THE POLITICS OF WITHDRAWAL

HGGS Forum 2019
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In recent years, in both political theory and political discourse a host of, often interrelated, notions have come to the fore that closely relate to strategies of withdrawal: exit, destitution, exodus, disconnection, retreat, refusal, etc. On the one hand, as Bruno Latour explains in his recent Down to Earth, the global ruling class is effectively preparing to exit a planet they have already given up on (from phantasies of space colonization to militarized island retreats). Meanwhile, Brexit and the US’ withdrawal from trade agreements and the Paris climate treaty, are symptomatic of political dreams of autonomy and isolation.

On the other hand, in radical (left) politics and political theory, we find calls to different strategies of withdrawal and fundamental refusal of the status quo: exodus from contemporary capitalist relations, invisibility as resistance in a context of ‘surveillance capitalism’, strategies of anonymity and tactics of destitution. Correspondingly, in response to the growing concern 24/7 capitalism, there’s a surge of report on disconnecting through opt-outs and burn-outs, self-care and self-precarization, and various other forms of (literal) retreats: from writing retreats and digital detoxes, to alternate forms of living, and other more radical forms of communing.