our activities, to try and make sense of what is taking place around us in the name of "politics" or "economic rationality" or "development," and to find within our own practices the spaces and modes which might pose the greatest challenges and problems to "business as usual."
F. To not be afraid to ask the most ambitious of questions, or to fail entirely.

Having arrived at year 2, we have a much larger number of collaborators and individuals who will be contributing to our ongoing inquiries. So these questions to you, Brian, are not meant in any way to reduce the voice of these inquiries to one spokesperson. They are instead meant to come back to some of the points of departure we shared and to explore both the theoretical concerns as well as the organizational ones.

In relation to the ideas we were exploring in the first year, what would you outline as the main theses?

Brian Holmes: Well, of course there are different levels, analytic and metaphorical, poetic and political, all entangled in the title, "Continental Drift." And since we've tended in our work together to be strict, sociological and painstakingly historical, with an

obsessive attention to economics, infrastructure and ideology, I'd like to turn that all upside down for a change and begin with the poetics. On the one hand, the title evokes geology, plate tectonics, the geohistorical splitting of great landmasses, the telluric shifts that rip continents apart, the incredibly powerful and violent energies coursing through the world today. It's a name for immensity. On the other hand, it immediately recalls something intimate and experimental, the situationist practice of drifting, of losing yourself, of abandoning conventional purposes and rationalized coordinates to seek out radically different orientations in experience, but on an unexpected planetary scale - as though you could wander across entire regions, spanning the gaps between worlds, or spiraling weightlessly through civilizations. So it's a name for intimacy in immensity. At the same time, without any possible escape, the overblown image of continental drift tends to deflate into its opposite, something familiar or downright banal: the basic condition of global unification by technology and money, where it's possible for privileged individuals to move freely but ignorantly about the earth, like taking the train across town for a buck and a quarter. So if you weave all those sensations together, the whole thing speaks of fault-lines in an overwhelming global unity, and of the elusive quest for a direct experience of a split reality. As though you could embrace the movement of a world that falls apart, as though you could embody the splintering cracks, the bifurcations, the shattering, and on the far side, begin understanding what it will be like to have to pick up the pieces....

16B: *OK, so what about the economy, the sociology, that obsessively analytic dimension?*

BH: What we managed to explore last year was above all a single thesis, drawn from the history of political economy: Karl Polanyi's notion of the "double movement." This refers to the fundamental paradox of capitalism, which by commodifying everything, by bringing every aspect of human experience under the rules of profit and reinvestment, at the same time provokes a defensive reaction of breakup, of escape, whether through withdrawal and autarky, warlike aggression, or the search for a better alternative. Polanyi, whose major work is called *The Great Transformation*, is really an ecological thinker. He shows how the notion of the self-

Between Us, Garibong Dong, Seoul

regulating market, which is supposed to assign a proper price to everything and thereby secure the necessary resources for the continual production of an ever-expanding range of goods, fails tragically to account for all the factors involved in the reproduction of land, of labor, and of the very institution of exchange, money itself. What happens instead is that careless trading in these "fictitious commodities" tends to destroy them, to blight the land, to exhaust and even kill the laborer, to ruin the value of the money through unchecked speculation. Polanyi showed how these self-destructive processes operated up to the First World War, how they ultimately wiped out the international gold standard that had been built up by British liberalism, and then brought on the Great Depression. What resulted was a division of the world into five rival currency-blocs, which went to deadly war against each other from 1938 to 1945. After the war, of course, the people of the world had to pick up the pieces, for better or worse; they had to establish new balances, new systems. Giving in to the history obsession, I tried to explain both the new basis of stability and the potential weaknesses of the postwar world-system that came together under the domination of the United States. With David Harvey's help we analyzed the very shaky state of that system today, with all the strains that neoliberal globalization is now placing on the world ecology, on

the conditions of existence for the global labor force, and even on the hegemony of the US dollar, whose continuing status as the international reserve currency has never been so uncertain.

16B: *That's something we realized during the first sessions: empires always find a way to tax, and the US has done it through the dollar.*

BH: Exactly. By printing more dollars for export, by floating more Treasury bonds, by manipulating interest rates to create a favorable trade conditions, even by exploiting huge monetary crises, like the so-called "Asian crisis" in 1997-89. But all that finally destroys any possibility of cooperation. Observing the first movements toward the constitution of rival blocs - the emergence of the EU, of the Japanese-Chinese-Southeast Asian trading system, of NAFTA itself, of a potential socialist pole in Latin America around Venezuela - was a way to ask whether the "double movement" described by Polanyi might be repeating itself before our eyes. It was also a way to understand Al Qaeda's call for a "new Caliphate" in the Middle East as another defensive reaction - though a particularly desperate and dangerous one - to the neoliberal push for global integration under highly exploitative unilateralist rules. I was very convinced by all those ideas, but at the same time, quite uncertain as to whether anyone would be ready to hear such things. Now, just one year later, all that speculation about a possibly violent breakup of the postwar world-system looks a lot less unlikely, after the experience of Hurricane Katrina, after the further decline of Iraq and Afghanistan into chaos, after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the continually deteriorating situation in Palestine. Maybe we didn't go far enough with the geopolitics! But at another level, closer to everyday experience, we also explored the consequences of the commodification of knowledge and culture, which many now consider a fourth "fictitious commodity." As people working with knowledge and culture - as "immaterial laborers" - we tried to look around us, on Wall Street where 16beaver is located, and see what the pinnacle of networked symbolic exchange really entails. It's tremendously important to understand the degree to which all forms of cultural and scientific production are increasingly being functionalized for market exchange, whose quintessence is the

Continental Drift – Chapter 1 – Part I with David Harvey

trading of immaterial goods on Wall Street. Financialization means the lived experience of semiotic obsolescence: the fact of producing symbolic trash, numbers that vanish infinitely into other numbers, the meaninglessness of making money with money. There is no inherently progressive aspect to immaterial labor, and "Empire" is still driven and piloted by imperialist nation-states, above all Britain and the USA. But still there is a deep ambiguity in the practice of immaterial labor, to the extent that it too is subject to a double movement - or in other words, to the extent that we too can recoil from the pressure of total commodification of ourselves, and look for ways to escape, or ways to fight back culturally, or better alternatives for the use of our minds, our expressive capacities and our sensoriums. I think that this uncertainty over the appropriate uses of culture and knowledge is potentially something which can be shared today, even across the geographical divides.

16B: *Based on the contributions others gave last year, what additional questions emerged for you, if any?*

BH: What emerges for me first of all is a better sense of the possible, of what we can really do together. Last year we had two

separate sessions, each very intense, but different. The first was more formal, more difficult in a way, and I think whether rightly or wrongly I put out a lot of pressure to up the intellectual ante, to introduce a tremendous amount of political and economic theory into what have largely been artistic and activist discussions. I think that was important to most people, and at the same time there were some very good interventions by the more activist-minded participants, mostly people who have worked together in Chicago, who have learned how to cooperate on very risky and often very successful projects, and who injected some elements of group process and horizontality that you can easily lose sight of in a heavily arty and academic context like New York.

The second session was somehow more relaxed, basically because we had gotten to know each other, and also because we had established some shared vocabularies. I forget at which point there emerged the notion of "felt public space" - related, I think, to a kind of dodgy reference to the artist Joseph Beuys - but anyway, the phrase was definitely an icebreaker, and it gives a good description, not only of the conversations that we had in that second session, but also of the kind of enlarged conversations that we might get to this time. By pooling experiences and talking through the details and difficulties of work that has been done in a wide range of places and contexts, what emerges is nothing homogeneous, but an incredible texture of differences and open possibilities that can't be reduced either to political sloganeering or to discrete little rungs leading up the golden ladder of the art world. Instead there is just a world out there, the real one: and little animated bits of it come walking through the doors of 16beaver. After this excruciating year, with the new outbreak of war during the summer and the realization, by so many people around the planet, that the problems facing us are deep and vast and unlikely to just resolve themselves with passing time or the usual elections, what stands out is a heightened sense of the importance of speaking with other people, and of listening. The hope is to extend the conversations of last year into a network of feelers that reach out further and maybe touch all of us a little deeper, so that we can really get somewhere with all the crazy hyperstimulated global wandering that present-day life seems to require.

Continental Drift – Chapter 1 - Part 1 Concluding Discussion

16B: *For some people, it is difficult to distinguish what we are attempting here from a colloquium that would happen say at some university or art institution. Is it important to differentiate?*

BH: Well, the problem I have, and maybe others have it too, is that the formalism and the professionalism of the museum-university-festival circuit sometimes keeps you from knowing either who you are, or what you're really talking about. This is not to say we should close the museums, picket the universities, burn the libraries or go back to the land or whatever. But it is to say that unconventional and dissenting ideas don't often come out of established and conventional functions. And when everybody tacitly agrees that cultural production can only take place under the beneficent gaze of the market and the state, and on their payrolls, what you get in my opinion is very dull and timid attitudes combined with grotesquely simulated and overblown emotions. Or, from the more ambitious and professional types, you may get hyper-specialized discourses and elaborate aesthetic affects, this sort of highly valorized cultural production which appears irrefutable when it comes out of MIT or MoMA, but still doesn't seem to be what we're looking for.

To put it in more theoretical terms, there is no possibility of generating a critical counter-power - or counter-public, or counter-public sphere - when there is no more search for relative autonomy, or when the collective self (*autos*) no longer even asks the question of how to make its own law (*nomos*). So the importance of this kind of project is to use it as a moment of experimentation, not just in the quest for the perfect theory or the perfect procedure, but cosmologically, to rearrange the stars above your head. Such events don't often happen, the only solution is do-it-yourself. It's also part of the search for the outside, which has existential necessity. I think I've learned the most about art and social theory from counter-summits with lines of teargas-belching cops, and from those kinds of anarchist summer universities where you camp out for a week and have a hard time finding a shower, but also get to cooperate directly with people whose words and gestures aren't totally dissociated from their bodies and their actions. Well, since those moments I have felt a need to develop more complex discourses and experiments, but hopefully not more conventional and complacent ones; and it seems like with this project, 16beaver has been a kind of convergence center in many people's search for different formats.

16B: *Organizationally speaking, what do you think is the importance of these kinds of activities? Although we may be reluctant to employ the word model, we are positing a certain mode of research/practice?*

BH: I guess we're positing it. I would guess that everyone involved in the organizing is secretly hoping that this will be some kind of turning point for their own practice, both in terms of the kind of critical research into contemporary society that is being proposed, and as a way to get beyond a certain social limit, a certain dependency on conventional institutions for fixing the calendars, setting the topics and themes, generally guiding the rhythm and focus of public interactions. I would guess that we're all dreaming that with a little extra effort, we could regain a certain intellectual and artistic dignity, a sense that we are establishing our own questions and problematics, while setting up experimental spaces to deal with them. I think this is a widely shared aspiration right now, not only for people who are operating autonomously and independently, but also for others who are pushing the limits of institutions and regaining the capacity to do something challenging in public. But it still remains to do it, to fulfill collective goals and get some palpable and usable results - which probably explains the reluctance to talk about models in the meantime!

16B: *What is the relation between this mode of inquiry we are positing and the topics we are actually exploring together?*

BH: For me, the relation would be in the possibility to have some transformative influence on the damnably complex reality that confronts everyone today, precisely the political-economic-cultural situations that we're trying to discuss. For example, you've probably heard me use the phrase "liberal fascism." What does that mean? Why should people involved with art and culture have to deal with such an idea? I've been trying to clarify the preconditions for liberal fascism on the psychosocial level, since I started my work on the flexible personality about five years ago. But at this point I think we should collectively define the concept, now that the reality exists, now that so-called Democrats have voted for the Military Commissions Act, which suspends habeas corpus and the right to a fair trial, or even the right not to be tortured, for anyone arbitrarily designated an "unlawful enemy combatant." Meanwhile, in case you managed to forget it, a corporation named Kellogg Brown & Root, aka Halliburton, has been given a $385 million contract to establish - I'm quoting directly from their website - "temporary detention and processing capabilities" to augment existing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement facilities, "in the event of an emergency influx of immigrants into the U.S., or to support the rapid development of new programs." New programs? Which new programs? What kind of potential is hiding in that juxtaposition between "unlawful enemies" and domestic Guantánamos? Why don't people talk about it?

One thing is that there's no adequate language to describe what's going on. But the other problem is that defining a concept doesn't necessarily help you do anything about the reality. What used to

Camp Campaign **Lower 9th Ward, New Orleans**

be known as the Left in the USA has lost any significant capacity to move from theoretical definitions to effective actions. Under such conditions, there is really no use to go blithely ahead with utopian thinking, it becomes hypocrisy. But utopian thinking is at the very origin of cultural practice, so far as I'm concerned. So this is what you call a crisis, a life-threatening moment. We know we should all "go out in the streets," but when we get there, there's no there there. We have to create arguments so strong that they can merge with feelings, in order to reshape reality. By trying to articulate an examination of contemporary conditions with a cooperative, non-professional public practice, I think we are moving away from the self-imposed blindness and silence that characterizes the hypermobile, hyperproductive citizen under a regime of liberal fascism. But there is much more to be done, and I am hoping to learn more about the practices of making things public that different people in the group have been developing.

16B: *Given that in this second year, we are attempting to expand our questions from last year, what would you say from your perspective are the developments intellectually in* *your own work, discursively in terms of writings you have come across, and politically in the last year?*

BH: Well, a year is a long time, so it may take a while to answer! Certainly in my own work I have pursued the inquiry that began with the text on "Neoliberal Appetites," which I presented at 16beaver last year. The point is to see how specific social institutions impress upon us the basic underlying procedure of neoliberal subjectivity, which consists in understanding yourself, your accomplishments and your own creativity, indeed your own desire, as *human capital*, to be nourished and cherished in terms of its potential returns on the market, and to be used as a measurement of the value of any kind of experience whatsoever. Of course, this capital is also something to be risked in particular ventures, the way you risk your money on the stock market. I think that both museums and universities are now doing a lot to encourage this kind of self-valuation among intellectuals and artists, through the exaltation of creativity as a productive force, and through the institution of intellectual property as a technique for reifying that force, making inventions into contractual "things" that can be securely owned. I have written a text called "The Artistic Device" to explore how neoliberal subjectivation takes place in the knowledge society, notably by examining a performance where an artist takes on the role of a day trader. The text also looks at a deliberate attempt to escape this form of subjectivation, to establish a new cooperative ethic and even a new imaginary, inseparable from the immanent experience of crossing a continent on the trans-Siberian train. The text ends with a Foucauldian analysis of a British university museum that's now under construction, called The Panopticon Museum. But I can guarantee you, this is not the same analysis of centralized power and internalized surveillance that has been repeated for the last thirty years. "The Artistic Device" is a text that people might want to read before our sessions. In addition to that I have been structuring a book on the whole problematic, with essays on the artists Ricardo Basbaum and Marko Peljhan, on the concept of swarming and its limits, on Felix Guattari and his schizoanalytic cartographies, as well as other things in the works. It's all online at the Continental Drift section of www.u-tangente.org.

unfair TRADE Jonathan Lowe's Shop, Carrick on Shannon, Ireland

Outside my work, a particularly interesting discursive event has been the publication of two essays by Malcom Bull, "The Limits of Multitude" and "States of Failure." These use the language of political philosophy to point to something very much like Polanyi's "double movement": namely an attempt to consolidate a World Government, which inherently fails and whose failure gives rise to what Bull calls the "dissipative structures" of a new multi-polar world. In "States of Failure" Bull shows the root impossibility of a world run by pure economics, as in the Clintonian dream of the World Trade Organization. Such a World Government either becomes a full-blown global state with military powers, or it dissolves, in various fashions, under the influence of different groups and social formations. What becomes clear at the end of the text, in a few amazing pages, is that this dissolution is already underway, and that the whole political question is how to keep it as peaceful as possible: that's where the specific character and orientation of the "dissipative structures" has so much importance. I think it can be interesting for the philosophically minded to read those texts before the upcoming Continental Drift sessions, as a

way to understand that the issues we are dealing with here are very much those of our times. Bull's development of the concept of World Government also vindicates, in a general way at least, the speculative research that my friends in Bureau d'Etudes have been doing for years.

The main thrust of my own research, however, has been in another direction, spurred on by the long-term realities of conflict and the particularly insane war of the summer months. It comes partially to light in a text called "Peace-for-War," which I wrote for the conference series recorded at www.dictionaryofwar.org. But I have a lot left to do before I can complete this argument. In order to grasp the strange mix, in the current American administration, between a kind of archaic Cold-War mindset and a very futurist, hi-tech practice of preemption, I have been looking into the early period of cybernetics, which was the great applied social science of the postwar period. Basically it's about control through negative feedback, or error control - like an anti-aircraft gun gradually homing in on its target, with the assistance of its automated tracking device and its human operator. This was the primary model for the early worldwide control systems that were installed after WWII, typically leaving a very reduced place for the human operator, as a kind of logical calculator and biological servomechanism nested inside the larger machine. The research shows how the fulfillment and closure of something like World Government was sought through the applications of cybernetic logic to city planning and to organizational and technological system-building at a global scale. But it also shows that the ambition to constitute a "closed world" (the title of a great book by Paul N. Edwards) was already overcome on the theoretical level in the late 1960s and early 1970s by the innovations of second-order cybernetics, with its emphasis on positive rather than negative feedback. Second-order cybernetics was first defined by a guy named Heinz von Foerster, who tried to understand all the perturbations that arise when the observer is part of the machine that he or she observes, and attempts to reorient or transform. Rather than seeking to preserve the balanced state of a homeostatic system, second-order cybernetics tries to map out how a system unbalances itself, alters its very parameters and rules, then goes through phase-changes provoked by the excess of
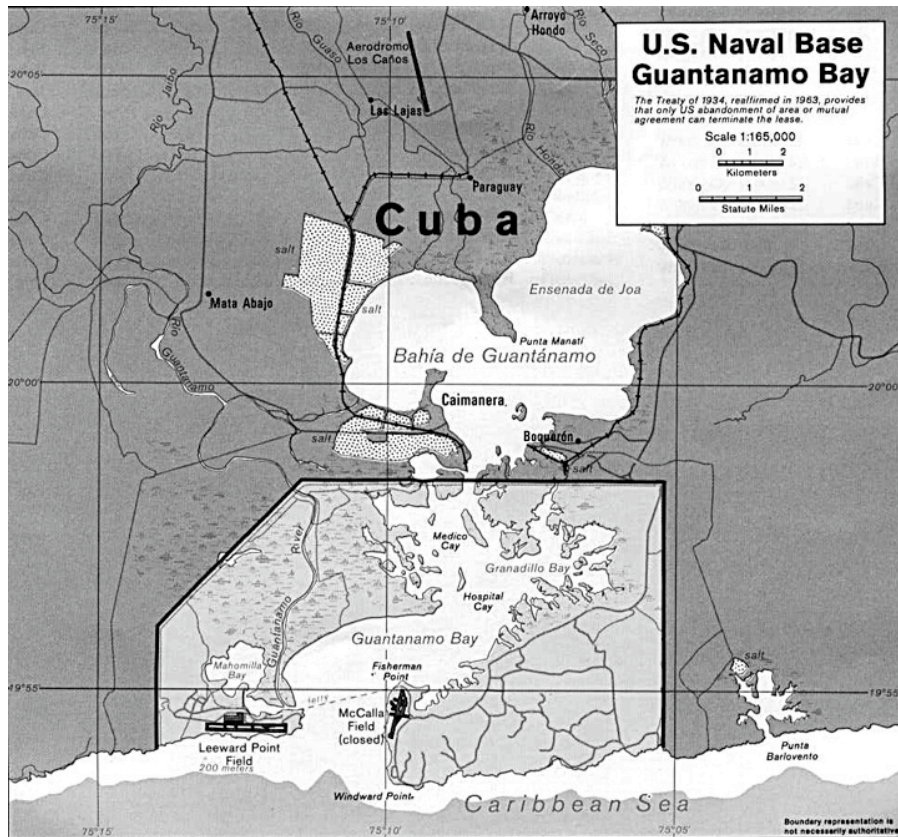
positive feedback. In fact, the notion of "dissipative structures" would come in right here. Similar ideas were taken up and played out in daily life by the counter-cultures, as a way to break down the grip of monolithic control systems on our minds. I think that if you look back on the psychedelic "acid tests" that were done around San Francisco in the mid-sixties, and at the particular role of electronic media as a kind of delirious counter- or alter-information source in those experiences, you get a first inkling of this kind of systemic unbalancing.

Recently I've been reading a lot of texts by Felix Guattari to understand the deeper principles of counter-cultural subversion, and I think Deleuze and Guattari's work does exactly that: it overflows cybernetic control through an excess of nomadic desire, in an aesthetic equivalent to the kinds of guerrilla tactics that were able to overcome the rationalist battlefield strategies of the US imperial system. Much of what we think of as avant-garde art still tries to pursue this kind of disruptive, overflowing movement. However, what the strategy of subversion ultimately led to, when postmodern capitalism had finished recycling it back into a new functional pattern, was the optimistic emphasis on innovation and phase changes that was characteristic of the New Economy. Second-order cybernetics, reborn as complexity theory, became the master discourse of the 1990s, of post-modernism, of the Internet boom: it was the cynical reason of immaterial labor, something I already more or less described in "The Flexible Personality." Semiotic chaos was made into a productive principle, as becomes clear when you look at a landmark book like "Increasing Returns and Path Dependency in the Economy" published by W.B. Arthur in 1994, which specifically focuses on the role of positive feedback in the creation of financial values. But this kind of economic logic couldn't last, it was just too unstable. In parallel to the collapse of the New Economy and the World Trade Towers, what we saw coming to the fore, with incredible suddenness, were more militant versions of emergence, practiced first by the antiglobalization movements, then very differently by the networked terrorists. In the 1990s, the system believed it could thrive on its capacity to destabilize itself. But in the end, that was an illusion.

Williamsburg (not) for Sale Brooklyn, New York

What we finally arrive at is a desperate moment where the US government tries to regain or prolong the paranoid fantasy of static control promised by the Cold-War image of World Government, but now through an entirely new, extremely dynamic strategy of "preempting emergence," to borrow the title of a brilliant article by Melinda Cooper, which is the third text I'd like to recommend. The individual's sense of a desiring, creative and valuable self at risk in an unpredictable world - in other words, the neoliberal appetite for self-capitalization - is paralleled on a macro level by a government that lashes out with its full hegemonic power in the attempt to annihilate risks which at the same time it continually re-creates, by its own compulsive drive to extend neoliberalism's constitutive instability to the entire earth. Here we have as situation as patently mad as the Cold War was, with all its strategic zero-sum games of Mutually Assured Destruction. And we see this new form of civilizational madness being built around us, in the form of the security architecture of biometrics, used for the computerized tracking and targeting of singularities on their labyrinthine paths through the world-space. This hyper-individualized control obsession underlies the liberal fascism of the Military Commissions Act.

U.S. Naval Base Guantanamo Bay

The Treaty of 1934, realfirmed in 1963, provides that only US abandonment of area or mutual agreement can terminate the lease.

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Map for Camp Campaign

In the face of the long-term bid by the US to achieve a kind of total planetary lockdown, societies in danger have reacted in two ways: by developing dangerous and aggressive forms of chaotic emergence, and by plunging into archaic religious identities which do not obey the rational models of mainframe cybernetics. In other words, they have reacted by risking the future and hiding in the past, which is the same symptomatic movement that we identified last year as "neolib goes neocon." The Bush administration itself has become at once archaic, in its dependency on a religious address to world populations, and hypermodern, in its attempt to institute a molecular surveillance of the future. But there's no room for a sane response on those two opposed planes: what we need is a way to survive and flower in a present that's open to becoming and alterity. So all of the above is just a more precise, perhaps deeper and more urgent way of asking the basic question: What to do in the face of the double movement of contemporary capitalism, with its disastrous consequences? Or in other words, how can we "subvert" (if that's still the word) a system which is so dramatically and dangerously failing in its simultaneous attempts to instrumentalize the archaic and to preempt emergence?

16B: *Based on that response, one question is whether what you outline above is compatible with a multi-scale social ontology as proposed by some thinkers like Manuel De Landa. (consisting of individuals, families, groups, communities, neighborhood associations, social and cultural groups, activist groups, small and medium sized corporations, unions, courts, towns, cities, city councils, regional groups, universities, large enterprises, states, state governments, nations, federal governments, national political organizations, media organizations, lobby groups, ngo's, international bodies, int'l courts, global corporations, conglomerates, trading blocs, ...)? The question is not meant to undermine the proposals we have examined so far, nor to reject the assertion that there are extremely powerful forces attempting to preempt emergence, nor even to deny the fact that there are large concentrations of power in the hands of a shrinking number of players. It is meant instead to demand a theoretical approach that does not reduce the complexity of our societies - an approach which makes it more plausible to retain spaces for contradiction as well as spaces for hope, for the heterogeneous potentialities which will alter the course of history.*

BH: Well, I definitely agree, and what we are doing together is predicated on that approach. But to acknowledge the existence of multiple actors and a multi-scalar society is one thing, to know what to do with it is another! The very quandary of democracy has always been the uncertainty of moving through those scales, compounded by the question of whether one would really want access to the power techniques used by the larger formations to manipulate the smaller ones, to homogenize them and make their actions knowable, predictable, steerable. The unpleasant suspicion that you are being steered, and the difficulty, or more

often the impossibility, of going high enough up the ladder to challenge that steering effect and ask for more transparent decision-making procedures, is one of the things that can literally drive people nuts under the paradoxical regime of democracy, which says you are free to participate in the drafting and interpretation of the collective law, but then consistently proves the contrary. One of the traditional responses to this problem has been to become more deliberate, to participate in or actually develop structures which are at once larger than the immediate forms of face-to-face association, yet at the same time contain both ethical cultures and formal procedures to make sure that individuals and small groups still have some input. I don't think that kind of deliberate action should be discounted, and the emergence of new parties, unions, NGOs, or the reform of old ones, is always worth attention. That's also why I keep intervening in formal art institutions and university programs, and encouraging group interventions, though always from a position of relative autonomy. I admire tenacious people who are able to introduce change and experimentation on those levels, and want to contribute. But the present-day situation has seen a real paralysis of most of those structures, which becomes clear when you look at the paradigmatic case of the political party.

There were a lot of reasons, in the late nineteenth century, for individual politicians to accept party discipline, one of them being that the party provided a new place and a new set of rules for the decision-making process, outside the cacophony of the parliaments. So increasingly, in the twentieth century, policy was worked out at the headquarters of parties, which then confronted each other as voting blocs in the parliaments. Another advantage of the party was that it could have a broad popular membership, which proved essential for gathering information about what people really want in a democracy. And the fact of being consulted, of participating in workshops or surveys devoted to a particular issue, perhaps even of going out on the street to ask questions as a party member addressing a general public, all that helped create loyalty at the voting booth - another essential attraction for the politicians. But the professionally conducted opinion poll, then in recent years the focus group, gradually replaced the function of broad party membership as an information-gathering device; and the function of advertising, then of the campaign as an integrated spectacle, also replaced the older, more organic ways of motivating people's votes. So today the political party has everywhere become a televisual juggernaut piloted by a sociological research arm, which serves only to get the vote out once every few years, while the specialized political-economic deals required to raise money to pay for those studies and campaign extravaganzas are struck under a veil of ignorance and manipulated information, at levels of complexity which citizens are completely unprepared to understand. And this same kind of phenomenon also crops up at the municipal scale, the corporate scale, the branch scale in unions, the state or national scale in big NGOs and so on, to the point where the idea of moving freely between them becomes a real fiction! The need for very large actors to operate at the world scale and at the speeds made possible by modern communication and transportation finally makes leaders just give up the whole pretense of any complex give-and-take between the different groups and organizations you mentioned, to the point where a guy like Bush says, almost immediately after taking office, "If this were a dictatorship, it would be a heck of a lot easier, just so long as I'm the dictator." Under the pretext of urgency, people with that kind of mentality will actually set about destroying the possibility of any bottom-up relationship between the scales, the way the Israeli military methodically destroyed the brand-new civil communication and transportation infrastructure this summer in Lebanon, and over the last year or so in Gaza.

16B: *This is why we wanted to add a fourth text to our list of shared references: a chapter from the Retort book "Afflicted Powers," entitled "The State, the Spectacle and September 11." Their book raises various critical questions and points where we may diverge from their analysis. But one interesting link to us is their discussion of the current regime's need both for "failed states" abroad and for "weak citizenship" at the centers of capitalism.*

BH: Yes, the Retort book is one of the few major statements to have come out of radical circles in the United States. They make an essential point when they say that state power now "depends more and more on maintaining an impoverished and hygienized

public realm, in which only the ghosts of an older, more idiosyncratic civil society live on." That's what I was describing above. Yet they tend to see the spectacle cracking in the wake of September 11, and I think that's particularly true beyond the US. September 11 and its consequences have brought many people to a shared understanding that traverses all the borders. We are becoming increasingly conscious that we live, not just in any one city or country or region, but in a world society: a world constantly traversed by people with multiple belongings, people who are acutely aware both of the interdependence of supposedly autonomous organizations, political units and sovereign power blocs, and also of the extreme fragility of the networks that link us all together. Never before has so vast a conversation and interchange been possible, even if it does not mean that any new articulations of power are necessarily emerging. What has emerged, despite all attempts to preempt it, is something like a resistance power, the power of people to block off the very worst, to self-organize in fundamentally negative, but still very joyful and cooperative ways, which I find extremely promising. What this seems to mean, in cultural and intellectual terms, is that every small meeting or working session is in reality just one temporarily active condensation of the immense and continuing process that is leading to the formation of a global public opinion and of a felt public space on a world scale, which may be called upon, in the near future, to resist the worst of what our governments and corporate oligarchs are now preparing. Such resistance, each time it becomes necessary, can happen only through cooperative events whose contours and distributed intelligence we ourselves will have to invent. That's what I call articulation. And what it suggests, in turn, is that what we say and do in such small meetings has more meaning and import than we are led to believe by the careerist and consumerist norms that have taken over the mediated surface of political spectacle.

Is it possible to fulfill a responsibility to this world conversation? Even in New York City at the heart of the financial district? We are proposing the Continental Drift experiment again because we believe it can have positive consequences, particularly in the arenas of art and activism that link most of us together. What we need, I think, is just for everyone who participates to take some small, self-assigned and untabulated responsibility for the practical unfolding of the event as it happens, and above all, to prepare in advance for the expression of a certain number of inquiries, activities and concerns, along with a readiness to listen to what all the others have prepared. We are organizing a "program" of contributions, as before; but experience shows that the program is only activated and made useful by the multiple proposals that undercut it, over-arch it and generally loosen the collective tongue, that feed the intellect and the imaginary. "Articulating the Cracks" is the theme. We have to find ways to make our activities more resonant. The shattering of old complacencies is at least an invitation to join all those who have taken the crisis of the present as a springboard.

A, B, Continental Drift