Destituent Power

An Incomplete Timeline

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A Note For the Reader

A proper genealogy of the destitution thesis has yet to be written. The names, dates, and texts that follow are necessarily incomplete. This is because the very nature of destitution is something that interrupts. It robs assumed modes of power of their sure-footedness by suspending the judgement implied by "class," "community," "nation," or "people" as the ground on which to found a new form of authority. Even the name "destituent power" feels paradoxical to us. Perhaps it is because the word "power" seems to only roll off the tongue of those thirsty for something more. This lust for abundance makes the power-hungry condescend to the destitute. At most they treat it as a means to an end as the cost of redemption, like a guerilla roughing it in the jungle until they capture the glittering palace like a prize. What if destitution itself was enough?

Despite its incompleteness, this timeline serves as a preliminary documentation of both its actualization and counter-actualization (i.e. the materialization of the idea and the idealization of matter). This line zig-zags from the recent to the past, beginning in December 2001 in the midst of an Argentine insurrection, next visiting reflections penned from 1920 in Berlin following a right-wing putsch, only after which the term arrives in roughly 2014 on the lips of radicals in the Global North. And like so many things before it, the concept is treated like a miracle delivered by a high priest (in this case, Giorgio Agamben) rather than a term forged in the fires of struggle.

Insurrection climaxed on the 19th and 20th of December 2001 in Argentina. Remembered through the chant "¡Que se vayan todos!" They all must go!, the packed streets rejected both political parties and union leadership. Perhaps for a time, it may have even seemed like the government would never prop itself back up – a string of officials foolishly ascended to the presidency only to fall. Participating in the events by way of militant-research, Colectivo Situaciones named the emptying out of government, "destituyente," "power which… doesn't create institutions but rather vacates them, dissolves them, empties them of their occupants and their power."[1] Curious is how the socialist elements of North American anarchism reacted to these events. In contrast, they saw a democratic Leninism at play in the neighborhoods and streets. After touring the protests, they wrote back home about organizational forms for "building power" on a mass scale, touting it as a success story for "direct democracy, popular assemblies, and self-management."[2] The lesson such North American anarchists took from it had nothing to do with vacating institutions, but a testament to how to found alternative ones.

Flash-forward to a published conversation from 2002 between Paolo Virno of autonomia fame and two Colectivo members. About halfway into a discussion on general intellect and exodus, Virno interrupts the conversation to pose a question (a question that is laden with all of the eurocentric elitism that one may hear): "Among the cultivated Argentine comrades, Walter Benjamin is read?" To which, they appropriately reply: "(Laughter). Yes, of course…"[3] Of course… for it is Benjamin's 1921 essay, "On the Critique of Violence" ("Zur Kritik der Gewalt"), with its technical usage of Entsetzung, which serves as the locus classicus of destituent power. Why? The events of 19th and 20th of December 2001 simultaneously marks both Entsetzung's incarnation via collective social antagonism and the counter-actualization of destitution for understanding anti-state and anticapitalist struggles. When Colectivo Situaciones clarify what led them to the creation of 'de-instituent' power, they do so as part of a larger set of reflections whose themes are none other than suspended time, historical impasses, and what they call an exhaustion of a historical sense (or what Benjamin identified as the poverty of experience). The key: Entsetzung, which refers to the deposing of sovereign power without its replacement. Entsetzung serves as the ur-form of

what now goes by the name of "destituent power," understood not only as suspension, abolition, and deposing, but also in terms of die Entsetzung; that is, dispossession as our general condition.

Next comes 2014, which roughly marks the year of destituent powers's popular reception within various leftist milieus in the global North. The two most widely circulated sources are speeches and fragments of Giorgio Agamben and the books of the Invisible Committee. Yes, a reception, but just as it is with every reception, a repetition. A repetition that refashions the weapons inherited from previous struggles. Consider two contrasting cases. In the closing pages of the second chapter of To Our Friends, the Invisible Committee writes, "Coming out of Argentina, the slogan 'Que se vayan todos!' jarred the ruling heads all over the world. There's no counting the number of languages in which we've shouted our desire…to destitute the power in place." By linking destitution to the announcement of a collective desire, the Committee directs our attention back toward the 2001 insurrections in order to grasp an arrested truth at the very moment of its realization. As Colectivo Situaciones put it, "The multitude does not present itself as people-agent of sovereignty. Nor does it operate according to its instituting power. We believe that the powers (potencias) of this new type of insurrection function in a 'de-instituting' way, as in the battle cry 'Que se vayan todos!' (all of them must go)." The same, however, cannot be said for Agamben. In place of the repetition at the heart of theoretical receptions, Agamben's wager is that the destitution of capital and its nation-states is not a question of politics but of ontology; since the historical separation of life from its form is the separation of the Being of Humanity from itself. While this may seem a dubious characterization, Agamben himself formulates the primacy of ontology in no uncertain terms when he writes: "the machinery of government functions because it has captured within its empty heart the inactivity of the human essence. This inactivity is the political substance of the West, the glorious nourishment of all power." On this account, destituent power is said to be the deactivation of the technique of sovereign power that splits forms-of-life into animal/human, bare life/power, household/city, and even constituent/constituted power.[4] That is, for Agamben, destituent power is an attribute of the inoperative/inactive subject that is the Being of Humanity; a power or capacity that wrests back life's own most possibility for assuming any form whatsoever from the truncated existence that defines us as the subject of so many dispositifs.

If we could break chronological order by neatly folding time, we would stitch together 2001-1921-2014 and more as the concept shuttled back-and-forth through time. But for simplicity's sake, we begin the timeline with Benjamin. For the purposes of this document, we hold in tension Benjam's Entsetzung as that which links 'de-instutent' insurrections and the destitute as a process (rather than a people or program) with no end. And with each passage, contemporary practices of destituent power are simultaneously advances and problems. For us, however, none hold meaning unless they are considered in light of powers like patriarchy, gender, coloniality, antiblackness, globally-integrated capital, and the state. Regarding the timeline itself, we have attempted to keep our commentary to a minimum, and when unavoidable, have relegated any remarks to the footnotes. The footnotes where we have provided context, background, and theoretical formalization are in bold and serve as clarificatory remarks to help situate the reader's position relative to the double articulation of destitution as idea in insurrectionary praxis and destitution as collective practice in partisan analysis. As a final note, we would like to draw the reader's attention to two sets of footnotes: fn. 12 and fn. 11 & 20. While footnotes 11 and 20 document the differing translations of Entsetzung employed by Agamben over the past 20 years – from its first appearance in Homo Sacer I as "de-pose" to its appearance in his Epilogue to The

Use of Bodies as "destituent power" – footnote 12 serves as the historical documentation of the collectivities and concrete situation that led to the practical articulation of what ultra-leftists the world over now simply refer to as "destituent power."

Destituent Power: An Incomplete Timeline

1921: Walter Benjamin, Zur Kritik der Gewalt ('On the Critique of Violence')

- Die Kritik der Gewalt ist die Philosophie ihrer Geschichte. Die »Philosophie« dieser Geschichte deswegen, weil die Idee ihres Ausgangs allein eine kritische, scheidende und entscheidende Einstellung auf ihre zeitlichen Data ermöglicht. Ein nur aufs Nächste gerichteter Blick vermag höchstens ein dialektisches Auf und Ab in den Gestaltungen der Gewalt als rechtsetzender und rechtserhaltender zu gewahren. Dessen Schwankungsgesetz beruht darauf, daß jede rechtserhaltende Gewalt in ihrer Dauer die rechtsetzende, welche in ihr repräsentiert ist, durch die Unterdrückung der feindlichen Gegengewalten indirekt selbst schwächt. (Auf einige Symptome hiervon ist im Laufe der Untersuchung verwiesen worden.) Dies währt so lange, bis entweder neue Gewalten oder die früher unterdrückten über die bisher rechtsetzende Gewalt siegen und damit ein neues Recht zu neuem Verfall begründen. Auf der Durchbrechung dieses Umlaufs im Banne der mythischen Rechtsformen, auf der Entsetzung des Rechts samt den Gewalten, auf die es angewiesen ist wie sie auf jenes, zuletzt also der Staatsgewalt, begründet sich ein neues geschichtliches Zeitalter […] Verwerflich aber ist alle mythische Gewalt, die rechtzende, welche die schaltende genannt werden darf. Verwerflich auch die rechtserhaltende, die verwaltete Gewalt, die ihr dient. Die göttliche Gewalt, welche Insignium und Siegel, niemals Mittel heiliger Vollstreckung ist, mag die waltende heißen.[5]

- "Interruption of a cycle that is in thrall to mythic forms of law, the suspension of law [auf der Entsetzung des Rechts] coupled with the violence on which it depends as they on it (ultimately, the violence of the state) will give rise to a new era of history. If the dominion of myth is already, in the present age, broken in places, that new ear is not such an unimaginably distant prospect that a word against law would take care of itself. However, if violence is assured of its continued existence as something pure and direct, even beyond law, that proves both the possibility of and the manner of revolutionary violence, by which name the highest manifestation of pure violence by humanity should be called. However, it is neither equally possible nor equally urgent for humanity to decide when in a specific instance pure violence was real. For only mythic violence, not divine violence, will be recognizable with certainty as such, except in effects that defy comparison, because the expiating force [Kraft] of violence is not obvious so far as humanity is concerned. Pure divine violence is free once again to adopt any of the everlasting forms that myth has bastardized with law. It is able to appear in true war exactly as in the divine court of the many on the criminal. But all mythic violence is reprehensible, the violence that establishes law, which may be termed the deciding kind; likewise reprehensible is the violence that upholds the law, the managed violence that serves it. Let divine violence, the insignium and seal, never the means of sacred execution, be called the disposing kind."[6]

- "So far as class struggles are concerned, in them (under certain conditions) strike must count as a pure means. Two essentially different types of strike…need to be described in greater detail at this point. It was Sorel who…first drew a distinction between them…contrasting them as political and proletarian general strike […] The political general strike demonstrates how the state will lose none of its strength, how power passes from the privileged to the privileged, how the mass of the producers will swap masters.' Unlike this political general strike…the proletarian version sets itself the sole task of destroying the violence of the state. It 'excludes all ideological consequences of any possible social policy; its adherents see even the most popular reform as bourgeois.' 'This general strike very clearly proclaims its indifference to the material gains of conquest by stating that it seeks to do away with the state…' While the first form [political strike] of withholding labour amounts to violence, occasioning a purely external modification of the conditions of labour, the second [proletarian general strike], being pure means, is wholly nonviolent. The reason is that it occurs not in any state of readiness to resume work after superficial concessions and some sort of modification in the conditions of labour but in a determination to resume only a quite different kind of labour, one not imposed by the state — a total upheaval that this type of strike not merely causes but actually brings about."[7]

- "On the breaking of this cycle maintained by mythical forms of law, on the suspension [Entsetzung] of law with all the forces on which it depends as they depend on it, finally therefore on the abolition of state power, a new historical epoch is founded."[8]

1995: Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life

- "The theme of desoeuvrement—inoperativeness as the figure of the fullness of man at the end of history—which first appears in Kojeve's review of Queneau, has been taken up by Blanchot and by Nancy…Everything depends on what is meant by 'inoperativeness.' […] The only coherent way to understand inoperativeness is…as a generic mode of potentiality that is not exhausted…in a transitus de potentia ad actum [passage from potentiality to actuality]."[9]

- "What is certain is only that it neither posits nor preserves law, but rather 'de-poses' (entsetzt) it."[10]

- "In the interruption of this cycle [of law preserving and lawmaking violence], which is maintained by mythical forms of law, in the deposition of law and all the forces on which it depends (as they depend on it) and, therefore, finally in the deposition of State power, a new historical epoch is founded."[11]

2001: Colectivo Situaciones, 19&20: Notes for a New Social Protagonism

- "By the neologism de-instituting we have tried to convey the meaning of the Spanish destituyente. A power which is, in a way, the opposite of instituent: that doesn't create institutions, but rather vacates them, dissolves them, empties them of their occupants and their power."[12]

- "If we talk about insurrection…we do not do so in the same way in which we have talked about other insurrections. This one, the one of the 19th and 20th, takes place by opening spaces that go beyond the knowledges about other insurrections such as they existed in the entire Marxist-Leninist discourse on revolution. Indeed, it was an insurrection to the extent that we witnessed the disruption of an order that claimed to be sovereign over the multitude […] In fact, the movement of the 19th and 20th was more a de-instituting action than a classical instituting movement. Or, in other words, the sovereign and instituting powers (potencias) were the ones that became rebellious without instituting pretensions…while exercising their de-instituting powers on the constituted powers. This seems to be the paradox of the 19th and 20th."[13]

- "Unlike political revolutions, this de-instituent insurrection did not produce a 'situation of situations,' a center replacing the centrality of the state it questioned. This was an experience of self-affirmation. In it there was a re-discovery of popular powers (potencias)…De-institution, therefore, seems to be a major signifying operation: if the politics carried out in terms of sovereign institution finds the point of its existence in the constitution of the social from the state, de-instituting action seems to postulate another path for practicing politics and enunciating social change. Such de-institution does not imply an a-politics: to renounce support to a representative (sovereign) politics is the condition…of situational thinking and of a series of practices whose meanings are no longer demanded from the state. We call aperture the combination of the action of de-institution, which expands the field of the thinkable, and the exercise of a protagonism that does not limit itself to the instituting functions of sovereignty."[14]

2008: Mario Tronti, Sul potere destituente

- "The idea of a 21st century socialism seems less important to me today. Less important considering the fact that today it's possible to make a pure and simple criticism of existing conditions that is strong enough to have the same aggregating, mobilizing capacity. And also because we are no longer dealing with subaltern classes. The same kind of work that we were talking about before, which is fragmented, dispersed, and yet nevertheless at a higher level of consciousness than traditional work – because it's a question of knowledge workers – makes possible a more realistic, less ideological discourse. Less messianic, more immanent to the practice of effective struggle against one's own working conditions, more so than against those who manage those conditions. Because the primary thing is not so much the project of building something, but rather of destituting that which is, of throwing that which is into crisis. That's an idea I'd bet on. I think you're referring to destituent power as an alternative to constituent power, whereas the various ideologies of the multitude continue to speak of constituent power."[15]

- "I really like this idea of destituent power. I think it's a great idea. We'd need to think about it further, go a little deeper, articulate the discourse a bit. Because in my opinion this might be what gets us beyond the crisis of subjectivity. Subjectivity, especially when once it became social subjectivity, with the possibility and with the reality and practice of organization, was naturally constitutive; it was the bearer of a positive project. In fact, it linked the struggle to the solution of problems, more than to the actual reasons for the

struggle. This is kind of the logic in which the workers' movement was trapped: at times, it was less a critique of capitalism than a sermon for socialism."[16]

2013: Giorgio Agamben, 'For A Theory of Destituent Power'[17]

- "…we have to think anew the traditional strategies of political conflicts. What shall we do, what strategy shall we follow? […] I think that we have to abandon this paradigm [constituent power] and try to think something as a 'purely destituent power,' that cannot be captured in the spiral of security. It is a destituent power of this sort that Benjamin has in mind in his essay On the critique of violence when tries to define a pure violence which could 'break the false dialectic of lawmaking violence and law-preserving violence' … While a constituent power destroys law only to recreate it in a new form, destituent power, in so far as it deposes once and for all the law, can open a really new historical epoch."[18]

2014: Giorgio Agamben, 'What is a destituent power (or potentiality)?'

- "If the fundamental ontological question today is not work but inoperativity, and if this inoperativity can, however, be deployed only through a work, then the corresponding political concept can no longer be that of 'constituent power' [potere constituente], but something that could be called 'destituent power' [potenza destituente]. And if revolutions and insurrections correspond to constituent power, that is, a violence that establishes and constitutes the new law, in order to think a destituent power we have to imagine completely other strategies, whose definition is the task of the coming politics. A power that was only just overthrown by violence will rise again in another form, in the incessant, inevitable dialectic between constituent power and constituted power, violence which makes the law and violence that preserves it."[19]

- "It is a destitution of this type that Benjamin imagined in the essay Critique of Violence, trying to define a form of violence that escaped this dialectic: 'on the breaking of this cycle that plays out in the sphere of the mythical form of law, on the destitution (Entsetzung) of law with all the powers on which it depends (as they depend on it), ultimately therefore on the destitution of state violence, a new historical epoch founds itself' (Benjamin, 1977, page 202)."[20]

- "Only a power that is made inoperative and deposed is completely neutralized. Benjamin located this 'destituent power' in the proletarian general strike, which Sorel opposed to the simply political strike. While the suspension of work in the political strike is violent…the other, as pure means, is without violence' (Benjamin 1977, page 194). Indeed, this does not entail the resumption of work 'following external concessions and some modifications to working conditions,' but the decision to resume only a work completely transformed and nonimposed by the state; that is, an 'upheaval that this kind of strike not so much causes (veranlasst) as realizes (vollzieht)' (page 194). The difference between veranlasst, 'to induce, to provoke,' and vollziehn, 'to accomplish, to realize,' express the opposition between constituent power, which destroys and always recreates new forms of law…and destituent power, which, in deposing law once and for all, immediately inaugurates a new reality."[21]

- "The destitution of power and of its works is an arduous task, because it is first of all and only in a form-of-life that it can be carried out. Only a form-of-life is constitutively destituent. The Latin grammarians called deponents (depositiva, or, also, absolutive or supine) those verbs that, similar in this regard to the middle voice verbs, cannot properly be called active or passive…What do the middle or deponent verbs 'depose'? They do not express an operation, rather they depose it, neutralize and render it inoperative, and, in this way, expose it/ The subject is not merely, in the words of Benveniste, internal to the process, but, having deposed its action, it is exposed and put in question together with it. In this sense, these verbs can offer the paradigm to think in a new way not only action and praxis, but also the theory of the subject."[22]

- "What deactivates operativity in a form-of-life is an experience of potentiality or habit, it is the habitual use of a potentiality that manifests itself as power of not…The destitution of the being-in-work of the work (of its energeia) cannot be carried out by another work, but only by a potentiality that remains as such and shows itself as such…To destitute work means in this sense to return it to the potentiality from which it originates, to exhibit in it the impotentiality that reigns and endures there."[23]

2014: Giorgio Agamben, The Use of Bodies

- "It is the secret solidarity between the violence that founds the juridical order and that which conserves it that Benjamin thought in the essay 'Critique of Violence,' in seeking to define a form of violence that escapes this dialectic: 'On the interruption of this cycle maintained by mythic forms of law, on the destitution [Entsetzung] of the juridical order together with all powers on which it depends as they depend on it, finally therefore on the destitution of state violence, a new historical epoch is founded.(Benjamin 4, pp. 108-109/251-252). Only a power that has been rendered inoperative and deposed by means of a violence that does not aim to found a new law is fully neutralized. Benjamin identified this violence—or according to the double meaning of the German term Gewalt, 'destituent power' – in the proletarian general strike, which Sorel opposed to the simply political strike. While the suspension of labor in the political strike is violent, 'since it provokes…only an external modification of labor conditions, the second, as pure means, is nonviolent' (ibid, p. 101/246). Indeed, it does not imply the resumption of labor 'following external concessions and this or that modification to working conditions' but the decision to take up a labor only if it has been entirely transformed and not imposed by the state, namely, a 'subversion that this kind of strike not so much provokes [veranlasst] as realies [vollsieht]' (ibid.). In the difference between veranlassen, 'to induce, to provoke,' and vollziehen, 'to complete, to realize,' is expressed the opposition between constituent power, which destroys and re-creates ever new forms of juridical order, without ever definitively deposing it, and destituent violence, which, insofar as it desposes the juridical order once and for all, immediately inaugurates a new reality."[24]

- "We call a potential destituent that is capable of always deposing ontological-political relations in order to cause a contact…to appear between their elements. Contact is not a point of tangency nor a quid or a substance in which two elements communicate: it is defined only by an absence of representation, only by a caesura. Where a relation is rendered

destitute and interrupted, its elements are in this sense oin contact, because the absence of every relation is exhibited between them. Thus, at the point where a destituent potential exhibits the nullity of the bond that pretended to hold them together, bare life and sovereign power, anomie and nomos, constituent power and constituted power are shown to be incontact without any relation…Here the proximity between destituent potential and what in the course of our research we have designated by the term 'inoperativity' appears clearly. In both what is in question is the capacity to deactivate something and render it inoperative—a power, a function, a human operation – without simply destroying it but by liberating the potentials that have remained inactive in it in order to allow a different use of them."[25]

2014: The Invisible Committee, To Our Friends

- "Coming out of Argentina, the slogan '¡Que se vayan todos!' jarred the ruling heads all over the world. There's no counting the number of languages in which we've shouted our desire…to destitute the power in place."[26]
- "So to destitute power it's not enough to defeat it in the street, to dismantle its apparatuses, to set its symbols ablaze. To destitute power is to deprive it of its foundation. That is precisely what insurrections do…To destitute power is to take away its legitimacy, compel it to recognize its arbitrariness, reveal its contingent dimension."[27]
- "To make the destitution irreversible, therefore, we must begin by abandoning our own legitimacy."[28]

2014: Colectivo Situaciones, 'Crisis, governmentality and new social conflict: Argentina as a laboratory,'

- "If during what we call the 'de-instituent' phase, social movements attacked the neoliberal state constituting practices capable of confrontation in areas such as the control of money, or bartering; of counterviolence, as in road blocks; and of political command over diverse territories, as in assemblies; social movements, if we can still call them that, currently confront new dilemmas about whether to participate or not (and when, and how) in what could be called a 'new governmentality,' thus expressing the distinguishing features of a new phase of the state form and requiring us to problematize the concept of social movement itself."[29]

2016: Gerald Raunig and Stefan Nowotny, "Introduction," Instituent Practices

- "This brings us directly to our third point: the question of destitution or varied figures of flight, defection, betrayal, desertion, exodus. With the concept of destitution, we aimed at the potentials 'of a dis-position (Ent-setzung) which is not related from the outset to performatively re-positing or re-instituting modified conditions of acting, but to the opening of a field of changing possibilities for acting.' A 'positive No' which derives its positivity neither from self-positioning nor from op-position, but from withdrawing its own power from the grammars of existing lines of conflict and from being taken into service by

dominant formations of forces and desire. Such a positive No is diagrammatical in that it crosses and abandons the prescribed alternatives of existing grammars; and it is resistant in a sense which cannot be derived from the negated because this resistance has its truth in the formation of forces that withstand the attempted impositions of subservience and deny them their cooperation, in order to advance the capacity of these forces aloof of dominant formations. The problem of destitution today presents itself less than ever as a question of deposition of the old, which opens into immediate reimposition and recomposition. It presents itself as the question of a dis-position, an Ent-setzung, a suspension of the ways in which life and living together are functionalized and subordinated to ends, an affirmation of the simple fact from which these functionalizations constantly nourish themselves as they simultaneously seek to make it forgotten or even defamed: the fact that life and living together are in no need of them in order to invent themselves."[30]

2017: The Invisible Committee, Now

- "Breaking the circle that turns our contestation into a fuel for what dominates us, marking a rupture in the fatality that condemns revolutions to reproduce what they have driven out, shattering the iron cage of counter-revolution—this is the purpose of destitution. The notion of destitution is necessary in order to free the revolutionary imagination of all the old constituent fantasies that weigh it down, of the whole deceptive legacy of the French Revolution. It is necessary to intervene in revolutionary logic, in order to establish a division within the idea of insurrection. For there are constituent insurrections, those that end like all the revolutions up to now have ended [...] And there are destituent insurrections, such as May 68, the Italian creeping May and so many insurrectionary communes..."[31]

- "Destituere in Latin means: to place standing separate, raise up in isolation; to abandon; put aside, let drop, knock down; to let down, deceive. Whereas constituent logic crashes against the power apparatus it means to take control of, a destituent potential is concerned instead with escaping from it, with removing any hold on it which the apparatus might have, as it increases its hold on the world in the separate space that it forms. Its characteristic gesture is exiting, just as the typical constituent gesture is taking by storm [...] Thus, where the 'constituents' place themselves in a dialectical relation of struggle with the ruling authority in order to take possession of it, destituent logic obeys the vital need to disengage from it. It doesn't abandon the struggle, it fastens on to the struggle's positivity."[32]

- "To destitute is not primarily to attack the institution, but to attack the need we have of it."[33]

- "The destituent gesture does not oppose the institution. It doesn't even mount a frontal fight, it neutralizes it, empties it of its substance, then steps to the side and watches it expire. It reduces it down to the incoherent ensemble of its practices and makes decisions about them."[34]

- "Destitution makes it possible to rethink what we mean by revolution. The traditional revolutionary program involved a reclaiming of the world, an expropriation of the expropriators, a violent appropriation of that which is ours, but which we have been deprived of.

But here's the problem: capital has taken hold of every detail and every dimension of existence. It has created a world in its image […] In doing so, it has reduced to very little the share of things in this world that one might want to reappropriate. Amazon's warehouses, the expressways, ad agencies, high-speed trains, Dassault, La Defense business complex, auditing firms, nanotechnologies, supermarkets and their poisonous merchandise? Who imagines a people's takeover of industrial farming operations where a single man plows 400 hectares of eroded ground at the wheel of his megatractor piloted via satellite? No one with any sense."[35]

- "Communism is the real movement that destitutes the existing state of things."[36]
- "The destituent gesture is thus desertion and attack, creation and wrecking, and all at once, in the same gesture."[37]
- "The police are a target and not an objective, an obstacle and not an opponent. Whoever takes the cops for an opponent prevents themselves from breaking through the obstacle the police constitute. To successfully sweep them aside, we must aim beyond them. Against the police, the only victory is political. Disorganizing their ranks, stripping them of all legitimacy, reducing them to powerlessness, keeping them at a good distance, giving oneself more room for maneuver at the right moment and at the places one chooses: this is how we destitute the police."[38]
- "We don't have any program, any solutions to sell. To destitute, in Latin, also means to disappoint. All expectations will be disappointed. From our singular experience, our encounters, our successes, our failures, we draw a clearly partisan perception of the world, which conversation among friends refines. Anyone who finds a perception to be correct is adult enough to draw the consequences from it, at least a kind of method."[39]
- "Communism is not a 'superior economic organization of society' but the destitution of economy. Economy rests on a pair of fictions, therefore, that of society and that of the individual. Destituting it involves situating this false antinomy and bringing to light that which it means to cover up."[40]

2018: Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright, Climate Leviathan

- "The first opening might find inspiration in the categorical refusal that underwrites Marx's critique of sovereignty and of communism… His clearest statement on the matter is a refusal of the possibility that revolutionary thought can 'know' in a definitive manner where revolutionary activity is going. Communism, he wrote, is 'not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things, the conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.' The second opening might be grounded in Benjamin's call for politically resolute witness to crisis, a stance that finds affirmation in Agamben's appeal to a 'coming community' and 'destituent' power. We wager we need to say yes and yes, affirming both positions at once. In this view, Climate X is at once a means, a regulative ideal, and, perhaps, a necessary condition for climate justice."[41]

2018: José Luis Fernández Casadevante Kois, Nerea Morán, Nuria del Viso, 'Madrid's Community Gardens'

- "Counter-power emerged as a means of collective action whereby the injustices suffered by subordinate or oppressed social groups become politicized, either in the form of silent rebellions that remain latent in everyday life or through challenges that are publicly and openly declared. The forms this collective action takes have varied over time, due to factors such as technological developments, cultural changes or socio-institutional processes. The idea of counter-power has always been ambivalent: on the one hand, it is defined negatively by its capacity to say NO and prevent the hegemonic elites from carrying out their agenda; on the other, it transmits an assertive strength, a capacity to say YES and deploy new sensibilities, desires, ways of organizing and alternative lifestyles. Destituent and constituent power are two sides of the same coin."[42]

2019: Lundi Matin, 'Next Stop: Destitution'

- "The situation is simple: the people want the fall of the system. But the system intends to keep going. It is this that defines the situation as insurrectional, as even the police openly admit. On their side, the people have the numbers, as well as their courage, joy, intelligence, and naivety. On the other side, the system has its army, its police, its media, and the deception and fear of the bourgeois. Since the 17th of November, the people have had recourse to two complementary levers: economic blockades, and the Saturday assaults on the government districts. These are each complementary, since the economy is the reality of the system, while the government provides its symbolic representation. To truly destitute them both, it is necessary to attack them both. This goes for Paris no less than the rest of the territory: to burn a prefecture and to storm the Elysée are a single and sole gesture. Every Saturday since the 17th of November, people in Paris have been magnetically focused on the same goal: storming the enclaves of government [marcher sur le reduit governmental]. From one week to the next, the only difference lies in (1) the increasing scale of the police apparatus set up in order to prevent it, and (2) the experience accumulated through the previous weekend's failure. If there are a lot more people with swimming goggles and gas masks this Saturday, it's not because 'organized groups of rioters' have 'infiltrated the demonstration.' Rather, it's because people were gassed extensively the week before, and they drew the same conclusion any sensible person would: better come equipped the next time. And anyway, we're not talking about demonstrations, but an uprising."[43]

2020: Rodrigo Karmy, 'The Destituent Moment of the Chilean October'

- "We could say that the irruption of experience as a political field is not a 'higher phase' but precisely a 'lower phase,' what Benjamin might have called a 'weak' response that never allows itself to be reduced to the populist logic's 'demands for equivalence' and its institutional politics. When high school students say 'evade' and invoke 'no fear' as an attitude against power, they turn the political moment into a destituent festival where images regain their life and bodies regain their strength. Life sees to it that imagining, acting and thinking come together in a single intensity and that bodies break down the mechanisms that subdue them. In this sense, it seems to me that the novelty is that the

> revolt emerges without a philosophy of history, in a properly comic gesture that does not even attempt to seize power or to negotiate with it, but rather to lay it bare, to expose its radically arbitrary character, its lack of any foundation. In other words, the experience of popular insurrection takes on a destituent character (as Agamben suggests, picking up the trail where Benjamin left it with respect to power (potencia), or Lacan with respect to the clinic) in which power-knowledge is deposed, and in which the people assume, for once, that there is nothing and no one 'behind' (or beyond) it coming to save them."[44]

Space 2014, volume 32, 65–74, 70.

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Destituent Power
An Incomplete Timeline
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https://destituencies.com/2020/destituent-power-an-incomplete-timeline/