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FROM PLURALITY TO POROSITY: AN ANARCHIST CRITIQUE
OF AGONISTIC SPATIALITY

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The paper offers an approach to global politics that theorizes the international alongside anarchist lines and suggests to conceive of international affairs as an assemblage and interplay of emergent biopolitical polities: porous sovereignties. The main objective of this paper is to intervene into the agonistic international political project. While three fundamental pillars of this project remain intact – the attempt to reconcile liberal and republican understandings of freedom, the socially constitutive function of power, and the critique of rationalism and liberal universalism – the concept of hegemony is problematized by arguing that an agonistic international perspectives of order and ethics can be envisaged beyond the hermetic constraints of the pluriverse.

The supposed necessity of organizing international affairs around large regional centers of cultural and political hegemony derives from the flawed Schmittian view on the political which is lost in a coercive vision of sovereignty. Schmitt is reluctant, yet far from incapable, of acknowledging the existence of constituent power prior and past to the moment of decision. By means of mobilizing an ideal type of ‘porous sovereignty’ which draws from Proudhon’s concept of social force and Hardt & Negri’s multitudinous political vision the paper suggests that sovereignty and power overlap fundamentally: sovereignty serves as a function of power and the various guises of sovereignty can only be properly eclipsed if approached through the question of what type of power they represent. It is argued that sovereignty’s essence is schizophrenic and either characterized by porosity or coerciveness, depending on the context of power (constituent or constituted) into which it is inserted. Hence, hegemony must not be conceived of exclusively as the product of a sovereign decision (coercive sovereignty, constituted power), but can also be the result of intertwining collective forces and reasons that initiate moments of quasi-stasis and inertia on the plane of immanence (porous sovereignty, constituent power). Eventually the paper intends to contribute to the formulation of an anarchist informed international ethics that moves beyond agonism’s conflictual consensus in a static pluriverse. The pluriverse, it is arguend, fails to grasp the permanent ontological reality of anarchy.
Anarchism and agonism are by no means incompatible and there exist in fact large overlaps between the two projects. The first part of the study will pay closer attention to the similarities of, and the potential cross-pollination between, anarchist and agonistic political thought. The argument commences subsequently and problematizing agonism’s spatial project: the geopolitical vision of a pluriverse that is organized around large regional centers that comprise of culturally hegemonic blocs. The final section introduces an anarchist alternative to the pluriverse and shows how agonism’s attempt to salvage pluralism from the homogenizing effects of neo-liberal globalization can be realized without succumbing to the inherently conservativeness of Schmitt’s decisionism.

II: Agonism and anarchism: fundamental overlaps

(a) The freedom of the ancient and the freedom of the modern

It is one of agonism’s fundamental concerns to strike a balance between what Mouffe calls the freedom of the ancients and the freedom of the moderns,¹ that is between the positive republican conception of liberty as ones capacity to participate in the public life of the community, as opposed to the negative liberal notion of freedom as the individual’s right not to be interfered with.² A contemporary variation of this ethico-political struggle still resonates in the debates between cosmopolitans and communitarians, with fault lines running between universal notions of right on the one side, and ethical conceptions of the good on the other.³ Agonism refuses to enter into a heroic discourse in which either principle would receive primacy and demonstrates instead a critical awareness that both facets of freedom need to be articulated and practiced simultaneously by a modern interpretation of radical democracy. It is then neither unencumbered individualism nor the greatest happiness for the greatest number that constitutes the bedrock of agonistic pluralism. Rather, a critical consciousness surfaces that exposes a Machiavellian momentum⁴ as it alludes to the necessary co-constitution of civic virtues and individual liberties: “On task of a modern democratic

¹ Mouffe, Chantal (2005): The Return of the Political, London: Verso, 62
² ibid., 14
³ ibid., 30
⁴ ibid., 18 ff.
political philosophy, as I see it, is to provide us with a language to articulate individual liberty with political liberty so as to construe new subject positions and create different citizens’ identities”. The challenge to cope with is really the re-invention of the political agent and the common good alike. As of the latter Mouffe suggests that this “good which defines a political association as such” should derived from the basic values of the modern political revolution: equality and freedom. The postmodern agent, on the other side, needs to be conceived of as a de-centered and de-totalized agent whose subject-position is constituted by a multiplicity of hegemonic struggles. The eventual culmination point of the introduced logic at which rather individualistic principles get enwrought by a notion of civic virtue and an ideal of a political good is the universitas-societas-nexus, a mode of radical democratic citizenship that moderates between competing notions of freedom.

It is not my intention to suggest that classical anarchism is equally capable of performing a sophisticated co-articulation of liberal and republican freedoms in the same way the much more recent agonistic branch of political thought is able to. In fact, certain branches of anarchist thought, i.e. Kropotkin's biological rationalism or Stirner's aggressive egoism, might even stand in detrimental opposition to the agonistic project. Yet it is indisputable that a congeniality between agonism and anarchism exists and that a fair amount of prominent 19th century anarchists did indeed embarked on a quest identical to the agonistic one. P.J. Proudhon and M.A. Bakunin addressed similar problems by means of raising questions in regard to socio-political assemblages that would permit for the parallel articulation of individuality and communality in a mutually constitutive, non-hierarchical way.

For Proudhon it is an inherent social individualism that constitutes the basic ontological framework of a mutualist society. The narrative puts a strong emphasis on the autonomy of socio-political agents and identifies the individual as originator and

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5 ibid., 56/57
6 ibid., 31
7 ibid., 47
8 ibid., 12
9 ibid., 66
ward of society.\textsuperscript{11} Proudhon’s agonistic side is most certainly no fully developed, and on occasion he even demonstrates strong liberal tendencies. \textit{The General Idea of Revolution in the Nineteenth Century}, for example, advocates for a society that is governed by a market logic and in which governance, government, and public law ought to be replaced with contracts, negotiated individually between subjects.\textsuperscript{12} Despite the admittedly strong focus on the realization of subjective freedoms Proudhon is by no means a methodological individualist. Quite on the contrary he demonstrates a critical awareness that both, liberal and republican liberties must coincide with rather than combat each other. The fact that his social-individualist ontology unfolds in concentric circles demonstrates his attempt to reconcile republican virtue with liberal autonomy: justice does not derive from a distant and abstract principle such as god or reason, but is rather constituted by the conflation of subjective notions of morality. Individuals don’t exist in isolation or solitude but are deeply rooted in various social context such as families, workshops, economic classes, nations, states, etc. - the second circle. The third layer comprises of the norms and institutions which have been developed within a specific social setting. These practices feed back towards the individual and shape the moral instinct of the person - a process that can be beneficial, but equally derogatory to the development of moral instincts.\textsuperscript{13}

Bakunin, admittedly way more collectivist that Proudhon, focuses predominantly on the emancipatory potential of communities and associations.\textsuperscript{14} In \textit{Marxism, Freedom, and the State} he remarks that even strong and intelligent individuals cannot escape the attractions of a solidarity\textsuperscript{15} and that collectives must realize “the liberty which consists in the full development of all the material, intellectual and moral powers which are to be found as faculties latent in everybody, the liberty which recognized no other restrictions that those which are traced for us by the laws of our own nature”.\textsuperscript{16} In a

\textsuperscript{11} Woodcock, George (1962): \textit{Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements}, Toronto University Press, 91
\textsuperscript{12} Proudhon, P.J. (1923/1851): \textit{The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century}, 234
\textsuperscript{15} Bakunin, Michael (1950/1872): \textit{Marxism, Freedom and the State}, 16
\textsuperscript{16} ibid., 17
complementary way the *Revolutionary Catechism* defines ‘justice as equality’\textsuperscript{17} and freedom as the “absolute rejection of every authority including that which scarifies freedom for the convenience of the state”.\textsuperscript{18} The tension that emerges between the necessity of communal life on the one side, and the invoked notion of freedom and justice on the other, demonstrates the latent agonism inherent in Bakunin’s philosophy: despite the fact that groupism is a constitutive element of political life it cannot be mobilized as an excuse to subordinate the individual to an abstract notion of the common good. Vice versa individual agents have every right to claim extensive individual liberties, but only if certain ethico-political principles (c.f. justice and equality) are maintained. This critical awareness that humans are not only “the most individualistic being[s] on earth”\textsuperscript{19} but also “the most social”\textsuperscript{20} ones does not automatically turn Bakunin into a proto-agonist, yet again, it demonstrates a family resemblance between agonism and certain strands of anarchism.

(b) The critique of rationalism and liberal neutrality

A second fundamental concern of the agonistic project is the reconceptualization of democracy beyond the prevalent accumulative and deliberative models. Mouffe’s primary concern in that regard is the striking absence of a genuine *political* moment in both models of public will formation. Neither accumulative nor deliberative democracy are capable of taking emerging antagonistic relations between political groups into account. While the accumulative model fosters a particularized, market-oriented form of politics that retreats into economics, the deliberative type descents into questions of morality as it claims to be able to establish a rational consensus upheld by supposedly universal ethics.\textsuperscript{21} Despite this rejections of mainstream liberal democracy Mouffe cannot be labeled an anti-liberal. What motivates her criticism is the attempt to refine the liberal project by means of adding a radical

\textsuperscript{17} Bakunin, Michael (1866): Revolutionary Catechism, in: Dolgoff, Sam (ed.): *Bakunin on Anarchy*.  
\textsuperscript{20} ibid.  
The agonistic model of democracy is then not directed against the liberal tradition \textit{per se}, but mainly against certain rationalist and universalist implications: that is an inherent methodological individualism which is incapable of taking group-identities into account, as well as certain types of potentially uniform and homogenizing forms of rationalism.\textsuperscript{23} The agonistic project should hence be understood as a constructive auto-critique that intends to strengthen the emancipatory core of the liberal tradition, while at the same time addressing problematic patterns of instrumental rationality.\textsuperscript{24}

The reason behind Mouffe’s concerns with mainstream liberalism lies in the tradition’s relatively prevalent claim of being able to determine certain parameters of irrefutable political rationality, i.e. an optimal moral position that nobody could reasonably object. On their search for an institutional and ethical framework capable of protecting the autonomy of the individual a great share of liberal theorists pursues the rather ambitious goal of encircling a realm that is free from exclusions or power relations. Driven by this ambition to settle the answer of the good regime once and for all theorists such as Rawls argue that the only possible stable ground for democratic politics can be a rational consensus. By means rejecting a simple modus vivendi agreement, as well as the instrumental rationality inherent to the accumulative model, deliberative democrats stress the constitutive character of communicative action and free public reason.\textsuperscript{25} Mouffe argues explicitly against this communicative understanding of rationality and claims that deliberative democrats failed to address one of liberalism’s core-problems, that is its \textit{presumed} universality.\textsuperscript{26}

Similar traits of skepticism against liberal claims of rationality and presumed universality are echoed in certain quarters of the anarchist tradition. What unites Bakunin and Proudhon is a shared hesitance to preempt the political via tough-terminating clichés of rationality and universality. Bakunin’s collectivist approach highlights the context specificity of political, social, and ethical knowledge: agents are

\textsuperscript{22} Crowder, George (2006): “Chantal Mouffe’s Agonistic Democracy”, refereed paper presented to the Australasian Political Studies Association conference, University of Newcastle, 25.-27.09.2006, 4
\textsuperscript{23} ibid., 4 f.
\textsuperscript{24} Mouffe, \textit{The Return of the Political}, 124
\textsuperscript{25} Mouffe, Chantal (2000): “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism”, Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Department of Political Science, Political Science Series 72, Vienna, 9 f.
\textsuperscript{26} ibid., 10
embedded in a community of practice which fosters the development of their latent faculties and enables individuals to access the material world that surrounds them through the various signifiers and layers of meaning that constitutes the composite of their life world. This imperative of community-centrism is made explicit in The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State, where Bakunin postulates that humans positioning themselves outside society cannot be considered free since humanization and emancipation will only take place within the specific setting of a societal context. In that regard Bakunin opts for a rather Hegelian interpretation of reason in which transcendence and far reaching claims of universality have very little buy. The answer to the question of what constitutes the good life or the ideal community is given by means of referring to the “actuality of the ethical ideals” and not to supposedly rational and universal claims of what is either good or right.

Politics, for Proudhon, is fundamentally unconcerned with questions of rationality and universality, or, in that regard, with any attempt of navigating towards an original position or argument that nobody could reasonably object. Proudhon's anarchism emphasizes in a very agonistic fashion the ever present possibility of conflict and tension that is immanent in human affairs. Politics is the realm of ongoing struggles between a vast number of antinomic positions of which the tension between authority and liberty is the most fundamental one. This tension, which prescribes the essence of political life and defines the ontology of society’s vast antipodal fabric, can be managed and balanced, yet it evades its ultimate resolution in the form of a Hegelian synthesis or a liberal original position. Practical reason does then not consist in the encirclement of neutral realms, rational discourse, or universal truths but can rather be found in the attempt to maintain a certain balance between opposing, antagonist, or even hostile principles and poles: “For Proudhon the exercise of practical reason involves finding a temporary balance of the two terms in ideas and practice, a balance that will be relative to time and place. Thus right and duty are

27 Dolgoff, 271
29 Prichard, Alex (2011): “What can the absence of anarchism tell us about the history and purpose of International Relations?”, in: Review of International Studies, 37, 1657/8
30 Prichard, Justice, Order, Anarchy, 101/2
correlative, commutative terms and their temporary balance is an immanent justice”.

In an almost agonistic sense Proudhon approximates the principle of hegemony. Political enterprises aren’t characterized by their attempt to realize presumably universal claims about absolute truth since perceptions of ‘truth’ and ‘rationality’ are in themselves discursive products that change their appearance depending on the hegemonic configuration from which it ultimately derives. The struggle over hegemony, and the temporary establishment of hegemonic practices which preclude any final word on the notion of the good life, is a defining criterion for agonism and anarchism alike.

(c) The constitutive function of power

Deriving from the Schmittian notion that politics is essentially based on us-them-divisions and patterns of exclusions a nexus between power, hegemony, and legitimacy emerges. This nexus constitutes the ontological foundation of agonistic politics. When it comes to the role played by power agonism defines it as being constitutive of social relations. While a great share of deliberative democrats view hierarchical relations as a bug in the social matrix that is essentially counterproductive to democratic authenticity, agonistic political theory envisages this relations as a defining feature of the political realm that cannot be wished away. The strive for hegemony is the manifestation of this ever present struggle between competing centers of power. Accepting the ever presence of these struggles leads to the insight that political environments are always in flux and that order, if it is perceived as a permanent stage of equilibrium, is ultimately unachievable. Mouffe calls it the “coming to terms with the lack of final ground and the undecidability that pervades every order”. For Schmitt politics entails a strong decisionist element: the making of decisions in an undecidable environment. Hegemonic practice are the ordering momenta that strive for the establishment of a temporary structure in an otherwise volatile environment whose foundations are continuously shattered by criss-crossing power relations: “Every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of

31 ibid., 102
32 Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism”, 14
34 ibid.
35 Mouffe, On the Political, 17 f.
contingent practices. Things could always have been otherwise and every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities. It is always the expression of a particular configuration of power relations”.

36 As a temporarily ordering force hegemony becomes the point of convergence where power and social objectivity meet. A priori defined political identities or autonomously articulated personal interests cannot exist in an environment whose basic coordinates are under permanent scrutiny. Identities and interests are contextualized properties and emerge on the basis of currently prevalent power relations: all social relations can then be ultimately traced back to existing power relations.37 Due to this constitutive role that power plays in the shaping of the demos it should not be viewed as a factor that is external to political practices, but rather as their fundamentally defining element.38 The final condensation point where power and the strive for hegemony merge is the condition of legitimacy. Whereas the liberal camp highlights the incompatibility of power and legitimacy and usually defines the latter in terms of the absence of social stratification, agonism sheds light on the connection between temporarily solidified power structures and their respective acceptance within a political community. Legitimacy is then predominantly defined as successful power.39

While Mouffe’s emphasis on the centrifugal, potentially excluding, and decisionist components of power fits squarely into the anarchist tradition her insistence on its ontological significance reveals once again certain overlaps with Proudon’s political theory. In his Little Political Catechism Proudon formulates a theory of relational power and explains how force is constitutive of, and immanent to, the social/political realm. His answer to the question “what constitutes the reality of social power?” which he asks to himself at the very beginning of the Catechism is short and rather straightforward: “The collective force”.40 He proceeds further and gives a more detailed definition of the quality of collective force: “Any being, and by that I mean only what exists, what is reality, not a phantom, a pure idea, possesses in itself, to whatever degree, the faculty or property, as soon as it finds itself in the presence of other beings, of being able to

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36 Mouffe, “Democracy in a Multipolar World”, 549
37 Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism”, 14
38 ibid.
39 Crowder, “Chantal Mouffe’s Agonistic Democracy”, 9
attract and be attracted, to repulse and be repulsed, to move, to act, to think, to PRODUCE [sic!], at the very least to resist, by its inertia, influences from the outside. The faculty of property, one calls force”. 41 This short paragraph makes two important statements about the ontological significance of power in relation to politics: first and foremost, force cannot be found in the realm of transcendence. Proudhon stresses that power is real or actual and that the exercise of power is closely tied to the physical presence of an agent who wields force in the first place. The material existence of “what is reality” and the possibility to generate power/force are hence inseparable intertwined. The second insight to be derived from the opening chapter of the Catechism concerns the strict relationality of force: the force wielded by social agents manifests itself ‘as soon as it finds itself in the presence of other beings’. Power is then not a property that exists self-evidently and independently of a specific social context. Social, political, or economic activity makes it possible in the first place to comprehend and experience power - power does not speak for itself but has to be made up through human interactions and can only be understood adequately in the context and by the presence of other forces. Vice versa a political world devoid of power relations would be impossible to comprehend. The existence of power relations, its strict relationality, and its inherently constituent capacity define the nature of politics in the first place. The presence of force has nothing to do with the absence of democratic authenticity but it rather the precondition for possessing initial agency.

III: The pitfalls of agonistic international politics

(a) Transnational order in the pluriverse

When it comes to transnational politics Mouffe utters her deepest concerns about the neoliberal project of globalization and the increasing lack of alternative political projects that are brought about by homogenizing and market-centered one-size-fits-all solutions. The major concern of the agonistic camp is the absence of broadly accessible channels that would allow for the challenging globalization from

41 Proudhon, Little Political Catechism, 654
In order to prevent the emergence of essentialist forms of identification, i.e. religious fundamentalism or nationalism, Mouffe suggests to maintain a transnational political system that is characterized by regime-pluralism and the existence of several regional hegemonic centers, the so called pluriverse. “To create channels for the legitimate expression of dissent, we need to envisage a pluralistic world order constructed around a certain number of great space and genuine cultural poles”. The idea of the pluriverse is again a Schmittian concept. Back in his days Schmitt diagnosed the decline of the European interstate law which has previously provided the basis for interaction between the major political forces on the continent. Its decline created a vacuum that could, in the worst case, lead to an international civil war. Confronted with the question what could possibly replace the jus publicum Europaeum Schmitt came up with two scenarios: the first one entailed the emergence of a new equilibrium that was stabilized by a single hyper power, namely the United States. The second one, which he favored, entailed the pluralization of political actors and the existence of several regional hegemonic centers: “only a multipolar world could provide the institutions necessary to manage conflicts and avoid the negative consequences resulting from the pseudouniversalism arising from the generalization of one single system”.

Analogous to Schmitt’s vision of the pluriverse Mouffe advocates for the agonistic coexistence of large regional units, organized around different cultures and values. The universalist model of cosmopolitan democracy, with its ideal of a cosmopolitan citizenship within a world republic, is not a real alternative to the pluralistic framework, mainly because it suggests that western liberalism is the only possible way of structuring a political system. Norbert Bobbios pactum subjectionis, a world state with enforcement capabilities, is not what Mouffe has in mind. The

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43 ibid.
44 ibid., 249
45 ibid., 250
46 Mouffe, “Democracy in a Multipolar World”, 553
agonistic order can rather be realized through a *pactum societatis*, which emphasizes the tool of negotiation for organizing political coexistence.\(^{48}\)

Despite the fact that no central authority is destined to rule the agonistic realm, Mouffe stresses that a certain ethico-political basis is desirable for the association. This basis is defined by the markers of ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’. In order to guarantee a maximum of diversity, a variety of different interpretations is permissible.\(^{49}\) Democracy, if interpreted in a western narrative, does mainly entail representative institutions, while non-western readings of the very same principle might favour procedures that come closer to direct democracy.\(^{50}\) Similarly, human rights if viewed through the western lens have a strong emphasis on individual autonomy, whereas other cultures value more collective elements such as harmony.\(^{51}\)

The question of the good regime can then be answered in multiple ways. Yet, while diverging interpretations will always exist, this ought no to be misinterpreted as a *carte blanche* that would open the floodgates of moral relativism. Agonistic pluralism is strictly based on a minimal non-negotiable set of ethico-political principles. Mouffe suggests that if a political order wishes to pass the test of the good regime it must be able to safeguard the dignity of the person: “a political form of society would need to be informed by a set of values whose role in that regime corresponds to that played in liberal democracy by the notion of human rights”.\(^{52}\) This principles are, of course, never directly comparable. By following Panikkar Mouffe suggests to search for *functional equivalents* which reveal whether a society asks the same question while giving culturally specific answers.\(^{53}\) De Sousa Santos calls this a *mestiza* conception of human rights that highlights their functional similarity in contextualized environments.\(^{54}\)

(b) Problematizing agonistic spatiality: reproducing the ‘territorial trap’

What Mouffe proposes for the international realm is a form of civilizational or cultural multipolarity that advances a model of hegemony and power organized around

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\(^{48}\) Mouffe, “Democracy in a Multipolar World”, 554

\(^{49}\) Mouffe, “Which world order: cosmopolitan or multipolar?”, 466

\(^{50}\) ibid., 462

\(^{51}\) Mouffe, “Democracy in a Multipolar World”, 558

\(^{52}\) Mouffe, “Which world order: cosmopolitan or multipolar?”, 456

\(^{53}\) ibid., 457

\(^{54}\) ibid., 461
cultural signifiers. This type of multipolarity that is grouped “around a certain number of great spaces and genuine cultural poles” strives for a pluralist order in which large regional units coexist. The delineation of the global political landscape takes place alongside cleavages that are defined by hegemonic struggles and which permit multiple and diverging interpretations of certain core principles such as public rule and human dignity. The agonistic principle organizes the contact points between these poles and has the purpose of preventing Schmitt’s dystopia of the “international civil war”. While the “universalist approach exacerbates such antagonism” the “multipolar world order will not eliminate conflict, but the conflict in question will be less likely to take antagonistic forms”. Eventually it is intended to arrive at a stage of a fragile equilibrium, maintained through a balance of power between hegemonic blocs - a model that is preferred over an order maintained by a single hyper-power.

The type of order envisaged by Mouffe strikingly resembles the contemporary multilateral system. What changes is the applied geopolitical perspective and the mode of spatiality: in Mouffe’s reading international political space would no longer be defined alongside the lines of Westphalian sovereignty but rather according to cultural signifiers and hegemonic practices. One of the novelties one will encounter is that the environment is not a purely statist one anymore. States do not vanish but turn rather into nested entities within hegemonic blocs that are mostly defined by shared cultural values and successful power. The spatial vision for the global political plane that is articulated under the heading of agonistic pluralism is eventually very similar to the project exposed by classical realist school of thought. Even the justifications for the respective pluralistic geopolitical visions overlap significantly. To reiterate: Mouffe argues that universal visions of liberal morality have no place in global political affairs. Any attempt to overwrite plurality with uniformity is dangerous and destined to fail “since the unification of the world under a single system can only suscitate violent reactions”. As demonstrated extensively in the previous section the reason for this potentially violent reactions is “the lack of ‘agonistic channels’ for the expression of

55 Mouffe, “Schmitt’s Vision”, 251
56 Mouffe, “Which world order: cosmopolitan or multipolar?”, 466
57 Mouffe, “Schmitts Vision”, 249
58 Mouffe, “Which world order”, 466 f.
grievances” which “tends to create the conditions for the emergence of antagonisms” that can eventually take “extreme forms and have disastrous consequences”.60

A similar line of reasoning can be encountered in Morgenthau’s *Six Principles of Political Realism*. The angle through which international affairs is approach is admittedly a very different one: Morgenthau is more concerned with foreign policy than with transnational democratic practices. Yet, the logic that justifies the primacy of politics over ethics mirrors Mouffe’s argument. Morgenthau claims that “universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation but that they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place.”61 Other than the individual the state “has not right to let its moral disapprobation of the infringement of liberty get in the way of successful political action”.62 This implied primacy of situational politics over universal moral considerations has two purposes, of which the first one comprises of the maintenance of the national interest which is defined as securing the state’s survival by means of amassing power. The second, and in the context of this paper more important one, is the stabilization of the multilateral system and the prevention of an imperialist crusader mentality that is driven by convictions of moral superiority: “All nations are tempted (...) to clothe their own particular aspirations and actions in the moral purpose of the universe”.63 A prudent foreign policy refrains from deriving its directives from the realm of morality: ethics and the pursuit of supposedly universal moral objectives are misplaced when inserted into an international political context. Political action in the international realm is defined by its pursuit for power. A limitation to this very specific objective is not only necessary for the security of the individual state, but serves as a safeguard-mechanism that prevents the international from being thrown off its inherent balance: “On the other hand it is exactly the concept of interest defined in terms of power that saves us from the moral excess and that political folly”. And further: “For if we look at all nations, our own included, as political entities pursuing their respective interests defined in terms of power, we are able to do justice to all of them”.64

60 ibid.
62 ibid.
63 ibid.
64 ibid., 12/3
Despite the fact that Mouffe and Morgenthau are concerned with the construction of very different political projects they justify their respective spatial visions by rather similar lines of reasoning and eventually arrive at comparable ends. Plurality is a form of justice and the spatiality of the global political sphere needs to be a fragmented one since only this configuration is able to channel the inherently conflict-laden nature of politics and helps to prevent the emergence of large scale international conflicts. Claims of universality that are made on supposedly moral grounds are counterproductive to this endeavor. Morgenthau’s multilateral system is then populated by power maximizing states that try to realize their respective national interest. Morality is not supposed to creep into the foreign policy register of states, since this might lead to imperial aspirations and a severe disturbance of the system’s balance. In Mouffe’s pluriverse state are superseded by large regional blocs that are defined by cultural affiliations and similarities. This specific form of multipolarity is supposed to constitute “an alternative to American unilateralism”\textsuperscript{65} which poses the danger of cultural imperialism in the guise of a forceful universalization of liberal values. In order to create room for counter-hegemonic projects frontiers need to be multiplied so that potentially antagonistic encounters are turned into agonistic ones.\textsuperscript{66}

A specific problem that emerges in this context is not the construction of counter hegemonic projects per se, but rather their spatial appearance. Agonism claims to radicalize democracy by means of pluralizing hegemonic struggles.\textsuperscript{67} Yet, in order to realize this plurality of agonistic encounters on the domestic level an inherently conservative political spatiality is lined out for the global political realm. Mouffe, driven by her justified rejection of cosmopolitan universalism, drifts towards the other extreme of the political spectrum and advocates a communitarian-style international system that is organized around cultural signifiers and locks democratic practices away behind large regional hegemonic centers. This project appears rather familiar and resembles Huntington’s vision for the post-Cold-War era in which political cleavages run alongside cultural lines.

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\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{66}] ibid.
\item [\textsuperscript{67}] Crowder, “Chantal Mouffe’s Agonistic Democracy”, 4.
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The inherent conservativeness of the pluriverse eventually reproduces what Agnew has termed the *territorial trap*. Agnew points out that this trap comprises of three elements, that is *first* the complete overlap between territorial space and sovereign space, *second* the emergence of strong binary divisions in the form of a domestic/foreign or national/international polarities, and *third* a hegemonic image of the state which serves as a container for society.\(^{68}\) Agonism does of course not reproduce the ‘territorial trap’ literary since it is not primarily concerned with territorial notions of space. Yet is still favors a certain spatial image of international politics which represents non-territorial or structural space.\(^{69}\) This structural space exists by virtue of power-relations, struggles over hegemony, and shared cultural principles within the large regional units that constitute the pluriverse.\(^{70}\) A *trap* in the form of spatial fixity and exclusivity is indeed reproduced, although the adjective *territorial* is certainly misplaced - *spatial trap* might be more suitable in that regard.

How does the *territorial/spatial trap* then resonate in agonism’s international political project? In terms of the first claim - the identity of sovereignty and spatiality - Agnew diagnoses a number of effects on the formation of agency in the international realm: (1) identities are viewed exclusively in state-territorial terms;\(^{71}\) (2) this separation leads to a universality/inferiority polarity that matches other binaries such as the domestic/foreign, inside/outside, or politics/force;\(^{72}\) (3) the historically contingent practice of statism is naturalized and eventually viewed as being the only viable form of political organization.\(^{73}\) Despite the fact that agonism exposes a non-territorial and post-statist outlook on international affairs it reproduces all of these effects. An agent’s identity within the pluriverse is characterized by a high degree of exclusivity due to the fact that it is produced and confined within hegemonic blocs. Struggles over hegemonic interpretations carry on within these respective blocs, yet, vis a vis other large regional units identity is always narrated in the form of one type of successful power. The


\(^{69}\) ibid., 55

\(^{70}\) Mouffe, “Democracy in a Multipolar World”, 549

\(^{71}\) Agnew, “The Territorial Trap”, 62

\(^{72}\) ibid., 63

\(^{73}\) ibid., 64
pluriverse hence leads to a form of *representational hegemony* in which individual agents are perceived of *as if* they belong to a relatively closed political community. Although the fault lines do not necessarily run between notions of universality vs. inferiority politics and the political are possible only *within* given hegemonic spaces *not across* them. An inside/outside polarity emerges and Mouffe herself is tempted to proclaim “the conditions are very different in the domestic and the international domains”.\textsuperscript{74} Agonism is ill equipped to theorize on the emergence of transnational political practices that would transcend hermetic notions of space, due to the supposed fact that the “kind of ‘conflictual consensus’ based on divergent interpretations of shared ethico-political principles that is necessary for the implementation of an agonistic model of liberal democracy cannot be expected at the global level” due to the absence of a transnational political community.\textsuperscript{75} Politics across autonomous regional blocs can only be practiced on the basis of an equilibrium of forces that is institutionalize in a new system of international law,\textsuperscript{76} but it can never be materialized as an agonistic encounter between individual agents and or groups that don’t define the hegemonic identity of the bloc at a given moment. In the same way the state is exaggerated by classical/territorial geopolitics the agonistic pluriverse fetishizes the struggle over hegemony. The former one perceives the state as being without alternative since it is the only body capable of providing security for its inhabitants. Similarly the plurivers is the only form of organization capable of performing a *Hegung des Krieges* (containment of war)\textsuperscript{77} since it prevents the uncontrolled multiplication of hegemonic struggles and confines them within “several big regional units with their different cultures and values”.\textsuperscript{78} Historically contingent cultural practices are naturalized and the pluriverse which fosters a coexistence of political regimes is the only viable form of organizing the contact points between them: the pluriverse is “unavoidable”\textsuperscript{79} in the same way the state is. The conceptual authority of ‘the struggle over hegemony’ is blind to the fact that plenty of socio-political association are not necessarily interested in achieving hegemony in the first place. The fixation impoverishes politics since it reduces its

\textsuperscript{74} Mouffe, “Democracy in a Multipolar World”, 553
\textsuperscript{75} ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Mouffe, “Schmitt’s Vision”, 249
\textsuperscript{77} ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Mouffe, “Democracy in a Multipolar World”, 553
\textsuperscript{79} ibid., 556
essence to one very specific type of strive. A politics of the everyday that has important structural and productive effect on the production of geopolitical outcomes is neglected since agonism aims too high and loses sight of processes situated on lower, i.e. local levels.

In terms of his second claim, that is the emergence of strong binary divisions such as domestic/foreign or national/international, Agnew stresses that this divisions are purely conceptual and do not necessarily match corresponding empirical processes. The ‘domestic’ has never been completely separated from the ‘foreign’, and the ‘national’ has always interacted with the ‘international’. Mobilizing binaries in order to allude to the distinctiveness of socio-political realms is misleading since is suggests the existence of a closure that has never really existed. Agnew suggests instead that the “domestic/foreign opposition constitutes as shifting interaction rather than a fixed polarity”. Moving back to agonism’s international political project it becomes apparent that the pluriverse is incapable of articulating these shifting interactions. International politics is not perceived of as a taking place on a spectrum whose respective ends are constituted by relative closure and relative openness. Mouffe rather opts for a fixed polarity that emerges by virtue of the existence of multiple cultural spaces. In following Derrida agonism perceives political identities as negative identities. Negative, in this context, refers to the fact that they can only come into existence after the demarcation from a constitutive outside. According to Derrida the creation of an identity implies the establishment of difference, which is often done on the basis of a hierarchy. Every identity is then relational and based upon an affirmation of difference that is the precondition of its existence. The language invoked by Mouffe - the vocabulary of hegemonic poles, great regional spaces, genuine cultural blocs - bolsters this claim and reinforces the narrative of closure and distinctiveness. The various shades and hues of social life, the chasms of politics, are only visible within the confinements of the a cultural bloc. Only there subject positions can be formed.

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80 Agnew, “The Territorial Trap”, 67
82 Mouffe, “The limits of John Rawls’s pluralism”, 231
through nodal points that represent the various hegemonic clashes within the demos. These practices don’t transpire into the pluriverse, the realm of necessity, which is concerned with a *Hegung des Krieges*, not with the formation of identities. In the pluriverse identities are always already established. The pluriverse arranges contact points, but it does not define their appearance in the first place. Consequently the ‘domestic’ is very distinct from the ‘foreign’, and the ‘national’ hardly communicates with the ‘international’ other than through hegemonic cultural representations.

Agnew’s last point refers to the subordination of society to the state, or, in the case of agonism, to emerging centers cultural hegemony which homogenize internal diversity. Mouffe remarks that a hegemonic bloc is characterized by its ability of successfully legitimize its specific form of social power. The power-legitimacy nexus is not problematic per se and is also invoked by a number of anarchists, most notably P.J. Proudhon. Problems start to surface when successful power is projected as a unitary representation of cultural identity outside of one hegemonic sphere and onto another. The *representation* of hegemony towards other regional blocs fails to reflect the plurality of agonistic struggles that are permanently going on within the ‘domestic’ sphere. Within this sphere “adversaries fight each other because they want their interpretation to become hegemonic”\(^83\), yet, this struggle within the bloc is not necessarily visible for outsiders. The representation towards other actors in the pluriverse, the outside, does not reflect the plurality of agonistic encounters on the inside. A regional bloc is a hegemonic force and can hence only represent a single type of successful social power. The pluriverse exposes traits of methodological nationalism as it traps society within the structural confinements of cultural space. Mouffe claims to delineate the conditions for a radical democratic project in which identities are formed through nodal points and a multiplicity of subject positions gets shaped by a democratic matrix.\(^84\) She argues explicitly against the Enlightenment ideal of an undifferentiated human nature\(^85\), and yet sanctions at the same time the potentially homogenizing framework of the pluriverse which represents the content of a regional bloc *as if* it were unitary and

\(^{83}\) Mouffe, Chantal (2000): “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism”, Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Department of Political Science, Political Science Series 72, Vienna, 9
\(^{84}\) Mouffe, *The return of the political*, 18
\(^{85}\) ibid., 13
homogenous. In the same way the state has been perceived of as an enabler of society and as the creator of individual rights,\textsuperscript{86} hegemonic cultural centers generate agency in the pluriverse in the first place and eventually allow domestic agonism to flow smoothly. Agnew notes that “prior to modern times society was rarely state defined. But in the 20th century ‘states are central to understanding of what a society is’”\textsuperscript{87} This statement applies to agonism as well, since hegemonic blocs are instrumental for its understanding of a society’s identity as an agent that operates within the pluriverse. To paraphrase Agnew: hegemonic blocs serve as the ‘containers of society’\textsuperscript{88}

(c) Forget Schmitt: plurality beyond the pluriverse

Mouffe pluriverse is actually a Schmittian concept and can only be understood properly if read in the context of ‘the political’. As a realist Schmitt was mainly focused on the vertical dimensions of the political process and emphasized properties such as necessity, rule, and authority.\textsuperscript{89} While the republican tradition of political thought highlights the potentially integrative function of antagonism, realists tent to conceive of conflict as a centrifugal force that leads towards exclusionary and hierarchical relations between agents.\textsuperscript{90} Politics is concerned with collective forms of identifications and the inevitable emergence of us/them patterns or friend/enemy dichotomies: “The political, as he [ed.: Schmitt] puts it, can be understood only in the context of the friend/enemy grouping, regardless of the aspects which this possibility implies for morality, aesthetics and economics”.\textsuperscript{91} Politics is then the realm of decisions: of picking sides, concepts, enemies, and ideologies - every consensus that is achieved within a specific in-group (‘us’) is necessarily based on the exclusion of an out-group (‘them’). If viewed in this narrative exclusion does not count as inherently undesirable but represents an entirely normal outcome of the political process.

Schmitt presents himself as a severe critic of liberal bourgeois attempts to make politics safe and to administer and regulate agency by means of bureaucratarize

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\textsuperscript{86} Agnew, “The Territorial Trap”, 69
\textsuperscript{87} ibid., 70
\textsuperscript{88} ibid., 70
\textsuperscript{90} ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} Mouffe, On the Political, 11
\end{flushleft}
vast portions of social life. In its most essential terms his take on sovereignty and politics needs to be perceived of as an affirmation of constituent power which reveals itself, according to Schmitt, in the possibility of combat, the prospect and the finality of death, the maintenance of a certain way of life, and, last but not least, the demarcation of the collective us from the collective them. Schmitt’s main concern is to salvage the meaningfulness of life through the preservation of collective forms of identification and the ever presence of conflict and antagonism. A world that lacks these essential binaries, i.e. the friend-enemy distinction, is eventually a world without politics and one that has lost any meaningful antithesis. The mechanism invoked to produce this antithesis, which is always polemical and acts as the most essential type of demarcation, is ‘the political’. Social life is essentially underpinned by sets of various binaries, for example profitability (economics), beauty (aesthetics), and goodness (ethics). Politics, however, which encompasses the political, is special to the extent that it produces the most basic and essential antipode in the form of collective enmity: “The specific distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy”. Schmitt’s take on decisionism has eventually very strong normative implications and is not only a mere formality that separates a random in-group from another random out-group. The decision is a form of sovereignty and defines its own ethical fundamant by means of articulating with great clarity how the good life, our good life, is supposed to appear in opposition to competing models of community, of their good life. The political emphasizes responsibility in the guise of demarcating and defending one’s own lifeworld against its possible negation by intruders, and it positions itself clearly against bourgeois ambiguity, liberal individualism, and their inherent skepticism vis a vis collective forms of identification.

One of the core elements of the decision is its inherently independent and legitimately sovereign character. The decision’s substance, the condition that defines the friend-enemy-criterion in the first place, “can neither be decided by a previously

92 Schmitt, Carl (2007): The Concept of the Political, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, xv
93 ibid., xvii & 33
94 ibid., xvi
95 ibid., 35
96 ibid., 26
97 ibid.
determined general norm nor by the judgement of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party”. The decision on the political is non-generic and genuinely unbound by prior notions of legality, goodness, or profitability. Sovereignty is a creative void that creates context and withdraws from it at the very same time. It is exactly this conflation of sovereignty and decisionism that needs to be problematized if one wishes to delineate an image of the international beyond the hegemonic constraints of the pluriverse. Schmitt’s attempt to salvage sovereign creativity (constituent power) from the crippling repetitiveness of law (constituted power) is indeed convincing. Possessing the ability to act in opposition to constituted power counts as a genuinely sovereign move and demonstrates the superiority of constituent power over constituted power. Yet, Schmitt’s conclusion according to which the generative forces of constituent power are best affirmed through the sovereign act of the decision - enshrined in the figure of the state - does not follow. Sovereignty understood as the realization of constituent power can be conceived devoid of a decisionist moment. Consequently the international can appear as a post-statist space which leaves the spatial notion of the pluriverse behind.

The moment of the decision is indeed the solution to a very specific dilemma that emerges for Schmitt in the context of sovereignty. The ability to act in an unbound, hence sovereign way trumps the dull repetitiveness of law and bureaucracy and affirms the generative potential of constituent power. Despite the fact that Schmitt champions certain unruly and archaic elements of life he is not willing to let them unfold freely and uncontrolled. Sovereignty and constituent power must define the essence of politics, and at the same time they need to be domesticated. Neither by law or bureaucracy of course, but by other means: the decision. The decision tames exactly the forces Schmitt freed in the first place, and it is his way out of a pit he dug himself into. The decision is schizophrenic in the way that is affirms and monopolizes constituent power synchronously. Schmitt’s emphasize on the fact that the decision can’t be multiplied, and that only the sovereign has the right to decide, is really an artifice, a maneuver, a diversion that allows him to play

98 ibid., 27
out legalists against democrats. Against the legalists Schmitt fields constituent power. This is dangerous, however, since constituent power could also be wielded by a multitude. Invoking the political and declaring at the same time that the decision cannot be multiplied but must reside with a centralized agent is his eventual turn against the democrats. Schmitt is indeed very conscious in terms of not letting constituent power, the force exalted by genuine sovereignty, remain unattended. Instead he attempts to shape and sculpt it, and then assigns it to the state: the sovereign decision, the ability to invoke constituent power for the purpose of deciding on the friend-enemy distinction, is the prerogative of the state.

The dilemma of sovereignty (accentuating and hedging constituent power at the very same time) reveals that sovereignty (as a creative act) and authority (as the decision on the friend-enemy-divide) are really two separate elements that exist parallel in the sphere of politics - both elements can be combined, but don’t have to.

Schmitt’s take on the political arena is that of authority in which decisions are singular, absolute, final. However, as demonstrated previously the infusion politics and sovereignty with authority is optional and not predetermined. The general conflation of politics with centralized decision making is indeed a deliberate and purely instrumental choice that attempts to strategically position the state as the only legitimate wielder of sovereign capacity. If Schmitt really wanted to preserve constituent power he could also have done this by means of emphasizing the productive potential of a democratic multitude. But this is would be entirely diametral to his anti-democratic and pro-statist agenda which is inherently problem solving and deals first and foremost with the question of legitimacy: how to legitimate the state’s supposed (not actual!) status as the sovereign. As shown above sovereignty as the affirmation of constituent power (“Sovereign is he who decides on the exception”) can perfectly well exist outside of a decisionist context. When Schmitt invokes authority and decisionism, and pitches both as being identical with sovereignty, he is not stating a fact but comes instead forward with a proposition: sovereignty ought to the perceived as if its essence is limited to the moment of

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100 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, xx
101 ibid., 30
102 ibid., xiv
103 Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5
deciding on the political. Emphasizing authority and decisionism as the bedrock of politics is instrumental in the struggle over sovereignty, mainly because the state is primarily defined by its ability to demarcate. As Schmitt notes himself: the high points of politics are “those moments in which ‘the enemy is, in concrete clarity, recognized as the enemy”.

This statement is exceptionally well phrased because it presents that state as if it were the sovereign by default, which is clearly not the case. The dilemma of sovereignty (again: accentuating and hedging constituent power at the very same time) can be solved in at least two ways: the one is statist, the other democratic. The specifically statist response is the mobilization of authority and decisionism which serve as tools for performing the given task. What the statement then really celebrates is the state’s ability to solve the dilemma of sovereignty by means of demarcating friend and enemy.

Schmitt’s strong emphasis on demarcation is not a voluntary choice but imposes itself as a necessity that derives from his fixation on the state. A state can only act as sovereign if it demarcates - it’s essence is indeed singularly defined by this very ability to tell the domestic from the foreign. The insistence on the fact that the decision can’t be pluralized is then completely accurate since it is one specifically statist way of embracing constituent power. Decisionism and demarcation does then not define the essence of sovereignty but rather the nature of the state. In this context the claim that “the state presupposes the concept of the political” is again unveiled as a deception since it suggests that the ‘the political’ exists prior to the state in the form of a meta-determinism that defines the nature of the political sphere. The political does indeed not precede the state but is rather its co-constitutive feature. Both, the political and the state, are binaries: the decision divides into friends and enemies, the state separates the inside and the outside, and, as already demonstrated, decisions are specifically statist affirmations of sovereignty and constituent power. The state does not presuppose the concept of the political, the state is the political which exists as a specifically statist response to the dilemma of sovereignty. Schmitt’s initial claim according to which a world that lacks

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104 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, xx
105 ibid.
106 ibid., 19
the friend-enemy-distinction is a world without a meaningful antithesis appears suddenly in a different light. The supposedly substantial divide is neither integral to the articulation of a sovereignty moment nor relevant for the exercise of constituent power in the first place. If the meaningfulness of life would really be the criterion it could assert itself in various other, i.e. democratic, ways. Only the state would indeed suffer from this loss of a meaningful antithesis since its very existence relies on the construction of hermetic binaries.

In the context of problematizing agonistic spatiality the assessment of Schmitt’s political thought revealed two important insights in regard to the pluriverse.

Firstly, it is questionable whether the pluriverse does indeed serve as Mouffe’s sought after counter-hegemonic project that would be necessary for containing the homogenizing influences of a single superpower by means of diffusing antagonism into agonism. As demonstrated the pluriverse has initially been designed in order to organize the contact point between states. It is actually a specifically westphalian way of maintaining the binaries that are necessary for the state to exist in the first place. The pluriverse does not diffuse antagonisms, it institutionalizes them.

Secondly, it has also been demonstrated that it is possible to conceive of sovereignty in international affairs beyond permanent strives for hegemony, and consequently beyond the pluriverse. The sovereign is indeed he who decides upon the exception. Sovereignty is the life affirming power “to make something from that which is not something” and can thus not be subject to laid-down laws. Yet, this momentum is not identical with the decision on the political, which is again a predominantly statist reflex. If sovereignty is primarily characterized as an affirmation of constituent power, and if the friend-enemy-divide is one way of performing this affirmation, the hermetic pluriverse is only one way of organizing the contact points between political communities. Being able to conceive of a sovereign movement outside the coercive corsets of states and cultural blocs sheds light on political formations that still distinguish to a lesser extend between inside/outside but don’t necessarily push this logic to its extreme and end up with a friend/enemy dichotomy. The separation of sovereignty and authority presents new

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107 ibid., 35
108 Schmitt, Political Theology, xxvii
perspectives in terms of imagining groupism outside of a hegemonic context which is unable to think past the political as the single most decisive mechanism of demarcation.

Agonism does not offer a spatial project for the international that would go beyond that of the highly problematic pluriverse. Anarchism on the other side, and especially P.J. Proudhon, might however be able to formulate the conditions for a global political demos that is conductive to certain agonistic core tenants (c.f. IIa, IIb, IIc) while circumnavigating the pluriverse. The last section of the paper will hence focus on anarchist notions of geopolitical spatiality.

IV: From plurality to porosity: the international as an anarchical frontier

What kind of geopolitical space could a radical project of global democracy envisage if it moved beyond spaces whose ontological constitution rests on friend/enemy binaries? By means of a conclusion I would like to offer some perspective about how notions of geopolitical space might benefit from the mobilization of anarchist theories of power. The question that might immediately cross the reader’s mind is perhaps: why anarchism? Isn’t anarchism contradictory to the study of international politics? Shouldn’t anarchism focus on local actions and outcomes, micro-politics, anti-politics? The answer to this question is certainly affirmative if one follows a narrow and orthodox understanding of geopolitics and frames the academic discipline as a science exclusively concerned with statism and coercive sovereignty. The anarchist tradition is indeed not particularly well equipped for offering a comprehensive theory of the interstate system that could move very far beyond a critique.

It is, however, much more useful to think of international politics in general, and the international in particular, not as a realm that is exclusively populated by the state form and coercive sovereigns. The international produces first and foremost a series of global political outcomes\(^{109}\) - some of these global outcomes can be traced back to the actions of states; others to the activities of actors that exist above and beyond the modern state. Confusion about the role of anarchism in geopolitics/IR

emerges only if one conflates the international with the interstate system.\textsuperscript{110} While the latter is indeed populated by discrete spaces that unite territory, population, and power, the former is constituted by a multiplicity of material and ideational forces that rarely fit into a statist scheme.\textsuperscript{111}

The ontological constitution of the international does hence not rely solely on the interstate system, which is then only one among several layers that form a complex transnational political machinery. Neumann’s & Sending’s suggestion to conceive international politics as a complex set of relations between polities - one that is driven by governmentality and not sovereignty - is indicative in that regard. The international then turns into a structure defined by power-relations that “generates different and changing practices of political rule (…) and agencies”.\textsuperscript{112} Anarchism might not be particularly well equipped to theorize upon the interactions between states. It is, however, almost predestined for understanding and explaining the emergence of global political spaces that are constituted by non-coercive forces. A widely shared commitment to non-domination obliges the anarchist tradition to conceive of the emergence of polities and political groupings under the absence of coercive mechanisms. This commitment to non-domination does, however, not entail a renunciation of power per se. Among classical authors it is P.J. Proudhon who embraces the idea that political space is fundamentally constituted by power-relations: “what constitutes the reality of social power?” he asks, and answers “the collective force”!\textsuperscript{113} This insight, in combination with a deep-rooted skepticism of state based politics and superimpositions of any kind, enables the anarchist tradition to construct political spaces that exists outside the territory-coercion-nexus. The act-capacity of political groupings depends then on the condition to manage and mobilize any sort of power other than coercion. The potential effect on geopolitics and IR is clear: newly emerging geopolitical space is not constituted by hermetic and coercive sovereignty but rather by structural, productive, and porous sovereignty. A political space’s integrity is eventually secured by a kind of force that is non-coercive in nature.

\textsuperscript{111} ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} Proudhon, “Little Political Catechism”, 654
Proudhon’s relational ontology is particularly helpful for understanding the constitution of geopolitical space as an assemblage of porous sovereignties.\textsuperscript{114} All politics, he proclaims in the Little Political Catechism, is, regardless of whether the theater is domestic or international, politics among natural groups. In its most basic terms a natural group can be any human association with a certain sense of solidarity\textsuperscript{115} - families, workshops, battalions are natural groups and must by virtue of their very existence be regarded as “social embryos” and the ontological foundation of any kind of political existence.\textsuperscript{116} These proto-polities are sustained through processes of agglomeration\textsuperscript{117} and commutation\textsuperscript{118} and come into existed via the mobilization of collective forces\textsuperscript{119} which can be material or ideational alike.\textsuperscript{120} Volatility and dynamic change is the ontological reality of politics since natural groups exist in a permanent stage of becoming: families, cities, communities grow; fractions split off and develop elsewhere. Material and ideational consensuses break down and reconfigure themselves.\textsuperscript{121}

Natural groups are a form of public sovereignty because they are actually or potentially involved in the production of global political outcomes - yet they are porous due to their proneness to change, their fuzzy edges, and their inherent temporality. The realm of (geo)politics is then not constituted by some sort of transcendental coercion-wielding machinery but rather through the immanent process of biopolitical reproduction and the continuous interplay of a variety of porous sovereignties. Hardt and Negri’s Multitude counts as a prime example for this dynamic process: the Multitude is the productive mass of biopolitical relations; it exists on the plane of immanence and by virtue of a relational ontology; and it wields constitutive power that is mobilized against the constituted power of Empire.\textsuperscript{122}

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\textsuperscript{114} ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{116} Proudhon, “Little Political Catechism”, 655 \\
\textsuperscript{117} ibid., 655 f. \\
\textsuperscript{118} ibid., 656 f. \\
\textsuperscript{119} ibid., 654. \\
\textsuperscript{120} Prichard, Alex (2013): Justice, Order and Anarchy, London: Routledge, 96 f. \\
\textsuperscript{121} ibid., 142. \\
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The very notion that all politics is politics among natural groups eventually leads towards a flat ontology of global affairs: the international is populated and constituted by natural groups (porous sovereignties) and not exclusively by the state form (coercive sovereignty). In that regard Prichard notes that for Proudhon “there is no distinction between ‘international’ and ‘domestic’ politics. States dominate and conquer populations and the relations between states are of the same kind as the relations between any other groups, only that the former are better armed”.¹²³ This conceptual opening breaks, in the vein of Laski’s pluralism, with any monistic conception of the state.¹²⁴ And it progresses even further by means of preventing the conceptual hegemony of the monistic state to spill over into the realm of global politics: the international is not a universal Westphalian republic populated by coercive sovereigns, but an association of associations of whom the state is only one among many others. The concept of natural groups also differs radically from any liberal notion of international politics in which subject positions are always already constituted. Porous sovereignties are subject positions in the making and thus inherently precarious. They don’t exist under, but rather by virtue of anarchy - anarchy is not a challenge to be mastered but the precondition for any sort of political life: the international is an anarchic frontier of permanent biopolitical reproduction, kept in motion by the restless movement of constitutive powers, and built around an assemblage of porous sovereignties.

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