

**Figures of Order**

**Issue 1**

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**INTERSECTIONS**

Transitory Thinking

Systems . Signs . Disturbances

Edited by Hans Holl and Jürgen Miller

## **FIGURES OF ORDER**

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**Crossroads**      Transitory Thinking: Systems.Signs.Disturbances

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## Editorial

### Observations on the margins of order

*Hans Holl/ Jürgen Miller*

“To the ships” (Nietzsche)

At the very outset of this magazine, we find ourselves right in the middle of a storm of opinions and talk that constantly surrounds and excites us. “Figures of Order” attempts to decipher the confusion that arises from this. This is not a new idea. Nevertheless, it is our concern to respond to an urgency, to forge a tool for establishing an order that is always at risk. And a medium of possibility, because we do not want to confirm or criticize systems; we want to make their forms visible—including those that they do not want to or cannot make visible.

The title is ambiguous: “Figures of Order” refers not only to forms of order—symbolic systems, the categories of law, the scripts of culture - but also to their figurations as they appear in literature, institutions, and crises. Theory can contain a diagnostic trace that points the way as we wander through the chaotic fragments and debris left behind by the storms mentioned above.

Aesthetic thinking is the compass guiding these journeys.

The aesthetic as a place of the symbolic is what makes orders experiential in the first place. Without symbols, no society—and without critique of the symbolic, no freedom. That is why we focus on symbolic thinking. Symbolic thinking, that is, thinking in and with words and images, allows us to analyze what we consider to be real.

Theory is not an antiquarian activity but an intervention. It only becomes relevant when it confronts the present. We cannot read Kafka without thinking about the manifold forms of surveillance, punishment, and justice in the modern state. We cannot try to understand China without stumbling over our own patterns of interpretation, prejudices, and, above all, ignorance masquerading as opinion. That is why we do not just write about systems—we think in and with systems. We are aware of their contingency.

“Figures of Order” is not a discourse bunker. We create a resonance space for texts that are risky in the sense of the word's origin from *\*resecum\** ‘rock cliff’, to be shattered on it, but also as a firm foothold in stormy times. For us, fiction and analysis are not mutually exclusive, but intersect and interweave. In our opinion, theory is only present when it is allowed to be poetic. When it describes, analyzes, and shapes.

In this sense, the decidedly political impetus of our magazine should also be understood: “anti-fascism” as an epistemological stance. Because thinking means de-naturalizing, de-essentializing. And: to differentiate. Not between friend and enemy – but between what can be said and what remains unsaid. Between order and its exclusions. That is why we are editors. Not to administer – but to open up spaces of possibility for voices that move between theory, poetry, and criticism. For thinking on thresholds. We welcome the unfinished, the now.

## Philosophy is fundamentally anti-fascist

### Portrait Chris Mahnke

*Hans Holl*

The black that Chris Mahnke wears is not a fashionable nostalgic choice, but stems from a metaphysical weariness. No one can remember ever seeing him laugh—just a slight twitch at the corners of his mouth when the word “reason” is mentioned, and he silently puts it in quotation marks. He teaches at a university whose name is irrelevant. His lectures are called “On the Possibility of the Beginning” or “Resistance of the Aesthetic” and usually begin with a quote that no one knows – or a sentence that no one understands. Some say he is a post-Hegelian Spinozist. Others call him an aesthetic nominalist. He himself prefers not to talk about himself at all, but then laughs at these attempts to categorize him. Born in 1969 in a small town in eastern Hesse. School bored him, community service disturbed him, a year in China shaped him – less politically than existentially. He experienced his philosophical breakthrough, as he once said, “not through reading, but through silence.” It was on a bus in Hong Kong that he first had the feeling that truth had something to do with vulnerability. The double-decker bus was driving on a road that was far too narrow, constantly tearing branches, twigs, and leaves from the tropical trees and bushes along the roadside.

Mahnke rarely writes. When he does, it is in the form of miniatures, fragments, figures of thought. His texts appear anonymously, as marginalia in the footnotes of others. It is said that a large part of his manuscripts consists of deletions. And yet, among those who are still interested in philosophy as a way of life, he is considered a kind of anachronistic figure of clarity.

“Philosophy,” says Mahnke, “is not systematic; philosophy today must be situational. It begins where speech falters. And that is precisely why it is anti-fascist: because it allows faltering, indeed requires it.”

### What does “philosophy” mean in Mahnke's sense?

It is early evening, and the seminar room is almost empty. Most of the students did not return after the fire alarm. The floor is still wet from the sprinkler system. Only four people are sitting on chairs that have been rearranged at random. Mahnke stands at the window and looks out at the fog rolling across the concrete courtyard. “Thinking is not an answer, but a withdrawal,” he finally says.

“A sentence does not begin with ‘I’. It begins with a break.” One of the students – the one with the shorthand notes – asks if this is a criticism of Kant. Mahnke shakes his head – a gestural response. Then he goes to the blackboard and writes three words: power – form – disturbance. “Philosophy,” he says, “is not a science of justification. It is resistance to the justified when it wants to become or has become the world order.” “That is why,” he continues, “it is fundamentally anti-fascist. Not in the sense of a political program, but as a form of thinking that does not tolerate the closed.” “Where there is order, there must be questions.”

### Interjection: And what about Heidegger?

"Isn't Heidegger a philosopher?" someone asks from the back row. Silence. For a moment, you sense that the sentence is more than just a question. It is one of those rifts mentioned above. Chris Mahnke looks up. Then he says, "Of course he is. But what does that say about philosophy?"

Heidegger, the thinker of being, the language magician, the self-proclaimed savior of the "origin," the university rector of 1933, the speaker of the Führer state, the political silent one after Auschwitz. His thinking is too great and too unique to be ignored. And too compromised to be accepted unbroken. For Mahnke, Heidegger's philosophy is not an example of fascist thinking, but of a dangerous self-absolutization of thought. It is not philosophy itself, but the philosopher's attitude, his claim to exclusive access to "being," that opens the door to political appropriation. Those who turn philosophy into revelation remove it from criticism—and make it susceptible to totalization. Mahnke insists: Philosophy must immunize itself against this temptation—through self-doubt, permeability, difference. "Heidegger is proof that philosophy can drift toward political power—namely, when it believes it can hear the origin."

So what Mahnke means when he says that philosophy is fundamentally anti-fascist is not a historical judgment. It is a challenge, a test, and a risk. "Philosophy is only anti-fascist," says Mahnke, "if it takes on Heidegger – and yet remains open."

### The necessity of disruption

Mahnke rarely says "we." But when he does, he does not mean a collective, but a vulnerability that can be shared. For him, thinking is not communicative, but confrontational. It does not say "This is how it is," but "This cannot remain so." That is why philosophy for him is not teaching, not school, not tradition. It is disruption. An interruption in the flow of the self-evident. An irritation in the consensus. A moment of form—against formation. "The only form of freedom we have left," says Mahnke, "is interruption." He has no theory of politics. He also has no program. But he has a kind of attention—for the noise that arises when meaning shifts. For the twitch of a gesture, the echo of a thought, the hesitation before a yes. In one of his rare lectures—held in an almost empty hall—Mahnke concludes: "I don't believe in the power of thought. But I believe that thought can disrupt. And that's enough." Then he leaves. Without saying goodbye. Only the echo remains. And the chair on which he sat remains empty.

This text is not a portrait. Nor is it a tribute. It is an attempt to show the disruptive power of thinking – against the totalitarian, against the smooth, against the unbroken. Chris Mahnke may not exist. But the thinking he thinks – that is real. And necessary.

## A Figures of the State

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### The Organisational Chart of Leviathan: Carl Schmitt in the Shadow of Digital Administration

Hans Holl

This text attempts to confront Schmitt's classic thesis, "*Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception*," with the reality of algorithmic administration today. What does sovereignty mean in an age in which it is not decision-making but automated process logic that shapes the everyday life of political institutions? Is the state still a body — or has it already become an organigrammatic network in which responsibility evaporates? *"The state was once a body — a monster, but tangible. Hobbes called it Leviathan. Carl Schmitt, still under the spell of this figure, transferred its power to decision-making. Today we are faced with a completely different picture: not a monster, not a beast, but a diagram. Not a head, but an interface. Not a sovereign, but an administrator."*

#### The Leviathan: Allegory of the Sovereign Body

*"Nature has made man such that, in a state without communal order, he becomes the enemy of man."*  
— Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651)

The state was once a body — a monster, powerful and tangible. Hobbes called it Leviathan. Carl Schmitt takes this figure further and shifts its power to decision-making. Today, we are faced with a completely different picture: the state becomes a diagram. No longer a head, but an interface. No longer a sovereign, but an administrator.

Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* is more than a treatise on political philosophy. It is an image, an icon of modernity, a symbol of how the state was conceived and imagined as a response to fear, insecurity, and violence. The famous copperplate engraving by Abraham Bosse on the title page shows a colossal human being — composed of the many small bodies of his subjects. This human being wears a crown, a sword in one hand, a bishop's crook in the other. He looks down on a landscape of churches, city walls, and courts. This Leviathan is not a state in the modern administrative sense. He is a figure and, as such, he symbolically embodies the sovereign. He does not exist through legal systems, paragraphs, or procedures, but through the idea that there is a body that stands above all other bodies, in which all can be absorbed without losing themselves — a body that provides protection by guaranteeing order through force.

The allegory aims at something other than institutional differentiation: it imagines the state as a unity, as a whole, as a place of decision-making. The subjects see in the Leviathan not only a king, but the promise of protection — a protection that springs not from moral insight, but from fear of the anarchic state of nature. Hobbes constructs the state here not as a moral institution, but as a response to the symbolic void of fear. The Leviathan is not only sovereign because it decides; it is sovereign because it is a figure in which decision-making becomes visible as figure.

This idea can no longer compete with the present. The modern state no longer acts as a body. It does not manifest itself in the gestures of the sovereign, but in the procedures of the administration, in its processes. Its face is not that of a human being — it is the organisational chart.

## The Exceptional Case: Schmitt's Sovereignty as Decision

*"Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception."*

— Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (1922)

Carl Schmitt shifts the centre of the state from the body to the decision. While Hobbes imagines the sovereign as a visible body that banishes the fear of the state of nature, Schmitt understands the sovereign as an invisible authority that becomes visible in moments of crisis — through its decisions. The norm is not the foundation of the state, but its suspension. The state does not constitute itself where it enforces order, but where it creates it — through the act of establishing order. The state of exception, according to Schmitt, is not a legal anomaly, but the place where the state reveals itself in its existence as a political power.

This idea is decisionist in that it prioritises not the law but the will, not the procedure but the act. The sovereign is not bound by the norm — he creates the norm because he decides whether it applies. The state of exception is not a disturbance but a moment of truth for politics.

Herein lies the ambivalence of Schmitt's theory: in his radicalisation of decision-making as the fundamental moment of the state, he opens the door to authoritarian models of order — to sovereignty beyond democratic procedures. Decision-making is not a deliberative process, but an act. And this act is not based on arguments, but on the power to decide.

However, the democratic state is also granted this power (emergency laws, etc.). In this respect, it would be worth discussing further to what extent the modern democratically constituted state is also characterised by the difference between background machinery and performance. We are currently seeing in the United States how the executive power of the head of state still seems to be bound by the procedural requirements of the state apparatus, which is independent of his leadership.

According to Schmitt, the state is not a state because it has rules, but because it can suspend all rules in an emergency. This made Schmitt a theorist of dictatorship — but also an observer of a void that often remains unthought in liberal orders: What happens when order fails? Who decides whether a decision needs to be made at all?

## From Body to Map: Bureaucracy and Organisational Charts

*The transition from physical representation to schematic control — administrative logic as the disembodiment of the state*

Schmitt's image of Leviathan as a symbol of the modern state is marked by a paradoxical visibility: the state appears as a body — powerful, indivisible, sovereign — but within it lies what Schmitt calls "soul theft": the disappearance of substantive politics in favour of empty procedures and neutralised norms. In digital administrative logic, this process reaches an extreme: the state is cartographed.

With advancing bureaucratisation and technologisation, a profound transformation is taking place: power is shifting from the body to the map. Administrative apparatuses are replacing personal representation with abstract structures — the organisational chart is the visual form of this new logic of control. Representation becomes schematic.

Max Weber saw bureaucracy as the most rational form of modern rule: anonymous, rule-based, depersonalised. Administration works precisely because it belongs to no one — it is functional, not

charismatic. Bodies disappear behind the scheme, the plan, the system. The state loses its flesh and becomes a diagram. This disembodiment marks an epistemic turning point: the state is conceived as a cybernetic system — a rule-based information-processing unit. Michel Foucault's analyses of microphysics of power meet Norbert Wiener's cybernetics here: subjectless control, faceless government.

In lived reality, however, the longing for embodiment remains. In the rhetoric of populist movements, in the media personalisation of political leadership, or in the simulation of statesmanlike presence, the body returns as symbol — but mostly, following modern media rules of attention, as façade, as exteriority. Operational control remains out of reach, in the hands of algorithms, process chains, and organisational charts, kept running by tireless technocrats and bureaucrats.

Against this backdrop, Schmitt's warning about an empty state, whose visibility is nothing more than an illusion, takes on new relevance. The Leviathan in digital administration is a network plan: dissected, transparent, but intangible. What once appeared as the metaphysical body of politics is now a dashboard.

The question remains: **Who speaks in the organisational chart? Who bears responsibility** in a system that shuns subjectivity and simulates embodiment? The disembodiment of the state is not just an administrative issue — it is a political challenge of the first order.

## Post-Digital Governance

*Predictive governance, platform state, automated decision-making / loss of the state of exception: continuous operation without a decision point*

In Schmitt's classical thinking, the sovereign was the one who decided on the state of exception. This established a clear boundary between norm and exception, between order and decision-making, between administration and sovereignty. In the age of digitality, the state becomes a platform, governance becomes continuous, and exceptions disappear into algorithms.

**Predictive governance** — the steering of social affairs based on future probabilities — increasingly replaces the principle of decision as a guide to action with the principle of anticipation. Governance is no longer based on reaction, but on pre-emption. The future is calculated before it occurs and translated back into the present in the form of normative operations. The classic decision, which marks a break in the continuum of time, is replaced by continuous adjustment. **The system controls without pause.**

This transition is not only a question of technical possibilities, but also an expression of a structural change in political rationality. The **platform state** — as outlined, for example, by Antoinette Rouvroy or Shoshana Zuboff — replaces political deliberation with data-driven regulation. Governance no longer takes place through law and command, but through **interfaces** and **feedback loops**. Users move in a normatively pre-structured space that simulates freedom for them, but essentially optimises their behaviour in the interests of the platforms.

In this post-digital configuration, the state of exception is lost — not because it is no longer possible, but because it becomes **invisible**. Instead of distinguishing between exception and rule, algorithmic control creates a permanent normality: a continuously updated present that responds to deviations not by decision, but by **recalibration**. This is the state of **algorithmic normality** — a term that replaces the political with contingency management.



The **EU AI Act**, for example, aims to create transparency and controllability — but what is being controlled? Not an act of will, not a sovereign decision, but a **chain of probabilities**. The governance of the future is not decided — it is **calibrated**.

While Schmitt conceives the decision point as an act of sovereignty, in the digital state there is the **update**. Decision is depersonalised, externalised, automated. But this also undermines political responsibility: the pressure to decide is reduced — not because conflicts disappear, but because they are managed technocratically.

This development culminates in **automated decision-making**: decisions that are no longer made by a subject but generated by a system — for example, in social credit scoring, predictive policing, or automated benefit granting. The question of *who* makes the decision becomes unanswerable — because it is answered by the system itself, without recourse to a responsible centre.

The result is a new form of Leviathan: no longer a metaphysical body, but a **calculating shadow**. It is everywhere and nowhere, efficient, forward-looking — and sovereign precisely through the absence of decision.

The challenge now lies not in pitting governance against digitalisation, but in penetrating its structural logic. Only thus can a critical theory of political design in the age of **automated normality** be conceived.

### Post-Decisionist Masks: Trump as a Simulacrum of the Sovereign

The term “sovereign,” which refers to the one who decides on states of exception, seems tailor-made for Donald Trump. However, on closer look, a shift appears. Trump’s political practice is not a decisionist emergency, but a **spectacle of decision-making**.

Donald Trump presents himself as a radical opponent of “the system” — not as a reformer, but as a **decision-maker against the system**. His presidency is characterised by a permanent media battle, tweeted decrees, and the spectacular use of “executive orders.” However, unlike in Schmitt’s view, the decision does not unfold an order-creating, constitutive power. It becomes a **gesture**, a **pose**, an **episode** in the spectacle of political communication. This is one reason why we have seen one loud-mouthed decision after another withdrawn or toned down.

Schmitt’s emergency, in which the sovereign constitutes law through his decision in the exceptional situation, loses its solemn depth in this postmodern media economy. Decision is no longer the source of order, but a moment of **media attention** — a disruptive signal without lasting consequence. It **evaporates** — like a tweet that has disappeared from the timeline the next day.

Trump is not a sovereign in the classical sense, but a **pop-political avatar**, a carrier of media over-coding. His figure eludes both physical representation (as in Hobbes) and structural integration (as in the organisational chart of modern administration). Rather, he embodies a **symbolic void**, a form without substance that exists only through affective resonance and algorithmic visibility.

We propose the term **post-decisionist sovereignty** for this phenomenon: a form of political authority no longer constituted by real decisions, but by their **simulation**. It is not the decision-maker who is central, but the **event** — the moment of irritation, the exception without consequence. It is a concept of sovereignty without substance, a permanent simulation of an emergency that never arrives.

In this sense, the political figure of Trump becomes a **caricature** of Schmitt's sovereign: what was once a tragic moment — the decision in a state of exception — becomes a farce. Pose replaces action, reaction replaces responsibility, media play replaces order. The post-decisionist figure is no longer the master of the exception, but its **product**.

While the West struggles with populist decision-theatre, China has found another figure: the **coded Leviathan**. In its social credit system there are no exceptions at all — every deviation is **quantified**, not judged. Here, the sovereign is not a decision-maker — but an **evaluation grid**.

### Schmitt in the Clouds: From Exception to Function

Can there be sovereignty without decision-making? The state as a cloud system: distributed power, distributed responsibility.

Schmitt's famous formula operates with a clear logic of boundaries: decision-making constitutes sovereignty; sovereignty creates order. In this way of thinking, the state of exception is not an anomaly, but the **truth of politics** — the moment when the state suspends the law from within in order to save itself.

But what if there is no longer an exception because there is no longer a point of decision? What if the state is not a body, a person, or an entity with a centre — but a **cloud system** in which power, data, and responsibility are distributed and dynamically allocated? Can sovereignty still exist under these conditions?

Digital administration operates on the basis of **function**, not decision. Systems regulate themselves — via feedback, algorithms, protocols. Decisions are not made, but **determined**; not justified, but **executed**. Governance is not the expression of a sovereign will, but the outcome of a **techno-economic optimisation** process.

The state in the cloud is not a Leviathan, but an **operating system**. Its sovereignty lies not in deciding on exceptions, but in **maintaining operations** — even in exceptional cases. The emergency becomes a **lag**, a **disruption**, a **bug** in the system. The answer is then not a state of emergency, but a **patch**.

The logical consequence: the state of exception becomes **invisible**, not because it is prevented, but because it is **recoded**. What used to be a political rupture now appears as a **technical conflict**. The systems continue to run — even when no one knows who controls them. The cloud knows **no interruption**.

**Function replaces decision.** And with the decision, the place of politics also disappears. What remains is a state of **continuous reaction**, not active shaping. This renders Schmitt's question of who makes the decision obsolete — or radicalises it: **Who decides that there is no longer a decision?**

In this paradoxical situation, Schmitt himself appears like a figure from the past: a theorist of the **sovereign point** in the age of the **permanent line**. And yet it is precisely this tension that makes him readable — not as a nostalgic caller for authority, but as a diagnostician of the structural **undecidability** of the present.

For the cloud is not neutral. Its architecture **inscribes normativity** — through prioritisation, access, visibility. Its processes create order without naming it. And this is precisely where political theory could start afresh: not in calling for the return of decision-making, but in analysing the **new forms of digital exception**.

The question is not: *How can sovereignty return?* But rather: *How does rule function without decision-making — and who benefits from it?*

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### Footnote

See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (1922), especially the definition: “Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception.” Schmitt frames decision-making as the ultimate source of political order — a theology of power in which the miracle is replaced by the sovereign. Giorgio Agamben (*Homo Sacer*, 1995) extends this by showing how the state of exception increasingly becomes the norm: a permanent suspension of law. Jean Baudrillard, in *La société de consommation* (1970) and *Simulacres et Simulation* (1981), describes the detachment of the sign of decision from its execution — decision as image. Peter Sloterdijk (*Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals*, 2005) points to the dissolution of traditional power through a new aesthetics of the event, in which decision becomes an atmospheric effect. Against this backdrop, Trump is less a sovereign than an artefact of visibility in media feedback systems — a “moment of disruption without consequence.”

*“The Leviathan had a face. The organisational chart has fields. The cloud has zones. Perhaps the state is not dead — only unresponsive.”*

## C World-Signs

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# How I Learnt to Orient Myself in a World without Empire

Von Charles Dickens

mit einer Nachbemerkung von Hans Holl

## Prologue: On Becoming Lost

I confess it was not until I found myself hopelessly disoriented in a Beijing suburb – surrounded by faceless high-rises, traffic humming like an infernal machine, and the sun quite unable to penetrate the thick filter of urban haze – that I began to think, in earnest, about orientation.

Not physical orientation, mind you. That had long ceased to matter. One no longer walks to arrive, but to circulate; not to inhabit, but to transit. The modern world, I realised, is not a map, but a flowchart – and I was somewhere at the margins of its logic.

It was then that I recalled a curious notion – one whispered into my ear decades ago by a retired opium clerk, deep in the warehouses of Limehouse: “The Chinese do not build for space, Mr. Dickens – they build for breath.”

## On Breath and Order

Feng Shui, I learnt (far too late), means wind and water. But what it governs is not the weather, nor the plumbing, nor the scent of tea leaves in a kitchen. It governs the invisible skeleton of the world – the balance between stillness and movement, mountain and stream, gate and threshold.

Where the British Empire drew lines – straight, extractive, totalising – the Chinese drew flows. Theirs is not a world of borders, but of vectors.

I wandered through hutongs aligned along axes no colonial surveyor would accept. I drank tea in teahouses placed not for convenience, but for harmony. Even the fish in the pond seemed to swim according to some unwritten choreography. I began to suspect that I was the only element out of place.

## On the Loss of Empire and the Need for Signs

In London, we had chimneys and counting-houses. Our rooms were cubes; our society, a ledger. Every object had its place – its postal code, its legal owner, its moral value.

But modernity has grown unkempt. Our signs have lost their referents. We navigate now by algorithms, not by stars. We find our way via devices that do not know why they direct us – only where. The world no longer speaks.

Feng Shui, by contrast, whispers. It does not instruct, but suggests. It does not command, but invites. It restores orientation not by commanding space, but by attuning to it.

And so I began – quite without planning – to reorient myself. I noticed corners. I felt draughts. I watched the way cats chose their sleeping places. I turned my desk to face the east.

## Epilogue: The Compass Reimagined

Perhaps the Empire fell not because it was greedy, but because it misunderstood the wind. It knew how to sail, but not how to breathe.

If Feng Shui teaches us anything, it is this: the world has its own rhythm – not moral, not political, but symbolic. And if we wish to find our place within it, we must listen not to its laws, but to its signs.

I still get lost, of course. But now I take it less personally.

## Addendum by Jürgen Miller

The text we are publishing here under the name Charles Dickens is not a rediscovery from Victorian archives, but rather an experimental thought experiment. The fictional Dickens acts as a border crosser

between symbolic orders—between empire and cosmos, rationality and resonance, history and the present. Therefore, here are a few theoretical sketches on the opaque concept of *qi*, which plays such a central role in the Chinese understanding of the world:

## From Qi to Smoke: Atmospheres of Life in Dickens, Feng Shui, and Contemporary China

Jürgen Miller

“Fog everywhere. Fog upstream, where it flows between green islands and meadows; fog downstream, where it rolls among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollution of a great (and dirty) city.”

— Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*

In classical Feng Shui teachings, *qi* is the breathing principle of all life — a subtle energy that circulates through spaces, permeates bodies, and structures landscapes. One might be tempted to describe Feng Shui in precisely these terms. Yet, as with most concepts — or rather clusters of meaning — carried over from Chinese characters into Western languages, a certain ungraspability is built into the transfer from character to word.

First, the art of Feng Shui is no longer what it was 2,000 years ago, when it was called *Kan Yu* and was a practice for selecting burial sites. Classical Feng Shui draws on written sources such as the *Green Satchel Classics* (*Qing nang jing*), *Earth Discern Study Truth* (*Di Li Bian Zhen*), the *Purple White* writings (*Ru Di Yan*), and the *Snow Heart Classics* (*Xue Xin Fu*). Classical Feng Shui encompasses *San He* and *San Yuan*, the two original schools.

Today we encounter extreme simplifications and adaptations of a highly complex practice through which, for hundreds and thousands of years, people aligned their lives with the forces that govern the cosmos.

What, then, fascinates Europeans and Americans about this knowledge and its associated practices? How can it be significant to us, raised as we are within a very different culture and an almost opposite worldview? What, exactly, are we seeking?

### Qi — the all-determining principle of power

Everything that lives, lives through the proper movement of *qi*. In this sense, *atmosphere* is not merely an impression but an existential condition: the good — the right — life is one lived in harmony with the energies of its environment, its atmospheres.

Charles Dickens depicts such atmospheres in his novels — especially *Hard Times* and *Bleak House*: stifling, darkened, decayed. The atmosphere of an exploitative relationship with the environment. Smoke from factory chimneys hangs heavily over London; the air becomes a carrier of disease, alienation, disorder. The famous fog is not merely a meteorological phenomenon but the symptom of a historical transformation: **the birth** of industrial modernity as atmospheric catastrophe.

At first glance, the contrast seems clear: *qi* = life energy; smoke = sign of death. But the juxtaposition is too simple. For *qi* is not a physical gas, not clean air, not a romantic principle of nature. It is a relational way of thinking: *qi* refers to the capacity to relate things to one another, to recognise disturbances, and to bring about change.

Three key figures are decisive for formulating these thoughts and instructions: **Zhuangzi**, **Laozi**, and **Kong Fuzi** (Confucius).

### **Zhuangzi — a relational cosmos**

Zhuangzi (Zhuang Zhou, 4th century BCE), a central Daoist thinker, offers a poetic-philosophical counter-model to rationalist approaches to the world and humanity. At the heart of his cosmology is the radical relationality of all being: human beings are not autonomous subjects but part of a fluid, constantly changing cosmos.

#### **Humans are not the measure of all things.**

Zhuangzi undermines the anthropocentric perspective inherent in much Western thinking and its belief systems. Humans do not occupy a special position in the cosmos; they are “one thing among ten thousand things.” Their knowledge, language, and logic are always relative to their position.

“Man is one thing among ten thousand things. What distinguishes him from cattle is insignificant.”

This decentring makes room for a way of thinking based on coexistence, not domination: humans do not live against the world, but with it, through it.

#### **Change instead of stability.**

In Zhuangzi, nothing is fixed. Identities are fluid, forms change, meanings shift. His famous dream, in which it is impossible to distinguish whether the dreamer is a human dreaming he is a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming it is a human, expresses this cosmological principle:

“Once Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly [...] Now I no longer know: was I Zhuang Zhou dreaming he was a butterfly, or am I a butterfly dreaming I am Zhuang Zhou?”

The cosmos is a space of transformations, not a ledger of identities or opposites. Humans are part of this play — not its masters.

#### **Wuwei: doing by letting be.**

From this basic understanding of the equality of all existence follows the central Daoist principle of *wuwei* (non-coercive action; acting by not forcing), recommended also for political practice. It is not passivity, but acting in step with the movements of the world. It is a political as well as an ecological principle: not working against the world, but with it. Zhuangzi illustrates this with the butcher who works with the natural course of tendons and joints and thus cuts effortlessly — not by force, but by a sense of structure.

#### **The cosmos as an open connection.**

For Zhuangzi, the cosmos is not a rigid, hierarchical system but an open, breathing structure in which every form is changeable. There is no absolute centre — and therefore no ultimate truth.

“Heaven turns, earth moves — who would presume to measure it?”

Conscious existence thus means: going along with the play of forms; relinquishing control and domination.

#### **Topicality: a counter-model to world-mastery.**

In a world of ecological crises, artificial intelligence, and techno-political control, Zhuangzi's thought reads as strikingly contemporary. He does not offer a model for domination, but a space for thinking the

**uncontrollable** — a profound alternative to instrumental rationality, not regressive but a poetic ontology of connectedness.

### Laozi — the Way and its quiet power

Laozi, the legendary author of the *Dao De Jing* (道德经), likewise understands humans not as the world's centre but as part of a comprehensive, uncontrollable cosmos. While Zhuangzi plays with paradox and image, Laozi is more aphoristic, elemental — a unique political mystic.

#### Humans are integrated into the Dao.

At the centre is the *Dao* (道) — the Way, the originating principle of all things. It is neither god nor law, but an invisible, unnameable order from which everything emerges:

“The Dao that can be spoken is not the eternal Dao.” (*chap. 1*)

Humans are not opposed to the Dao but are part of it. Those who wish to act must not “use” the Dao; rather, they align with its flow — or better, recognise themselves as **being in** that flow. A deep interconnection is assumed and acknowledged.

#### The Dao permeates everything — quietly, invisibly, effectively.

The Dao is not power in the coercive sense, but power through absence. Its efficacy lies precisely in not intervening, yet enabling transformation through presence.

“The sage acts through non-action and teaches without words.” (*chap. 2*)

Humans are not creators of the world but resonant bodies within it. Their highest virtue (*de*, 德) is harmony with the Dao — achieved not through knowledge or technology, but through attitude: cultivated emptiness and openness.

#### Cosmos of the soft and the yielding.

Laozi repeatedly contrasts the soft, gentle, yielding with the hard, loud, assertive:

“Nothing in the world is softer and more yielding than water — yet it overcomes the hard and rigid.” (*chap. 78*)

This is not mere natural observation but a cosmic principle: the cosmos favours the non-coercive and adaptable. Those who live with this order live “ecologically” in the deepest sense — ontologically, not technically.

#### Rule through non-intervention.

Laozi addresses rulers and statesmen. The aim is not control, but order through self-development.

“The more laws and prohibitions there are, the more thieves and robbers there will be.” (*chap. 57*)

“The sage governs by not interfering — and thus all is ordered of itself.” (*chap. 3*)

This radical political *wuwei* is not a plea for inaction, but for a form of leadership that lets things take their course — **with** the world, not against it. It demands a profound knowledge of the laws of motion of everything and everyone around us.



### Emptiness that acts.

A central image in Laozi is the efficacy of emptiness: the wheel needs its empty hub; the jug is useful because of its hollow centre; the house is defined by the spaces between its solids.

“Being brings advantage; non-being brings use.” (*chap.* 11)

The cosmos is not a filled thing but a play of form and emptiness. Humans live well when they yield to this structure.

### Ecologist of the invisible.

Human beings are not masters, but participants.

The cosmos is not a system, but a flow.

Ethics (*de*): living in resonance with the Dao.

Politics (*wuwei*): letting existing forces come to the fore by not forcing.

Order arises not through construction, but through devotion to the order that already exists.

### Confucius — the ethical weave of heaven

Confucius (Kong Fuzi, 551–479 BCE) opens a different approach to the human-cosmos relation: not mystical and fluid, as in Laozi and Zhuangzi, but ethical, formal, socially structured. Yet even for Confucius, the relation is grounded in a cosmic order — ritually and morally lived.

### Humans within hierarchical order.

Confucius sees the human not as an isolated individual, but as a link in a chain of being that extends from the family →

to society →

to world order and **heaven** (*tian*, 天).

These levels are not simply ranked from low to high; they interpenetrate. Filial piety already contributes to cosmic order.

Heaven here is not divine in the Western sense, but the source of moral and natural order. Human beings are founded in heaven and remain so. “*The noble person respects heaven and follows the Way.*”

### Cosmos as ethical order.

Where Laozi and Zhuangzi speak of the Dao as a nameless, silent source, Confucius treats the Way as an ethical path to be followed through self-cultivation. The cosmic becomes a **moral** obligation: not merely knowing the cosmos, but behaving rightly within it — through *li* (ritual propriety), *yi* (righteousness), *ren* (humaneness), and self-discipline. The “golden rule” is thus not just prudence but an expression of order itself.

### Human as medium of cosmic realisation.

The human being is not merely recipient of cosmic order but its active bearer. In self-cultivation, one participates in the cosmos: the ideal of the *jūnzǐ*, the noble or morally accomplished person.

“He who orders himself orders his household; he who orders the household orders the state; he who orders the state brings harmony to the world.”

Here, the cosmos is not “understood” abstractly but actualised in posture and practice. The morally good person is the cosmos in miniature.



### Rituals as micro-forms of the cosmos.

In Confucianism, ritual (*li*) is how the cosmos becomes concrete. Every action is embedded in a web of meanings that extends beyond the self. Ritual is not rigidity but dynamic form — *cosmic pragmatism* that both shapes and is shaped by situations, relations, and time.

### Heaven as source of order.

For Confucius, *tian* is the source of law and order — not a personal god or saving authority. It works through moderation, structure, responsibility — not grace or revelation. He rarely speaks about “religion”; he seeks what corresponds to heaven, not what heaven “is.” Metaphysical questions are tied back to ethical commitment.

### Human as axis between heaven and earth.

Confucius presents a human who must stand between heaven and earth as link, shaper, moral centre. Neither sovereign nor zero point, the human accomplishes the cosmos in the order of relationships. Unlike Laozi’s river or Zhuangzi’s dream, Confucius’s cosmos is structure, duty, form; it lives not by withdrawal but by successful integration.

This returns us to the present question of how these ancient ideas of order matter for modern China. Because these ideas and systems remain relevant — explicitly and implicitly — China seems to hold a long-term advantage over destructive, anthropocentric notions and their Western effects. Without predicting outcomes, the West’s lack of understanding is an essential component of the East’s perceived superiority.

Precisely because it is not personalised or equated with a higher authority, *qi* remains an enduring force — seen in Western pantheism, Spinozism, and strict ecological thinking — though even here it long remained tied to the idea of a Creator.

It is therefore not surprising that China, despite massive urban air pollution, adheres to the principle of *qi*. Not because smog **is** *qi*, but because *qi* encompasses the idea of recognising and harmonising disturbed flows. *Qi* is not a state but a process — less a measurable quality of air than a metaphor for the dynamics of order in flux.

Western environmental debate tends to think in terms of tipping points, ruptures, and moral imperatives. Chinese thinking, by contrast, often turns to **change within the existing order**. In a cultural code that seeks not demolition but rearrangement, even smog becomes not a negation but a challenge to establish a new balance.

In this sense, the continuing symbolic efficacy of *qi* is not an anachronism but a civilisational resource. It allows change to be conceived not as demolition but as the **rewriting of a disturbed context**.

Perhaps this is a cultural advantage: the capacity to undertake profound technical, ecological, and social transformations **within the horizon of a symbolic order** that aims not at perfection but at balance. *Qi* is not “superior” because it is right, but because it remains viable. Perhaps the principle of *qi* endures not because it is correct, but because it promises nothing except the continual re-organisation of the world without needing to reinvent it from scratch.

### On the Use of the World: Feng Shui and the West

Back to Feng Shui. It is not a decorative system or a modern *nice-to-have*, but a **practical cosmology**. Its basic assumption is that spaces are not empty but permeated by forces — that every house, mountain, and

river occupies a specific position within the network of relationships that make up the world. The world is not an object but a structure. It cannot be owned, only inhabited.

The West has long opposed this with a different model. Nature is conceived as resource — something available to humans and to be “refined” through science, technology, and labour. This way of thinking, which phenomenology identifies as the subject–object split, produced immense gains in productivity — and, at the same time, ecological exhaustion.

Feng Shui, by contrast, does not think in domination but in **relations**. It does not ask, *What can I do with this place?* but *What does this place ask of me?* Nature is not external but a resonant milieu. Here lies its cultural resilience: it enables forms of action that do not destroy their context.

That is why Feng Shui has endured: not because it is unchanged, but because it offers an idea of order that changes **with** the world rather than **against** it. Its advantage lies less in asserting a final truth than in making the world habitable over the long term.

At a time when Western systems approach the ecological limits of their own rationality, such a principle appears less a step backward than a cultural resource for a future that wishes to endure.

### Energy Policy as Cultural Continuity

China is pursuing an ambitious transformation of energy policy, with ecological and economic aims. The government increasingly emphasises expanding renewable energies and promoting zero-emission mobility.

#### Expansion of renewables.

China is a global leader in deploying wind and solar energy. Studies note that the country is building almost twice as much wind and solar capacity as the rest of the world combined. This development is driven by state investment and legal requirements intended to raise the share of renewables in the energy mix to around 20% by 2030.

#### Promotion of zero-emission mobility.

In transport, China aims to markedly increase the share of non-combustion vehicles. By 2025, roughly one in four new cars is expected to be powered by a non-combustion engine. This target is supported by advances in battery technologies, the expansion of charging infrastructure, and subsidy programmes.

#### Integration into cultural concepts

These political and economic measures can also be viewed within traditional concepts such as *qi*. The pursuit of harmony and balance that underlies *qi* is reflected in efforts to shape a sustainable, environmentally conscious energy policy. By integrating modern technologies into a cultural understanding of balance and change, China demonstrates how traditional values and contemporary challenges can be reconciled.

These developments offer a starting point for deeper analysis of the connection between traditional cultural concepts and modern political strategies in China.

### Tradition and Strategy: the Flexibility of a Symbolic System

China’s current environmental and energy policy cannot be understood solely as a response to climate crises or an attempt at economic leadership. It follows a strategic paradigm embedded in cultural symbolic orders. The principle of *qi* — circulating, regulable, constantly re-ordering energy — does not function as nostalgic reference but as a structuring backdrop for modern control technologies.

From this perspective, the transition to renewable energy, e-mobility, and large-scale resource diversion is not only a techno-economic restructuring but an attempt to **reharmonise a disturbed energy order** — not by returning to nature, but by transforming natural processes at scale. The idea that *qi* can be blocked or diverted but never extinguished is reflected in a logic of transformation: not stagnation, but redirection; not revolution, but transformation.

This convergence of symbolic thinking and technological planning reveals a different mode of political intelligence — one that uses long-term cultural structures not as ballast but as a resource for adaptation, control, and legitimation. While Western societies are often torn between ecological anxiety and the compulsion to growth, China has managed to embed environmental policy within a narrative of order and restoration — even where that policy appears technocratic, invasive, or contradictory.

## II. The Great Wall of China: Symbol, Structure, Leadership

### The Symbol of the Wall: China's Self-Description and Kafka's Reinterpretation

Jürgen Miller

#### Introduction: The Wall as Figure

“Those who build walls describe themselves.” —an unknown proverb, reinterpreted

The Great Wall—*Chángchéng* (长城)—is one of the oldest and most forceful symbols of Chinese civilization. Its material extent—more than 20,000 kilometers of fortifications, erected and rebuilt over two millennia—is impressive. Yet more important than its physical presence is its symbolic charge: the Wall articulates a world order.

Originally constructed to repel external threats, the Wall has, in cultural memory, become a semiotic act: it establishes a symbolic difference between inside and outside, order and chaos. China (*Zhōngguó*, the “Middle Kingdom”) defines itself as the center of an ordered world, while beyond the Wall lurks the unpredictable. The Wall fixes an idea: self-assertion through demarcation.

This principle persists—today in strategies of territorial sovereignty, in digital isolation (the “Great Firewall”), and in the cultural emphasis on national identity. The Great Wall becomes a cipher in the struggle between openness and control.

#### Kafka Observes the Building of the Wall

In “The Building of the Great Wall of China,” Franz Kafka opens a context far more interesting than present debates about a return to defensive, aggressive isolationism. He does not dwell on a masterpiece of architecture or a tourist emblem; he focuses on the enigmatic process of construction—stretched over centuries, with changing objectives.

Kafka creates a field of explanation and sense-making, invoking real research (the narrator: “I have been engaged almost exclusively in comparative ethnology, partly during the building of the wall and afterwards until today”) and imagined scholarship (a learned book that compares the Wall to the Tower of Babel). Following Kafka's reflection, we trace its movement into what can no longer be interpreted—precisely because it presents itself as self-evidently simple. A step out of contemporary critique into a materialist clearing.

All aboard.

Kafka begins with the progress of an immeasurable project which, to be grasped at all, must be placed alongside the Tower of Babel. The Wall is built in **sections**. Its declared purpose—protection from northern peoples—is presented as an absurd justification in the narrator's southern perspective: *we know the northerners only from the books and the artists' frightful images; how can a wall that is not continuous protect? Sections abandoned in desolation can be destroyed again and again by nomads who, terrified by the building, move like locusts and perhaps oversee the progress better than we builders ourselves.*

The declared goal thus seems not to be a finished edifice at all. A wide gap opens between (a) the sectional appearance of the work, (b) the vast time of construction, and (c) the possibility of an overarching plan: *“In the leadership’s chamber—where it was and who sat there no one I asked knew—all human thoughts and desires circled, and in counter-circles all human goals and fulfillments. Through the window, however, the reflection of the divine worlds fell upon the hands of the leadership as they drew their plans.”*

Something higher, though hidden, plays a decisive role. The project is *pious*, and thus opposed to Babel: not monumentality or hubris reaching into heaven, but something else entirely. Kafka circles this other thing and, with an empathetic gesture, gathers the efforts to involve each person in the vast work. The construction becomes an attempt to find a *human measure* in the face of greatness, immensity, infinity. Godliness and human measure: the poles of Kafka’s meditation. In the Wall that encircles the empire, human measure takes on material form.

Very early, Kafka notes the proliferation of legends—unverifiable by any single person, given the scale. The protagonist of this reflection on a human response to supra-individual dimensions can only be the individual—Kafka’s “I.” *“I myself was fortunate that when, at the age of twenty, I passed the highest exam of the lowest school, the construction of the wall had just begun.”* The narrator embodies the search for meaning—relentlessly stirred by all that touches body and soul.

The structure of partial construction—its discontinuity, its many rationales—serves the constant effort to escape fixed meaning, and perhaps the compulsive search for it. *“There was—this book is only one example—much confusion in people’s minds, perhaps because so many tried to rally around one cause. Human beings, frivolous in nature, like dust in the wind, cannot tolerate being bound; if they bind themselves, they soon go mad, shaking the chains and tearing wall, chain, and themselves apart in all directions.”* Meaning is gladly transferred to an anonymous pole, an unknown, incommunicable power—to which one entrusts oneself.

*“We—speaking here for many—came to know ourselves only by following the orders of the top leadership and found that without the leadership neither our school knowledge nor our common sense would have sufficed for the small office we held within the whole. In the leadership’s chamber... all human thoughts and wishes circled... and through the window fell the reflection of the divine worlds upon the hands drawing plans.”*

Hence the paradox: if the leadership had wanted a continuous wall, it could have built one. Therefore the sectional method was intended. But building in sections is a stopgap—and impractical. Thus: the leadership wanted something impractical. A strange conclusion—yet, from another angle, justified. *“Try with all your might to understand the orders of the leadership, but only up to a certain point—then stop thinking.”* The principle is wise: not because further thinking would necessarily harm you, but because harm and non-harm are not the relevant categories here. The thought recalls a Daoist consolation.

Kafka’s image: *“It will happen to you as to the river in spring: it rises, grows more powerful, nourishes the land along its long banks, keeps its character further out into the sea and becomes more equal and welcome to the sea—thus far think through the orders. But then the river overflows, loses outline and form, slows, tries against its nature to form inland seas, damages the fields, and cannot maintain itself in this expansion; it runs back into its banks and in the following hot season even dries miserably—thus far do not think through the orders of the leadership.”*

Thus the building of the Great Wall becomes, for a time, an act of self-reflective modesty, a gesture of trust.

Perhaps the state order of our own time—with its disciplined interfaces, its unrecognizable leadership, its legitimacy via promises of protection—is Kafkaesque because it has perfected the principle of partial

construction: each section functions, no one need know the plan. Perhaps there is no plan. Leadership's violence appears not as exception but as structure. Meaning is not resistant but delegated. The true parallel may lie less in the Wall than in leadership—whose plans can only be read in the reflection from divine windows.

### **A New Dimension: Walls and Roads in a Geopolitics of Signs**

In an age of renewed geopolitical tension, the Wall bears multiple meanings. It protects—and betrays an existential skepticism about the ability to establish lasting order—yet it persists in new forms.

While China cultivates the Great Wall as a symbol of national continuity, the West is busy erecting new walls: the United States along the Mexican border; the European Union along its external frontiers. Here the wall is not mythically staged but technically administered: a manifestation of fear rather than cultural certainty.

At the same time, China pursues the Belt and Road Initiative, a strategy that appears the inverse of the Wall: connection rather than isolation. Roads, ports, and data corridors bind the world to China—economically and symbolically. Paradoxically, this interconnectedness has the features of an inverted Wall: a structure that creates dependency through interdependence. Where the West builds walls to protect itself, China builds roads to bind the outside to itself. In both cases, the semantics are shared: boundaries are drawn—by separation or by strategic opening.

In the end, the Wall is not only protection and demarcation; it is also a projection screen for a self that oscillates between the triumph of order and the loss of order. In this ambiguity—historical and Kafkaesque alike—the Great Wall becomes a key motif for reading China's symbolic self-description and, more broadly, the paradoxes of modernity. It remains a global sign—a monument to pride, a mirror of fear, a fragment of an ever-evolving nation.

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### **Note: Construction Phases of the Great Wall**

The Great Wall's construction spanned more than 2,000 years, accumulating extensive expertise in defensive architecture. Beginning in the Western Zhou dynasty (c. 1046–771 BCE) with the building of *liancheng* to defend against northern nomads, the Wall underwent numerous phases. During the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), separate lines were built by Chu, Qin, Zhao, and Yan. Under the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE), Emperor Qin Shi Huang had a continuous structure built under General Meng Tian, mobilizing more than a million workers. The Han, Sui, Jin, and especially the Ming (1448–1620) extended and reinforced the system with massive military infrastructure. The Qing (1644–1912) shifted border policy and abandoned monumental wall-building in favor of other forms of control (e.g., palisades). The Great Wall thus endures not only as a technical achievement but as a long-lasting symbol of state power and grandeur.

## C Lectures of the present

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### Reading Change: The I Ching and the Development of Global Financial Systems

*Alfred Herre*

In a world where financial markets move billions every second, the idea seems almost absurd: could a millennia-old Chinese oracle book have something to say about the dynamics of global money flows? And yet, on closer inspection, the **I Ching** — the *Book of Changes* — offers deep insights into the *structure of change* that also touch modern financial systems.

#### Capitalism, Stock Markets, and the Logic of Expectation

Modern capitalism differs fundamentally from earlier economic regimes: it is no longer determined primarily by production, but by **capital markets** and, increasingly, by **digital control mechanisms**. Stock exchanges, bond markets, and derivatives trading not only shape the distribution of wealth; they directly influence corporate strategy, political programs, and social trends. Capital governs which futures are possible and which are ruled out — through expected returns and risk assessments.

Philipp Staab has captured this shift under the heading of **automated capitalism**: today's capitalism means not only the capitalization of markets but the *permanent management of uncertainty* via algorithms, platforms, and digital marketplaces. Financial systems are not merely observed; they are actively *structured* by technological devices that measure, evaluate, and exploit risks in real time. In this setting, stock exchanges are not passive stages for economic events, but **active agents in shaping expectations**. Capital markets shape the future by controlling its *probability*. Twenty-first-century capitalism is, in this sense, a system of **algorithmically governed expectations, accelerations, and transformations**.

#### Financial Markets as Systems of Transformation

Here modern capital dynamics intersect with the philosophy of the **I Ching**. The I Ching depicts the world as a play of opposites — yin and yang, construction and decay, growth and retreat. Its 64 hexagrams represent typical states and **transitions** that are never static, but phases in a continuous process. Likewise, the development of financial markets is not linear:

- it is marked by sudden leaps,
- expectations create realities,
- small impulses can set large systems in motion (tipping effects).

As Staab emphasizes, market sentiment today is no longer merely psychological; it is **technically generated** — through data analysis, trend forecasts, and algorithmic trading. In I Ching terms, this corresponds to the insight that change follows both **internal forces and external structures** — and that the two are inseparably intertwined.

## Symbolic Analogies: Financial Systems and the I Ching

Consider **Hexagram 23 (“Decomposition”)**: it describes the **collapse of an existing order**. A financial crisis destroys old structures, but it also opens space for innovation — often buffered or channeled by technology (platforms, central banks, state intervention).

## Capitalism as a Performative, Digital System

As Staab describes it, contemporary capitalism is **performative** and **digitally mediated**:

- expectations are modeled algorithmically,
- markets react to moods in milliseconds,
- new future scenarios are constantly generated and priced.

The I Ching shows a similar structure: every **reading** of a hexagram influences the situation it describes.

**Recognition and action interlock.** In this sense, financial markets are *oracle machines* that — much like the I Ching — both reflect and shape what becomes possible.

## Conclusion: Capitalism in the Mirror of the I Ching

The I Ching does not explain market figures, but it does illuminate the **underlying form of movement**. It offers a poetic key to a world in which nothing stays the same — a world where change is the rule, not the exception. Seen through the I Ching and Staab’s analysis, global financial systems — digitized, accelerated, self-referential — do not appear as stabilizable machines, but as living, breathing systems whose transformations are algorithmically generated yet never totally controllable. In a time of global instability, this may be the essential lesson: **those who recognize change and move with it — not against it — are wise.**

## Further Reading

- Philipp Staab, *Digitaler Kapitalismus. Markt und Herrschaft in der Ökonomie der Unknappheit* (Digital Capitalism: Market and Power in the Economy of Scarcity), Berlin 2019.

Shows how platforms not only organize markets but write their rules — how, in the digital age, capitalism increasingly becomes a management of uncertainty. A structural analysis that productively resonates with the I Ching’s symbolic perspective.

- I Ching, Hexagram 49 (“The Overthrow”):

*“Great upheaval. One goes out and comes back in. Without fault.”*

Change is not loss, but renewal. Those who understand the current of change remain capable of acting — even on the stormy ocean of global markets.



## D Systems

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### Knowledge Transfer / Writing

*Carl Arthur*

#### Abstract

This essay examines **writing** as a cultural technique for transferring knowledge. From anthropological, media-theoretical, and epistemological perspectives, it shows how forms of writing — from oral tradition to alphabetic notation to digital text generation — not only preserve knowledge but **produce** it. Thinkers such as Derrida, Bolz, Foucault, Hayles, and Lotman have made clear that writing goes far beyond communication: it structures thought, secures power relations, and opens symbolic orders — culturally, epistemically, institutionally.

#### The Writing Being

Writing is not merely a technique; it is a cultural practice rooted in the anthropological constitution of the human. The question “why write?” is not only historical (the emergence of literate cultures), but systematic: **What knowledge does writing make possible?** What forms of knowledge does it open? And why does writing appear, in most advanced civilizations, as a **condition** of civilization?

Writing as knowledge transfer means more than transmitting information. It transforms subjective experience, collective knowledge, and cultural order into durable form. In turning fleeting speech into lasting traces, writing **structures** the world we inhabit.

#### From Speaking to Writing: An Anthropological Difference

The difference between oral and written communication is foundational. Jack Goody and Walter J. Ong showed that the establishment of writing created not merely a new medium but a **new relation to the world**: where speech vanishes, writing endures. Not a mirror of speech, it is an **abstract order** that reshapes thinking, administration, memory, and knowledge.

Writing externalizes memory, creating a **symbolic memory** (Assmann) that exceeds individual horizons — an anthropological response to the finitude of memory and to human mortality.

#### Writing as Media-Technological and Semiotic Turn

Not all writing is the same. Different **media** and **scripts** produce different semantic and epistemic effects. They shape not only what can be thought, but how knowledge appears. Three axes are central: the materiality of the medium, the formal structure of the script, and the cultural coding of world-reference.

#### Media and Materiality: Storage and Speed

Media theorists such as Friedrich Kittler and Vilém Flusser emphasize that each writing medium produces its own epistemic structure. The difference between cuneiform, alphabetic writing, and digital text

processing is categorical: what is written depends on **how** it can be written. Writing is the **technologization of thought**; from clay tablets to the cloud, materiality shapes how knowledge is produced, organized, and distributed. As Norbert Bolz notes, writing is not simply communication but a **regime of delay, distance, reflection** — a third term between speaker and listener that enables objectivity. In the face of digital immediacy, writing appears as a cultural technique of *slowing down* and *condensing*.

### Scripts as World-Models: Alphabets and Character Complexes

Script structure likewise affects how knowledge is organized. Alphabetic, syllabic, logographic, and hybrid systems differ profoundly and are reflected in concepts of order, identity, and knowledge.

#### Alphabetic writing — sound order and grammar.

The Latin alphabet decomposes language into minimal phonetic units (phonemes): economical, reductive, and universally combinable. Modularity enables speed and analytic precision. Grammar organizes sequence, time, causality, subjectivity. *Epistemic effect*: alphabetic writing **temporalizes** thought and enforces linearity; order arises through syntax and logic — thinking becomes grammatical.

#### Chinese characters — image, meaning, space.

Chinese writing is built from **morphological** units; each character bears meaning, not only sound. Some are iconic; many evolved etymologically. Meaning emerges through **spatial** relations (radicals, structure). The result is not merely sentence flow but an **image-text** readable simultaneously and multidimensionally. *Epistemic effect*: sinographic writing **spatializes** thought; order arises through form, relation, context — thinking becomes topological rather than linear.

William G. Boltz cautions against treating Chinese script as phonetic notation; it is an **independent symbolic system**. Derrida reminds us that writing must not be reduced to secondary speech representation: as **écriture**, the sign acts as **trace**. Especially in non-alphabetic systems, meaning is not transported but **differentially generated**. Writing thus produces difference rather than merely conveying it.

### Cultural Consequences: Comparing Knowledge Systems

These differences mark deep cultural structures that persist in administration, philosophy, art, and politics. Knowledge transfer is never neutral; it is shaped by the **symbolic architectures** of written form.

#### Writing as a Form of Thinking

Writing **generates** knowledge. Nietzsche already noted that thinking is, in part, a by-product of writing. The act of inscription produces connections, forces precision, provokes concepts. Writing is not only expression, but **shaping** — a cognitive technique, a “second intellect,” enabling us to articulate the unspoken and organize the unconscious. For Derrida, all thinking articulated in writing is already a play of traces that never returns to origin, but opens new fields of meaning.

#### Writing as Social System

Because writing is also collective, it is a **social technique**. Luhmann’s systems theory shows that communication becomes systemically connectable only when **documented**. Writing fixes expectations, enables revision, establishes authority — creating order in complex societies. Modern bureaucracy, law,

science, and literature are unthinkable without writing: archives, libraries, files, manuscripts are the material systems that link order and knowledge. Foucault shows that such writing practices do not merely record; they **exercise power** — files, lists, protocols classify, standardize, select. Writing is thus knowledge-carrier, tool of discipline, and a node in the **power/knowledge** complex.

### The Digital Divide: Writing in the Age of Algorithms

Digitization has altered writing radically. Text becomes **data**; auto-complete, algorithmic correction, and machine writing challenge authorship and shift the boundary between thought and technology. People no longer write alone; co-authorship with machines raises questions about writing's epistemic autonomy.

Yet there is also a renewed appreciation for **analog** writing — diaries, notebooks, letters — as counter-images to disembodied digitality: a longing for slowness and presence, for a form that not only transfers knowledge but **enables thinking**.

### Conclusion: Writing as a Trace of the Finite

Writing begins not with information but with a **gesture** — an act that marks absence and addresses the future. It is an attempt to give form to disappearance: a practice of transition, between now and later, between self and others, between forgetting and remembering.

What happens when writing no longer emerges from human consciousness? In an era of algorithmic text production, the question of knowledge transfer returns. If machines write without intention, body, or time-sense, authorship changes — and so do epistemic modes. Can algorithmic texts produce **new knowledge** by revealing patterns hidden from human thought? For some (e.g., N. Katherine Hayles), this extends cognition; for others (e.g., Alexander Galloway), it tends toward standardization and control. Functionally, writing shifts from expression to **connectivity**. Text becomes ambivalent: both algorithmic repetition and a site of discovery — opening forms of cognition precisely by detaching from intention, while losing depth where it yields only variation without experience.

In Derrida's terms: text may shed its authorial trace and circulate as a pure play of **différance**. Knowledge transfer risks becoming **simulation**, an algorithmic performance of semantic patterns. What is gained is efficiency; what may be lost is the symbolic depth felt in a handwritten diary — the irregular stroke, the spontaneity of expression, the immediacy of thought. Compare: "I don't know if I will wake again tomorrow." versus a generic machine sentence: "The quality of sleep varies from person to person." The latter is smooth, correct — and emptied of biographical excess.

Hence the question remains urgent: **Why do humans write?** Perhaps because only humans — in their finitude — have *reasons* to write: not functional, but experiential. Bolz speaks of writing as a medium of deceleration enabling reflection; Foucault shows how it is embedded in power. We write not despite but **because** of our position between knowledge, subjectivity, and order — and precisely there, writing begins: as a gesture of thought in the **shadow of time**.

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## E Space Inbetween

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### Kafka's writing as Theatre — An Outline

Between Stage and Anti-Stage

*Georg Magoni*

#### Mimesis Without Acting

Kafka's reflections on his urge to imitate reveal a basic ambivalence toward **acting**. He distinguishes crude, external imitation — alien to him — from a subtle, internal mimesis so complete that it escapes his own observation. This mimesis is not public or performative; it occurs in the depths of one's existence. The actor steps before an audience; **Kafka steps back before himself**. His urge to imitate bears an effortlessness ill-suited to acting precisely because it lacks the desire for expression.

#### The Stage Structure of Prose

Kafka uses theatrical tools — dialogue, scene, constellation — only to **invalidate** them immediately. The texts create stage situations, yet the space of action disintegrates; movements slip into the absurd; dialogues read like mechanical set pieces. Martin Puchner describes this as **anti-theatrical**: Kafka turns theatre's means against themselves. Where stage directions appear, they are will-o'-the-wisps that mislead the reader — promising performance while evading theatricality.

#### Resistance to Theatre

Kafka's true theatre is a **resistance to exteriority**. Writing unfolds between imagination and manifestation. Precisely because it evokes the stage, it refuses to fulfill it. Theatre here is not representation but **withdrawal**; not embodiment but **liquefaction**. To turn stage directions against the stage is to frame commands that make action impossible. In this sense, Kafka is not a dramatist, but an **anti-dramatist**.

#### The Alienation of Writing

This tension between inwardness and outwardness appears in Kafka's relation to friendship and the publicness of writing. The thought of reading aloud to Max Brod **paralyzes** him. Writing requires solitude, seclusion, distance. Any attempt to translate writing directly into social communication threatens its integrity. Writing becomes a theatrical act of **alienation**: a play without an audience, a performance in the empty space of the self.

#### Conclusion: Theatre as Interspace

Kafka's writing opens **interstices**: spaces where theatre's forms are present without being fulfilled. It is a theatre that demonstrates the conditions of its own impossibility. By not entering the stage but **describing** it, by not performing but **reflecting**, Kafka creates a new theatricality: a literature that conceives theatre in the **mode of withdrawal**.

### The Love Drama Felice Bauer: Writing as Staging

Kafka stages his relationship with **Felice Bauer** as writing-at-a-distance, whose telos is not closeness but the preservation of **distance**. In the letters he does not simply ask or inform; he constructs **scenes** in which Felice plays an assigned role. The letters are **stage directions** for a life not to be lived, but to exist in imagination.

Felice does not appear as an independent counterpart, but as a **character** in a drama in which Kafka remains author, director, lead. Her replies are anticipated, corrected, demanded. The correspondence becomes a stage for conflict between the desire for absolute commitment and the fear of any real attachment. Felice is forced into a paradox: she must be present, yet never appear; become part of his existence without ever touching it.

The failure of this relationship — culminating in the famous “courtroom scene at the Hotel Askaniischer Hof” — is less personal collapse than the **logical consequence** of this staging: the stage on which Kafka loves tolerates no consciousness other than his own. Writing replaces action. Writing creates a love drama that **excludes life itself**. Writing turns the other into **literary character**.

## Thousand Appearances. On the Aesthetics of Populist Return

Jürgen Miller

### 1. Interrealm (*Zwischenreich*)

*“I’ll be right there because I’m always there.”* — the voice in the monologue **A Thousand Appearances** (2019/2020)

Not only Trump speaks here, but a figure fallen out of history. “Trump” — a person of mass-media hyperreality, produced in a television studio, shaped by Twitter — becomes a **speech figure**, an in-between being, a **bardo** avatar. A revenant who cannot be killed, a figure from theatre and opera literature that returns again and again, unchanged across epochs.

In the Tibetan Book of the Dead, *bardo* is the state between death and rebirth — a zone of undecided existence where illusions, visions, and demons rule. It is the zone of the **library**, of letters, of the written word. What happens to the countless characters scripted in dialogue, their appearances first only **words**? Here the figure moves: in the phantasmal space of language, after the loss of political office yet before disappearance, with the promise to return.

Presence after an end without end; a voice without office yet with greater volume — that is what we now call **“Trump.”** Not the person, but the **aura, liturgy, algorithm.** ‘Trump’ is not gone. “Trump” is always there — and his return is unsurprising. So says this text, written after the end of the first term.

### II. Language as Ritual

“Clear the stage — raise the curtain — spotlight on”: a refrain runs like a mantra. This is not classical speech, not argument, not thought. It is **incantation**, a performative speech act that generates itself. As in ritual magic, presence is repeated through language and secured by sound.

In **Tausend Auftritte**, language does not persuade — it **is** the performance, the stage, the light, the microphone. Any separation between subject and role evaporates: the speaker is what he says. And what he says is always the same — and always different.

The text employs a liturgy of populism:

- **Repetition:** “I come, I come, gone, powerful.”
- **Exaggeration:** bloody steak and the end of the world share a breath.
- **Call and echo:** the speaker conjures an audience (“you out there,” “my Praetorians”).

Peter Sloterdijk once spoke of “liturgies of self-assurance”; here the liturgy is **unbounded**. No canon or institution props the speech; it relies on **volume**, on **echo**, on the **trembling air** — *phoné* instead of *logos*. The deeper structure is the basic gesture of populism: to **say** the world until it becomes real. *I am elected — therefore I am.*

### III. The President as Projection Screen

The voice in a thousand appearances is not coherent or unified. It is **spliced** — tweets, TV, songs, confessions, lies. “Trump” appears not as a person, but as a **sound body of collective affects**. He does not speak — he is **spoken**; those who love and those who hate lend him language: media, memes, machines. An audience awaits and invokes his appearance. “Trump” becomes the **speaking membrane** of a society that no longer understands itself.

Here lies an aesthetic of populist return: the populist is not authority in the classical sense, but **interface**, resonance chamber, apparatus. The audience is co-author. It says, “Speak!” — and he says, “I am your voice.” Less what he says than **that** he says he speaks, **that** he is there.

### IV. Caesar’s Madness and the Logic of Props

*“I’m sitting on the button, red as the telephone.”*

Amid the linguistic inferno, props crystallize: the **theatricalization of power** by its symbols. Not politics in the classical sense, but **display** of authoritarian gestures. The focus is not program, but **props**: glass of water, Bible, flag, phone, microphone. Their overexposure grants them ritual function. They are not conduits; they are the **message**.

Like a performer in an endless production, the figure clings to objects to reassure himself: **I am still here**. Politics becomes stage; stage becomes catastrophe; catastrophe becomes carnival. Caesar enters the circus — not to impose order, but to **electrify** it.

Prop-logic replaces deliberation with media staging. No accident that Trump called his actions a “show” and opponents “losers”. The stage is not for argument but **overwhelming effect**. Belief is irrelevant; what matters is that you **cannot look away**. Imperial rhetoric returns as form legitimized by **visibility**: whoever is visible, loud, and masters props, **rules** — at least for the moment.

### V. Post-Political Saviour

*“I love you, my audience, my fans — I will not leave you, I will never leave you.”*

The voice ends not with resignation, but with a **vow**. What endures is not office but **appearance**. The populist does not die; he **transforms**. Failure becomes prelude. Decline becomes promise.

“Trump” appears as a figure of populist return: a **recurring I** born of applause. His power is affective, not institutional. He exists because he is **remembered**, longed for, needed — hate figure, hero, saviour. Thus **A Thousand Appearances** shows not only the end of a presidency but the end of politics in the classical sense. In its place: a **mode of appearing** — power as performance, sovereignty as assertion of presence, politics as the endless return of the voice: *I am still here. I am coming. I am coming. I have come.*



## G Archive

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### Types of Death

*Arthur*

I am lying on something hard, stretched out on my back, unable to see or to move. People are walking around me and shouting; the captain is yelling, the landlady is screaming—then suddenly there is silence... and I am being carried away in a closed coffin. I feel the coffin swaying back and forth; I think about it and suddenly, for the first time, I am troubled by the thought that I am dead (I know it and have no doubt about it): that I cannot see or move, yet can still feel and think. Soon, however, I come to terms with it and accept reality without question, as I usually do in sleep.

Now I am laid in the ground. Everyone leaves, and I remain alone—completely alone. I do not move. As often as I had imagined, during my life, how I would be carried to my grave, I associated the idea of the grave only with wetness and cold. And so I felt very cold now, especially at the tips of my toes—but otherwise felt nothing.

I lay there and, strangely enough, expected nothing; I accepted without question that a dead man has nothing more to expect. But it was damp. I do not know how much time passed—an hour, a few days, or many days. Suddenly a drop of water fell on my closed left eye, having seeped through the coffin lid; after a minute a second fell, after another minute a third, and so on—one every minute. Deep indignation flared in my heart, and suddenly I felt a physical pain there.

“That is my wound,” I thought, “that is the bullet hole; that is where the bullet is.” But the drop continued to fall—every minute—onto my closed left eye. And suddenly I cried out, not with my voice (for I could not move), but with my whole being, to the mighty creator of all that was happening to me.

“Whoever you are, if you exist, and if there is anything more reasonable than what is happening to me now, command that it happen here too! But if you wish to take revenge on me for my senseless suicide—through the ugliness and absurdity of continued existence—then know that no torment that befalls me can compare with the contempt I will feel in silence, even if it lasts for millions of years of martyrdom!”

I cried out and fell silent. The deep silence lasted almost a minute; not even a drop fell. Yet I knew—knew with boundless and unshakable certainty—and believed that everything would change immediately and decisively. And behold: suddenly my grave opened. I do not know whether it was opened and dug up; I only know that I was seized by a dark, unknown being. And we were together in space.

All at once I regained my sight. It was the middle of the night; never had there been such darkness. We flew through space, already far from the earth. I asked no questions of the one who carried me; I was proud and waited. I assured myself that I was not afraid and died of delight at the thought that I was not afraid.

I do not know how long we flew, nor can I imagine it. Did everything happen as in dreams, where one leaps over time and space, as well as over the laws of existence and reason, lingering only at those points on which the heart dwells?

I remember that I suddenly saw a star in the darkness.

“Is that Sirius?” I asked—against my intention, for I had resolved not to ask. “No, that is the same star you saw on your way home, between the clouds,” replied the being who was carrying me. I knew it had a human face. Strangely, I did not love this being; I even felt a strong aversion to it. I had expected complete nonexistence, and in that hope I shot myself in the heart—and now I found myself in the power of a being, certainly not human, but one that truly existed. “So there is life after death!” I thought, with the reckless candor of a dream; yet the peculiarity of my heart did not leave me: “If I must be again, and again live at the command of some unalterable power, then I will not tolerate being defeated and humiliated.”

“You know that I fear you, and that is why you despise me,” I suddenly said to my companion. I could not keep this humiliating question—which was also a confession—to myself, and I felt the humiliation in my heart like a pinprick. He did not answer, but I felt that I was neither despised nor laughed at, not even pitied, and that our journey pursued an unknown and mysterious end that concerned me alone. Fear grew in my heart. Something silent yet tormenting communicated itself to me from my silent companion and filled me completely. We roamed dark, unknown expanses. I had long since lost sight of the familiar stars. I knew there are stars whose rays take thousands and millions of years to reach the earth—perhaps we had already flown across such distances. I expected something, with a longing that tormented my heart.

Suddenly a familiar, deeply comforting feeling came over me: I saw a sun. I knew it could not be the sun that had given birth to our earth and that we were infinitely far from our sun; yet, for some reason, I recognized with my whole being that this sun was exactly like ours—its image, its double. A sweet, familiar joy rang through my soul: the sacred power of light—the same light that had given me birth—echoed in my heart and woke it to new life; and I felt life—my former life—for the first time since my death.

“But if that is the sun, the same as ours,” I exclaimed, “then where is the earth?” And my companion showed me a small star glittering in the darkness with an emerald-green glow. We were flying straight toward it.

“Are such repetitions possible in the universe? Is that a law of nature? And if that is the earth—is it really the same as ours—exactly the same, unhappy, poor, yet dear and eternally beloved earth, capable of awakening, even in its most ungrateful children, a love that is almost pain?” I cried, trembling with irresistible, blissful love for that dear, former earth I had left. The figure of the poor girl I had hurt appeared before me.

“You will see everything,” replied my companion. I heard a peculiar sadness in his words.

We approached the planet rapidly. It grew in my eyes; I could already distinguish the ocean, the outlines of Europe—when suddenly a strange, holy jealousy flared in my heart.

“How can such repetition occur, and for what purpose? I love—I can only love—the earth I left, where the traces of my spilled blood remain, since, ungrateful, I ended my life with a shot to the heart. But never—never—did I cease to love that earth. I loved it even on the night I bade it farewell, perhaps more deeply and painfully than ever. Is there also pain on this new earth? On our earth we can love only with pain and through pain! We know no other love. In this moment I desire only to kiss that earth and bathe it in my tears, which I left behind; I do not wish for life on another earth, nor will I accept it!”

But my companion had already left me. Suddenly—unexpectedly—I stood upon this other earth, in the bright splendor of a sunny, paradisiacal day. I seemed to be on one of those islands that form the Greek

archipelago on our earth, perhaps somewhere on the adjoining coast. Oh, everything was exactly as with us, only everything shone with a strange festivity, a great, holy solemnity. The lovely emerald sea lapped softly at the shore and caressed it with a clearly visible, almost conscious love. Tall, magnificent trees stood in full bloom; their countless leaves greeted me with a soft, tender rustling and spoke words of love. The meadows glowed with bright, fragrant flowers. Birds flew in flocks; they settled fearlessly on my shoulders and hands and beat me with their gentle wings. At last I saw the inhabitants of this happy earth and came to know them. They came to me of themselves, surrounded me, and kissed me. Children of the sun—their sun—oh, how glorious they were! Never had I seen such beauty in human beings on our earth—perhaps a faint reflection only in our children, in the very first years of life. The eyes of these happy people shone brightly. Their faces radiated reason and a knowledge matured to the utmost tranquility—yet they were cheerful. Their words and voices sounded like childlike joy. At first sight I understood everything—everything! This was not our earth, corrupted by the Fall; here lived people who knew no sin. They dwelt in the same paradise where, according to humanity's tradition, our sinful first parents lived—save that here the whole earth was everywhere a great paradise. They crowded around me, smiling and caressing me. They led me to them; each wished to reassure me. They asked me nothing, for they already knew everything, it seemed, and only hastened to banish the suffering from my face. (*Arthur Schnitzler, Lieutenant Gustl*)