16. Sovereignty

> '*But it does not require much effort to see that a virtual and always present entity is exactly the opposite of what is needed for the collective to be assembled: if it's already there, the practical means to compose it are no longer traceable; if it's total, the practical means to totalize it are no longer visible; if it's virtual, the practical means to realize, visualize, and collect it have disappeared from view.*'
>
> *Bruno Latour*

Synopsis: *Sovereignty means control (1); An empty word for the state (2–3); Who else could claim sovereignty? The government (4); Why would the government strive for sovereignty? (5–6); Sovereignty in the digital world (7).*

1. Sovereignty means control*

As has been established,[497] sovereignty means total control; in the context of a state, sovereignty means control over all information processing carried out within its territory.[498]

2. *

As also established, control is both external and material;[499] it is the concrete ability of a specific Being to allow or prohibit a specific processing operation by another. In addition, it is the state that creates the platform, the information processing environment necessary for its citizens to live a meaningful life.[500]

Consequently, by definition, the state is sovereign on its platform (on its territory[501]), that is, it is able to allow or prohibit (any) processing on it by its citizens. How could it be otherwise? If it is the state that makes any

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497 In Chap. 6, par. 2.
498 On state territory, see Chap. 17.
499 See Chap. 6, par. 1.
500 See Chaps. 11, par. 3 and 7, par. 3.
501 See Chap. 17, par. 2.

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information processing by its citizens possible, then how could it not, at the same time, be able to control it? If the state is the creator of the information platform on which we live, how could it not, by definition, control all of our processing on it?

From this point of view, sovereignty, meaning control over all information processing on the information platform that is the state, is an empty word, it has no meaning, because it is self-evident for the state—the mere existence of a state means that it is sovereign.[502]

3.

Of course, while the state is able to control any processing on its information platform, it will not of its own accord act upon this, because the state has no will[503] of its own. It is able to exercise control naturally, because it created the platform; it has no will (let alone a purpose) either to create the platform or to control the processing by any Being on it, but at the same time it cannot not do it—the state cannot avoid exercising control. Control over its information platform comes as the natural result of its creation.[504] It is not the result of any conscious action by the state.

The state has sovereignty over its platform, meaning that it can control all information processing on it, but this does not mean that it will actually act upon this control in any particular manner.

4. Who else could claim sovereignty? The government*

Of all other Beings within a state (at least in the analogue world), only the government, because it controls the state, could raise a sovereignty claim over all the information processing happening in a state's territory.

The government controls the state; it has the ability to allow or prohibit processing operations both on the state and by the state.[505] The former, in particular, means that the government has the ability to control the processing operations of others (other Beings) on the information platform

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502 This does not, however, mean that another state (specifically, its government) cannot control the processing of that state; see Chap. 14, par. 9.
503 In the meaning of consciousness, see Chap. 11, par. 8.
504 See Chap. 6, par. 4.
505 See Chap. 12, par. 8.

that is the state. The state is always sovereign, because it is omnipresent, but it is up to the government to itself become sovereign,[506] that is, to control indirectly all information processing on the platform that is its state through its control over the state.

5. Why would the government strive for sovereignty? *

In essence, the government does not strive for sovereignty, at least not directly. The government (which is a Being) merely controls a dataset (in this case, the state); control over a dataset means control of its processing and of processing on it.

If an individual (another Being) exercises control over a Thing, for example, a table, it controls processing on that table (the individual's own processing, as well as the processing carried out by other Beings on it). Similarly, if that same individual controls another Being (e.g. a corporation or a drone), it controls the processing done by the Being itself as well as that which is done on it: whatever processing is carried out by that corporation or that drone is also controlled by that same individual as the indirect result of its control of the corporation and the drone (which created the new information). By the same token, because the government controls the state, it controls the processing done by it and on it[507]—irrespective of the vast, immense scope of such processing.

Therefore it is not for its sake, in pursuit of sovereignty, that the government controls the state—control over the state is natural to the government, because the state (and the government) exists. Sovereignty (that is, the quest to control each and every processing operation happening on the information platform that is the state) comes as a natural result of the controlling nature of the relationship.[508]

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506 And, thus, omnipotent, because the government, unlike the state, has a will.
507 In principle, see par. 6.
508 In the same manner that, on an individualised basis, it is sought after by any Being exercising control over another Being or a Thing, see Chap. 6, pars. 2 and 8.

6. *

However, we have seen that total control is impossible.[509] Myriad process-ing operations are possible on any dataset,[510] and any attempt by any single Being to (consciously[511]) control them all is inconceivable. A Being, or a Thing, cannot be totally controlled by another.

Consequently, if sovereignty is for the state an empty, meaningless word, for the government it is an (unreachable and unattainable) aim. Its control over the state can never be total. This does not, however, mean that the government will ever give up its efforts to achieve total control—on the contrary, it will increase its control over the state as much as possible.

Accordingly, because the state is what it is,[512] the government aims, but can never achieve, to control each and every processing operation by any Being on the information platform that is its state, with such control (as ex-perienced by individuals and organisations, but also animals and artificial Beings) being the indirect result of its efforts above.

In practice, sovereignty for the government materialises on the informa-tion platform that is its state because the government controls the majority of its state's attributes, meaning the majority of the processing operations that take place on it.[513] It is in this way that the government governs. Histor-ically, every increase in the information processing capabilities of humans (i.e. citizens) has led to an analogous increase in the sovereignty exercised by the government on the information platform that was its state—at least, this was the case until the advent of the digital world.

7. Sovereignty in the digital world*

As seen previously, the digital world today, specifically in the form of con-temporary, large and private online platforms, is fundamentally challenging the beginning-of-time model of government control over the state, and state control over its citizens.[514] However, it is the digital world itself that could ultimately give sovereignty renewed meaning.

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509 See Chap. 6, par. 2.
510 Which remain finite in the analogue world; see, however, Chap. 1, par. 16 on the digital world.
511 Therefore, unlike the state, see par. 3.
512 See par. 2.
513 See Chap. 6, par. 2.
514 See Chap. 12, par. 11.

Because the digital world is artificial, constructed following preset spe-
cifications, total control could theoretically be possible, embedded into
the system. For example, in the analogue world a state, and more so a
government, cannot control (unless with disproportionate effort) the action
of one of their citizens grabbing an apple (regardless of for what purpose
the apple is grabbed). However, in the digital world apple-grabbing (and
its outcomes) must be predesigned and installed into the system as a poten-
tiality to enable such an action to be possible. Otherwise it simply cannot
occur. Purpose, and the means to achieve it, therefore have to be built into
the system.[515]

In other words, in the digital world information processing is predeter-
mined and thus controllable. It remains to be seen whether new, in the
sense of unpredicted, processing can take place in it, or whether its users
(humans and artificial Beings alike) will only be able to act in specific
predetermined ways—whether new creation is possible within that which
has been created already.

At the same time, in the digital world, in stark difference to the analogue,
state territory is dynamic—it is the information processing environment in
the digital world that has been created by that state's Beings.[516] Although
appearing to be dominated, for the moment at least, by large online private
platforms (in a way that draws parallels with the company states of the colo-
nial era[517]), governments may in the future decide to stake their sovereignty
claims more forcefully, particularly taking into account the transformation
of (their) citizens into users.[518]

Sovereignty, then, will acquire a new meaning for states and governments
alike. States may need to share their unique identification function, at least
in the digital world. Governments may see the achievement of sovereignty
move further away from their grasp. Or the exact opposite may prove to be
the case: states may claim the digital world as they have the analogue world,
with governments finally achieving sovereignty in the digital world because
of its artificiality. Whatever the case may be, the concept of sovereignty,
particularly within the context of the state, which has been the dominant
preoccupation of humanity for the past few centuries, is bound to change
fundamentally in the digital world, perhaps beyond recognition.

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515 See also Chap. 1, par. 17.
516 See Chap. 17, par. 11.
517 See Chap. 7.1, par. 5.
518 See Chaps. 17, par. 10, and 12, par. 11.

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