

## The Politics of Evasion

Burgeoning national security programs; thickening borders; WikiLeaks and Anonymous; immigrant rights rallies; the Occupy Movement; student protests; neoliberal austerity; global financial crises – these developments underscore that the fable of a hope-filled post-cold war globalization has faded away. In its place looms the prospect of states and corporations transforming a permanent war on terror into a permanent war on society. How, at the critical juncture of a post-globalization era, will policymakers and power-holders in leading states and corporations of the global North choose to pursue power and control? What possibilities and limits do activists and communities face for progressive political action to counter this power inside and outside the state?

This book is a sustained dialogue between author and political theorist, Robert Latham and Mr V, a policy analyst from a state in the global North. Mr V is sympathetic to the pursuit of justice, rights and freedom by activists and movements but also mindful of the challenges of states in pursuing security and order in the current social and political moment. He seeks a return to the progressive, welfare-oriented state associated with the twentieth century. The dialogue offers an in-depth consideration of whether this is possible and how a progressive politics might require a different approach to social organization, power and collective life.

Exploring key ideas, such as sovereignty, activism, neoliberalism, Anarchism, migration, intervention, citizenship, security, political resistance and transformation, and justice, this book will be of interest to academics and students of Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, Law, Geography, Media and Communication, and Cultural Studies.

**Robert Latham** teaches in the Political Science, Communication and Culture, and Social and Political Thought programs at York University in Toronto, Canada. He has published widely on topics including political economy, security, digital activism, technologies of border surveillance, critical theories of sovereignty, transnational relations, migration, and multiculturalism.

# **The Politics of Evasion**

A post-globalization dialogue along  
the edge of the state

**Robert Latham**

First published 2016  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2016 Robert Latham

The right of Robert Latham to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

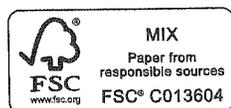
*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*  
Names: Latham, Robert, 1956- author.

Title: The politics of evasion : a post-globalization dialogue / Robert Latham.  
Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2016. | Series: Interventions | Includes bibliographical references and index.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2015047062 | ISBN 9781138647572 (hardback) | ISBN 9781315626963 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Globalization—Political aspects. | International organization. | International cooperation. | State, The. | Liberalism. | Security, International.  
Classification: LCC JZ1318 .L37 2016 | DDC 320.01—dc23  
LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015047062>

ISBN: 978-1-138-64757-2 (hbk)  
ISBN: 978-1-31562-696-3 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman  
by Saxon Graphics Ltd, Derby



Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

## Contents

<i>Annotated table of contents</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xxiii
<b>1 Security, circulation, and the limits of liberal order</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>"New forms of disruption"</i>	1
<i>"We can label this logic, evasion"</i>	6
<i>"Bringing risk into the picture"</i>	12
<i>"Openness and closure produce one another"</i>	18
<i>"Deepening security and the possibilities of protest"</i>	18
<i>"It's the nature of the target that matters"</i>	22
<i>"Linking anonymity and liberalism"</i>	25
<i>"Disorder as an evasive tactic"</i>	30
<i>"No pure, angelic form of liberalism"</i>	34
<b>2 Resistance, time, and the state in question</b>	<b>39</b>
<i>"Between permanence and temporariness"</i>	39
<i>"The enduring and the transient"</i>	45
<i>"A standpoint from which to question the state"</i>	54
<i>"The melting of all that is solid"</i>	60
<i>"Alongside permanence is the possibility of non-permanence"</i>	66
<i>"Creating new meanings and framings"</i>	72
<b>3 Neoliberalism, hyper-security, and the bounding of political life</b>	<b>79</b>
<i>"The desirability of publicness"</i>	79
<i>"The internal/external divide"</i>	85
<i>"A range of interventions and forms of presence"</i>	90
<i>"Looking at the interspatial logics of deployment"</i>	98

*"What sort of power comes along with evasion?"* 104

*"The state is a deployment machine"* 111

**4 Toward a progressive politics of evasion 118**

*"Lapsing into a defeatism"* 118

*"Evading deployments"* 124

*"A progressive politics of evasion"* 128

*"Entering a trajectory of transformation"* 133

*"Leave it up to the people"* 138

*"What kind of new collectivities are in play here?"* 143

*"Closure is needed to create passages"* 148

*"The battle within societies over various forms of collectivity can't be avoided"* 152

*"Making passage and re-collectivity constitutional logics of the state"* 157

*Index* 164

## Annotated contents

**1 Security, circulation, and the limits of liberal order 1**

*"New forms of disruption"* 1

Mr V opens the discussion abruptly with concerns about groups such as WikiLeaks and Anonymous; leading into the topics of the NSA/Snowden revelations; private versus public provision on the internet; the power of corporations on the internet; and their complicity with the national security state – considered with regard to the changes and departures these developments entail as well as an apprehension that the intensification around security since 9/11 is part of a broader transformation.

*"We can label this logic, evasion"* 6

These developments are set against the background of what is entailed in the operation of relatively open communication systems where groups and individuals evade limits in order to confront power; as well as the broader question of what this implies for liberal versus non-liberal orders.

*"Bringing risk into the picture"* 12

The forms of evasion and confrontation made possible through open systems can be thought of in terms of the problems of circulation within and across spaces and social systems, as suggested by Foucault, who also viewed these through the lens of risk. The discussion addresses the question of how systems address risk – and Deleuze's control society concept is considered. Mr V remains concerned whether these formulations can contend with innovation that actually changes the system itself and creates conditions of risk.

*"Openness and closure produce one another"* 16

Latham tries to push the discussion beyond risk and safety concerns, to consider how quickly a system becomes complicated that might be considered open; where even within an open system closure is required; where distinct social realms and spaces within the system get demarcated; and where, if there are no places to transfer between, forms of openness and movement that are possible would have no meaning in the first place. Mr V explains that this all makes finding security strategies to deal with circulation all the more imperative.

*“Deepening security and the possibilities of protest” 18*

Mr V further underscores that he is concerned not just with mobility in systems, but how they are vulnerable to being altered through intervention as a form of disruptive confrontation (for example, by hackers). These possibilities and tensions are put in historical context, specifically with regard to the complexities of global security and protest in relation to the formation of communication, public sphere, and commercial infrastructures across the centuries.

*“It’s the nature of the target that matters” 22*

The schizophrenic nature of US policy toward digital activism is discussed with regard to what is seen as acceptable and safe or unacceptable and threatening. Comparison to earlier forms of activism is made with the introduction by Mr V of the notion that today there is a sort of transience, where “threats can come not only from anywhere, or from anybody, but also in forms not yet known or from sources you otherwise might trust.”

*“Linking anonymity and liberalism” 25*

Latham argues, to a skeptical Mr V, that transience and “coming out of nowhere” is linked to anonymity and ultimately to openness and liberal order. The implications are explored, including how Anonymous and related practice can be placed on the plane of liberal logics along with mass surveillance and the logics of control societies.

*“Disorder as an evasive tactic” 30*

After reiterating how openness is an essential part of liberal logics and reconsidering arguments about the attempt to find a balance between liberty and security, Mr V and Latham engage the notion that autonomous sites of resistance and media are forced to practice what Mr V calls a sort of self-evasion, a self-limiting practice resulting from the tensions between liberalism’s characteristics of openness and closure. Latham brings up the question of whether forms and practices of disorder are important aspects of evasion.

*“No pure, angelic form of liberalism” 34*

The discussion turns to the way the spaces liberalism creates for openness, agency, and autonomy can equally create closeness and repression. The necessity for evasion in this context is considered, along with the question of what it means to attempt to advance openness in the face of increasing security and control. Latham suggests that to probe deeper it is necessary to put the state as a political form in question.

**2 Resistance, time, and the state in question****39***“Between permanence and temporariness” 39*

Picking up, from where the last discussion ended, on the necessity of putting the state in question as a political form, the notion of political time is introduced. More specifically, consideration is given to the ways that the state elevates itself to the status of a permanent political form; and has the power to pronounce on what else is

temporary or permanent. Latham argues this distinction – and temporality more generally – is an important consideration when determining the legitimacy of the state. Mr V defends the value of state-established permanence regarding justice, rights, and citizenship.

*“The enduring and the transient” 45*

How widespread the contrast of temporariness and permanence is within Western modernity is discussed. Latham explains the precarious nature of temporariness and defends the need to push beyond it, but not by recourse to state-based permanence; while Mr V maintains that progressive change can come from moving within the context of permanence to improve the enduring frameworks of the state. Consideration is given to groups such as migrants and First Nations in relation to settled citizenry and whether the types of benefits permanence ostensibly offers can be obtained without reliance on a state taken to be permanent.

*“A standpoint from which to question the state” 54*

It is established by both Latham and Mr V that the state as a force for permanence has a uniquely long history and has evolved many practices, customs, and rules for producing permanence; along with the power to pronounce on the permanence and temporariness of organizations and practices across social and political life. Even corporations, Mr V argues, do not possess this power. Discussion turns to the question of what it might mean to put the state and its permanence in question, specifically through perspectives such as Anarchism. Latham points to how movements like Anarchism are forced to operate in this world of permanence and temporariness and, more generally, face dilemmas around how to sustain gains in support and organization.

*“The melting of all that is solid” 60*

The state, Latham contends, may not be as unique as first thought as a producer of both permanence and temporariness. Institutions such as private property and forces associated with globalization also exhibit this duality. Consideration is given to the relationship between these broader global – and historical – contexts and the state. Mr V suggests that more fluid and transitory contexts explored by postmoderns may, counter-intuitively, open up the possibility of restoring a progressive, just state. Latham reminds Mr V that within those broader contexts is located the basis for hyper-security and the neoliberal state.

*“Alongside permanence is the possibility of non-permanence” 66*

Building on the historical contexts laid out in the previous section exploring the establishment of permanence and temporariness, Latham tries to move the discussion outside of the binary of permanent and temporary, seeking to explore its inter-subjective and contingent nature; where permanence can be seen as only a claim, however powerful, which is subject to being revoked and retrenched, leaving Mr V’s permanent justice at best vulnerable. Meanwhile, Mr V insists on the rightful dominance of the state as setting the terms for political time and Latham points to the way others senses of time might matter for political life and putting the state in question.

*“Creating new meanings and framings” 72*

In this concluding section the discussion touches on the political issues associated with permanence in an attempt to challenge notions of time and history that underpin the supposedly concrete nature of the state. Latham brings up relevant critical thought – such as Nietzsche’s concept of the untimely, Walter Benjamin’s “dialectical reversal,” Deleuze and Guattari’s “lines of flight,” and Alain Badiou’s “event” – in an attempt to explore ways to organize political time that are alternatives to the state. Mr V insists these alternatives have to have real traction, while Latham counters that gaining greater purchase on the value of alternatives necessitates further discussion of the relationship between political space and the state, which they agree to address next time.

**3 Neoliberalism, hyper-security, and the bounding of political life 79***“The desirability of publicness” 79*

Mr V returns in this meeting concerned with making sure the question of the public realm and authority is made central in any consideration of political space and alternatives. After an exchange on the merits and drawbacks of arguments in the 1990s about the “retreat of the state,” Latham addresses V’s concerns regarding publicness and argues that the possibilities and limits of public authority are shaped by how the state is present and absent in social space (or “society”). How this also relates to the temporariness and permanence of the state – considered in the last meeting (Chapter 2) - is also discussed.

*“The internal/external divide” 85*

The question of publicness and authority is considered in relation to the divide between the domestic and international realms. Latham insists that there are far more commonalities in what states do across the domestic/international divide than typically assumed; and that gaining some insight into these commonalities can aid our understanding of the dwindling public realm and intensification of security. Mr V asserts there are very important differences between the domestic and international realm, and this difference holds out promise for the remaking of the public-oriented commonwealth.

*“A range of interventions and forms of presence” 90*

Continuing with the domestic/international realm theme, Latham contends that one way in to understand both the differences and commonalities between these realms is to focus on what states do or don’t do – how they are present and absent – in social spaces (both inside and outside of national borders). This can be seen as relevant to states in both the global North and South – a claim that troubles Mr V. The role of state presence in constituting the public realm is considered. Of particular concern is the way that, despite publicness, state presence can be very narrow, bounded, and vulnerable to withdrawal. Based on observations about presence and absence, the connections between security and neoliberalism are discussed.

*“Looking at the interspatial logics of deployment” 98*

Pursuing these connections further, Latham argues, can be aided by focusing on the political infrastructure of the state that makes its presence and absence possible. More specifically, the state is present through the way its agencies, experts, forces, and representatives are deployed in local contexts. These deployments are interspatial in that they involve sending pieces or fragments of an organization from a headquarters or center to another space such as a local community. In this light the potential narrowness and tentativeness (temporariness) of state presence is more visible – along with the links to neoliberalism, hyper-security, and practices of evasion. Mr V, in contrast, argues that such an approach is reductive and overlooks the reality of the national public realm, along with the possibilities of strengthening it against tendencies toward abandonment of broad commitments to the public good.

*“What sort of power comes along with evasion?” 104*

Mr V charges that the question of power is missing here, which prompts a discussion of the notion of power set against the context, and evasion and deployments as considered in the previous section. Latham highlights how power, conceived in negative terms, is not just a matter of control over subjects, but a matter of channeling and bounding where people, discourses, and resources are injected into a contained situation for the purposes of reinforcing the flexible and adaptable control mechanisms of neoliberalism.

*“The state is a deployment machine” 111*

In this concluding section Mr V reasserts that there is nothing inevitable about negative power or the neoliberal and anti-public aspects of deployments; nor even that societies are stuck with a political world shaped by deployments. Latham agrees, but also emphasizes that we cannot underestimate the implications of the impact of states and corporations distributing their presence, entrenching their power, and ultimately channeling social and political life in ways that empty and level out the so-called democratic project. They agree to focus next time they meet on alternatives that might exist for challenging and transforming these conditions.

**4 Toward a progressive politics of evasion 118***“Lapsing into a defeatism” 118*

In this first section we are re-introduced to the debates surrounding the logic of deployment from the previous meeting. Mr V suggests it might be possible for progressive forces to take control of deployments and use them for the public good. He also argues this potential strategy should be complemented by the work of progressive political networks – national and transnational – and communities and activists congregating in the public square. Latham counters that in the midst of a world of deployments this hope may be displaced.

*“Evading deployments” 124*

Latham suggests that one way forward may be to evade deployments and their influences. Whereas, Mr V is skeptical that, without transforming the entire social and political system, this can succeed. Mr V insists that control of the political center, the state, is crucial, which in turn is met with skepticism from Latham based on repeated failures of progressive politics in the face of the considerable organizational presence and force of neoliberal capitalism and state hyper-security. Both agree to return to the key conditions that they believe should be kept in mind in identifying alternatives. They discuss the access the forces of neoliberalism and security have to our social and political worlds and how this underlies the abandonment of public and collective life and its replacement with debt, privatization, surveillance, and violence. The section ends with Latham proposing that they probe the question of whether groups and communities get somewhere by evading this access; and with Mr V claiming this leads either to age-old utopian escapist hopes or to protectionism.

*“A progressive politics of evasion” 128*

The discussion turns to whether thinking in terms of the channels – linked previously to deployments – is useful for this strategy of evasion. Latham introduces the concept of “re-collective passage,” to capture this; with passage understood as the social and political pathways leading away, evading in progressive ways, from structures of power (of states and capital) and opening up possibilities for fashioning alternatives. This is distinguished from Deleuze and Guattari’s “lines of flight.” The term “re-collective” is meant to convey the possibilities of fashioning new collective social forms out of various social histories and resources. Comparisons are made to terms such as “public” and “multitude.” Mr V worries that these terms and forms are just an application of spatial labels to familiar notions of resistance and the pursuit of autonomy.

*“Entering a trajectory of transformation” 133*

The attempt, by Latham, to defend the concept of re-collective passage prompts him – after criticism from Mr V that there’s little new here – to distinguish it from more familiar concepts of grass-roots activism, social movements, and prefiguration. More broadly, he argues there is a commonality among those forms of activism – even across the political spectrum – which re-collective passage unites. Consideration is given to the scale of passage, with Latham arguing that it is best to see passage operating at a meso-scale – standing between the micro-scale of individuals and small groups and the macro-scale of whole societies or entire social formations. At the meso-level there is opportunity to transform how societies are organized (such as its borders and forms of work). Mr V is concerned that this abandonment of the macro is yet another bracketing of the political center and the possibilities that electoral politics hold out as a progressive force.

*“Leave it up to the people” 138*

Mr V continues expressing unease with what Latham is suggesting; especially the notion that passage would be open-ended as to the strategies and tactics chosen by

collectivities. He, more generally, pushes Latham to clarify what Mr V sees as a theoretical black hole of popular self-determination and to specify tangible ways that re-collective passage can and is being used by populations on both sides of the political spectrum to circumvent and/or challenge the structures of power. Latham addresses this through examples like community banking which seeks to deflect the flow of revenues from – and generally evade – financial centers like Wall Street in order to build alternative, local public financial institutions.

*“What kind of new collectivities are in play here?” 143*

Despite these explanations Mr V is troubled by a sense that Latham is going in circles and offering no real ways forward for transformation, even in such areas as the challenging of permanence which had been of great concern to Latham in previous discussion. Latham defends passage by pointing to how these are open efforts that are not operating within the permanence framing of the state. The conversation also addresses scale-up issues: how one moves from distinct passages to wider macro-social and political transformation, which Mr V contends rests on a familiar progressive hope for critical mass and widespread mobilization. Latham suggests there are instances of growth and the spread of new forms and political contestation as seen even in late 1980s Eastern Europe. They also discuss more contemporary and quite different examples, disputing whether even to include the attempt to found the non-state electronic currency Bitcoin. The section ends with reflection on what Mr V takes to be the quite real possibility that these passages are very vulnerable to being captured by state and corporate interests.

*“Closure is needed to create passages” 148*

Taking up further the issue of vulnerability, the discussion addresses what can be done to limit it and returns to the theme of anonymity and its relation to passage and the possibilities of evading capture. Latham argues that rather than setting anonymity against identity in re-collective passage, it is better to see the tension between anonymity and established identities and histories in far more complex ways; otherwise they might restrict the possibilities of fashioning new social and political forms. Mr V points to how this, problematically, allows for a wide range of political orientations from Left to Right. He is concerned that the open-endedness of re-collective passage does not contend with the very different Left and Right (e.g. Libertarian) politics that might be drawn up into a passage. Mr V also suspects that the shielding aspect of passages compromises their relationship to the public realm and limits access to public goods in potentially exclusionary ways. Latham addresses this issue through the example of squatters’ movements (regarding access to housing). Mr V further challenges Latham by contending that the whole approach is too strategic and does not address the value of principles as realized in human rights.

*“The battle within societies over various forms of collectivity can’t be avoided” 152*

The question of rights and strategy is taken up in greater detail, with Latham arguing that they can operate in tandem and Mr V arguing that this thinking can lead to

undesirable political outcomes such as domination by the religious Right or new meso-level changes like closing borders to migrants. Latham claims that conflict over collective life is a key site of struggle for the Left and Right, and the attempt to prevent it means making social and political life closed to new ways of organizing it. He also draws on Gramsci's concept of passive revolution to suggest that some change only reinforces existing order and does not count as re-collective passage. Mr V insists that this is too risky and that macro principles are required to distinguish progressive from regressive forces. The example of the movement for the Palestinian right of return is raised by Latham as an example of how progressive and regressive forces can be distinguished through the concept of passage.

*"Making passage and re-collectivity constitutional logics of the state" 157*

In this concluding section, Mr V is pushing Latham for tangible "takeaways" and inroads to large-scale changes. Issues taken up include the place of violence in passage, large-scale revolution, and the relationship between radical alternatives and persisting structures of power. Whereas Mr V sees continued commitments to Anarchistic thinking in Latham's conclusions, Latham counters that we can work with both Anarchism and Statism, and obtain inspiration from Gramsci to look to how passage and re-collectivity can become logics that even help organize future forms of the state – on terms that would be quite different than any state we are aware of now; a sort of re-collective state that internalizes passage and re-collectivity.

*This is a work of political imagination. The character Mr V is a fictitious composite of numerous encounters the author has had across many years and is ultimately the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.*

## Preface

I was not really sure why he chose to contact me and I certainly did not trust the voice on the line when I received the initial phone call out of the blue, as I sat in the office I was assigned while visiting for a semester at a US university. In my home university office I do get calls sometimes from a government office staffer seeking my participation in some policy-outreach effort or asking me to attend some event where a high government official will typically explain (or, rather, justify) a new policy. And there has been the odd caller, here or there, claiming they had proof say that the Chinese were secretly taking over the government, wanting me to endorse such a view. I am polite but get off as quickly as possible.

This call was different. He was actually not pitching something to me but interested in some of my ideas. He said he worked for the US government, dealing with security. Naturally, I was flattered by his mention of a work or two I had written. What academic doesn't crave such attention? When it comes it is especially meaningful since I, like many academics who do not write policy-oriented work, assume my writings are wholly ignored, if not scorned, by the official world (though of course we – typically secretly – hope otherwise).

His tone had a tinge of sociability to it as well and somehow his voice was familiar. He said he was struggling with some policy issues bearing on the relationship between security, government power, popular protest, and changing forms of domestic and global politics. Somehow, some of my ideas were relevant. He asked that we meet face to face to discuss how I might help. I was drawn in like a rapid breath.

We met in a fairly upscale and crowded cafe where I could see that our presence and lingering would not be much noticed amidst a wide assortment of customers. As soon as I approached the man in a green sweater, as instructed, I instantly realized why the voice was so familiar. He was graduate student studying at another institution than my own but whom I had come to know when he was visiting in town to conduct research for his Ph.D. thesis. I recall that he was well trained in the social sciences, aware of many of the trends in contemporary social and political thought of the recent past, and could not only engage with thinkers that are conventional (such as Isaiah Berlin) but also those that are less conventional (such as Michel Foucault). We became familiar with one another because of my participation in a faculty-student seminar series, which he joined on an unofficial,

informal basis (allowed by the organizers to be present, I suspect, because of his charm and insightfulness). Across that year we had the opportunity to spend time after the seminar sessions discussing my work and his, exploring the issues and questions that motivated us both.

But this recognition and history simultaneously deflated and pleased me. I was disappointed that this was not someone who came upon my work somehow and was impressed. However, I was also delighted to see my exchanges with a bright student had some lasting effect and even influence – enough so that he bothered to look into the ideas I struggled with long after he left my orbit. I was also happy to see that he had gone on to an important position, even if it was in the government as opposed to a university or a non-profit.

I felt like I was restarting the relationship with ease, the way I sometimes do with old friends I have not seen for years but with whom I am able to automatically return to familiar banter as though our time apart was mere weeks. He told me that he had wanted to get together to ask whether I would be willing to meet with him regularly across the next few weeks to deliberate over a range of issues bearing on the changing nature of state power and societies within and across national borders. Despite his being a former student I was skeptical and frankly suspicious as to what he – I will call him Mr V – might really want from me and from such an endeavor. All sorts of nonsense crossed by mind. Perhaps someone had put him up to it? But why bother? What was at stake for the wider world of power in engaging with me? Not much I figured. I was well aware that officials, especially at the higher-level, mid-career stage, are under considerable time constraints, with little flexibility well into the evening hours. Meeting time was very scarce.

When I probed him gently and obliquely along these lines Mr V quickly surmised that I was wary and in need of some persuasion. He said that he was at a point in his personal and professional life where he felt the urge for a sort of mini-sabbatical, knowing full well that a real sabbatical would be career suicide right now. The personal side was not about seeking a rest but pursuing some meaningful intellectual realignment. He wanted to get back to thinking critically, at a distance, about many of the weighty issues he had been confronting. He also felt he had lost touch with many of the intellectual impulses and motivations that had got him, in the first place, into political studies and now practice. As a former interlocutor who had treated him as though he was an equal, and for whom he felt some intellectual affinity, I was the person with whom he thought he could most easily re-enter intellectual discussion. Also, he thought the foundation of work I had done over the years at least touched on some of the issues he was grappling with.

The professional factor driving this desired encounter, I was informed, was rooted in his increasing dissatisfaction with what he perceived to be a growing tension between states and societies and a deepening cynicism among officials about any aspirations after the cold war ended regarding strengthening democracy and human rights, fighting inequality, and poverty, or increasing wellbeing among the marginalized. He said he had been thinking of contacting me for a few years now but just could not bring himself to actually do it. The developments of 2011 and 2012 around the so-called Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement, WikiLeaks, street

protests against austerity, but also the new national security laws legalizing expanded forms of surveillance and detainment, finally inspired him to ultimately bother to try to take a bit of time to think a few things through. From what I could surmise at the time, Mr V seemed to be propelled into our adventure by a desire to gain some clarity about how to begin to align changes in the relations between states, corporate power, and societies, with some hope for advancing democracy, rights, and social justice. I think the best way to understand his standpoint is as someone both sympathetic to the pursuit of justice, rights, and freedom by progressive activists and movements and mindful of what he understands to be the challenges of states in pursuing security and order in the current social and political moment.

I think he wanted to arrive at some new plateau where the tensions, if not contradictions, at play in the early twenty-first century would be seen to begin to decrease. I leave it to the reader to decide if this objective was approached and whether it is a worthwhile one (after all, plateaus can be deadening).

He proposed that we meet once a week for four weeks, for very long afternoon coffees. He asked that I lead the discussion and treat our meetings as though they were a retreat of sorts, where we could raise issues we were concerned about and ask questions of one another about our thoughts and assumptions. I was not to worry about hitting any right notes and themes he might have in mind – though he made clear he would be bringing them to the table. He claimed he knew enough about me to know even if he did not like where I might take things that and he would have no problem working through his concerns, based on whatever I might throw his way. I wasn't sure he did know me enough, especially my more recent thinking; and, in any event, what I might argue in discussion would exceed anything I might have published in standard scholarly contexts.

The decision to turn our discussions into a published book stems from my insistence that the exchange between us addresses issues in ways that might be of value to a body of readers. Mr V agreed with that assessment and thought in the end that some sort of record of his concerns would be desirable, given he is usually limited to governmental internal memos and reports. He readily acknowledged that any attempt at writing his own book would mean he could not express himself freely.

What follows represents my attempt to convey the substance of our discussions. I have done my best in the chapters of this book to bring our discussion back to life through as accurate a transcription as possible. References and notes have been added where either an author or a work entered the dialogue or I thought it would be useful to readers to refer to a relevant source or scholarly work. I electronically recorded our conversations with my cell phone, but only after having agreed to destroy them after a designated time and never share the recordings in any form or context. As to the boundaries of the discussion, we agreed mostly to limit discussion of specific current or planned policies, not only because they may help identify Mr V, but also because the emphasis has been put on the political, theoretical, and philosophical dimensions of the current political juncture as we understand it rather than on revealing secret, non-public developments inside the state.

We spoke briefly by phone some time after our last meeting about whether to transcribe the conversations, as accurately as possible word for word. We also explored other possibilities: I could convey the various points made in a first person account; or describe the discussions in a more general way; or even take some other expository approach. We agreed that the transcription had a few advantages. First, it holds out much greater potential for readers to take both sides – Mr V's, and mine – seriously and potentially approach both sympathetically. In this way V's viewpoint will not be mediated by my words and depictions and V's voice can be sustained across the entire book. Also, there is no indoctrination, natural superiority, or student-teacher relationship. Second, it allows for potential insight into how unsettled and even tenuous arguments can be. As I reviewed the transcript I noticed that there was a great deal of uncertainty across the entire discussion. I even saw how upended I became through the engagement with V. He pushed me toward a sort of amalgam of my more Anarchist leanings with his patently statist orientation. Writing up a description of the discussion risked seeking resolution of points – if anything in my favor and back to some purer ideological standpoint. This indeterminacy is also consistent with what is discussed in Chapter 4 regarding the pursuit of contestable paths out from neoliberalism and hyper-security. Finally, the transcribed discussion allows readers to judge whether our exchange was ultimately a failure in addressing and satisfying Mr V's pursuit of answers. In the spirit of learning from mistakes the discussions reveal, repeatedly, the limits of questions and issues as well as the potential.

As I thought about these factors in favor of transcription, I recalled some of the excellent work of Mikhail Bakhtin on the advantages of a dialogic approach in his works *The Dialogical Imagination* and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. A dialogic approach opens the way for more than one distinct voice, perspective, or consciousness. Dialogue allows, potentially, for as direct a presence of these multiple individual beings as possible in written form, and as little of a mediating master expositor as possible. As a result, there is the possibility of a voice speaking through the text that is other than the author's, despite the author's ultimately privileged position of power over what is written. In dialogue the relationship and tensions between voices can become as central as any particular concept or object discussed or argument made. In addition, as the conflict between voices is communicated in the text there is at least the possibility that the text will not ultimately resolve in the author's favor. Consistent with that, Bakhtin contended that dialogue makes it possible for incommensurate exchange and mutually contestable positions to potentially be expressed. In contrast, the monologic approach organized around a total, singular, textual voice, for Bakhtin, represented that of the unitary, hierarchical authority – which runs contrary to the spirit of the encounter between Mr V and me.

What results in my view is an exchange, where on one side is my own critical, post-statist, anti-capitalist perspective informed by a range of theorists associated with post-structuralism, Marxism, and post-Marxism from Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari to Antonio Gramsci, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey. On the other side is Mr V's commitment to seek a

return to a state in a progressive form, tied to the development of social democracy across the twentieth century with its emphasis on social rights and a robust public realm associated with thinkers such as T.H. Marshall and Karl Polanyi. The exchange is set in the context of our current post-globalization moment and the emergence of what can really be thought of as a new seeping and permeating repression throughout society. Issues addressed range from digital activism, sovereignty, and borders to transnationalism, social control, political resistance, and intervention in social and political life.

I am convinced the dialogue offers a read on how people living in liberal capitalist states might – or might not – think through the implications of changing practices and policies around surveillance, detention, political disruption, intervention, pre-emption, and neoliberalization as a departure from more traditional twentieth-century conceptions of the liberal state: anchored, as are so many things, in concepts of the nation, citizenship, the border, effective intervention, and human rights.

While this will become clear from the first chapter onward, I can say here that Mr V entered our discussions worried. As he sees it, state officials, corporate leaders, activists, communities, and even seemingly apolitical individuals across North America and Europe – the part of the world he knows best – are making choices about pursuing security, configuring political order, struggling for justice and rights, seeking wellbeing, as well as remaining inactive and disengaged. Mr V has been concerned that the tensions and incompatibilities across these choices, and in relation to the broader transforming global context, can produce toxic political outcomes.

The initial traces of those outcomes Mr V finds in burgeoning national security programs; thickening borders; WikiLeaks, Anonymous, fears of an open internet; immigrant rights rallies; Occupy movements; student protests; global financial crises – these he held to be signals that the dream of an inevitable march toward a tidy, post-cold war globalization, comfortably anchored in a framework of liberal order, is now left behind.

This, to a degree, flows from the now widespread recognition that the standard globalization story is now patently revealed as the fable it always was. One in which the all too comfortable setting of rising transnationalism, expanding transborder flows, softening sovereignty, and social and political homogenization with a tinge of multiculturalism was to unfold against the background of a slowly transfiguring but stable (liberal) nation-state model inherited from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In its place looms the possibility of states and corporations involved in the permeating, irruptive repression mentioned above, as the war on terror becomes recognized as being a war on societies.

The discussion assumes that as in any historical moment, significant perils and possibilities both exist. The risks are that the liberal state through techniques and practices increasingly at hand, from surveillance to social manipulation and violence, can continue to morph, in partnership with corporations, in previously unanticipated ways into menacing forms. But the possibilities are that progressive peoples and groups can exploit social, organizational, and technical openings and

resources to fashion more just orderings of political and social life within, across, and perhaps beyond the state. As is so often the case, these perils and possibilities are very much interrelated and often in opposition – as policies and actions in one realm provoke counter-actions in the other.

Mr V kept emphasizing the benefits of returning to the progressive state. Whereas for me the one common theme that I came to emphasize as my thought took shape across the issues and topics we discussed it is how important evasion is, even to the very possibility of confrontation. It is all too easy to overlook how freedom to confront and oppose state organs – or more broadly to contend with the structures of power that shape contemporary life – rests on avoidance, escape, and elusion. This close connection between evasion and confrontation is not paradoxical in my view: not only does a world of increasing surveillance and control raise the value and seeming necessity of evasion. More fundamentally, as examples such as the historically vivid Underground Railroad in the US reinforce, the very possibility of freedom, resistance and confrontation, human mobility, and self-determination assumes being in some “other place” (a retreat, an in-between space, at some distance away), from which the very choice about confrontation can be made and perhaps even where alternatives can be devised or pursued. As I observe the events in Greece after the election of Syriza, well after my encounter with Mr V took place, I have only come to appreciate how fragile and difficult it is to get to and sustain such an other place.

Alas, I think there is a double movement afoot, in that the state and capital also embrace the politics of evasion, as they limit and fragment their presence whether it is in what are often called neoliberal policies, elusive security practices, secrecy, concealment, or sheer avoidance. The title of the book, *Politics of Evasion*, was chosen because the discussion kept coming back, in my view, to address in various ways whether approaches to and forms of power were becoming more evasive and with what implications, both desired and dreaded.

## 1 Security, circulation, and the limits of liberal order

*When we came together in our first meeting I was not sure how to start or even if Mr V was to be the initiator. I had come with a somewhat innocent question just to start things off about what he might think is most important regarding the political and social life he thinks is disappearing in the current environment of neoliberalism and heightening security. I was thus somewhat surprised when, after a few minutes of back-and-forth about our current personal lives, Mr V jumped right into a discussion of the internet and security, rather than a more general question. He mentioned some fairly recent news items about the relationship between corporations and activists on the internet. I knew he was involved in some of the policy development in this area. Although surprised, I was not displeased since I had always wondered what some of the thinking might be behind the news headlines and official public statements over the last few years, where we have seen Edward Snowden labeled a traitor, WikiLeaks discussed by the US as an “enemy of the state,” and Anonymous treated along the same continuum as cyberterrorists.<sup>1</sup> I also recall thinking in the back of my mind that this topic opened up onto a few important questions about the current political moment that might help us get our discussions started – especially since it related to deepening security practices associated with increasing surveillance.*

### “New forms of disruption”

MR V: I want to get your take on something I’ve been puzzling over. I assume that given your interest in security and the internet, you noticed how corporations were enlisted in the so-called battle against the basically unprecedented actions of WikiLeaks and Anonymous. It was all over the news in late 2010. Both Facebook and Twitter blocked the accounts and pages associated with Anonymous and what they called their Operation Payback campaign. Anonymous was upset about the

<sup>1</sup> A discussion of the possibility of this designation is available at “Exposed: U.S. may have designated Julian Assange and WikiLeaks an ‘enemy of the state,’” September 27, 2012. Available at: [www.democracynow.org/2012/9/27/exposed\\_us\\_may\\_have\\_designated\\_julian](http://www.democracynow.org/2012/9/27/exposed_us_may_have_designated_julian) (accessed October 4, 2012).