Chapter Eight

Withdrawal Symptoms

Refusal, Sabotage, Suspension

Darin Barney

> History is full of people who just didn't.
>
> —Anne Boyer, "No" (2018)

What makes withdrawal a political word? Withdrawal is both an act and a condition. One withdraws, or makes a withdrawal (as from a bank account); one can also be withdrawn, or experience withdrawal (as from an addiction). It is tempting to describe this as a distinction between active and passive senses of withdrawal. Conventionally, this distinction permits assignment of political value to withdrawal in the first sense only: withdrawal is political when it takes the form of intentional, positive action, even if that action is oriented toward negation, protest, or refusal. Withdrawal in the second sense suggests a pathological condition passively endured and is not typically coded as political. Instead, it is cast as a condition in which the agency usually associated with politics is absent or denied. Withdrawal in this second sense is posed as the opposite of politics understood in terms of participation, engagement, and responsible, accountable action as typically associated with citizenship in the liberal mode. In what follows, I will argue that the collapse of these distinctions characterizes withdrawal as a political orientation. Withdrawal is a mode of politics in which action and condition, doing and being, become almost indistinguishable, suggesting alternative possibilities for being political.[1]

1. "Mode" has distinctive meanings in music, grammar, and mathematics. The Latin *modus* denotes a measure, size, or quantity. The French *mode*, a feminine noun, refers to "a manner of living or thinking proper to a country or age," and is linked to mood. See "mode, n." *OED Online Third Edition*, September 2002.

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This suggestion is welcome, because the institutions of liberal democratic politics are failing to rise to domestic and global challenges including growing economic inequality and wealth concentration, systemic racism, and environmental collapse (Wolin 2017). What would it mean to be in withdrawal from all this in a manner that is nevertheless political? In this chapter, I will explore the possibility and implications of a politics of withdrawal across three registers: refusal, sabotage, and suspension. Each of these relates to withdrawal in ways that obviate the distinction between discrete action and the condition of being in the world in relation to others. In this way, they exceed established vocabularies that reduce politics to the action of autonomous, responsible, liberal subjects, and raise the prospect of recuperating politics in a different mode.

It is implied here that politics consists in what Jacques Rancière describes as disagreement. By disagreement, Rancière does not mean a mere difference of opinion. Instead, it is as when a subject does not agree with a verb with respect to number. Disagreement is a structural and structuring misfit or miscount whereby the status of those who count—those who recognize each other as speaking beings, as people with names—relies upon the non-recognition of those who do not count, those who are not recognized as speaking beings, those without names who are not acknowledged as capable of opinion or grievance and whose utterances register as mere noise, or as a groan. In this view, the relationship between those who count, those who recognize and speak to each other in the public sphere as if they are equals, is not a political relationship. The relationship between the recognized and the unrecognized—an inequality the public sphere of citizens relies upon for its integrity—is also not a political relationship. Rancière (1999, 28) gives the name "police" to these relationships, which function to organize and enforce the existing distribution of parts. By contrast, politics takes place when the misfit, the miscount, the wrong—the inequality that structures the public sphere—manifests as disagreement, essentially: between the radical equality of all people and the contingent inequality that constitutes a polity. As Rancière (1999, 27) describes:

> Politics does not exist because men, through the privilege of speech, place their interests in common. Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing in common a wrong that is nothing more than this very confrontation, the contradiction of two worlds in a single world.

Politics is present when disagreement is made sensible—felt, in various ways, as the shudder produced when functioning parts slip out of alignment (Rancière 2005). Politics does not take place within the established order of

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a city or state. It is a violation of that order. It is not when a miscount is resolved because an error has been revealed and corrected, such that those who had been mistakenly excluded are now included, and parties are reconciled according to the terms of the existing system of counting. Politics is when, in one way or another, a miscount that exceeds the possibility of a recount using the existing system of counting is materialized.[2] It's not when a groan once discounted as noise is recognized as a grievance and incorporated into the existing count, but when the terms of the count themselves are rejected or no longer hold, and the structural arrangement of parts and their relationships are thereby transformed.

REFUSAL

Movements, events, and even individual experiences of subjectivation often commence in resistance, when a limit is reached that provokes a "no" or "no more." From the perspective of politics as disagreement, this moment is not decisive. Disagreement arises when an existing order interprets resistance as a demand to be included, responds with an offer of recognition and reconciliation, *and this offer is refused*. This refusal to be incorporated manifests a structural disagreement and exposes the potential for a reordering of parts. In Canada, for example, Indigenous activists and theorists have set out a politics of refusal in relation to the recognition and reconciliation offered by the Canadian state in response to centuries of resistance by Indigenous peoples (Government of Canada 2019). These activists and thinkers are in disagreement, and refuse recognition, reconciliation and incorporation offered on terms they see as continuous with the existing settler-colonial order, holding out for (and onto) fundamentally different structural arrangements and material relationships: jurisdiction, Indigenous legal orders, territory, land (Manuel and Derrickson 2017; Pasternak 2017).

Not all Indigenous thinkers, leaders, activists and communities in Canada express their disagreement with settler colonialism in the form of refusal, but those who do have expressed the position with great clarity. For example, Glen Coulthard (2014, 3), a Yellowknives Dene political theorist, argues that "the politics of recognition in its contemporary form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonial power that Indigenous peoples' demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend." Recognition and reconciliation aim to make good on the promise of liberal pluralism by

2. See also Wolin's (2017, 107) account of fugitive democracy: "revolutionary transgression is the means by which the demos makes itself political. It is by *stasis* not *physis* that the *demos* acquires a civic nature." On *stasis* as a condition of politics, see Agamben (2015).

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offering to include previously excluded Indigenous peoples (as if their historical discounting were simply a mistake, rather than structural) while leaving the constitutional and material basis of settler colonial states and relations intact. As Coulthard writes (2016, 251), with Nishnaabeg thinker Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, settler colonialism is a "structure of domination that is partly predicated on the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples' lands and the forms of political authority and jurisdiction that govern our relationships to these lands." In terms that disagree with notions of capitalist property and liberal autonomy into which the settler state seeks to enroll Indigenous peoples, Coulthard and Simpson (2016, 249) name these forms of authority and jurisdiction "grounded normativity" and "place-based solidarity." These recalcitrant forms, practiced under conditions of duress, materialize refusal as a politics of being in disagreement with, and withdrawal from, ongoing structures of domination and subordination.

As Audra Simpson (2014, 5), an anthropologist and Kahnawake Mohawk describes, some Indigenous people enact refusal "in living and knowing themselves" as something more than what the capitalist settler state assumes or demands them to be in order to be recognized. In doing so, they embody a "knotty reminder of something else." This "something else" of which Indigenous refusal reminds us is that, recognition notwithstanding, the dispossession of Indigenous lands and the denial of Indigenous legal orders remain the historical and contemporary foundation of the Canadian state. However, it also reminds us of the possibility of being otherwise (see Povinelli 2012). According to Simpson (2014, 5), in refusing recognition and demanding (or enacting) the return of their lands and jurisdiction, "Indigenous peoples are reminders, sometimes indecipherable announcements of other orders, other authorities, and an earlier time that has not fully passed." The practices in and by which these indecipherable announcements are made are many and diverse (L. Simpson 2017). Moreover, Indigenous peoples are not the only ones who inhabit a condition of disagreement, and who refuse the offer to be reconciled with a material order that is structurally unjust. It is a condition that belongs to the "undercommons" more generally, whose constituents—"black people, indigenous peoples, queers and poor people"—find that they "cannot be satisfied with the recognition and acknowledgement generated by the very system that denies that anything was ever broken. . . ."[3] Refusing the offer of

3. Halberstam 2013, 6. The "undercommons" is a term coined by Harney and Moten (2013). If the commons refers to the collective property, interest, or orientation of those recognized as belonging to a given community, the undercommons refers to the same amongst those who do not belong and are subordinated, those whose non-belonging establishes the basis of their commons. As Harney describes it elsewhere: "The undercommons is a kind of comportment or ongoing experiment with and as the general antagonism, a kind of way of being with others, it's almost impossible that it could be matched up with a particular institutional life" (Harney and Moten 2012, n.p.).

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recognition by a system built upon an original and structural disagreement, Halberstam continues (2013, 6), expresses a desire "to find each other, to see beyond it and to access the places we know lie beyond its walls."

From time to time, the structural dispossession, exclusion or disappearance upon which a given polity is founded and maintained is exposed. This exposure manifests as disagreement. In response, the existing order offers to reconcile with those in disagreement, by recognizing them as part of that order, after all. Some accept this offer. Others refuse it. These others thereby perdure in a condition of being-in-refusal, a political mode of withdrawal that simultaneously negates the hold of the existing order of relations and affirms the continuous possibility of being otherwise. One task for critical theory is to attend to the forms taken by politics in this mode, and to discern the qualities of the condition it reflects.

SABOTAGE

In a recent essay, the trenchant American social critic Rebecca Solnit (2019) takes a poke at sabotage. It comes by way of an insightful critique of the Icelandic film, *Woman at War* (Erlingsson 2018), which tells the story of Halla, an environmental activist who blows up power lines in an effort to stop an industrial aluminum development that threatens the countryside's sensitive ecosystem. Solnit's criticism is that the film foregrounds individual heroism in the achievement of social change, at the expense of organization and collective action. She contrasts the fictional (and, it seems, futile) sabotage depicted in the film with an actual case of sabotage in Iceland in 1970, in which a dam opposed by local farmers (it would flood their land) was blown up prior to completion. Describing this as "almost the only story I know of an environmental sabotage having significant impact," Solnit (2019, n.p.) adds: "it may be because it expressed the will of the many, not the few."

At issue for Solnit is the question of how change happens—"how you do this thing that saves rivers or islands or the earth"—and, by extension, how this thing is represented. According to Solnit, "Positive social change results mostly from connecting more deeply to the people around you than rising above them, from coordinated rather than solo action" (2019, n.p.). The problem with Halla's action is not just that it failed to produce meaningful change, but that it was "singlehanded." Singlehandedness plays well in cultural milieus where masculine heroics are the paradigm of social action but, in such narratives, "we don't get much of a picture of how change happens and what our role in it might be, or how ordinary people matter" (2019, n.p.). Moreover, such narratives lead us to believe that change can be (and, perhaps, can only be) accomplished without politics. As Solnit writes:

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> We are not very good at telling stories about a hundred people doing things or considering that the qualities that matter in saving a valley or changing the world are mostly not physical courage and violent clashes but the ability to coordinate and inspire and connect with lots of other people and create stories about what could be and how we get there. Back in 1970, the farmers did produce a nice explosion, and movies love explosions almost as much as car chases, but it came at the end of what must have been a lot of meetings, and movies hate meetings. (2019, n.p.)

Here, one hears a faint echo of Badiou's (2007, 148) dictum that "all politics comes down to collective actions debated and decided upon in meetings."

Solnit is right that politics is misrepresented in stories that cast it as heroic, individual, masculine action.[4] However, she is wrong to suggest that sabotage can be reduced to this sort of action and is, thereby, non-political. Sabotage is the name given to action that seeks to intervene in the production, circulation and accumulation of value, in its various forms. As I argue elsewhere (Barney 2019), its characteristics include that it is a normal way of doing business, that it is routinely practiced by states, that it works on operations, mobility, and flows, and that its medium is infrastructure, along with a few others to be discussed below. There is certainly a long and important history of political action that has involved breaking things, ranging from the Luddites (Hobsbawm 1952; Jones 2013), to more contemporary practices associated with certain forms of computer hacking (Sauter 2014) and various forms of direct action by environmentalists (Woodhouse 2018), to list but a few. Naming these practices "sabotage" is not an error, but doing so because they involve breaking things is to mistake what defines sabotage *as a mode of politics*. It also pleases authorities who are happy to equate all forms of sabotage with violence, criminality, and destruction. As a mode of politics, I argue, sabotage is better understood in terms of withdrawal. Specifically, it is a form of withdrawal from economic and police infrastructures with which one or more people find themselves in structural disagreement, via action (or inaction) that reduces the efficiency of those infrastructures and confounds the norms that govern them.

The association of sabotage with withdrawal is longstanding. In her classic 1916 text, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) defines sabotage as "the conscious withdrawal of the workers' industrial efficiency" (Flynn 2013, 91). Such withdrawal can take many forms—as Émile Pouget (1913, 101) writes: "To list out the thousands of methods and ways of sabotage would be an endless rosary." In his account of the history of industrial sabotage in France, Pierre Dubois (1979; orig. French 1976) isolates three distinct forms: the destruction of machinery and/or goods; stop-

4. On post-masculinist courage and its politics, see Barney (2011).

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ping production (through strikes); and "slowing down production" by means that include absenteeism and "going-slow." Of these, it is the last that best illustrates the core quality of sabotage as a form of deliberate withdrawal. In his jail-cell introduction to Pouget's *Sabotage*, Arturo Giovannitti (1913, 23) points out that, "The first form of sabotage, which was formerly known as *Go Cannie*, consists purely and simply in 'going slow' and taking it easy when the bosses do the same in regard to wages." It is with going-slow in mind that Giovannitti (1913, 14) goes on to say of sabotage that, "It is not destructive. It has nothing to do with violence, neither to life nor to property. It is nothing more or less than the chloroforming of the organism of production." "Slacking off of work," Pouget (1913, 76) writes, "may be called the instinctive and primordial form of sabotage." Nearly all accounts of workers' sabotage point to going-slow (and not machine-breaking) as its definitive form, and describe it in terms of a disagreement between the actual value of labour and the amount of compensation received for it. As Flynn (2013, 96) puts it: "Sabotage is an unfair day's work for an unfair day's wage. It is an attempt on the part of the worker to limit his production in proportion to his remuneration." In some instances, going-slow is a tactic aimed at winning wage increases; in all cases, it is a refusal of the bosses' control over the time and value of work, a way of being-in-refusal at work.

This points to sabotage as a politics of withdrawal. In his methodical account of the proliferation of workers' sabotage in French industry in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Dubois (1979, 81) indicates several motivations for going-slow besides exerting pressure in support of demands for wage increases. These include "screening the worker's real activity," in a manner that "enables him to keep some control over what he does," under working conditions that are otherwise determined and policed by management. Other reasons for going-slow include workers' protection of their own health and safety, insulating co-workers from layoffs (by making it seem that more labor is required to meet targets) and attending to the quality of production, all to standards higher than those determined or observed by management.[5] However, another motivation identified by Dubois merits quoting at length:

> A go-slow, finally, like the other forms of sabotage we have looked at, can take on a dimension of demonstration, of pointing to alternatives . . . one can say that a collective go-slow is a means of creating group solidarity. It is a means of

5. It is important to note that fouling the quality of goods rivals going-slow as a definitive tactic of worker's sabotage. Pouget (1913, 74–91) and Flynn (2013, 97–103) are emphatic in their advocacy of botching, adulteration, and spoilage as tactics (see also Dubois 1979, 27–30). They are equally emphatic in asserting that capitalist factory-owners are unrivalled in deploying various means to diminish the quality of goods in order to lower costs, manipulate price, and increase profits. It is in this light that workers' deciding to produce goods of a *higher* quality than prescribed by the bosses—including by working slowly—becomes a saboteurial tactic.

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> consolidating the group, but also a means of demonstrating opposition; workers on a go-slow stop obeying orders and observing prescribed work methods, and the authority of management is disputed and flouted. (1979, 83)

In going-slow, saboteurial workers "preserve a certain margin of freedom for themselves" (1979, 82).

What is interesting about these accounts of workers' in bygone days, committing sabotage by going-slow, is how distant they seem from the heroic, non-political, singlehandedness that Solnit attributes to contemporary, environmentalist direct action. Sabotage in the form of going-slow sounds and feels less like taking down a transmission line and more like what Audra Simpson (2014, 5) was quoted above describing as a "knotty reminder of something else . . . sometimes indecipherable announcements of other orders, other authorities, and an earlier time that has not fully passed." According to Flynn (2013, 109), for exploited workers positioned in structural disagreement with industrial capitalism, sabotage is not simply a tactic, or a means to an end. It is "an absolute necessity," something they do "instinctively, continually, year after year and generation after generation," a practice in "constant use." Similarly, for Pouget (1913, 35) sabotage "requires a permanent, restless action." Here, the significance of sabotage seems to lie less in discrete, individual acts, and more in the ongoing condition of being in disagreement, refusal and withdrawal. As Stevphen Shukaitis (2014, 193) observes in his account of refusing work under contemporary conditions of immaterial labor, "The refusal of work is a concept and practice—an approach to and understanding of the political, not an incantation."

The question is whether, or in what sense, this condition qualifies as political. In his account of workplace idleness as a contemporary form of resistance, Roland Paulsen (2014, 105–19), distinguishes between idleness in the form of withdrawal (expressing resignation, directed nowhere), idleness as "direct dissent" (expressing indignation, directed at a local target), and idleness as "framed dissent" (expressing a structural grievance, directed at structures of power). The implication is that going-slow becomes political (or saboteurial) only, or most substantially, when it takes the form of framed dissent. Withdrawal, by contrast, is assumed to be politically inert. "The essence of the motive of withdrawal," Paulsen (2014, 107) writes, is "a purely negative reaction that also is adaptive since it is not aimed at making any change except for creating a sphere of autonomy within the established order of power." To his credit, Paulsen recognizes that this triptych reproduces a set of normative expectations about politics—i.e., that it consists of willed, intentional public actions for which individuals who mutually recognize each other as actors are credited and responsible—that might misrepresent the actual political potential of workplace idling and other forms of sabotage. He

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writes, "It should be noted that the typology is not hierarchical in the sense that framed dissent can be regarded as 'more developed' than withdrawal. On the contrary, the resignation and hopelessness expressed among withdrawing interviewees struck me as more original than the other two" (2014, 118).

This originality might account for the long history of resistance that has taken various forms of withdrawal, or withholding, among people whose options for political action in the form of speaking in public have been structurally limited or dangerous. As James Scott has shown, this sort of action has been especially important in the histories of peasants, slaves, and colonized indigenous peoples, those not recognized as subjects, whose forms of resistance were not (and have not been) considered political, and who have thereby often been misrepresented as docile, passive and acquiescent. As Scott (1985, 290) observes, this misrepresentation and erasure is possible only if one adheres to a conception of political subjectivity that insists "acts of resistance must be *shown* to be intended" in order to count as political acts. By contrast, the "willful and massive non-compliance" of colonized and repressed peoples documented by Scott is comprised of an array of acts of withdrawal, withholding and sabotage whose intentions are rarely, if ever, openly declared. As Scott writes:

> For many forms of peasant resistance, we have every reason to expect that actors will remain mute about their intentions. Their safety may depend on silence and anonymity; the kind of resistance itself may depend for its effectiveness on the appearance of conformity; their intentions may be so embedded in the peasant subculture and in the routine, taken-for-granted struggle to provide for the subsistence and survival of the household as to remain inarticulate. The fish do not talk about the water. (1985, 301)

To insist that acts of resistance—such as idling at work—are political only if they can be attributed to the openly declared intentions of recognized and responsible actors is to reproduce one of the means by which public spheres become structures of policing. As Gayatri Spivak (1988, 308) has argued, canonically, "the subaltern cannot speak." Idling, withdrawal, and other forms of sabotage are political because they are not, and cannot be, recognized as such. They materialize an ongoing disagreement between a subject (or class of subjects) and an existing order, and reflect a mode of being political that conventional notions of subjectivity do not allow us to recognize. Such non-recognition is what constitutes the disagreement upon which politics is founded. The political character of withdrawal, here styled as going-slow and as a species of sabotage, consists in precisely this: it is a mode of being political for those who are in disagreement—i.e., those who are not recognized, or who refuse to be recognized, as subjects—and whose forms of acting do not count as political on established terms.

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Sabotage thus confounds liberal frameworks in which politics refers exclusively to communicative interaction between human actors who appear before and recognize each other, whose intentions are open and discernible, and whose action produces outcomes for which these actors can be held responsible. This is the great insight of Evan Calder Williams' (2016, 12–13) recent theorization of sabotage as essentially dissimulating, a form of "negation which never steps out into the open" and is, thereby, "unrecognizable for a liberal mode of recognition." According to Williams (2016, 14), "Sabotage contravenes some of the fundamental suppositions that underpin what has been meant by *political*, across a wide spectrum. In particular, it cuts against a base insistence on being present." Those engaged in sabotage are already and by definition invisible, inaudible and unrecognizable as political actors on the terms of the existing public sphere. They are neither present nor absent. They are withdrawn, simultaneously there and not there, the part that has no part, to use Rancière's phrase. Subjects in withdrawal cannot be held accountable (because they are not really present), but they also cannot be discounted (because they are not really absent). They wreck the counting altogether. Sabotage is thus a "meeting of police logic and egalitarian logic," the type of encounter that Rancière (1999, 32) equates with politics. This is a different sort of meeting. It consists in modes of everyday withdrawal from the efficiency of capitalist and state systems that go undeclared and unacknowledged as politics. These modes of action, Williams writes (2016, 16), "get continually shoved to the side in favor of a politics based around a model that joins the military (open engagement), the civic (public representation), and theatrical (experience delineated into those who act and those who watch)." Nevertheless, sabotage expresses disagreement with the structural organization of the public sphere in a manner that openly expressed opinions or claims that are recognizable as speech could not, and far more radically.

This is not just because sabotage is clandestine, but also because the "unrepresentable modes of shadowy, deferred, and distributed agency" that comprise sabotage are illegible to liberal conceptions of political action and accountability predicated on the unique and willed agency of discrete human actors (Williams 2016, 14). Saboteurial actors are not only withdrawn from public recognition, they also recede into the complex material relations that together comprise operating systems and structures, and which contain (in the double-sense of storing and holding back) alternative possibilities. If, as the Invisible Committee (2014, 87) has noted, "power has become environmental itself, has merged into the surroundings," then refusal of this power also withdraws into what is otherwise assumed to be the background. Sabotage, according to Flynn, is "pulling the fine thread of deviation" that shifts a functioning system out alignment and produces a shudder. If merely pulling a fine thread is to matter, a whole range of other materials, mechanisms, and

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entities must respond and do their part. No saboteur ever acts singlehandedly, or is uniquely responsible for what ensues.[6] Williams describes sabotage as "a form of inflection":

> . . . one that sees the ground of its daily activity as a diachronic map and tremendous reserve of materials, aspects, and properties constantly contested and open to inversions. . . . To sabotage, then, means to let the negation vanish into that design, in a dissimulating mimicry of normal function that only shows itself as noise, turbulence, and a creeping sense that *something is going on here.* (2016, 20–21)

This creeping sense that something is going on—the shudder that happens when something is withdrawn and a system falls out of alignment, even slightly—signals the distinctive character of sabotage. As Williams (2016, 19) writes: "It is not an operation with a definite content but an exacerbated relation." As the material expression of an exacerbated relation, sabotage is less a discrete, intentional act of an openly dissenting individual and more a mode of politics that corresponds to an ongoing condition of being in disagreement, refusal and withdrawal.

SUSPENSION

"At some crisis times like this one," Lauren Berlant writes (2016, 393), "politics is defined by a collectively held sense that a glitch has appeared in the reproduction of life." Berlant refers to a mode of politics that does not reproduce the present, ad infinitum. Such politics, she continues, are "nonreproductive, generating a form from within brokenness beyond the exigencies of the current crisis and alternatively to it too" (2016, 393). The glitch is an experience of infrastructural failure, in which "the movement or patterning of social form" is, or becomes, unreliable; the glitch is "an interruption within a transition, a troubled transmission" (2016, 393). Refusal and sabotage are modes of politics proper to the glitch.

Berlant's emphasis on transitional conditions is instructive. None of these modes of politics are ends: not in the sense of putting an end to capitalist, colonialist, racist, extractivist, heteronormative orders, and not in the sense of ideal, ultimate forms. Lives of disagreement, refusal, and withdrawal are hard lives. They are suited for the time between present disagreement and possible futures that have yet to arrive. As Berlant (2016, 393) wryly observes,

6. The Invisible Committee: "Someone who knows how to make a system operate also knows how to sabotage it in an effective way. But no one can individually master the set of techniques that enable the current system to reproduce itself. Only a collective force can do that" (2014, 97).

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"All times are transitional," and the politics that belong to such times are for "managing the meanwhile within damaged life's perdurance." Politics for the meanwhile—which is to say, *all the time*—are marked by persistence and good sense. Glitches expose "conditions of disrupted jurisdiction, resource, and circulation" and they disturb the stability of established rules and norms, but this is "not the same thing as the absence or defeat of structure as such" (394). No saboteur operates under the illusion that her in/action will single-handedly bring the system down once and for all, but neither does she thereby concede that there is nothing to be un/done. In the meanwhile, the time of the glitch, under conditions of disagreement, refusal, and withdrawal that comprise "living with the malfunctioning world" (396), politics takes the form of an infrastructural maneuver. As Berlant puts it:

> the question of politics becomes identical with the reinvention of infrastructures for managing the unevenness, ambivalence, violence, and ordinary contingency of contemporary existence . . . [offering] terms of transition that alter the harder and softer, tighter and looser infrastructures of sociality itself. (394)

In this account, politics is not an intersubjective process of critical judgment, but instead a material, relational practice of crafting "critical social form," relentlessly.

The politics of "the rolling ordinary" withdraws from final, sovereign solutions and, instead, "looks to non-sovereign relationality as the foundational quality of being in common" (Berlant 2016, 396, 394). This resonates strongly with the quality of sabotage as an everyday, material practice of radical mediation (Barney 2019, 221–22). As Williams describes, sabotage marks

> an intimate and highly practical understanding of a system and its abstractions, the awareness that comes, often literally, from handling and grasping, cleaning and traversing, and having to attend to all the small errors, frictions, lags, and glitches in a system envisioned to function smoothly, even automatically. (2016, 16)

It also resonates with the recent critical turn to infrastructure as both an instrument of policing, and a site of disagreement and political invention that calls for a specifically material form of politics that exceeds the limits of discursive interaction (Invisible Committee 2014, 81–98; Cowen 2017). The politics of the meanwhile is also strongly suggested by what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten have described as "planning" in the context of the struggles of the black undercommons:

> the plan is to invent the means [of social reproduction] in a common experiment launched from any kitchen, any back porch, any basement, any hall, any park

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> bench, any improvised party, every night. This ongoing experiment with the informal, carried out by and on the means of social reproduction, as the *to come* of the forms of life, is what we mean by planning. [P]lanning in the undercommons is not an activity, not fishing or dancing or teaching or loving, but the ceaseless experiment with the futurial presence of the forms of life that make such activities possible. (2013, 74–75)

Here, the distinction between passivity and activity that is typically mobilized to disparage withdrawal, refusal, non-compliance, and going-slow as non- or anti-political forms, is decisively dissolved. With planning, we arrive at a mode of politics in disagreement that, if not positive (because it cannot be), is nevertheless radically affirming because it embodies the possibility of being otherwise, together.

Planning's orientation to the "*to come* of the forms of life," also suggests the specific temporality of politics in the mode of disagreement and withdrawal. Planning in the undercommons, in disagreement, refusal, and withdrawal, does not determine the future; it acts into it in a manner that is predicated on, and affirms, the future's essentially contingent nature. Williams (2016, 17) describes the political character of sabotage similarly: "It is the uncertainty between something that is and something that might be that most comes to shape the future uses of sabotage." Politics is a principle of uncertainty, expressed in the conviction that "at least one more thing can always be done other than what is being done" (Rancière 2010, 2). To commit an act whose outcome is given in advance of its unfolding into the world, with all its relations, is to engage in something other than politics. As Jacques Derrida (1994, n.p.) puts it, "If the whole political project would be the reassuring object, or the logical or theoretical consequence, of assured knowledge, that would be a machine that runs without us, without responsibility, without decision, at bottom without ethics, nor law, nor politics." The forms taken by the mode of politics discussed in this chapter all reflect ways of releasing a latent potential into the contingency of the future. They are ways of being uncertain about everything but the disagreement that initiates a political situation. For those who refuse, the saboteurs and planners, the outcome of being political is always to come.[7] For them, the political condition is necessarily an experience of *suspension*.

Suspension is a rich word. In their consideration of atmospherics in recent environmental thought, Timothy Choy and Jerry Zee (2015, 213) describe suspension as "both a condition and a process . . . a form of mixture in which particulates are carried as a distribution in the fluid body of something else." Suspension refers to "the potentials of substances to shift from states

7. See Derrida (1994, 73–83; 2005, 28–41, 78–94).

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of settlement or condensation to ones of airborne agitation, to settle again in time, or to activate a reaction, somewhere else" (211). We might recall here the Indigenous activists, communities, and thinkers whose refusal to be reconciled throws the material relations of settlement into suspension, relations the Canadian state presumed to be settled in its favor. In her study of the struggle of the Algonquins of Barriere Lake, Shiri Pasternak documents Indigenous legal and social orders that endure and remain intact despite their apparent subordination to the contested sovereignty of the settler state. As she observes, "The ongoing exercise of Indigenous jurisdiction over land, resources and bodies on their homelands reveals the continuity of this suspended space between settler assertions of sovereignty and the vitality of Indigenous territorial jurisdiction" (2017, 4). At some point, that which has been suspended by Indigenous refusal, or held in suspension by assertions of Indigenous jurisdiction, might settle out, but the form of this settlement will most surely be something else, something other than recognition or reconciliation (Whyte 2018). Who knows what will happen? In his account of abandoned and incomplete infrastructure projects as the ruins of the future, Akhil Gupta (2018, 72) reminds us of the inextricable link between suspension and contingency. "The time of suspension, of the hiatus, of the pause," he writes, "is also a time of relative temporal openness. The future is unknown and unknowable: the project may go ahead, or be scrapped, abandoned or modified." Suspension is the experience of potential, the simultaneous possibility of being and non-being, the signature characteristic of politics (Agamben 1999). Contrary to the commonplace assumption that nothing happens when things are suspended, critical accounts of suspense suggest the definitive affective experience of suspension is that, as film theorist Alanna Thain (2017, 2) puts it: "*Something is happening*." This is why suspension is a good word for the spatial and temporal condition of politics in the mode of withdrawal, the inscrutable politics of being in disagreement, of refusal, and sabotage. These are politics present in the glitch and marked by the shudder, a politics in which something *is happening*, even (or especially) when it seems otherwise.

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