

13 Power Complexities and Political Theory

Peter J. Katzenstein and Lucia A. Seybert

This book opened with an invitation to think afresh about power and uncertainty in world politics. This concluding chapter summarizes in its first section the findings of the twelve empirical case studies (in ten chapters). Since actors regularly have to tackle *both* risk and uncertainty, control and protean power are closely related. The efficacy of control power is not in question; the persistent neglect of protean power's agility and potentiality is.

In its second section, this chapter probes the writings of ancient, modern, and contemporary political theorists on the issue of control and protean power. During the last half century, conceptual and explanatory inquiries into power have failed to plumb the insights of political theorists. International relation scholars are a partial exception to this generalization, but even their interest has been limited to a handful of theorists, such as Hobbes or Kant. Focusing largely on arguments about the possibilities for war or peace, they have typically bypassed the broad contributions that political theory has made to the analysis of power. Our brief discussion bolsters this book's central point. Ever since Aristotle, the distinction between the actualities and potentialities of control and protean power has been a subject of theoretical inquiry.

The chapter ends with a brief interpretation of the United States and America as exemplars of control and protean power. Since 1945 the challenges to US control have waxed and waned. Many disruptions of US primacy are linked to developments in American society, its transnational engagement as well as its nationalist confrontations. American society is protean in its multiple traditions and coalitions and has surprised the world again and again, as in the elections of Barak Obama and Donald Trump in 2008 and 2016. The dynamics of control and protean power are thus exemplified by the dynamics of the relations between the US state and American society.

Control and Protean Power: Evidence from the Cases

The case studies in this book do not clinch an argument. They illustrate and help us to recognize patterns, an important avenue for an understanding of power dynamics in world politics.¹ Spanning security, economic, social, and cultural issues in diverse arenas of world politics, the case studies highlight relations between control and protean power that are too often overlooked. They are summarized here under the headings of congruence or incongruence of experience and context, different relationships between control and protean power, operational and radical uncertainty, power dynamics in different social settings, and the reversibility between protean and control power. Moved by different intellectual and political commitments and interests, scholars can make world politics look like a well-trimmed garden or an overgrown park. However, when we impose only one of these two logics, sensibilities and sets of practices on all the flora and fauna of world politics we will fail to understand important parts of its ecology. It is the complexity of that ecology that produces effects that are often unanticipated.² Control power often fails to recognize the next big wave. The surfer's solution is to temper the urge to look for the perfect ride, to be attentive and stay attuned, and to ride cascades building from all directions.

Why is this book using the empirical findings of the case studies both in the development of the theoretical framework in Chapters 1 and 2 as well as in this summary section of this concluding chapter? Guided by the case studies, we developed in the first two chapters a substantive theoretical, empirically grounded framework for the analysis of power. But we did not fully mine the evidence. The review of the case studies in this section thus records patterns that may prompt other scholars preferring an empirical, hypothesis-testing approach committed to the identification and reduction of observed variance, to also use the ideas and findings of this book. This dual approach reflects the book's eclectic and pragmatic stance on questions of ontology (open rather than closed systems) and epistemology (broader notions of explication rather than narrower ones of explanation). This approach, furthermore, is also reflected in the book's case studies. While all the authors worked creatively with the core ideas advanced in this book, some of the case studies have enriched the book's theoretical framework by making distinctive contributions of their own. Meaning indeterminacy (Chapter 3), power reversibility (Chapter 5), judgments versus decisions (Chapter 7) and *techne* versus *episteme* (Chapter 8) are obvious examples. Furthermore, the case studies

¹ Cartwright 2007: 24–42. ² Jervis 1997: 91.

of hydrocarbons (Chapter 7), film (Chapter 10), and carbon sinks (Chapter 12), are presented in a narrative style particularly apposite for capturing the fluidity of the power dynamics they analyze.

Experience and Context

What do the twelve case studies tell us about the relations between control and protean power under conditions of risk and uncertainty? Our answer to this question should avoid the common mistake of inferring power outcomes from observed political practices. To insist that the party that prevailed in a political contest is the party that had more power collapses the distinction between practice and power and encourages the spinning of tautologies. Political practices are generating power dynamics, not manifesting them. The case studies track political practice to the risk- and uncertainty-inflected experience and context of actors and from there to variable configurations of control and protean power.

In a few cases, the power story is relatively clear-cut. The history of human rights (Chapter 3), for example, is understood best in terms of the protean power potentials that inhere in innovative practices shaped by institutional and meaning indeterminacies. The situation is somewhat complex because imperial actors experienced the context as risk, subaltern actors as uncertainty. It is this divergence of departure points that accounts for attempted (and failed) control on the part of the colonizers and system-transforming, protean power-generating innovations by actors encountering the inadequacies of existing governance structures. In other words, by not relying exclusively on control power Chapter 3 helps to explain the observed outcomes: the rapid collapse of the institution of empire after 1945 and the stunning victory of anti-imperialist insurgents. Still, meaning indeterminacy as the primary source of uncertainty in the context of the rights revolution does not necessarily surround the formulation and promotion of other international norms. As described in Chapter 11, the framing of the landmine ban as a human rights issue did not launch a cycle of repeated norm revisions that would open up room for further improvisation. On the contrary, state actors continued to experience and describe arms control as falling into the realm of risk. As a result, their corresponding practices of (in)action at the international level reinforced the context attributes upon which such reasoning was based and made the deployment of control power not only a reasonable but also an effective response. In light of these two norm evolution accounts, the conditions under which meaning indeterminacy swings the balance toward protean or control power remains unanswered. The utility of both perspectives on power, however, is clear.

In the case of over-the-counter derivatives and sovereign debt (Chapter 8), the story is a bit more complex. In derivative markets some actors develop conventions, such as risk models and ratings, that make it possible for them to experience an uncertain context as risk. At the same time other actors experience the same context as profoundly uncertain and respond with innovative products and strategies with unpredictable and power-generating effects. In moments of financial crisis or panic, all actors experience totally unpredictable markets for what they are. But soon after, post-crisis arrangements restabilize experiences and generate a sense of control over governable risks. Thus, they set the stage for a new cycle of financial instability, where control is an incomplete and elusive goal. In sovereign debt, comparable power dynamics are at play. States and large corporations experience markets for the most part as manageable risks, bordering only occasionally on uncertainty. This leads to a mixture of affirmation of established strategies and a dose of improvisation when needed. In contrast, so-called smaller distress debt funds, peripheral players compared to primary dealers and sovereigns, experience profound market uncertainties. Refusing to be sidelined, one of them introduced innovative legal arbitrage strategies that, unpredictably, set free protean power dynamics and changed the game for everybody.

An experience of crisis, however, does not inevitably lead to a deepening of the surrounding uncertainty, nor is it always met by further improvisational practices by agile actors. The politics of carbon sinks (Chapter 12) shows that even in the context of climate change mitigation, the effects of context attributes and actor experiences on one another remain fluid. This occurs in a nested policy domain in which governments reformulate issues marked by radical, epistemic uncertainty in risk terms. Experiences thus affect the corresponding power outcomes differently at each stage and do not necessarily generate protean power. In the intergovernmental negotiations leading up to the Kyoto Protocol, control power prevailed in a context of risk. NGOs experienced it as such and failed in having governments adopt new rules. In the post-Kyoto period of parallel relations of government- and NGO-initiated rules, the rise of a voluntary market for carbon sinks was the result of improvisation as NGOs remained uncertain what would follow from their adoption of practices that were no longer constrained by the politics of intergovernmental negotiations. In the final phase, the context became more uncertain for governments that were now committed to taking some action on forests but had no clue how their actions would play out in the end. Experiencing the new situation as risk, NGOs seized on this opening – in a circumscribed way they capitalized on their prior improvisation and translated their efforts into an

evolving intergovernmental regime that, itself control-driven, still provided some room for protean power.

In other cases, evolving practices reveal different power dynamics over time, as the history of LGBT rights (Chapter 4) illustrates. Poland's LGBT activists and their opponents relied on improvisations and refusals that played out in risky and uncertain contexts and experiences, generating different power dynamics. Most notably, the story of LGBT rights promotion in the context of EU enlargement illustrates the limits of control power. There was a short-lived period of EU and INGO policies in the run-up to and in the wake of EU accession that we can characterize as affirmation of existing expectations. As the inadequacy and one-sidedness of membership conditionality became apparent, local activists found themselves readjusting to the unpredictable blending of external pressures with local sentiments. In contrast, unable to tap any external discourse, however controversial, for support, the original German LGBT movement in the 1860s was marked by more easily detectable innovation from the outset. The long-term evolution of LGBT rights is a story of the actualization of various power potentialities, deriving from actor experiences of risk and uncertainty. Crucially, it shows that the interaction between actors and context generates practices that result in adjustments in power outcomes that either reconfirm existing constraints or challenge them through protean power and repeated shifts in the unknown unknowns.

Terrorism and counterterrorism (Chapter 9) show a complex picture marked by overlays rather than a temporal sequence of different power constellations. Reinforced by political expedience and bureaucratic inertia, states encounter and describe uncertain security contexts as risky. Their default response of enforcement can evolve in principle, but such change requires the confluence of otherwise unyielding factors. As a result, governments remain tethered to the domain of imagined risk management and control power, even though leaders may recognize in private the futility of their public promises to eradicate all terrorist threats. Terrorists, by contrast, experience and operate in a context of uncertainty requiring innovation and generating protean power. When they succeed, however, terrorists are pulled back into the experience of a risky world while the context remains, for the most part, unavoidably uncertain. The politics of terrorism and counterterrorism thus set in motion complex mixtures of protean and control power dynamics.

What distinguishes the counterterrorism account of protean power are distinctive patterns of agency that impact on the interactive fluidity of the context in which actors operate. In a similar way, the story of Hollywood's

fluctuating prominence in the world of film (Chapter 10) also displays opposing sets of actors, variously endowed with control power resources, yet interacting and transforming the very landscape in which their competition unfolds. The co-dependence between producers of cultural content and its consumers creates patterns seemingly amenable to profit-making. Yet, as the limited reach of Hollywood's strengths illustrates, the resulting control is short-lived at best and illusory at worst. Global audiences, as a whole, and also in their cultural or regional subcontexts, play a key role in shaping patterns of innovation countering affirmation, even complacency, at the other extreme. Sometimes filmmakers adopt established means of reaching their audiences and so reproduce risk-based assumptions about how the industry operates. Despite such measures, however, the fickleness and short half-life of best practices is apparent, and without seeking to dominate, actors carving out new paths prevail in the constantly changing world of film. Their success, unexpected and often fleeting, can be labeled as protean power in retrospect. It arises from responses to local challenges, niche markets, and unique audience tastes with the impact of their creative contributions magnified by their previous neglect.

Actor awareness of "knowing how little we know" is explored in Chapter 6 on the technological frontiers conquered in science, start-ups, and bitcoin. There are several layers to this uncertainty. First, it stems from the very questions asked and challenges tackled. Second, the recognition of the profound gaps in our knowledge creates ambiguity about the appropriateness of regulation, further altering the course of invention. Does it make sense to consider the relative risks and costs of pursuing individual innovations? How much of the resulting change is based on deliberate moves and how much of it is the outcome of creative improvisation and intuition? Are there ways in which inefficient regulations can be bypassed altogether? The chapter offers a continuum of responses to such questions, mapping the degree to which actors allow their experience of uncertainty to guide their actions. Battles over intellectual property rights seek to fence in precious discoveries but at the same time increase incentives for the emergence of still newer alternatives. In a different approach, scientists who make their findings readily available do so because they are reluctant to hold further advances hostage to narrow interests that would favor confined lines of inquiry. Start-ups take the innovation game still further. They not only seek to meet existing technological or other needs but create entirely new ones. Finally, in explicit recognition of the failure of the formal banking system, especially at times of crisis, bitcoin offers an alternative currency, a fundamentally novel technology, and a transformed environment of unpredictability in which, to date, it has thrived. Construing these high-tech

vignettes as attempts to stay ahead in the uncertainty game, we must not forget that those who succeed and briefly hold protean power do not anticipate this at the outset. A scientist may dream of getting the Nobel Prize but she or he can hardly plan on doing so. The decision to adopt bitcoin is deliberately disruptive and introduces new power potentialities. Depending on their position, actors exploit or bypass ever-changing unknowns. No “win” is a guarantee of future success.

Hydrocarbons (Chapter 7) show sequenced and layered power complexities that conventional analyses of the control powers of large corporations and states largely miss. In the 1950s and 1960s innovations by European governments and the Soviet gas ministry created a new infrastructure of pipelines, practices, and market relations. Subsequently, refusal and improvisation created control and protean power dynamics that acted back on the experience of actors and the context they faced. The break-up of the Soviet Union and a number of Ukrainian gas crises made Russian and European executives acutely aware of their mutual dependence, the geopolitical and contractual uncertainties of Ukrainian transit routes, and the advantage of developing joint innovative practices to reorganize gas transits from Russia to Western Europe. In sharp contrast, in the United States a number of small gas producers experienced only uncertainties as, for more than two decades, they were searching for a commercially viable way of extracting gas from shale. Paradoxically, then, a relatively inflexible gas market invited radical innovation to bypass long-standing technological and market constraints. Improvisation in the face of a slowly-unfolding crisis generated protean power dynamics and produced new uncertainties for all actors operating in global hydrocarbon markets. In reaction, European and Russian firms made still more changes to long-standing contractual practices that led to further unanticipated consequences. Finally, Western sanctions imposed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea and a very large Sino-Russian gas deal were, for the most part, improvising protean power-producing moves adopted in the face of profound uncertainty about future price movements in hydrocarbon markets rather than the exercise of effective control power.

The case of migration (Chapter 5), finally, reflects all power complexities in great clarity, implicating all practices in contexts and experiences of risk and uncertainty. The analysis of illegal migration sits at the intersections of improvisation, innovation, refusal and affirmation, and of risk and uncertainty, generating continuous protean and control power blending. In resonance with the counterterrorism case (Chapter 9), the account of migrants making their way through fluid landscapes erases any suspicion of specific normative assumptions of protean power dynamics.

Although protean power rests in the ability to find channels of possibility where established means of control fail, it is not somehow designed to topple structures of domination by default. Protean power may be more visible if generated by actors who otherwise lack the attributes of control power. Yet *any* agents, not just weak ones, can find themselves responding to uncertainty in a shape-shifting way. In the setting of migration through Mexico, uncertainty mixes with risk and actors are faced with responding to both simultaneously. They convert innovations and improvised solutions into established and reproducible responses, only so these can be overturned again with the arrival of the next train, bus, or truck. Chapter 5 also allows us to observe the internal heterogeneity among actors, suggesting that any specification of their experiences of the surrounding context might need to be fine-tuned even further. For example, state agents operating in different contexts can encounter entirely different conditions that influence their interactions with migrants, smugglers, and crime cartels. The journeys described in this chapter represent always changing sequences of sometimes fatal decisions, illustrating that neither protean nor control power will ever prevail and that they often operate concurrently.

Relations between Control and Protean Power

The case studies of migration, bitcoin, hydrocarbons, finance, terrorism, film, arms control, and carbon sinks (Chapters 5–12) show the relevant actors to be interacting. In the human rights and LGBT cases (Chapters 3 and 4), the identities of actors wielding control power and actors demanding new rights or exploring new practices are entangled. The recognition of uncertainty in science along with a desire to advance knowledge and bypass narrow uses of technology also bring entanglement to the forefront (Chapter 6). And in the case of carbon sinks, NGOs shifted from advocates to regulators, adopting a new identity in the policy process (Chapter 12).³

Relations between control and protean power can be both competitive, as in all cases but migration, oil, and carbon sinks (Chapters 3, 4, 6–11), or complementary, as in all cases but human and LGBT rights, finance, and arms control (Chapters 5–7, 9, 10, and 12). In some instances, such as high-tech, gas, terrorism, and film (Chapters 6, 7, 9, and 10), both relationships unfold at the same time. In the case of terrorism (Chapter 9), for example, states and terrorist groups are in highly competitive relations,

³ For reasons of length not reported in Chapter 5, the migration case also shows evidence of entanglement as migrants adopt new ways of thinking of themselves and their goals in life after confronting the violence they encounter on the route. See also Brigden 2013.

Table 13.1 *Relations between Control and Protean Power*

		Types of relations				
		Interactive	Entangled	Competitive	Complementary	Parallel Nested
Ch. 3	Human rights		x	x		
Ch. 4	LGBT rights		x	x		
Ch. 5	Migration	x			x	
Ch. 6	High-tech/ knowledge frontiers		x	x	x	
Ch. 6	High-tech/bitcoin	x	x	x	x	x
Ch. 7	Hydrocarbons/gas	x		x	x	x
Ch. 7	Hydrocarbons/oil	x			x	x
Ch. 8	Finance	x		x		
Ch. 9	(Counter-) Terrorism	x		x	x	
Ch. 10	Film	x		x	x	x
Ch. 11	Arms control (post-1997)	x		x		x
Ch. 12	Carbon sinks	x	x		x	x

even though complementary power dynamics are also in play. States develop counterterrorism tactics that cultivate unexpected practices, for example, in the use of social media. And ISIS has tried to organize a caliphate state in parts of Iraq and Syria. Similarly, in the gas industry (Chapter 7) states and corporations are typically linked in various competitive economic and political relationships spawning protean power dynamics. But the innovative fracking technology developed by small American producers has also had very positive effects on the control power of the United States in energy markets. We observe a similar pattern in the case of both bitcoin and scientific discoveries (Chapter 6). And while studios and film producers compete intensely in national, regional, and global markets, Hollywood also provides film templates that foreign producers can and do exploit profitably (Chapter 10).

Rounding out the possibilities, a few cases show that the relationship between control and protean power can evolve in parallel as in bitcoin, hydrocarbons, film, and the 1997 landmine treaty as one important episode in arms control (Chapters 6, 7, 10, and 11) or be nested as in carbon sinks (Chapter 12). Conceived initially as a fundamental challenge to financial institutions and states, major corporate actors and governments adapted quickly to explore the blockchain technology

underlying bitcoin's electronic currency (Chapter 6). Serving the energy needs of large parts of the world, oil and gas markets operate in parallel and with different political logics (Chapter 7). In the 1997 landmine treaty (Chapter 11) control was temporarily slipping out of the hands of major states as other actors established a forum that bypassed the traditional UN venue for negotiations. Finally, in carbon sinks (Chapter 12) the markets for carbon trading were developed and operated by NGOs at first without and, later, with state support.

The empirical case studies reported in this book resonate with the findings of other scholars working in variegated empirical domains. In different cases of transnational advocacy networks, banking, and consumer politics scholars have pointed to "unexpected power,"⁴ "the power of inaction,"⁵ and "the political power of weak interests,"⁶ that could all be interpreted as different manifestations of diverse relationships between control and protean power in empirical settings as different as insurance, climate change, science and technology policy, environmental law, and genetically modified food.⁷ Together with the plausibility probes offered in this book, these studies provide suggestive evidence for the importance of protean power dynamics under conditions of uncertainty.

Operational and Radical Uncertainty

Political actors encounter two kinds of uncertainties. Operational uncertainty speaks to the complexity of the world. Political choices and practices often evolve in situations in which the secondary and tertiary consequences of particular actions are mind-boggling and next to impossible to calculate. Experienced intuition and feelings prevail. "Bounded rationality" and "satisficing" are social science concepts that acknowledge the prevalence of educated guesswork in much of world politics.⁸ Although in principle such known or knowable unknowns lend themselves to probability calculations, for many practical purposes they often do not. Radical uncertainty is of a different kind. Unknown unknowns are by their very nature not susceptible to any form of calculation.⁹ For example, in arms control the end of the Cold War provided a radically new context that informed differently the experience of various state and non-state actors (Chapter 11). In contrast, operational uncertainty in the run-up to the financial crisis of 2008 was not deemed to be salient. Actors and analysts overlooked important elements of

⁴ Hertel 2006. ⁵ Woll 2014. ⁶ Trumbull 2012.

⁷ Everson and Vos 2009; Heal and Milner 2013. ⁸ Scott 1998: 327–28.

⁹ For a typology of forms of not knowing, see Beck 2007: 126–27.

uncertainty in a context they had come to experience only in terms of risk (Chapter 8). More generally, actors have different theoretical or practical knowledge about the settings in which they operate. What is visible to some actors remains invisible to others as in migration (Chapter 5), LGBT rights (Chapter 4), and carbon sinks (Chapter 12). Unsurprisingly, therefore, actors adopt different instruments to cope with uncertainty through sophisticated model-based risk estimates in credit derivatives markets (Chapter 8); treaties and contracts in individual rights (Chapter 3), hydrocarbons (Chapter 7), and sovereign debt markets (Chapter 8); and rights in LGBT movement politics (Chapter 4).

Most of the case studies in this book offer evidence of political actors coping with both operational and radical uncertainty. In a few cases, however, one or the other kind of uncertainty holds center stage, shifting the center of gravity closer to risk or uncertainty. To the extent that empirical enquiry has to focus on snapshots in the fluid continuity between uncertainty and risk, this is not surprising. Complex arms control negotiations over cluster munitions and conventional arms sales posed for governments and NGOs plenty of risks and operational uncertainties but no radical uncertainties (Chapter 11). The same is true for oil producers (Chapter 7). Future oil prices were highly unpredictable and affected by myriads of factors, but they were in principle knowable. Trust-inflected, long-term relations imbue actors with intuition and empathy, counterweights to the knowledge that they do not know.

By contrast, the politics of human rights are marked by a radical uncertainty that is grounded in the meaning indeterminacy of all discourses and texts (Chapter 3). During the last century successive redefinitions of what it means to be human have been at the center of evolving human rights declarations and treaties. And that evolution was shaped profoundly by protean power. In the case of LGBT rights that indeterminacy can have domestic roots when contested international norms are experienced as imposed, and international ones when norms are polarizing (Chapter 4). Hydrocarbon markets show how firms, taking what appear to be calculated risks, collectively create systemic uncertainty and unpredictability of demand and supply (Chapter 7). Similarly, indeterminacy inheres in the legal fiction of the *pari passu* clause in sovereign debt contracts (Chapter 8). Once its implausibly innovative legal interpretation was backed by court rulings both in Europe and the United States, a “vulture” fund playing arsonist in the house of sovereign debt destabilized fundamentally global markets for sovereign bonds. Sharing a deep affinity with the profound (Knightian) uncertainty pervading the finance industry, film producers and directors also operate under conditions of radical uncertainty as they have no way of knowing which of their

films will be a hit (Chapter 10). As is true of other complex systems, the distribution of returns in the global film industry is highly non-normal and “fat-tailed.” “Nobody knows anything” quipped screenwriter William Goldman many years ago; asked years later he doubled down and said “now more than ever.”¹⁰

Finally, carbon sinks illustrate how operational uncertainty about climate change mitigation efforts is embedded in the radical uncertainty that defines the issue of global warming (Chapter 12). This means that political actors can choose to frame uncertainty one way or the other. And that frame can be consequential for political mobilization and demobilization strategies. Radical uncertainty about the future of planet Earth may have the effect of demobilizing government action while operational uncertainty may not. Or the logic may work in reverse, as Krugman argues. “When it comes to climate change uncertainty strengthens, not weakens, the case for action now.”¹¹ Conversely, migrants experience the many choices they face – where to travel, how to travel, with whom to travel – as operationally uncertain (Chapter 5). Yet along their routes they experience many instances of radical uncertainty that are embedded within the larger operational uncertainty frame. Table 13.2 summarizes the distinction between two kinds of uncertainty across the different cases.

Institutional and Social Settings

Under conditions of risk and uncertainty actors devise creative practices that help them to navigate social settings marked by both control and protean power. In his analysis of the institutions organizing US nuclear deterrence, Scott Sagan, for example, has shown that highly interactive and tightly coupled complexity makes us “expect that the unexpected will occur, that unimaginable interactions will develop, that accidents will happen.”¹² Although high reliability organization theory operating on the assumption of risk makes us believe otherwise, Sagan’s empirical studies found its optimism wanting. His findings support instead normal accidents theory. Institutions are often inhabited by individuals operating in fluid systems of participation with often inconsistent preferences. Complexity makes the unknown – accidents – unavoidable. In Charles Perrow’s words “complex social systems are greatly influenced by sheer chance, accident and luck . . . and most attempts at social control are clumsy and unpredictable.”¹³ Barry Posen’s analysis of uncertainty

¹⁰ Chapter 10, fn. 56. ¹¹ Krugman 2013. ¹² Sagan 1993: 3.

¹³ Quoted in *ibid.*: 31.

Table 13.2 *Operational and Radical Uncertainty*

	Operational uncertainty	Radical uncertainty
Human rights (Chapter 3)		x
LGBT rights (Chapter 4)	x	x
Migration (Chapter 5)	x	
High-tech/knowledge frontiers (Chapter 6)	x	x
High-tech/bitcoin (Chapter 6)	x	x
Hydrocarbons/gas (Chapter 7)	x	x
Hydrocarbons/oil (Chapter 7)	x	
Finance (Chapter 8)		x
(Counter-)Terrorism (Chapter 9)	x	x
Film (Chapter 10)		x
Arms control (post-1997) (Chapter 11)	x	
Carbon sinks (Chapter 12)	x	

management in military organizations preparing for conventional war is in broad agreement with Sagan's. Organizations seek to address the problems posed by uncertainty through a variety of mechanisms of control and coordination. But the struggle to manage uncertainty is undercut by the fact that "those with formal authority over the organization are a cause of uncertainty" because of their pursuit of independence from and power over those on whom they depend.¹⁴ Protean power dynamics thus can thrive in institutional settings.

Students of international political economy have downplayed the fact that economic institutional complexes exhibit similar power dynamics. One of the proponents of a rational design approach to the study of institutions conceptualizes uncertainty in the following way: "parties always know the distribution of gains in the current period, but know only the probability distribution for the distributions of gains in future periods."¹⁵ This approach assumes, implausibly, either that complexity is low because of the simplifying assumption that uncertainty is the same as risk, or that uncertainty is reflected only in poor information.¹⁶ As long as analysis views economic organizations and institutions apart from the political processes in which they are embedded, it tends to over-emphasize

¹⁴ Posen 1984: 45. ¹⁵ Koremenos 2005: 550.

¹⁶ In his trenchant critique of Koremenos et al. Alexander Wendt points out that "the Rational Design framework seems to treat the nature of uncertainty as unproblematic and ends up with a conceptualization that effectively reduces it to risk." Wendt 2001: 1029. See also Seabrooke 2007: 373.

the importance of constraints and stability at the expense of creative choice and recompositional change. In their analysis of the emergence of genuine novelty, John Padgett and Walter Powell, for example, argue that “logical cognition, no matter how useful for refinement and improvement, is unlikely to be a fundamental process for generating novelty, because logic can only use axioms that are already there.”¹⁷ Since outcomes such as the information revolution are simply unthinkable before they occur, “institutions,” Yuen Yuen Ang writes, “are designed not merely to cope with cognitive limitations but rather to harness and activate the creative potential of the unknowns.”¹⁸ In short, institutional models of coherence overlook the power dynamics that inhere in uncertainty and do not fit the logic of institutional complementarity.¹⁹

Depending on the pervasiveness of the cracks that institutional settings provide, the case studies of human and LGBT rights, migration, terrorism, arms control, and carbon sinks all point to protean power dynamics (Chapters 3–5, 9, 11, and 12). Notably, the rise of protean power is detectable in actors’ agility to explore institutional openings that exacerbate underlying uncertainties. The two rights cases (Chapters 3 and 4) document in considerable detail power dynamics linked to institutions and issues of legitimacy. The migration case shows how migrants and smugglers can exploit some of the inherent contradictions between border and refugee protection regimes, thus leveraging the state’s own institutions against its control power (Chapter 5). The international state system offers numerous normative, discursive, and geographical sites for terrorists to implant themselves (Chapter 9). In the run-up to the signing of the 1997 Ottawa Landmine Treaty, advocates compensated for their lack of control power by coordinating on innovative strategies of persuasion that took advantage of the uncertainty around issues of threat and leadership after the end of the Cold War (Chapter 11). Specifically, small states and NGOs marshalled extensive evidence showing that landmines caused indiscriminate harm to civilians long after the cessation of hostilities. The end result was a treaty that overcame the opposition of the major states and, in particular, of the United States as the remaining superpower.²⁰ Finally, although in carbon sinks NGOs played a lesser role, they did exploit uncertainty to their own power advantage, extracting what probability estimates they could out of their unique position and expertise (Chapter 12).

The case studies of film and hydrocarbons, by way of contrast, analyze power dynamics that are operating on open social terrains marked by an

¹⁷ Padgett and Powell 2012: 1. ¹⁸ Ang 2016: 275, fn. 15. ¹⁹ Herrigel 2005.

²⁰ Subsequent efforts on cluster munitions and conventional arms trade were less successful.

absence of institutions. Nigerian film producers, for example, have competed with Hollywood, unencumbered by institutional contexts such as theater chains controlling the screening of movies (Chapter 10). And in hydrocarbon markets firms tend to rely on the depth of their relationships, improvisation, and innovation to mitigate the operational and radical uncertainties they encounter, thus reshaping the broader context in which they operate (Chapter 7). Intense and complex renegotiations of contracts among firms with long-term relationships and considerable amounts of trust are an integral part of coping in settings that indelibly link risk with uncertainty.

Reversibility

Finally, the case studies point to the importance of power reversibility. They illustrate that actors qualifying as powerful in control terms, such as the resources they possess, can nevertheless show sufficient agility to generate protean power effects. Conceivably, control and protean power can even reinforce one another in the case of such well-endowed actors. Similarly, while control may be limited in the case of traditionally peripheral actors, one consequence of their ability to improvise could be the uncovering or creation of new control power resources. In hydrocarbons (Chapter 7), innovative natural gas producers in Texas had to cope with gut-wrenching uncertainties and protean power dynamics. And so did credit rating agencies in finance (Chapter 8). Conversely, terrorist groups like ISIS have exercised control over a caliphate state spanning Syria and Iraq (Chapter 9). Skeptical major states in the negotiations over a Cluster Munition Convention proved to be agile. They pushed for limiting the treaty's scope and exploited various technological fixes (Chapter 11). Surprisingly, matters did not turn out as skeptical states had expected. Signed by 107 states in 2008, the use of cluster munitions has become stigmatized since then even by non-signatories, as many signatories have completed the destruction of their stockpiles before treaty-mandated deadlines.

Going beyond simple reversibility, some cases also show how control and protean power are mutually constitutive. In migration, viewed through the lens of practice, the protean power of migrants creates the state's control by making possible innumerable, flexible, everyday actions of state agents and bureaucrats (Chapter 5). The same holds for hydrocarbons. Abstract logics of control are worked out on the ground, through everyday fluid relationships between firms, governments, and consumers (Chapter 7). This agrees also with the basic facts in the world of finance (Chapter 8). Uncertainty is a

pervasive feature of financial markets that are open rather than closed. Control power simplifies and stabilizes complex uncertainties in various ways, including the invention of stabilizing categories (rating) and practices (reliance on risk models). Protean power dynamics can undercut their effectiveness quickly, however, especially in volatile moments of crisis.

The relations between control and protean power are reversible. In shifting fields of power possibilities, some actors who are taking advantage of protean power dynamics are intent on exercising control. Others exercising control improvise and innovate, taking advantage of protean power dynamics. Activists pressing for human rights during the decolonization movement of the 1940s and 1950s, for example, succeeded in seizing political control, thus preparing the ground for heart-breaking human rights violations of their own. Focusing on actor attributes – strong or secure and weak or precarious – tends to conceal reversibilities in positions that changing relations and practices in fields of multiple power configurations and power potentialities can make visible.

Control and Protean Power in Political Theory²¹

Why another neologism describing power? Is power not about different kinds of control as the different faces of power discussion, briefly reviewed in Chapter 1, illustrates? The conceptualization of power dynamics offered in this book suggests otherwise. The faces of power debate was really about control in two different forms: as action in power's first face (most clearly expressed in the behavioral approach of Dahl) and as social order as power's second, third, and fourth face (articulated in different ways by Bachrach and Baratz, Lukes and Hayward); as action and order control power directs and diffuses. Protean power is about the passing from potentiality to actuality of an actor and about the effects of actuality on the future potentialities of the same actor or others; as the actualization of potentialities, protean power creates and circulates. Neglecting for a moment the world of pure risk and pure uncertainty, worlds where actor experience and context attributes match up, both power types operate in a world of risk and uncertainty. At the point where control and protean power meet risk and uncertainty, power becomes the source of the unexpected in world politics.

²¹ Most of what we write here derives from readings and discussions in a seminar that Professor Jill Frank taught together with Peter Katzenstein in the fall of 2016; PK's extensive and deeply clarifying conversations with Anna Wojciuk; and a set of profoundly penetrating and immensely helpful comments by Stefano Guzzini.

We build on Stewart Clegg's argument that focuses on the difference between Hobbes and Machiavelli as epitomizing two strands of thinking about power in political theory. Control power is central to Hobbes and his mechanical, scientific approach aiming at universal laws. Protean power is the focus of Machiavelli and his insistence on the exercise of power and historical contingency. Hobbes is interested in what power is, Machiavelli in what power does.²² We develop this insight further by including a number of other theorists who have focused on the relationship between what we call control and protean power.

Although they differ greatly in their arguments, Hobbes and Foucault are the inspiration for realist and critical security scholars who focus largely on capabilities and order as two forms of control power. Speaking in different registers and voices Clausewitz and Machiavelli point to the limits that chance and imagination impose on control power. Arendt, Deleuze, Deleuze and Guatarrie, Aristotle, and Agamben push further and draw our attention to potential capacities and protean power. Our brief discussion of such a diverse group of thinkers is selective and designed solely to highlight our central point. Rather than offering substantive, extended engagement, it serves as a reminder of the existence of a variegated and distinguished lineage of political thought that is rarely read, let alone discussed, by scholars of international relations. In contrast to those wedded in their view of control power exclusively to Hobbes and Foucault, we hold that political theorists of very different persuasions have theorized extensively protean power, in different ways and with different terminologies. Thinking of control power only in terms of capability and order overlooks the importance of protean power as the capacity to actualize potentialities. In fact, it is the issue of potentiality that has interested political theorists throughout the ages. The concept of protean power is therefore not a faddish neologism, but a useful reminder of an important topic in the debates among political theorists and in the world we seek here to illuminate.

Control Power and Chance

Power in international relations is often thought of in Hobbesian terms, as an actor capability. In this view actors deploy control power by drawing on capabilities to produce desired outcomes susceptible to probabilistic calculation. For Hobbes, for example, power is unitary, homogeneous, unidirectional, and asymmetric. It is checked only by the power of other sovereigns. Unlike Hobbes, who sees power as a purely external

²² Clegg 1989: 5–7, 21–38, 202–7. See also Hindess 1996.

constraint on a subject's will as her ultimate passion, for Foucault power is formative of a subject's will; he analyzes the internal processes by which subjects are created. Hobbes focuses on the sovereign's hierarchical control of subjects; Foucault on the creation of self-controlling subjects through the diffusion of control mechanisms that render sovereign policing of subjects superfluous. Hobbes focuses on the individual and "power over;" Foucault on the system and "power through."

Hobbes' anarchic state of nature is marked by radical uncertainty ruled by passion.²³ Among all of man's passions fear is the most important. Unbridled quests for control power make life unbearably hard. Individuals are thus ready to transfer all of their rights to all things to one sovereign with unlimited power of control.²⁴ In speaking God's word, interpreting the laws of nature, and fixing the meaning of human speech the sovereign's power is total and expresses the unity of a people. In one magical moment subjects are thus transported from a condition of unpredictability and diffuse fear of everyone in the state of nature to a condition of predictability and concentrated fear of the sovereign in the commonwealth. Not so the sovereign who remains in the state of nature, but is now endowed with an unlimited control over her or his subjects who remain prone to indulge their many other passions. The sovereign thus must always guard against the possibility that things can fall apart.²⁵

We can find passages in the writings of other theorists that resonate with Hobbes' line of argument. Aristotle, for example, includes might (*kratos*) in his extensive and nuanced treatment of different kinds of power.²⁶ So does Thucydides in a famous passage in the Melian Dialogue, which realists like to quote in support of their claim that international relations is determined only by material capabilities and power politics: "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."²⁷ Machiavelli, too, is often claimed as an advocate of an amoral power politics. He insists that all states rest on "good laws and good arms." War is the main business of rulers.²⁸ In *The Prince* Machiavelli uses the concept of *potestà* – admittedly only once in the entire text – to describe the authority to exercise unrestricted physical

²³ Hobbes 1996: 3–11, 24–46, 62, 86–129, 145–54, 183–94, 214–16, 483–91.

²⁴ The solution is paradoxical since a contractarian, bottom-up derivation of the Leviathan cannot happen in a true state of nature; its occurrence only shows that there exists no true state of nature. However, Leviathan can also be justified *ex post* and top-down, and is then designed to avoid the state of nature. The solution of anarchy at home only intensifies its problem in international relations. We thank Stefano Guzzini for this point.

²⁵ Hobbes 1996: 221–30. ²⁶ Aristotle 2000: 1324b, 25–29.

²⁷ Strauss 2008: 5.89, 352. ²⁸ Machiavelli 1998: 48, 124–25.

domination that Cesare Borgia grants to Messer Remirro de Orco “a cruel and ready man, to whom he gave the fullest power.”²⁹

With his reconceptualization of sovereign as disciplinary power, Foucault focuses on systems of repressive governance that produce political order, although one shorn of the notion of political action.³⁰ In the middle and late years of his writings there occurs a notable shift from power as outright repression to power as productive practices of individual self-cultivation.³¹ The Panopticon is a place for the exercise of total control and an ideal setting for scientific experiments uncontaminated by uncertainty.³² For Foucault, as for Hobbes, predictability rests in knowledge and scientific expertise, which buttress control power as the characteristic mode of contemporary governance.³³ Knowledge and expertise operate top-down through the invention and acceptance of categories, such as social deviance. However, in contrast to Hobbes, in much of Foucault’s subsequent writings disciplinary power is no longer conceived of in centralized, unitary, homogeneous, and unidirectional terms.³⁴ Power is not actor-centric, direct, and specific; it is impersonal, indirect, and diffuse.³⁵ It works through a variety of social complexes such as the family, medicine, psychiatry, education, and business, locations of epistemic regimes that shape political life recursively through what Ian Hacking has called “looping effects.”³⁶

Disciplinary rather than sovereign power thus becomes the center of Foucault’s analysis.³⁷ It is constituted by surveillance and social classification, as foundations of social order rather than coercion and territorial exclusion.³⁸ Unlike Hobbes, Foucault downplays the importance of direct, coercive action. He stresses instead the systemic aspects of government (or governmentality) to determine the subject’s conduct indirectly, through the cultivation of specific dispositions and the instilling of specific norms.³⁹ Its Christian, pastoral legacy prompts the European welfare state to “constantly ensure, sustain, and improve the lives of each and every one.”⁴⁰ Depending on the “micro-relations of power,”⁴¹ disciplinary power is a diffuse and impersonal force. Operating through systems of

²⁹ Ibid.: 28. According to Harvey Mansfield, personal correspondence October 13, 2016, the same concept appears twenty-nine times in the *Discourses*.

³⁰ Guzzini and Neumann 2012.

³¹ The first and the last two volumes of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* illustrate this shift.

³² Foucault 1977: 202–5. ³³ Foucault 1982: 78–84. ³⁴ Foucault 1977.

³⁵ Guzzini 2012: 21.

³⁶ Foucault 1982: 78–84; Guzzini 2010: 8–10; Hacking 2004: 279.

³⁷ Foucault 1977; 1980: 89–108.

³⁸ Best 2008: 358–60; Digeser 1992; Larner and Walters 2004: 496.

³⁹ Rose 1999: 3; Foucault 1982: 789. ⁴⁰ Foucault 1981: 235–36; Walters 2012: 21–29.

⁴¹ Foucault 1980: 199; Walters 2012: 21–29.

expert knowledge, it is both pervasive and productive.⁴² Disciplinary power is pervasive because it relies on systems of self-governance and self-policing of the citizens themselves. It is productive because the individuals through which it passes are normalized by its effects.

Far from making power disappear as in current writings on international relations that focus on diffusion, for Foucault diffusion magnifies power by enhancing its productivity in the reconfiguration of decentralized practices. A widened and deepened system of rule applies to and works through actors whom it both governs and empowers.⁴³ The ubiquity of disciplinary power meeting acceptance and resistance leads to iterative adjustments of an impersonal system of all-encompassing governance. The recalcitrance of the political will of elites and the intransigence of individual assertions of freedom yield unending adjustments in the mechanisms of control.⁴⁴ Innovations in disciplinary mechanisms lead to an ever more far-reaching form of internalization of the knowledge by which subjects govern themselves and each other.

The logic of power entails both discipline through rule by abstract categories and refusal of abstraction.⁴⁵ Individuals are both objects and subjects, experiencing and exercising power. Contextually, specific and focused on power practices, Foucault's analysis prefers granular treatments of singular moments to grand theoretical narratives. His analysis does not start from the assumption that some actors have power and others do not. Instead, it focuses on sites and relationships that reveal power plays, struggles, reversals, evasions, and innovations. Techniques of exercising power and tactics of subverting power co-evolve.⁴⁶ For Foucault, we are all the products of power that moves through the capillaries of society.⁴⁷ Power "is never localized here or there . . . Power passes through individuals. It is not applied to them."⁴⁸ In his analysis of disciplinary power Foucault thus focuses on how it constitutes or creates subjects not under the watchful eyes of a Leviathan, but through largely uncontrolled mechanisms and techniques.

Especially in the last years of his life, Foucault at times seemed to point to the limits of control power and the possibility of the actualization of power potentialities spurring subversive creativity and innovative resistance that could move around or outwit control.⁴⁹ Since the power to control is all-pervasive and operates even within subjects, Foucault argues that the state was never "sufficiently in one place to be seized, that the

⁴² Foucault 1977: 194. ⁴³ Guzzini 2012: 2, 8–9, 16. ⁴⁴ Gordon 1991: 5.

⁴⁵ Foucault 1982: 781, 785. ⁴⁶ Walters 2012: 14.

⁴⁷ Foucault 1980: 109–33; Lipschutz 2007: 230.

⁴⁸ Foucault 2003: 29; Debrix and Barder 2009: 404.

⁴⁹ Digeser 1992: 984–85, 991, 1003.

state was everywhere and that therefore the ‘revolution’ had to be everywhere, ubiquitous as well as permanent.”⁵⁰ At another point he writes that zones of incorporated resistance show governmental power to be somewhat elastic, though not infinitely so, as contestation creates “an incitement to political creativity.”⁵¹ In revealing protean power potential, enterprising subjects can cope with the “immediate enemy” without having far-reaching plans.⁵² Relying on a constitutive analysis of the formation of actor identities and the drawing of boundaries of what is possible, Foucault’s analysis encompasses processes of empowerment not expressly granted by a sovereign but through self-activated practices. Individuals have the choice to diminish or enhance unavoidable friction.⁵³ Empowerment through improvisation and innovation occur in a system of control and self-monitoring that is stretching its octopus arms, like Hobbes’ Leviathan, through all of the nooks and crannies of a self-governing society, made orderly by all-pervasive processes of disciplining.

As Clausewitz writes, in contact with chance, friction is a formidable opponent of those seeking unhindered control, both in war and politics.⁵⁴ “Chaos and control featured centrally in his writing,” and he was conflicted by their opposing realities.⁵⁵ Uncertainty, the singularity of context, emotions, and cognitive limitations made a mockery of all systematic attempts to calculate and predict behavior. Agility in developing the original idea informing a military campaign under constantly changing circumstances was the most promising avenue to success. Yet, in Clausewitz’s thinking, power also had to navigate around contingency by relying on probabilities. Planning was the attempt to adhere to strategic aims by comprehending particular situations, a positive exploitation of fortune. Routine and imagination were both necessary to cultivate, in Michael Howard’s words, “the capacity to adapt oneself to the utterly unpredictable, the entirely unknown.”⁵⁶ Besides emotion and rationality, for Clausewitz war is defined by “the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam.”⁵⁷ Clausewitz thus points to a power that operates in the domain of the unexpected.

Many political theorists of power have probed that type of power. Since control power is often upended or evaded, they expand the analysis beyond actual capabilities to include also actors’ potential capacities, understood both as creativity in the actualization of potentiality in the present and enhanced potentialities for future action. Machiavelli, for

⁵⁰ Foucault 1981: 253; O’Malley 2000: 261; Sheridan 1980: 111. ⁵¹ Walters 2012: 43.

⁵² Foucault 1982: 780. ⁵³ Digeser 1992: 995. ⁵⁴ Clausewitz 1984: 120.

⁵⁵ Porter 2016: 252. ⁵⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*: 255.

⁵⁷ Clausewitz 1984. Evidently, for Clausewitz as for Weber (see Chapter 1, pp. 11–12, fn. 42), “chance” is not coterminous with “probability.”

example, shares an affinity with Clausewitz in his analysis of power. Rather than focusing on the common good, as does Hobbes, Machiavelli is interested in the art of the possible. Besides referring to *potestà*, though only once, throughout *The Prince* he invokes numerous times a ruler's *potentia* – his capacity, ability, or strength exercised in many different contexts.⁵⁸ In contrast to Hobbes, for Machiavelli “might does not make right.” *Potentia* is a dispositional capacity to do or not to do. It is activated by a prince's acquired, calculating, discretionary *virtu*, his political ability, and physical strength. This is power-in-action rather than power-as-order.

Power derives from the opportunity that chance (*fortuna*) provides and is actualized by the prince's ability, or *virtù*, to seize the moment. This is an excellent characterization of protean power. Since the concept of risk had not yet been invented, Machiavelli is not interested in assessing the epistemic aspect of fortune as risk or uncertainty.⁵⁹ This does not stop him, however, from theorizing about it. Fortune is like a destructive river. To protect against it requires strong dikes.⁶⁰ Precaution serves the ruler well in the domain of known unknowns; there will always be floods or foreign invasions. Prudent action guided by both resilience and partial control provides the best antidote for a world full of contingency. Not so in the domain of unknown unknowns; there caution or impetuosity are the proper response. And since there are no universal principles that govern a world of indeterminacy, Machiavelli leaves it at that.⁶¹ Man does not have to accept chance with passive resignation. He is an agile dancer with an unpredictable partner. And thus he exercises power (*potentia*) in the face of uncertainty. “Fortune is arbiter of half of our actions . . . she leaves the other half, or close to it, for us to govern.”⁶²

Protean Power and Actualized Potentiality

Power talks and speech has power. For Hannah Arendt the power of speech is the starting point for an individual who has the courage to reveal her or himself in the public realm.⁶³ Power cannot be stored. Power emerges as the actualization of a potentiality when people act in concert. It actualizes in common projects through speech and action. Arendt

⁵⁸ Machiavelli 1998: 12, 15, 16, 29, 138. In a few places Machiavelli refers also to two other kinds of power: *potentato* applied to a self-directed and self-enclosed agent or power-holder, as in potentate, normally a government (pp. 45 and 72); and *potente* (p. 43), meaning one who is strong or powerful, not necessarily a prince or ruler. On this point and many others we are indebted to Jill Frank's astute reading of the text.

⁵⁹ Bernstein 1996. ⁶⁰ Machiavelli 1998: 98. ⁶¹ Lockwood 2013: 16.

⁶² Machiavelli 1998: 98.

⁶³ Arendt 1998: 175, 178–79, 186, 189–90, 194, 199, 200, 205–6, 220.

agrees with Machiavelli, Foucault, and Deleuze: in the dynamics of the creation and evolution of power, it is not only outcomes that matter but processes of power actualization. It takes individual speech to start a work of politics; it takes a joining together to end it. Along the way, and to great frustration, the unexpected is bound to happen. Power is not static. It requires actualization of potentialities. Power is revealed and exhausted in the performance of bringing people together. In politics, as in Christianity, against all odds the new and unexpected is a potentiality that is always on the cusp of being born.⁶⁴

Gilles Deleuze is also interested in speech and the chance events it can create.⁶⁵ In developing the concept of power, he updates and dissents from Foucault. Deleuze argues that control over communication is even more individualizing and repressive than disciplinary power. Yet even though speech and social communications are thoroughly dominated by corporate actors, they still offer the prospect for authenticity and independence through acts of “fabulation” and imagination that can add up to refusal.⁶⁶ “Rebellious spontaneity” can upend control. Deleuze thus argues that “we’ve got to hijack speech . . . The key thing may be to create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control.”⁶⁷ Echoing Machiavelli, Deleuze envisages new kinds of events “that can’t be explained by the situations that give rise to them, or into which they lead. They appear for a moment, and it’s that moment that matters, it’s the chance we must seize.”⁶⁸

But speech is inherently indeterminate and easily stunted. Students of international law have debated at great length the degree of indeterminacy that inheres in norms and laws.⁶⁹ Treaty negotiations, for example, often yield international agreements that are unclear, incoherent, or ambiguous. Some scholars hold that the process of international negotiation eventually forces an unambiguous interpretation or enunciation of an agreed-upon norm to specific situations.⁷⁰ Others demur and argue that on politically contentious issues no such force exists in an anarchic international system or a weak international order; relevant norms will remain

⁶⁴ In criticizing Arendt, Judith Butler has suggested that we must avoid identity essentialism by acknowledging the plurality of the self and include in political analysis things Arendt’s emphasis on action and speech in the public realm slights: performative aspects of bodily speech, the precarious, the private, and economic and social rights. Butler 2015: 66–98.

⁶⁵ Deleuze 1995. ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 174. ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*: 175. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*: 176.

⁶⁹ Kardon 2017: 64–66. In behavioral arguments of international relations and politics more generally, this is known as the problem of multiple equilibria. Game theorists try to solve the problem by deriving focal points for coordination that are rooted in common knowledge. To the extent that common knowledge is collective and requires meaning determinacy, the solution, though widely accepted, lacks full persuasive force as Chris Reus-Smit argues in Chapter 3.

⁷⁰ Koh 1997: 2646.

indeterminate as does the entire edifice of international law. The forces that bring about unambiguous interpretation of legal outcomes are thus profoundly political.⁷¹ Between these two positions weaker versions of indeterminacy arguments hold sway.⁷²

Because speech can be stunted, Deleuze and Guattari's diagnosis of power develops an entirely new and idiosyncratic conceptual vocabulary.⁷³ It aims at side-stepping and undermining all hierarchies of established thought. For Deleuze and Guattari the centralization of modern society "overcodes" the segmentation of traditional society. Politics thus penetrates all segments and all individuals. Stable and predictable "molar" macro-structures of the state are deeply interrelated with unstable and unpredictable "molecular" processes or "flow quanta" and "line segments." The molar structures of the capitalist welfare state do not "control" flows of capital and information, but render them legible and manageable by "coding" or "overcoding" them. Molar state structures thus are creatively adapting to changes and transformations in the molecular flows and their micro-politics. At times, however, molecular processes escape adaptable molar structures by taking a "line of flight." For Deleuze and Guattari small is not beautiful. Instead, the molecular is often proto-fascist. Deleuze and Guattari play up the importance of potentiality and the unexpected. Although they develop an esoteric terminology to escape from the shackles of conventional speech and thought, their insistence on the intersection of molar and molecular worlds and lines of flight resonates deeply with this book's insistence on the intersection of control and protean power and the importance of the unexpected in world politics.

Shifting our perspective, Aristotle and Agamben find power not only in the relations between but also within subjects as well as between subjects and objects.⁷⁴ Far from disavowing the importance of the public realm, they place it in the encompassing political significance of human potentialities and impotentialities in the many sites where power dynamics create and intersect with the unexpected.

⁷¹ Koskenniemi 1989: 35–40, 59, 590–91, 597. ⁷² Solum 1987.

⁷³ Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 224–27. We are deeply indebted to Anna Wojciuk for making us understand better this difficult text. Like Guattari and Deleuze, Martin Heidegger calls for a new language that does not suffer from the tyranny of the public, thus setting free the dormant power of the potential. Heidegger 1977: 193–99.

⁷⁴ The distinction between and within subjects and objects does not map cleanly onto the difference between inter-subjective and intra-subjective. Unlike Aristotle, contemporary theorists deal with the intra-subjective only in the sense of there being no subject that describes an empty signifier (Lacan), pure contingency (Agamben), or an assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari). We thank Anna Wojciuk for helping us appreciate this point.

For Aristotle the self is not a unified agent ready for action.⁷⁵ The self is instead plural, subject and object, doer and being done to.⁷⁶ Whether and how power remains a potential capacity waiting to be actualized (*energeia*) depends on the context. It is through actualization or “being-at-work” that the self creates potentiality. There exists then a dynamic and reciprocal relationship within each person between his or her actuality and potentiality. For Aristotle the final end and cause (*telos*) that humans aim at as they find themselves in unending chains of inter- and intra-subjective relationships is “happiness” or well-being (*eudaimon*). And agents have at their disposal cornucopia of power potentialities to achieve well-being. Aristotle’s soul exists and reveals itself only in the specificity of each individual’s practices grounded in dynamically evolving actualities and potentialities. For Aristotle there is no universal plan or playbook for attaining happiness. It needs to be struggled for and chosen with every step we take along life’s path. His thinking is relational and relativist with respect to the world of inter-subjectivity. It is relational and non-relativist with respect to a person’s desire (*orexis*) or conscious choice (*prohairesis*).⁷⁷

Drawing on and interrogating Aristotle, Giorgio Agamben theorizes individual choice even further by developing the concepts of impotentiality and destituent power.⁷⁸ Impotentiality is the power of not doing, of deciding not to run before the race begins or not to end with the finish line in sight. Agamben draws on Aristotle who writes that “every potentiality is at the same time a potentiality for the opposite . . . Everything which is capable may fail to be actualized. Therefore that which is capable of being may both be and not be. Therefore the same thing is capable of being and not being.”⁷⁹ For Agamben destituent power, or not doing, is an activity rather than its negation; the two concepts are linked. Inoperativity exists in a zone of indeterminacy best described in the Greek middle voice, lacking in English, which is neither active nor passive. This is a space for useless use that relates to both the active self and the self of potentiality. A modest act of distancing by not doing is not a liberation of the individual. It points instead to dialectics without movement as a condition of change. Although it may seem small, for Agamben this act has great political significance. It demarcates a sphere of “destituent” power that de-activates the machinery of the state. If constituent power is describing the politics of revolution and insurrection, a violence that creates a new order on the terrain of the old, destituent power has the task of imagining

⁷⁵ Frank 2005. ⁷⁶ Ibid. ⁷⁷ Aristotle 1933: 1048a11.

⁷⁸ Agamben 2014; 1999, 177–84.

⁷⁹ Aristotle 1933: 1050b9–11. See also 1019b17–21 and 1046a30–35. We thank Professor Frank for finding textual support for our intuition.

an entirely different still-to-become politics.⁸⁰ It is a radical form of an-archaic power. Drained of nature, essence, and a stable identity, the subject of control power thus becomes both the center and the agent of a process that “accomplishes something which is being accomplished in him.”⁸¹ For Agamben agrees with Aristotle that what is true of agents is true of the world they inhabit. Both are actual and filled with enormous potentialities and impotentialities. “This is the origin (and the abyss) of human power.”⁸² Individual choice thus activates the unpredictable in time, space, and politics.

The purpose of power analysis for a political theorist is to think about the nature of the polity, including questions about organized violence and the common good, freedom, and responsibility.⁸³ The purpose of explanatory theory is to think about micro-theories of action and macro-theories of domination with a specific focus on the behavior and outcome of social action. The first engages in constitutive, the second in causal analysis. This section has fallen squarely in the domain of political theory; the discussion of the different faces of power in Chapter 1 in that of explanatory theory. The distinction is not ironclad. Lukes’ third face of power, for example, spans both types of theory as does Hobbes’ theory of sovereign power. And so does the pragmatic and eclectic stance we have articulated in the opening of this book. Re-specifying the concept of power, as in this book, is not the same as developing a theory of power. It is folly to chase the chimera of a general theory of power. The best we can do is be aware of how a specific concept of power fits into different theoretical traditions or orientations, and how those traditions or orientations are then remade by that concept.

Power and Imagination

Fictional expectations are an important mechanism that activate the unpredictable. Economic sociologist Jens Beckert probes the “how-possibles” in Aristotle’s and Agamben’s world of potentialities. *Imagined Futures* emerge from collective economic practices rather than individual stories. They are make-belief imaginaries with which actors stabilize an unknown future.⁸⁴ Risk-taking and capitalist growth depend on the interpretive frames that help actors to cope with contingency and uncertainty through imagining a future that is familiar. Actors pretend a future present that instills confidence to act under conditions of uncertainty. As in literary fiction, a present future is a world all of its own. The radical contingency of

⁸⁰ Agamben 2014: 70. ⁸¹ Ibid.: 68. ⁸² Agamben 1999: 182. ⁸³ Guzzini 2016b: 27.

⁸⁴ Beckert 2016: 8–12, 61–67.

that world is stabilized by a variety of everyday mechanisms and practices, which in moments of crisis can collapse overnight, as was true at the height of the financial crisis in 2008. Fictional expectations thus help actors to coordinate their behavior. They affect the future directly in performance – through enactment in practices and by existing institutions. This challenges how we normally think about the seeming efficacy of control. It is protean rather than control power that captures the volatility inherent in uncertain environments and that taps the agile responses of actors with their often fictional expectations.

Similarly, Annelise Riles has documented how uncertainty has shaped legal fictions surrounding the posting of collateral that is central to the functioning of global derivative markets.⁸⁵ The problem of temporality in financial contracts is solved pragmatically by quotidian legal practices that create a legal fiction of calculability that delimits the uncertainties and indeterminacies in financial markets. As a matter of practice, collateral is a chain of legal fictions about the rights of parties that appear well understood when, in fact, they are not. Such fictions are placeholders communicating a collective commitment among market participants to an arrangement that is useful though false. Although they are problematically related to markets, legal fictions are readily accepted and thus become reliable predictors and indeed creators of market realities.

More than in the social sciences, the concept of imagination is central in the arts. To be sure, economic and literary fiction are not the same. “Design fiction” implemented by collective actors focuses on their practical credibility; “mere fiction” told by an individual storyteller intent on creating an inherently persuasive story is not.⁸⁶ Both, however, point to a world richly filled with potentialities. In his play *Constellations*, for example, writer Nick Payne creates a multitude of possible worlds all hanging on different turns of phrases spoken at different times by the play’s two protagonists, a bee-keeper and a quantum physicist. Specifically, Payne plays with the notion of time reversibility. The basic laws of quantum physics do not know past or present. “Time is irrelevant at the level of a-atoms and molecules. It’s symmetrical.”⁸⁷ The possibility exists “that we are part of a multiverse . . . at any given moment, several outcomes can co-exist simultaneously.”⁸⁸ In that multiverse every choice made or not made exists in an ensemble of parallel universes too large to imagine. And yet, in that vastness honeybees live their intensely short lives with “an unflinching clarity of purpose.”⁸⁹ That raises the bar enormously for a

⁸⁵ Riles 2011. Lockwood and Nelson (Chapter 8) discuss the importance of “legal fiction” and the world of make-belief in the world of finance.

⁸⁶ Beckert 2016: 71. ⁸⁷ Payne 2012: 74. ⁸⁸ Ibid.: 22–23. ⁸⁹ Ibid.: 47.

predictive science of politics. Tom Stoppard's play *Arcadia* also engages issues of potentialities. For Valentine, the play's mathematical biologist, "the unpredictable and the predetermined unfold together to make everything the way it is."⁹⁰ In the arts, the creation of a pretend reality is shared by author and audience. In politics the pretend reality of Donald Trump's "alternate facts" and Adolf Hitler's "Big Lie" is the product of deliberate political manipulation. The relation between fiction and reality is complementary. In inventing their own reality, fiction and politics enhance the possibilities that inhere in uncertainty. Far from negating it, fiction and politics enlarge the heretofore unimagined. The potential and the actual, power capacity and power capability are deeply intertwined.

The study of power, in the words of Robert Dahl, is grounded in observations that "don't defy the laws of nature as we understand them."⁹¹ That view of the laws of nature continues to be shaped profoundly by a mechanical understanding of the political and natural universe, equilibrium models, and classical probability theory dating back to the seventeenth century. Conventions of scholarship have congealed into a worldview, with more (reliable and valid indicators and innovative measurement and modeling techniques permitting replication) and less (applying significance tests to populations rather than samples and reporting only positive findings because negative ones are next-to-impossible to publish) admirable traits.

But as Immanuel Wallerstein and his colleagues argued in *Open the Social Sciences*, what is truly remarkable is how old-fashioned and out-of-step with current scientific beliefs and practices this view of natural science is.⁹² Many natural scientists actually believe in non-linearity rather than linearity, complexity rather than simplification, the impossibility of distancing measurer from measurement, and, occasionally, the superiority of qualitative, interpretive capaciousness over quantitative, rigorous precision. This shift in the perspective of nature as active and creative rather than passive and repetitive makes the mechanical, "scientific" construction of the social world in international relations appear like a superstitious oddity handed down from ancient times. The resolute belief that the micro-world aggregates up to explain the macro-world looks incongruous when complexity and massive perturbation mark that macro-world.⁹³ The natural and the social world is a complex rather than a complicated system. It is creative and active in its self-organization. It is not resting inertly at or near a fictitious point of equilibrium. Novelty and the unexpected play a large part in the contemporary scientific

⁹⁰ Stoppard 1993: 47. ⁹¹ Dahl 1957: 214. ⁹² Gulbenkian Commission 1996: 60–63.

⁹³ *International Organization* 2017.

understanding of “the laws of nature as we understand them” that Robert Dahl invoked half a century ago. The actualization of protean power potentialities in a world of the unexpected fits right into this contemporary scientific conception of nature.

This is Alexander Wendt’s fundamental point in his book *Quantum Mind and Social Science*. Wendt makes a bold argument establishing the possibility of a unified ontology for the natural and social world that links the one real world we inhabit inextricably to an infinity of possible worlds from which the real world emerges once we measure it.⁹⁴ Human beings and their experiences are for Wendt not given but potential realities deserving close study. Experience is not grounded in a world of separable, constitutionally pre-social individuals struggling to achieve sociability in a context of competition, atomism, and efficient causation. Rather, experience is grounded in a world that is relational, social, and political through and through. In this account of human experience, Wendt agrees with “pre-classical mechanics classicists” like Aristotle who rely on a logic of “both/and” rather than “either/or.” He similarly avoids post-Enlightenment dichotomies such as subject–object, mind–body, part–whole, desire–reason.⁹⁵ One central aspect of the reality Wendt and Aristotle study are ongoing potentialities or powers (*dunameis*). In this book we have identified protean power as one such ongoing potentiality that is always ready for actualization in the in-between spaces of an always shared world.

Wendt attacks the unchallenged, reigning assumption that social life is governed by the laws of classical physics. A century after the quantum revolution this is not a far-fetched argument. For example, Kenneth Boulding’s orderly “loss of strength gradient” stipulates that power diffuses as an actor’s strength diminishes the further he or she moves away from home base.⁹⁶ Experimental advances in quantum physics, however, have confirmed quantum entanglement, the notion of “spooky action at a distance,” strange and unpredictable effects that show separate particles to be completely entangled at very long distances.⁹⁷ Expressed by wave functions, quantum probabilities are entirely different from classical probabilities into which they collapse only at the limit. Quantum probabilities offer complete descriptions of all potential realities. Classical probabilities are incomplete descriptions of one, existing reality. To be sure, wave functions exist only at the level of subatomic particles. But the experimental evidence in physics has firmly established quantum theory as the reigning view of how nature works. The implications of that view,

⁹⁴ Wendt 2015.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*: 4, 31, 34, 35, 37. Professor Frank, personal communication, March 5, 2017.

⁹⁶ Boulding 1962: 262. ⁹⁷ Markoff 2015; Wendt 2015: 53–54.

however, remain a subject of intense debate. Experimental evidence in a variety of social science fields such as quantum decision theory and quantum consciousness theory are beginning to accumulate. It is much too early to assess whether various branches of quantum theory will withstand sustained scientific testing in the social sciences. But as Wendt points out, in their early stages some of the results look intriguing, even promising, in accounting for otherwise jarring incongruities.

As radical and unfamiliar as this view may appear to international relations scholars today, it would not have surprised Aristotle. Going beyond Hobbes' sparse and unidimensional view of power as control, he probed in different ways the relation between actual power capabilities and the actualization of potential capacities. Important thinkers of contemporary society and politics have similarly sought to go beyond a one-sided conceptualization of power as capability or hierarchical order. John Dewey, for example, writes about power as "the sum of conditions available for bringing the desirable end into existence."⁹⁸ Judith Butler invokes a power that circulates "without voice or signature."⁹⁹ Zygmunt Bauman writes that "liquid life is a precarious life, lived under conditions of constant uncertainty,"¹⁰⁰ in modernity "the prime technique of power is now escape, slippage, elision and avoidance."¹⁰¹ And William Connolly explores the fragility of things revealed by self-organizing processes that foster unpredictable, adaptive creativity.¹⁰²

A generation ago, politics typically occurred in macro-institutions, be they liberal, statist, or corporatist. In today's volatile world power is shifting from the macro- to the micro-level. Institutions are evaluated for their effectiveness in shaping the incentives of individual action rather than their collective purposes. Resilience has become the central concept in addressing the radical unknowns and unpredictabilities in ecology, finance, and security.¹⁰³ Under conditions of inescapable uncertainty states must "insure against the fallibility of their assumptions, marshal their power more conservatively, and prepare for the likelihood of predictive failure by developing the intellectual capability to react to the unknown."¹⁰⁴ Differing on any number of important issues, the late Foucault and Hayek agreed on this one: individuals and their immediate communities are becoming ever more important to the problem of

⁹⁸ Dewey 1980: 246. We thank Alex Livingston for sharing with us his unpublished paper and pointing out the similarity between Dewey and the concept of protean power. Livingston (2017: 12) writes that "energy is not a unified substance. It is a placeholder for the plurality of material, social and emotional interactions that define the contours of particular practical situations."

⁹⁹ Butler 1997: 6. ¹⁰⁰ Bauman 2000: 1–2, 11. ¹⁰¹ Bauman 2005: 11.

¹⁰² Connolly 2005; 2013; Dewey 1980; Livingston 2017.

¹⁰³ Walker and Cooper 2011; Chandler 2014. ¹⁰⁴ Porter 2016: 239.

governance under conditions of man-made risk and uncertainties.¹⁰⁵ The resilience of society and the adaptability of individuals are ever more important, and with it – for better and for worse – protean power potentialities awaiting their actualization. Today’s behavioral economics, big data and nudges prepare the ground for the future of brain research and neuro-technologies applied to human happiness. These developments, our analysis implies, may shift the sites of protean power, but they will not reduce the unpredictabilities brought about by the dynamics of protean and control power.

Across the ages political theorists have acknowledged power and uncertainty, rooted in the infinitely variegated relations between actual and potential power. This book’s argument about power and uncertainty resonates with that rich tradition. Little is gained by insisting on the primacy of one or the other kind of power or to view one kind of power as a parasite of the other.¹⁰⁶ What matters is the intermingling of their risk- and uncertainty-enhancing effects. Protean power intersects with control power in the overlapping domains of uncertainty and risk, thus both enhancing and illuminating the unexpected in world politics.

The United States and America

The last half century has seen a prolonged, inconclusive debate about the unavoidable decline or continued primacy of the United States and American society. With particular focus on its military, economic, and diplomatic dimensions, the rise of the Soviet Union in the 1950s, Japan in the 1980s, and China in the first decade of the twenty-first century have fed into US anxieties and self-doubts reflected in animated and anguished debates. In the late 1980s, for example, public debate was captivated by the cyclical theory of the rise and the fall of great powers. China’s recent and India’s anticipated rise have raised new questions about the nature of their power. China has been called a “partial,” India a “modest” power.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the unexpected calamity of the financial crisis of 2008 and a slow recovery in its aftermath as well as the spread of ISIS have spurred new disagreements about the role of the United States and America in the evolving international order. Like rafts that ride the rip currents of world politics these debates persist without any prospect of ever being resolved.

¹⁰⁵ Chandler 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Isaac 1987: 6; Morriss 2002: xiii; Pansardi 2011; Dahl 1957: 206; Ringmar 2007: 195–96.

¹⁰⁷ Shambaugh 2013.

Whatever the state of this conversation may be, the American president continues to wield enormous powers. He exerts control over others by commanding the US military, tapping enormous economic resources, negotiating at the highest levels of diplomacy, getting broad media coverage, and presiding over one of the largest, wealthiest, and most dynamic societies in the world. Admittedly, presidential power is not unlimited. The assessment of how far that power reaches and what it controls varies, depending on when and where one looks or whom one asks. International relations scholars explain, and sometimes predict, such limitations by pointing to inadequate resources and strategies. Yet it is often the case that actors armed with ample resources and carefully crafted strategies fail.

Despite its position of primacy, the United States is unable to avoid the effects of protean power. In former President Obama's words "America, as the most powerful country on earth, still does not control everything around the world."¹⁰⁸ His approach to American foreign policy accepted ambivalence and ambiguity as unavoidable byproducts of a complex international system. He was a realist when necessary in the military defense of US vital security interests. He was a liberal in his efforts to strengthen multilateral approaches and international norms. Weary of American self-righteousness and mindful of the need for US leadership, Obama tailored US policies to specific situations. He preferred tactics to strategy. To put it in terms of this book's argument: Obama did not think that the United States could control world politics, but had to adapt flexibly to unpredictable protean power dynamics.

President Trump speaks of Obama as a spineless pragmatist and feckless opportunist whose lack of a sense of national greatness made him accept or create power vacuums, violence, and volatility throughout the world. Trump's approach to politics is to produce such volatility deliberately and exploit the uncertainties it creates. He channels information almost randomly to create uncertainties and thus unbalance and defeat his opponents. Trump has little knowledge of or interest in directional policies. Instead, he aims at maximizing volatility so that he can make "great deals." His approach to politics merges a ruthless pursuit to control others with the tactic of unpredictability.¹⁰⁹ He is wagering that a transactional approach to international relations and unwavering commitment to American greatness will be effective. It is a bet placed on the success of unrestricted, unilateral control power and of protean power dynamics creating heightened volatility and unpredictability.

Explicit acknowledgment of protean power processes is an important step in developing an approach that does not aim only for unachievable

¹⁰⁸ Baker 2014, A1. ¹⁰⁹ Lee 2016.

levels of political control, but allows also for practical guides to political creativity. Neither kind of power is inherently morally desirable or undesirable. But in their interaction both create unpredictable change and “forms of everyday political engagement and mobilization” that are crucial for a comprehensive analysis of world politics.¹¹⁰ Prudence requires getting ready for the unexpected by investing in the resilience of both state and society. In the face of the unpredictable, Obama placed his confidence in America’s resilience and capacities.¹¹¹ Trump aims instead to rebuild US capabilities and restore US greatness, whatever that may mean. The moral purposes that imbue both Obama’s localized cosmopolitanism and Trump’s assertive nationalism are indispensable for the articulation of normative political orders that will unavoidably remain exposed to the dynamics of control and protean power processes.

One important example of protean power in world politics is the unmatched dynamism and transnational spread of American practices. Virtually unknown today, during the First World War Randolph Bourne was an early observer of this aspect of American power when he published an essay under the title “Trans-national America.”¹¹² America was the first “cosmopolitan federation of national colonies,” combining American patriotism with internationalism. A century later, the ideas and practices of the American trans-nation are affecting and being affected by processes that spread around the world with greater ease than ever before. Economic globalization and popular culture in its many manifestations have created what Aida Hozic has dubbed “Hollywood” and made America an irresistible empire of mass consumption – persistent savings and current account deficits included.¹¹³ The distinguishing characteristic of America’s trans-nation lies in its active engagement of the world.

But that is only one of America’s several faces. Another is America’s fierce nationalism, steeped in the Jacksonianism of right-wing populism. Like liberal transnationalism it, too, is an enduring part of America’s multiple traditions. Today, American politics is going through one of its periodic realignments. The cycle of presidential power shifts from Clinton to Bush, Bush to Obama, and Obama to Trump has occurred with increasing intensity and without producing large majorities. Out of the fractious politics within and between the different parts of America will eventually emerge, currently still unfathomable, something new. Protean power processes are churning in American society, upending all predictions and conventions. Walt Whitman captured this internal

¹¹⁰ Howard and Walters 2014: 400. ¹¹¹ Goldberg 2016.

¹¹² Bourne 1977: 248–64. See also Keck 2016. ¹¹³ Hozic 2001; de Grazia 2005.

division of America in the *Song of Myself*: “Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself; (I am large, I contain multitudes).”¹¹⁴

This is not to argue that either US or American ideas and practices are imprinting the world. Rather, their transfer sets free processes that generate new capacities as those ideas and practices are being examined, breached, negotiated, affirmed, and undermined. For better and for worse, American society is a vital node in the global circulation of protean power that illustrates the creative and destructive capacities of Americans and others to affirm, refuse, improvise, and innovate. What is true of cultural projects and practices holds more generally. “Although American popular culture necessarily carries the imprint of the society which produced it,” writes C. W. E. Bigsby, “its movement beyond the confines of America changes both meaning and structure. It becomes plastic, a superculture, detached from its roots, and widely available for adaptation, absorption and mediation.”¹¹⁵

The secret of the products and practices of America’s ever changing technology complexes, knowledge industries, popular culture sites, and politics, among others, does not rest only in America as it exists but also in America as it is imagined. Narratives about American exceptionalism and the American dream are forever changing. For both US primacy in military, political, and economic affairs and America’s hegemony in technology, knowledge, and entertainment are weakening not compared with any other state or society, but compared with the dynamism of a global system increasingly shaped by the influences of many other actors and processes. Yet America remains the only New World, spelled with capital letters. It is not merely a white brand – as is Shanghai with its 5,000 skyscrapers. The New World is an act of imagination and psychological rebellion against local living conditions and political arrangements throughout the world. Statues of Liberty, real and imagined, symbolize the enduring appeal of the New World and remind us of the often glaring distance that separates the imaginary from the real America.

How do we align these contrasting, even contradictory, observations about US and American power and the attempted homogenization and continuing pluralization of global politics through control and protean power? Modern technology is not only a superficial equalizer, but a wedge that opens up new spaces for the articulation of new commonalities and differences in and through political power. This creates a politics of hybridity rather than purity.¹¹⁶ The tensions between and overlays of control and protean power illustrate that hybridization is neither spontaneous nor apolitical. It entails different forms of political struggle

¹¹⁴ Blodgett 1953: 97. ¹¹⁵ Bigsby 1975: xii–xiii. ¹¹⁶ Pieterse 2004: 74–77.

reflected in practices of affirmation, refusal, improvisation, and innovation that are often heterogeneous and unpredictable.

International relations scholarship often focuses on US control over resources measured by territory, populations, GDP, the defense budget, market size, and other such indicators. This neglects protean power dynamics that America has enabled and that circulate widely in world politics. The dynamics of power in world politics are shaped by this US–American complex. The control exercised by power wielders is often upended by the spontaneous practices of their targets.¹¹⁷ Since both aspects of power are deeply intertwined, to focus on one or the other impairs our understanding of the significance of and tensions between US and American power in world politics.

The coincidence of processes of Americanization and anti-Americanism shows that the United States and America are jointly creating a world that is simultaneously emerging into greater similarity *and* persistent diversity. In these processes the United States and America both win and lose. They are unable to bet confidently on the control and protean power dynamics marking world politics. And, deeply enmeshed with them, they are also unable to leave the tables at which the poker and roulette games of world politics are played.

¹¹⁷ Aalberts 2012: 240.