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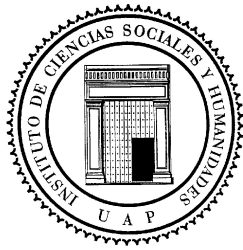
The Meaning of Revolution Today

GET  POLITICAL

Change the World Without Taking Power

New Edition

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3 Beyond Power?

I

The world cannot be changed through the state. Both theoretical reflection and a whole century of bad experience tell us so. 'We told you so', say the satisfied ones, 'We said so all along. We said it was absurd. We told you that you couldn't go against human nature. Give up the dream, give up!'

And millions throughout the world have given up the dream of a radically different type of society. There is no doubt that the fall of the Soviet Union and the failure of national liberation movements throughout the world have brought disillusionment to millions of people. The notion of revolution was so strongly identified with gaining control of the state that the failure of those attempts to change the world through gaining control of the state has led very many people to the conclusion that revolution is impossible.

There is a toning down of expectations. For many, hope has evaporated from their lives, giving way to a bitter, cynical reconciliation with reality. It will not be possible to create the free and just society we hoped for, but we can always vote for a centre or left-of-centre party, knowing quite well that it will not make any difference, but at least that way we will have some sort of outlet for our frustration. 'We know now that we will not be able to change the world', says one of the characters in a novel by Marcela Serrano. 'That has been the greatest blow of all for our generation. We lost our objective in the middle of the way, when we still had the age and the energy to make the changes ... The only thing that is left is to ask with humility: where is dignity?'¹

Is the character in the book not right? If we cannot change the world through the state, then how? The state is just a node in a web of power relations. But will we not be always caught up in the web of power, no matter where we start? Is rupture really conceivable? Are we not trapped in an endless circularity of power? Is the whole world not a spider-web, which can be made a little better here and there? Or perhaps: is the whole world not a multiplicity of spider-webs, so that just when we have broken through one, we find ourselves entangled in another? Is the idea of a radical otherness not

best left to those who comfort themselves with religion, to those who live with a dream of heaven as the reward for living through this vale of tears?

The great problem with trying to retreat into a life of private dignity and saying 'let's make the best of what we've got' is that the world does not stand still. The existence of capitalism implies a dynamic of development which attacks us constantly, subjecting our lives more directly to money, creating more and more poverty, more and more inequality, more and more violence. Dignity is not a private matter, for our lives are so entwined with those of others that private dignity is impossible. It is precisely the pursuit of personal dignity that, far from taking us in the opposite direction, confronts us fully with the urgency of revolution.²

The only way in which the idea of revolution can be maintained is by raising the stakes. The problem of the traditional concept of revolution is perhaps not that it aimed too high, but that it aimed too low. The notion of capturing positions of power, whether it be governmental power or more dispersed positions of power in society, misses the point that the aim of the revolution is to dissolve relations of power, to create a society based on the mutual recognition of people's dignity. What has failed is the notion that revolution means capturing power in order to abolish power.³ What is now on the agenda is the much more demanding notion of a direct overcoming of power relations. The only way in which revolution can now be imagined is not as the conquest of power but as the dissolution of power. The fall of the Soviet Union not only meant disillusionment for millions; it also brought the liberation of revolutionary thought, the liberation from the identification of revolution with the conquest of power.

This, then, is the revolutionary challenge at the beginning of the twenty-first century: to change the world without taking power. This is the challenge that has been formulated most clearly by the Zapatista uprising in the south-east of Mexico. The Zapatistas have said that they want to make the world anew, to create a world of dignity, a world of humanity, but without taking power.⁴

The Zapatista call to make the world anew without taking power has found a remarkable resonance. This resonance has to do with the growth in recent years of what might be called an area of anti-power. This corresponds to a weakening of the process by which discontent is focused on the state. This weakening is clear in the case of the would-be revolutionary parties, which no longer have the

capacity they once had to channel discontent towards the struggle to seize state power. It is also true of social-democratic parties: whether or not people vote for them, they no longer have the same importance as focuses of political militancy. Social discontent today tends to be expressed far more diffusely, through participation in 'non-governmental organisations', through campaigning around particular issues, through the individual or collective concerns of teachers, doctors or other workers who seek to do things in a way that does not objectify people, in the development of autonomous community projects of all sorts, even in prolonged and massive rebellions such as the one taking place in Chiapas. There is a vast area of activity directed towards changing the world in a way that does not have the state as its focus, and that does not aim at gaining positions of power. This area of activity is obviously highly contradictory, and certainly includes many activities that might be described as 'petty bourgeois' or 'romantic' by revolutionary groups. It is rarely revolutionary in the sense of having revolution as an explicit aim, yet the projection of a radical otherness is often an important component of the activity involved. It includes what is sometimes called the area of 'autonomy', but it is far, far wider than that which is usually indicated by the term. It is sometimes, but not always, in open hostility to capitalism, but it does not find and does not seek the sort of clear focus for such activity that was formerly provided by both revolutionary and reformist parties. This is the confused area in which the Zapatista call resonates, the area in which anti-power grows.⁵ It is an area in which the old distinctions between reform, revolution and anarchism no longer seem relevant, simply because the question of who controls the state is not the focus of attention. There is a loss of revolutionary focus, not because people do not long for a different type of society, but because the old focus proved to be a mirage. The challenge posed by the Zapatistas is the challenge of salvaging revolution from the collapse of the state illusion and from the collapse of the power illusion.

But how can we change the world without taking power? Merely to pose the question is to invite a snort of ridicule, a raised eyebrow, a shrug of condescension.

'How can you be so naïve?' say some, 'Do you not know that there can be no radical change in society? Have you learnt nothing in the last thirty years? Do you not know that talk of revolution is silly, or are you still trapped in your adolescent dreams of 1968? We must live with the world we have and make the best of it.'

‘How can you be so naïve?’ say others, ‘Of course the world needs a revolution, but do you seriously think that change can be brought about without taking power, by election or otherwise? Do you not see the forces we are up against, the armies, the police, the paramilitary thugs? Do you not know that the only language they understand is power? Do you think capitalism will collapse if we all hold hands and sing “All we need is love”? Get real.’

Reality and power are so mutually encrusted that even to raise the question of dissolving power is to step off the edge of reality. All our categories of thought, all our assumptions about what is reality, or what is politics or economics or even where we live, are so permeated by power that just to say ‘no!’ to power precipitates us into a vertiginous world in which there are no fixed reference points to hold on to other than the force of our own ‘no!’. Power and social theory exist in such symbiosis that power is the lens through which theory sees the world, the headphone through which it hears the world: to ask for a theory of anti-power is to try to see the invisible, to hear the inaudible. To try to theorise anti-power is to wander in a largely unexplored world.

How can the world be changed without taking power? The answer is obvious: we do not know. That is why it is so important to work at the answer, practically and theoretically. *Hic Rhodus, hic saltus*, but the *saltus* becomes more and more perilous, the pressures not to jump become ever greater, the danger of falling into a sea of absurdity ever more difficult to avoid.

Let us forget our ‘fear of ridicule’⁶ and ask then: how can we even begin to think of changing the world without taking power?

II

To think of changing the world without taking power, we need to see that the concept of power is intensely contradictory. But to make this argument we need to go back to the beginning.

In the beginning, we said, is the scream. It is a two-dimensional scream: a scream not just of rage, but of hope. And the hope is not a hope for salvation in the form of divine intervention. It is an active hope, a hope that we can change things, a scream of active refusal, a scream that points to doing. The scream that does not point to doing, the scream that turns in upon itself, that remains an eternal scream of despair or, much more common, an endless cynical

grumble, is a scream which betrays itself: it loses its negative force and goes into an endless loop of self-affirmation as scream. Cynicism – I hate the world, but there is nothing that can be done – is the scream gone sour, the scream that suppresses its own self-negation.

The scream implies doing. ‘In the beginning was the deed’, says Goethe’s Faust.⁷ But before the deed comes the doing. In the beginning was the doing. But in an oppressive society, doing is not an innocent, positive doing: it is impregnated with negativity, both because it is negated, frustrated doing, and because it negates the negation of itself. Before the doing comes the scream. It is not materialism that comes first, but negativity.⁸

Doing is practical negation. Doing changes, negates an existing state of affairs. Doing goes beyond, transcends. The scream, which is our starting point in a world which negates us – the only world we know – pushes us towards doing. Our materialism, if that word is relevant at all, is a materialism rooted in doing, doing-to-negate, negative practice, projection beyond. Our foundation, if that word is relevant at all, is not an abstract preference for matter over mind, but the scream, the negation of what exists.

Doing, in other words, is central to our concern not simply because doing is a material precondition for living⁹ but because our central concern is changing the world, negating that which exists. To think the world from the perspective of the scream is to think it from the perspective of doing.

Saint John is doubly wrong, then, when he says that ‘in the beginning was the Word’. Doubly wrong because, to put it in traditional terms, his statement is both positive and idealist. The word does not negate, as the scream does. And the word does not imply doing, as the scream does. The world of the word is a stable world, a sitting-back-in-an-armchair-and-having-a-chat world, a sitting-at-a-desk-and-writing world, a contented world, far from the scream which would change everything, far from the doing which negates.¹⁰ In the world of the word, doing is separated from talking and doing, practice is separated from theory. Theory in the world of the word is the thought of the Thinker, of someone in restful reflection, chin in hand, elbow on knee. ‘The philosophers’, as Marx says in his famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, ‘have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.’

Marx’s thesis does not mean that we should abandon theory for practice. It means rather that we should understand theory as part of practice, as part of the struggle to change the world. Both theory

and doing are part of the practical movement of negation. This implies, then, that doing must be understood in a broad sense, certainly not just as work, and also not just as physical action, but as the whole movement of practical negativity. To emphasise the centrality of doing is not to deny the importance of thought or language but simply to see them as part of the total movement of practical negativity, of the practical projection beyond the world that exists towards a radically different world. To focus on doing is quite simply to see the world as struggle.

It might be argued, with some force, that changing society should be thought of not in terms of doing but in terms of not-doing, laziness, refusal to work, enjoyment. 'Let us be lazy in everything, except in loving and drinking, except in being lazy': Lafargue begins his classic *The Right to be Lazy* with this quotation (1999, p. 3), implying that there is nothing more incompatible with capitalist exploitation than the laziness advocated by Lessing. Laziness in capitalist society, however, implies refusal to do, an active assertion of an alternative practice. Doing, in the sense in which we understand it here, includes laziness and the pursuit of pleasure, both of which are very much negative practices in a society based on their negation. Refusal to do, in a world based on the conversion of doing into work, can be seen as an effective form of resistance.

Human doing implies projection-beyond, and hence the unity of theory and practice. Projection-beyond is seen by Marx as a distinctive characteristic of human doing:

A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architecture from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. [Marx 1965, p. 178]

The imagination of the labourer is ecstatic: at the commencement of the labour process it projects beyond what is to an otherness that might be. This otherness exists not only when it is created: it exists already, really, subjunctively, in the projection of the worker, in that which makes her human. The doing of the architect is negative, not only in its result, but in its whole process: it begins and ends with the

negation of what exists. Even if she is the worst of architects, the doing is a creative doing.

Bees, to the best of our knowledge, do not scream. They do not say 'No! Enough of queens, enough of drones, we shall create a society which will be shaped by us workers, we shall emancipate ourselves!' Their doing is not a doing that negates: it simply reproduces. We, however, do scream. Our scream is a projection-beyond, the articulation of an otherness that might be. If our scream is to be more than a smug look-how-rebellious-I-am scream (which is no scream at all), then it must involve a projected doing, the project of doing something to change that which we scream against.¹¹ The scream and the doing-which-is-a-going-beyond distinguish humans from animals. Humans, but not animals, are ecstatic: they exist not only in, but also against-and-beyond themselves.

Why? Not because going-beyond is part of our human nature, but simply because we scream. Negation comes not from our human essence, but from the situation in which we find ourselves. We scream and push-beyond not because that is human nature, but, on the contrary, because we are torn from what we consider to be humanity. Our negativity arises not from our humanity, but from the negation of our humanity, from the feeling that humanity is not-yet, that it is something to be fought for. It is not human nature, but the scream of our starting point that compels us to focus on doing.¹²

To take doing, rather than being or talking or thinking, as the focus of our thought, has many implications. Doing implies movement. To start from doing-as-going-beyond (and not just the busy-bee doing-as-reproduction) means that everything (or at least everything human) is in movement, everything is becoming, that there is no 'being', or rather that being can only be a frustrated becoming. The perspective of the scream-doing is inevitably historical, because the human experience can only be understood as a constant moving-beyond (or possibly a frustrated moving-beyond). This is important, because if the starting point is not screaming-doing (doing-as-negation) but rather the word or discourse or a positive understanding of doing (as reproduction), then there is no possibility of understanding society historically: the movement of history becomes broken down into a series of snapshots, a diachronic series, a chronology. Becoming is broken down into a series of states of being.¹³

To put the point in other words, humans are subjects while animals are not. Subjectivity refers to the conscious projection

beyond that which exists, the ability to negate that which exists and to create something that does not yet exist. Subjectivity, the movement of the scream-doing, involves a movement against limits, against containment, against closure. The doer is not. Not only that, but doing is the movement against is-ness, against that-which-is. Any definition of the subject is therefore contradictory or indeed violent: the attempt to pin down that which is a movement against being pinned down. The idea that we can start from the assertion that people are subjects has been much criticised in recent years, especially by theorists associated with postmodernism. The idea of the person as subject, we are told, is a historical construct. That may be so, but our starting point, the scream of complete refusal to accept the misery of capitalist society, takes us inevitably to the notion of subjectivity. To deny human subjectivity is to deny the scream or, which comes to the same thing, to turn the scream into a scream of despair. 'Ha! Ha!' they mock, 'you scream as though it were possible to change society radically. But there is no possibility of radical change, there is no way out.' Our starting point makes such an approach impossible. The sharpness of our No! is a sword that cuts through many a theoretical knot.

Doing is inherently social. What I do is always part of a social flow of doing, in which the precondition of my doing is the doing (or having-done) of others, in which the doing of others provides the means of my doing. Doing is inherently plural, collective, choral, communal. This does not mean that all doing is (or indeed should be) undertaken collectively. It means rather that it is difficult to conceive of a doing that does not have the doing of others as a precondition. I sit at the computer and write this, apparently a lonely individual act, but my writing is part of a social process, a plaiting of my writing with the writing of others (those mentioned in the footnotes and a million others), and also with the doing of those who designed the computer, assembled it, packed it, transported it, those who installed the electricity in the house, those who generated the electricity, those who produced the food that gives me the energy to write, and so on, and so on. There is a community of doing, a collective of doers, a flow of doing through time and space. Past doing (of ourselves and others) becomes the means of doing in the present. Any act, however individual it seems, is part of a chorus of doing in which all humanity is the choir (albeit an anarchic and discordant choir). Our doings are so intertwined that it is impossible to say where one ends and another begins. Clearly there are many

doings that do not in turn create the conditions for the doing of others, that do not feed back into the social flow of doing as a whole: it is quite possible, for example, that no one will ever read what I am now doing. However, the doings that do not lead back into the social flow of doing do not for that reason cease to be social. My activity is social whether or not anybody reads this: it is important not to confuse sociality and functionality.

To speak of the social flow of doing is not to deny the materiality of the done. When I make a chair, the chair exists materially. When I write a book, the book exists as an object. It has an existence independent of mine, and may still exist when I no longer exist. In that sense it might be said that there is an objectification of my subjective doing, that the done acquires an existence separate from the doing, that the done abstracts itself from the flow of doing. This is true, however, only if my doing is seen as an individual act. Seen from the social flow of doing, the objectification of my subjective doing is at most a fleeting objectification. The existence of the chair as chair depends upon someone sitting upon it, reincorporating it into the flow of doing. The existence of the book as book depends upon your reading it, the braiding of your doing (reading) with my doing (writing) to reintegrate the done (the book) into the social flow of doing.¹⁴

It is when we understand 'we scream' as a material 'we scream', as a screaming-doing, that 'we-ness' (that question that rumbles through our book) gains force. Doing, in other words, is the material constitution of the 'we', the conscious and unconscious, planned and unplanned, braiding of our lives through time. This braiding of our lives, this collective doing, involves, if the collective flow of doing is recognised, a mutual recognition of one another as doers, as active subjects. Our individual doing receives its social validation from its recognition as part of the social flow.

III

To begin to think about power and changing the world without taking power (or indeed anything else), we need to start from doing.

Doing implies being able-to-do. The scream is of no significance without doing, and doing is inconceivable unless we are able-to-do. If we are deprived of our capacity-to-do, or rather, if we are deprived of our capacity to project-beyond-and-do, of our capacity to do

negatively, ecstatically, then we are deprived of our humanity, our doing is reduced (and we are reduced) to the level of a bee. If we are deprived of our capacity-to-do, then our scream becomes a scream of despair.

Power, in the first place, is simply that: can-ness,¹⁵ capacity-to-do, the ability to do things. Doing implies power, power-to-do. In this sense we commonly use 'power' to refer to something good: I feel powerful, I feel good. The little train in the children's story (Piper 1978) that says 'I think I can, I think I can' as it tries to reach the top of the mountain, has a growing sense of its own power. We go to a good political meeting and come away with an enhanced sense of our own power. We read a good book and feel empowered. The women's movement has given women a greater sense of their own power. Power in this sense can be referred to as 'power-to', power-to-do.

Power-to, it must be emphasised again, is always a social power, even though it may not appear to be so. The story of the little train presents power-to as a matter of individual determination, but in fact that is never the case. Our doing is *always* part of a social flow of doing, even where it appears to be an individual act. Our capacity to do is always an interlacing of our activity with the previous or present activity of others. Our capacity to do is always the result of the doing of others.

Power-to, therefore, is never individual: it is always social. It cannot be thought of as existing in some pure, unsullied state, for its existence will always be part of the way in which sociality is constituted, the way in which doing is organised. Doing (and power-to-do) is always part of a social flow, but that flow is constituted in different ways.

It is when the social flow of doing is fractured that power-to is transformed into its opposite, power-over.

The social flow is fractured when doing itself is broken.¹⁶ Doing-as-projection-beyond is broken when some people arrogate to themselves the projection-beyond (conception) of the doing and command others to execute what they have conceived.¹⁷ Doing is broken as the 'powerful' conceive but do not execute, while the others execute but do not conceive. Doing is broken as the 'powerful' separate the done from the doers and appropriate it to themselves. The social flow is broken as the 'powerful' present themselves as the individual doers, while the rest simply disappear from sight. If we think of 'powerful' men in history, for example, of Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler, then power appears as the attribute

of an individual. But of course their power to do things was not an ability to do them on their own, but an ability to command others to do what they wished them to do. The 'we' of doing appears as an 'I', or as a 'he' (more often a 'he' than a 'she'): Caesar did this, Caesar did that. The 'we' is now an antagonistic 'we', divided between the rulers (the visible subjects) and the ruled (the invisible de-subjectified subjects). Power-to now becomes 'power-over', a relation of power over others. These others are powerless (or apparently powerless), deprived of the capacity to realise our own projects, if only because we spend our days realising the projects of those who exercise power-over.

For most of us, then, power is turned into its opposite. Power means not our capacity-to-do, but our incapacity-to-do. It means not the assertion of our subjectivity but the destruction of our subjectivity. The existence of power relations means not the capacity to obtain some future good but just the contrary: the incapacity to obtain the future good,¹⁸ the incapacity to realise our own projects, our own dreams. It is not that we cease to project, that we cease to dream, but unless the projects and dreams are cut to match the 'reality' of power relations (and this is usually achieved, if at all, through bitter experience), then they are met with frustration. Power, for those without the means of commanding others, is frustration. The existence of power-to as power-over means that the vast majority of doers are converted into the done-to, their activity transformed into passivity, their subjectivity into objectivity.¹⁹

Whereas power-to is a uniting, a bringing together of my doing with the doing of others, the exercise of power-over is a separation. The exercise of power-over separates conception from realisation, done from doing, one person's doing from another's, subject from object. Those who exercise power-over are Separators,²⁰ separating done from doing, doers from the means of doing.

Power-over is the breaking of the social flow of doing. Those who exert power over the doing of others deny the subjectivity of those others, deny their part in the flow of doing, exclude them from history. Power-over breaks mutual recognition: those over whom power is exercised are not recognised (and those who exercise power are not recognised by anyone whom they recognise as worthy of giving recognition²¹). The doing of the doers is deprived of social validation: we and our doing become invisible. History becomes the history of the powerful, of those who tell others what to do. The flow of doing becomes an antagonistic process in which the doing of

most is denied, in which the doing of most is appropriated by the few. The flow of doing becomes a broken process.

The breaking of doing always involves physical force or the threat of physical force. There is always the threat: 'Work for us or you will die or suffer physical punishment.' If domination is robbery of the done from the doer, that robbery is, necessarily, armed robbery. But what makes the use or threat of physical force possible is its stabilisation or institutionalisation in various ways, an understanding of which is crucial to understanding the dynamic and weakness of power-over.

In pre-capitalist societies, power-over is stabilised on the basis of a personal relation between ruler and ruled. In a slave society, the exercise of power-over is institutionalised around the idea that some people (whose quality as persons is denied) are the property of others. In feudal societies, it is the notion of divinely-ordained hierarchies of person-hood that gives form to the commanding of some by others. The personal nature of the relation of power-over means that the use or threat of force is always directly present in the relation of domination itself. The refusal to work is always an act of personal rebellion against one's owner or lord and punishable by that owner or lord.

In capitalist society (which is what interests us most, since that is where we live and what we scream against), the stabilisation into a 'right' of the bossing of some people by others is based not on the direct relation between ruler and doer but on the relation between the ruler and the done. The doers have now won freedom from personal dependence on the rulers, but they are still held in a position of subordination by the fracturing of the collective flow of doing. Capital is based on the freezing of the past doing of people into property. Since past doing is the precondition of present doing, the freezing and appropriation of past doing separates the precondition of present doing from that past doing, constitutes it as an identifiable 'means of doing' (more familiarly, 'means of production'). Thus, the freed serfs and slaves are freed into a world where the only way in which they can have access to the means of doing (and therefore of living) is to sell their capacity-to-do (their power-to-do, now transformed into power-to-labour or labour-power) to those who 'own' the means of doing. Their freedom in no sense frees them from subordination of their doing to the dictates of others.

Capital is that: the assertion of command over others on the basis of 'ownership' of the done and hence of the means of doing, the pre-

condition for the doing of those others who are commanded. All class societies involve the separation of done (or a part of the done) from doing and doers, but in capitalism that separation becomes the sole axis of domination. There is a peculiar rigidification of the done, a peculiarly radical separation of done from doing. If, from the perspective of the social flow of doing, the objectification of the done is a fleeting objectification, immediately overcome through the incorporation of the done into the flow of doing, then capitalism depends on making that objectification a durable objectification, on converting the done into an object, a thing apart, something that can be defined as property. Capitalism thus implies a new definition of 'subject' and 'object', in which the 'object' is durably and rigidly separated from the subject's doing.²²

This does not mean that subject and object are constituted by capitalism. Subjectivity is inherent in negativity (the scream), and negativity is inherent in any society (certainly any in which doing is subordinated to others). However, the separation between subject and object, doer and done or done-to, acquires a new meaning under capitalism, leading to a new definition and a new consciousness of subjectivity and objectivity, a new distance and antagonism between subject and object. Thus, rather than the subject being the product of modernity, it is rather that modernity expresses consciousness of the new separation of subject and object which is inherent in the focusing of social domination upon the done.²³

Another way of formulating the same point is to say that there is a separation of the constitution of the object from its existence. The done now exists in durable autonomy from the doing which constituted it. Whereas from the perspective of the social flow of doing, the existence of an object is merely a fleeting moment in the flow of subjective constitution (or doing), capitalism depends on the conversion of that fleeting moment into a durable objectification. But of course durable autonomy is an illusion, a very real illusion. The separation of done from doing is a real illusion, a real process in which the done nevertheless never ceases to depend on the doing. Likewise, the separation of existence from constitution is a real illusion, a real process in which existence never ceases to depend on constitution. The definition of the done as private property is the negation of the sociality of doing, but this too is a real illusion, a real process in which private property never ceases to depend on the sociality of doing. The rupture of doing does not mean that doing ceases to be social, simply that it becomes *indirectly* social.

Capital is based not on the ownership of people but on the ownership of the done and, on that basis, of the repeated buying of people's power-to-do. Since people are not owned, they can quite easily refuse to work for others without suffering any immediate punishment. The punishment comes rather in being cut off from the means of doing (and of survival). The use of force comes then not as part of the direct relation between capitalist and worker. Force is focused in the first place not on the doer but on the done: its focus is the protection of property, the protection of ownership of the done. It is exercised not by the individual owner of the done, for that would be incompatible with the free nature of the relation between capitalist and worker, but by a separate instance responsible for protecting the property of the done, the state. The separation of the economic and the political (and the constitution of the 'economic' and the 'political' by this separation) is therefore central to the exercise of domination under capitalism. If domination is always a process of armed robbery, the peculiarity of capitalism is that the person with the arms stands apart from the person doing the robbery, merely supervising that the robbery conforms with the law. Without this separation, property (as opposed to mere temporary possession) of the done, and therefore capitalism itself, would be impossible. This is important for the discussion of power, because the separation of the economic and the political makes it appear that it is the political which is the realm of the exercise of power (leaving the economic as a 'natural' sphere beyond question), whereas in fact the exercise of power (the conversion of power-to into power-over) is already inherent in the separation of the done from the doing, and hence in the very constitution of the political and the economic as distinct forms of social relations (see Pashukanis 1978; Holloway and Picciotto 1977, 1978b).

The conversion of power-to into power-over always involves the fracturing of the flow of doing, but in capitalism, to a far greater extent than in any previous society, the fracturing of the social flow of doing is the principle on which society is constructed. The fact that the property of the done is the axis on which the right to command the doing of others is based puts the breaking of the flow of doing at the centre of every aspect of social relations.

The breaking of the social flow of doing is the breaking of everything.²⁴ Most obviously, the rupture of doing breaks the collective 'we'. The collectivity is divided into two classes of people: those who, by virtue of their ownership of the means of doing,

command others to do, and those who, by virtue of the fact that they are deprived of access to the means of doing, do what the others tell them to do. That projection which distinguishes people from bees is now monopolised by the former class, the owners of the means of doing. For those who are told what to do, the unity of projection-and-doing which distinguishes the worst architect from the best bee is broken. Their humanity, in other words, is broken, denied. Subjectivity (projection-and-doing) is appropriated by the capitalists (or rather, not so much by the capitalists as by the perverse relation of capital). The doers, deprived of the unity of projection-and-doing, lose their subjectivity, become reduced to the level of bees. They become objectivised subjects. They lose too their collectivity, their 'we-ness': we are fragmented into a multitude of 'I's, or, even worse, into a multitude of 'I's, 'you's, 'he's, 'she's and 'they's. Once the social flow of doing is broken, the we-ness which it braids is broken too.

The break between projection and doing is also a break between the doers and the doing. The doing is ordained by the non-doers (the commanders of doing), so that the doing becomes an alien act (an externally imposed act) for those who do. Their doing is transformed from an active doing to a passive, suffered, alien doing. Doing becomes labour.²⁵ Doing which is not directly commanded by others is separated from labour and seen as less important: 'What do you do?' 'Oh, I don't do anything, I'm just a housewife.'

The separation between doer and doing, doing and done, is a growing separation. The capitalists' control of the done (and hence of the means of doing) grows and grows, accumulates and accumulates. The fact that capitalist rule is focused on the done rather than on the doers means that it is boundlessly voracious in a way in which doer-centred domination (slavery, feudalism) is not: 'Accumulate! Accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!' (Marx 1965, p. 595). The endless drive to increase the quantitative accumulation of the done (dead labour, capital) imposes an ever faster rhythm of doing and an ever more desperate appropriation of the product of doing by the owner of the done. The done comes to dominate the doing and the doer more and more.

The crystallisation of that-which-has-been-done into a 'thing' shatters the flow of doing into a million fragments. Thing-ness denies the primacy of doing (and hence of humanity). When we use a computer, we think of it as a thing, not of the union of our writing with the flow of doing which created the computer. Thing-ness is

crystallised amnesia.²⁶ The doing that created the thing (not just that specific doing, but the whole flow of doing of which it is a part) is forgotten. The thing now stands there on its own as a commodity to be sold, with its own value. The value of the commodity is the declaration of the commodity's autonomy from doing. The doing which created the commodity is forgotten, the collective flow of doing of which it is part is forced underground, turned into a subterranean stream. Value acquires a life of its own. The breaking of the flow of doing is carried to its ultimate consequences. Doing is pushed below the surface, and with it the doers, but it is more than that: those who exercise power-over are also pushed aside by the fragmentation on which their power-over is based. The subject in capitalist society is not the capitalist. It is not the capitalists who take the decisions, who shape what is done. It is value. It is capital, accumulated value. That which the capitalists 'own' – capital – has pushed the capitalists aside. They are capitalists only to the extent that they are loyal servants of capital. The very significance of ownership falls into the background. Capital acquires a dynamic of its own and the leading members of society are quite simply its most loyal servants, its most servile courtiers. This is true not only of capitalists themselves, but also of politicians, civil servants, professors, and so on. The rupture of the flow of doing is carried to its most absurd consequences. Power-over is separated from the powerful. Doing is denied and the crystallised negation of doing – value – rules the world.

Instead of doing being the braiding of our lives, it is now the negation of doing – value – in the form of its visible and universal equivalent – money – which braids our lives, or rather tears our lives apart and sticks the fragments back together into a cracked whole.

IV

Power-to is inherently social and is transformed into its opposite, power-over, by the form of this sociality. Our capacity to do is unavoidably part of the social flow of doing, yet the fracturing of this flow subordinates this capacity to forces we do not control.

Doing, then, exists antagonistically, as a doing turned against itself, as a doing dominated by the done, as a doing alienated from the doer. The antagonistic existence of doing can be formulated in different ways: as an antagonism between power-to and power-over,

between doing and labour, between done and capital, between utility (use-value) and value, between social flow of doing and fragmentation. In each case there is a binary antagonism between the former and the latter, but it is not an external antagonism. In each case, the former exists as the latter: the latter is the mode of existence or *form* of the former. In each case, the latter denies the former, so that the former exists in the mode of being denied.²⁷ In each case, the content (the former) is dominated by its form but exists in antagonistic tension with this form. This domination of form over content (of labour over doing, of capital over done, and so on) is the source of those horrors against which we scream.

But what is the status of that which exists in the form of being denied? Does it exist at all? Where is power-to, where is unalienated doing, where is the social flow of doing? Do they have any sort of existence separate from the forms in which they currently exist? Are they not mere ideas, or romantic echoes of an imagined Golden Age? They are certainly not intended as a romantic harking back to a past age: whether there was ever a golden age of free doing (primitive communism) does not really matter to us now. They point not towards the past but towards a possible future: a future whose possibility depends on its real existence in the present. That which exists in the form of being denied exists, therefore and inevitably, in rebellion against this denial. There is no unalienated doing in the past, nor can it exist, hippie-like, in a present idyll: nevertheless, it exists, crucially, as present antagonism to its denial, as present projection-beyond-its-denial-to-a-different-world, as a presently existing not-yet.²⁸ That which exists in the form of being denied is the substance of the ecstatic, the materiality of the scream, the truth which allows us to speak of the existing world as untrue.

But it is more than that. The power-to that exists in the form of power-over, in the form, therefore, of being denied, exists not only as revolt against its denial, it exists also as material substratum of the denial. The denial cannot exist without that which is denied. The done depends on the doing.²⁹ The owner of the done depends on the doer. No matter how much the done denies the existence of the doing, as in the case of value, as in the case of capital, there is no way in which the done can exist without the doing. No matter how much the done dominates the doing, it depends absolutely on that doing for its existence. Rulers, in other words, always depend on those whom they rule. Capital depends absolutely upon the labour which creates it (and therefore on the prior transformation of doing

into labour). That which exists depends for its existence on that which exists only in the form of its denial. That is the weakness of any system of rule and the key to understanding its dynamic. That is the basis for hope.

'Power', then, is a confusing term which conceals an antagonism (and does so in a way that reflects the power of the powerful). 'Power' is used in two quite different senses, as power-to and as power-over. The problem is sometimes addressed in English by borrowing terms from other languages and making a distinction between *potentia* (power-to) and *potestas* (power-over).³⁰ However, posing the distinction in these terms can be seen as pointing merely to a difference whereas what is at issue is an antagonism, or rather, an antagonistic metamorphosis. Power-to exists as power-over, but the power-to is subjected to and in rebellion against power-over, and power-over is nothing but, and therefore absolutely dependent upon, the metamorphosis of power-to.

The struggle of the scream is the struggle to liberate power-to from power-over, the struggle to liberate doing from labour, to liberate subjectivity from its objectification. In this struggle, it is crucial to see that it is not a matter of power against power, of like against like. It is not a symmetrical struggle. The struggle to liberate power-to from power-over is the struggle for the reassertion of the social flow of doing, against its fragmentation and denial. On the one side is the struggle to re-braid our lives on the basis of the mutual recognition of our participation in the collective flow of doing; on the other side is the attempt to impose and reimpose the fragmentation of that flow, the denial of our doing. From the perspective of the scream, the Leninist aphorism that power is a matter of who-whom is absolutely false, as indeed is the Maoist saying that power comes out of the barrel of a gun: power-over may come out of the barrel of a gun, but not power-to. The struggle to liberate power-to is not the struggle to construct a counter-power, but rather an anti-power, something that is radically different from power-over. Concepts of revolution that focus on the taking of power are typically centred on the notion of counter-power. The strategy is to construct a counter-power, a power that can stand against the ruling power. Often the revolutionary movement has been constructed as a mirror image of power, army against army, party against party, with the result that power reproduces itself within the revolution itself. Anti-power, then, is not counter-power, but something much more radical: it is the dissolution of power-over, the emancipation of

power-to. This is the great, absurd, inevitable challenge of the communist dream: to create a society free of power relations through the dissolution of power-over. This project is far more radical than any notion of revolution based on the conquest of power and at the same time far more realistic.

Anti-power is fundamentally opposed to power-over not only in the sense of being a radically different project, but also in the fact that it exists in constant conflict with power-over. The attempt to exercise power-to in a way that does not entail the exercise of power over others, inevitably comes into conflict with power-over. *Potentia* is not an alternative to *potestas* that can simply coexist peacefully with it. It may appear that we can simply cultivate our own garden, create our own world of loving relations, refuse to get our hands dirty in the filth of power, but this is an illusion. There is no innocence, and this is true with an increasing intensity. The exercise of power-to in a way that does not focus on value creation can exist only in antagonism to power-over, as struggle. This is due not to the character of power-to (which is not inherently antagonistic) as to the voracious nature, the 'were-wolf hunger' (Marx 1965, p. 243) of power-over. Power-to, if it does not submerge itself in power-over, can exist, overtly or latently, only as power-against, as anti-power.

It is important to stress the anti-ness of power-to under capitalism, because most mainstream discussions of social theory overlook the antagonistic nature of developing one's potential. The antagonistic nature of power is overlooked and it is assumed that capitalist society provides the opportunity to develop human potential (power-to) to the full. Money, if it is seen as being relevant at all (and, amazingly, it is generally not mentioned in discussions of power, presumably on the basis that money is economics and power is sociology), is generally seen in terms of inequality (unequal access to resources, for example), rather than in terms of command. Power-to, it is assumed, is already emancipated.

The same point can be made in relation to subjectivity. The fact that power-to can exist only as antagonism to power-over (as anti-power) means of course that, under capitalism, subjectivity can only exist antagonistically, in opposition to its own objectification. To treat the subject as already emancipated, as most mainstream theory does, is to endorse the present objectification of the subject as subjectivity, as freedom. Many of the attacks on subjectivity by structuralists or postmodernists can perhaps be understood in this sense, as attacks on a false notion of an emancipated (and hence

autonomous and coherent) subjectivity.³¹ To argue here for the inevitability of taking subjectivity as our starting point is not to argue for a coherent or autonomous subjectivity. On the contrary, the fact that subjectivity can exist only in antagonism to its own objectification means that it is torn apart by that objectification and its struggle against it.

This book is an exploration of the absurd and shadowy world of anti-power. It is shadowy and absurd simply because the world of orthodox social science (sociology, political science, economics, and so on) is a world in which power is so completely taken for granted that nothing else is visible. In the social science that seeks to explain the world as it is, to show how the world works, power is the keystone of all categories, so that, in spite of (indeed, because of) its proclaimed neutrality, this social science participates actively in the separation of subject and object which is the substance of power. To us, power is of interest only in so far as it helps us to understand the challenge of anti-power: the study of power on its own, in abstraction from the challenge and project of anti-power, can do nothing but actively reproduce power.

V

We have presented the issue of power in terms of a binary antagonism between doing and done, in which the done, existing in the form of capital (apparently controlled by, but actually in control of, the capitalists) subordinates, ever more voraciously, all doing to the sole purpose of its self-expansion.

But is this not too simple? Surely that which we scream against is far more complex than this? What about the way that doctors treat their patients, what about the way that teachers treat their students, that parents treat their children? What of the treatment of blacks by whites? What about the subordination of women to men? Is it not too simplistic, too reductionist, to say that power is capital and capital is power? Are there not many different types of power?

Foucault in particular makes the argument that it is a mistake to think of power in terms of a binary antagonism, that we must think of it rather in terms of a 'multiplicity of force relations' (1990, p. 92). Corresponding to the multiplicity of power relations there is then a multiplicity of resistances

... present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. [1990, pp. 95–6]

In terms of our scream, that would suggest an endless multiplicity of screams. And indeed it is so: we scream in many different ways and for many different reasons. From the beginning of our argument it was stressed that the ‘we-ness’ of ‘we scream’ is a central question in this book, not a simple assertion of identity. Why, then, insist on the binary nature of an overriding antagonism between doing and done? It cannot be a matter of an abstract defence of a Marxist approach – that would make no sense. Nor is it in any sense the intention to impose a single identity or unity upon the manifest multiplicity of resistance, to subordinate all the variety of resistances to the *a priori* unity of the Working Class. Nor can it be a matter of emphasising the empirical role of the working class and its importance in relation to ‘other forms of struggle’.

In order to explain our insistence on the binary nature of the antagonism of power (or, in more traditional terms, our insistence on a class analysis), it is necessary to retrace our steps. The starting-point of the argument here is not the urge to understand society or to explain how it works. Our starting-point is much sharper: the scream, the drive to change society radically. It is from that perspective that we ask how society works. That starting-point led us to place the question of doing in the centre of our discussion, and this in turn led us to the antagonism between doing and done.

Obviously, other perspectives are possible. It is more common to start positively, with the question of how society works. Such a perspective does not necessarily lead to a focus on doing and the way in which doing is organised. In the case of Foucault, it leads rather to a focus on talking, on language. This perspective certainly allows him to elucidate the enormous richness and complexity of power relations in contemporary society and, more important from our perspective, the richness and complexity of resistance to power.

However, the richness and complexity is the richness of a still photograph, or of a painting.³² There is no movement in the society that Foucault analyses: change from one still photograph to another, but no movement. There cannot be, unless the focus is on doing and its antagonistic existence. Thus, in Foucault's analysis, there are a whole host of resistances which are integral to power, but there is no possibility of emancipation. The only possibility is an endlessly shifting constellation of power-and-resistance.

The argument in this chapter has led to two important results, which it is worth reiterating. First, the focus on doing has led to an intimation of the vulnerability of power-over. The done depends on the doer, capital depends on labour. That is the crucial chink of light, the glimmer of hope, the turning-point in the argument. The realisation that the powerful depend on the 'powerless'³³ transforms the scream from a scream of anger to a scream of hope, a confident scream of anti-power (see Holloway 1995a). This realisation takes us beyond the merely radical-democratic perspective of an endless struggle against power to a position from which we can pose the issue of the vulnerability of capital and the real possibility of social transformation. From this perspective, then, we must ask of any theory not so much how it illuminates the present, but what light it throws on the vulnerability of rule. What we want is not a theory of domination, but a theory of the vulnerability of domination, of the crisis of domination, as an expression of our own (anti-)power. The emphasis on understanding power in terms of a 'multiplicity of relations of force' does not give us any basis for posing this question. Indeed, on the contrary, it tends to exclude the question, for, while resistance is central to Foucault's approach (at least in his later work), the notion of emancipation is ruled out as being absurd, for it presupposes, as Foucault correctly points out, the assumption of a unity in the relations of power.

To pose the question of the vulnerability of power thus requires two steps: the opening of the category of power to reveal its contradictory character, which has been described here in terms of the antagonism between power-to and power-over; and second, the understanding of this antagonistic relation as an internal relation. Power-to exists as power-over: power-over is the form of power-to, a form which denies its substance. Power-over can exist only as transformed power-to. Capital can exist only as the product of transformed doing (labour). That is the key to its weakness. The issue of form, so central to Marx's discussion of capitalism, is crucial for an

understanding of the vulnerability of domination. The distinction which Negri makes (and develops so brilliantly) between constituent and constituted power takes the first of these two steps and opens up an understanding of the self-antagonistic nature of power as a precondition for talking about revolutionary transformation (see Negri 1999). However, the relation between constituent and constituted power remains an external one. Constitution (the transformation of constituent into constituted power) is seen as a *reaction* to the democratic constituent power of the multitude. This, however, tells us nothing about the vulnerability of the process of constitution. In the face of power-over (constituted power) it tells us of the ubiquity and force of the absolute struggle of the multitude, but it tells us nothing of the crucial nexus of dependence of power-over (constituted power) upon power-to (constituent power). In this sense, for all the force and brilliance of his account, Negri remains at the level of radical-democratic theory.³⁴

Does this emphasis on the perspective of the scream lead us then to an impoverished view of society? The argument above seems to suggest that the perspective of the scream leads to a binary view of the antagonism between doing and done, and that in such a perspective there is no room for the 'multiplicity of forces' which Foucault sees as essential to the discussion of power. This seems to suggest a split between the revolutionary or negative perspective and the understanding of the undoubted richness and complexity of society. This would indeed be the case (and would constitute a major problem for our argument) if it were not for the second result of our previous discussion, namely that the antagonistic relation between doing and done, and specifically the radical fracturing of the flow of doing that is inherent in the fact that power-over exists as ownership of the done, means a multiple fragmentation of doing (and of social relations). In other words, the very understanding of social relations as being characterised by a binary antagonism between doing and done means that this antagonism exists in the form of a multiplicity of antagonisms, a great heterogeneity of conflict. There are indeed a million forms of resistance, an immensely complex world of antagonisms. To reduce these to an empirical unity of conflict between capital and labour, or to argue for a hegemony of working-class struggle, understood empirically, or to argue that these apparently non-class resistances must be subsumed under class struggle, would be an absurd violence. The argument here is just the contrary: the fact that capitalist society is charac-

terised by a binary antagonism between doing and done means that this antagonism exists as a multiplicity of antagonisms. It is the binary nature of power (as antagonism between power-to and power-over) that means that power appears as a 'multiplicity of forces'. Rather than starting with the multiplicity, we need to start with the prior multiplication that gives rise to this multiplicity. Rather than starting with the multiple identities (women, blacks, gays, Basques, Irish, and so on), we need to start from the process of identification that gives rise to those identities. In this perspective, one aspect of Foucault's enormously stimulating writings is precisely that, without presenting it in those terms, he greatly enriches our understanding of the fragmentation of the flow of doing, our historical understanding of what we shall characterise in the next chapter as the process of fetishisation.

A last point needs to be dealt with before passing on to the discussion of fetishism. It is an important part of Foucault's argument that power should not be seen in purely negative terms, that we must also understand the way in which power constitutes reality and constitutes us. That is clearly so: we are conceived and born not in a power-free vacuum but in a power-traversed society: we are products of that society. Foucault, however, fails to open up the category of power, to point to the fundamental antagonism that characterises it. Thus, we can say, for example, that we are products of capital, or that everything we consume is a commodity. That is clearly so, but it is deceptive. It is only when we open up these categories, when we say, for example, that the commodity is characterised by an antagonism between value and use value (utility), that use value exists in the form of value, and in rebellion against this form, that the full development of our human potential presupposes our participation in this rebellion, and so on. It is only then that we can make sense of the statement that everything we consume is a commodity. Similarly with power: it is only when we open up the category of power and see power-over as the antagonistic form of power-to that it makes sense to say that power constitutes us. The power that constitutes us is an antagonism, an antagonism of which we are profoundly and inevitably part.