

THREE

We Are the Crisis of Capital and Proud of It

In these three sessions we are trying to pose the question of how we can think about revolution after the failures of revolution in the twentieth century. It is not enough just to think of individual struggles. It is very important to focus on particular struggles, but we have to go further than that. We have to go further than that, because our problem is not just to win the occasional struggle and make things a little bit better here and there. Our problem is how we can break the dynamic of capitalism, the dynamic of money, the dynamic of profit, which is so obviously destroying the world and threatens to destroy humanity completely.

What I have suggested is that there is a shift taking place in the way that revolution is being posed. The dominant twentieth-century concept of revolution focused on the issue of conquering state power. The goal was to conquer state power and, from there, to bring about a major transformation in society. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of China as a capitalist power, it has become very clear that that didn't work. So, if we want to go back to the question of revolution, we have to think of it in a different way.

The basic thing in the grammar or, perhaps better, anti-grammar, of revolution that is emerging is the idea that the central problem is not in the first place, or not only, exploitation, it is capital as a system of social cohesion. Capital as a system that increasingly draws all our activities into a certain logic—all our activities here, in the so-called more developed

countries, but also all our activities throughout the world, into a certain logic, into the logic of profit. You can think of capitalism as a kind of spider's web that is gradually—or progressively, not gradually at all, actually very fast—strangling us all, pulling us into its logic, leaving no room for anything else, progressively destroying the world. The center of the web is, of course, the relation of exploitation, because the web wouldn't exist, this weaving of social relations through the dominance of money and commodity wouldn't exist if labor power itself weren't a commodity. It's not that we're throwing exploitation out the window, now we're going to talk about social cohesion, it's not that. Rather, there is a shift in the balance between these two central elements. What we are beginning to focus on is the notion of capital as a system of social cohesion. So then the question becomes not how we gain power in order to change everything but how we can break this system of social cohesion. That's the idea that has guided the way I have been thinking about these lectures. We started off on Tuesday with *We*, with the force of rupture, with the power that could potentially break the social cohesion, because the only way that we can break the spider's web is actually through the power of us flies, caught somewhere in the middle. In other words, we have to start with ourselves if we are going to think of a power of rupture. When we think of ourselves as the power, as the possible force of rupture, as the possible force that can push beyond capital, break this dynamic of death, then we are saying, in the first place, *We are dignity*. We will no longer accept this system based on humiliation, based on dehumanization, based on the negation of our own subjectivity, on the negation of our own dignity. We are dignity in revolt against the negation of our own dignity. We are dignified rage, *digna rabia*. We are not victims. If *We* start off thinking *We are victims*, then there is no way out, unless some kind of god or party comes along and saves us. And that's not going to happen.

When we start with the notion that We are dignity, We are not victims, We are not poor, We are rich in creative potential. We are rich because We are in fact the creators of the social world. We rise up not because We are poor but because We are rich. We are frustrated rich, because the richness of our creative potential is frustrated by the society We live in. Because our richness is forced into the commodity form, into the money form, into the prison of the commodity, of money. We are rich, We are the only creators, and therefore our lords and masters, the capitalists—capital, in other words—depend upon us. The lord always depends upon the servant and that is the source of hope.

We are in revolt because that is what dignity means, that is what humanity means, and there is absolutely nothing special about our revolt. We are in revolt because We are perfectly ordinary people. We are in revolt simply because to exist in a society based on domination means to struggle against that domination. And because We are in revolt and are ordinary and because We are dignity, We organize ourselves in ways that articulate our dignity, that articulate our rebellion, that articulate our struggle to take back the world. That means, I think, that we organize ourselves in assemblies, communes, councils, soviets, whatever you want to call them, and not in the form of the state, not in the form of state-centered organizations such as parties, because they are forms of organization designed to exclude us and which do effectively exclude us. We are dignity, We are richness, and We are also self-contradictory because We exist in, against, and beyond the existing society and that inevitably reproduces itself within us. So, We are self-contradictory and We are confused. We don't actually know all the right answers; We have questions. Asking, We Walk. We walk, We advance by asking, not by telling, not by laying down the correct answers, not by creating programs that everybody can follow.

And because We exist in and against and beyond the existing society, We are also anti-identitarian. The only way

to actually conceive social change is by challenging our own identities, by moving beyond them, by negating them and going beyond. We are verbs, We are therefore anti-institutional. We overflow, We are verbs, not nouns and, crucially, We are doers, not laborers. We are, in fact, doers against labor. We are creators against the incarceration of our activity in the form of labor.

That's basically what I said the first day. For those of you who have been here the three days, that's the third time that you've heard it, but some things are worth repeating.

The second day I posed the question of revolution in terms of conflict between the forces of rupture, in other words ourselves on the one hand, and the forces of cohesion on the other hand. Then we focused on the following:

First of all, on the way in which our ruptures or pushes against and beyond are expressed and it seems to me that they are expressed volcanically, not smoothly, but in ruptures or eruptions all over the place. Spaces or moments or types of activity in which we say no, here we will not accept the logic of money, we will not accept the logic of profit, we will not accept the dynamic of death. Here, in this little space, in this little moment, in this particular activity—in relation to water, say, or education—we will not accept commodification. And these can be seen as cracks in the texture of domination, as autonomous spaces if you like, or they can be seen as dignities. Or they can be seen as communizings—spaces or moments in which we create the basis of what could possibly be another society.

Then we went on to talk about how these cracks confront an enormous force of social cohesion. This enormous force of social cohesion often makes its first appearance in the form of the police, who seek to enforce law and order. The law and order is, of course, the law and order of capital. Behind that first front of repression, there lies a deeper force of social cohesion, which is money. It is actually money that binds the world together, that binds our activities together. If we try to

understand money, then we go to the concept of value, value as constituting the basis of money. Then we go a step further and see that what constitutes value is labor. What constitutes the magnitude of value of a commodity is the amount of labor time required to produce it. Once we get to labor, it's comforting. Well, it's not comforting at all; it's actually quite exciting, though, because then we are back home again. Once we say the basis of it all is labor, then we are on the home ground of our own activity. We are actually on the home ground of that which we control—or do not control, but could potentially control. Because when we talk about labor, the labor that creates value, the labor that therefore creates money and the social bond, we are talking about our own activity forced into a form that we do not control. In other words, we are talking about a tension that runs through our activity. Between the labor that we are forced to perform in order to click into this capitalist society, on the one hand, and that doing or creativity or longing against labor for a different sort of activity that runs deep inside all of us. Once we say this social cohesion is actually constituted by our own alienation, by our own alienation from ourselves, our own abstraction from ourselves, then we are immediately opening up another possibility and saying maybe we can actually give expression to the antagonism that is within our own activity, maybe there are ways in which we can say we will not labor. We will not subordinate our activity, at least not totally, to the dominion of capital.

If you think of those cracks I mentioned a moment ago, cracks like the Zapatista area in Chiapas, cracks like here, like CIIS, like this meeting, then this experience of going against labor, this experience of doing that which we consider desirable or necessary is actually a profound part of all our lives. If it's a profound part of all our lives, that means that anticapitalism is a profound part of all our lives, that there is nothing special about being anticapitalist. It's the most ordinary thing in the world, thank goodness.

The first day we talked about We and the second day we talked about capital as a system of social cohesion, and what I want to talk about today is We as the crisis of capital. As the crisis of this system of social cohesion. In other words, hence the title We Are the Crisis of Capital and Proud of It.

It's more common to understand crisis in the opposite way. It's more common to say the crisis is the fault of the banks or crisis is the fault of finance capital, or the fault of the government, they are the ones to blame: we're not to blame, they are in fact making us suffer for the consequences of their own irresponsibilities. That's a common theme in Left discourse here and throughout the world. That seems to me disastrous. Awful. First, because if we say they are the ones who are responsible for the crisis, we are being made to suffer the consequences, then we immediately put ourselves in the position of victims. And if we are victims, then what can we do except beg for a solution? We put ourselves in the position of supplicants. We say oh please, please, Mr. President, change the policies, create jobs for us, here we are waiting for your good will. That, for a start, seems to me to be wrong. But it's much worse than that in fact. Because if you say that the banks or the capitalists are to blame for the crisis, then there's something wrong. Because if capital is a form of domination, if capital is a relation of domination, then we are in effect saying that it's the dominators who are in the wrong: they are responsible for the crisis of domination. Please, let's get rid of them, let's put other bankers, other capitalists there, ones who are more competent, who can really dominate us effectively. I don't think that's what we want.

If we say capital is a relation of domination, then the obvious thing to say is if the relation of domination is not working properly, then that must be due to the dominated. It must be because the dominated—us, in other words—are not sufficiently submissive. That's why there is a crisis in the relation of domination. Once we think of that, then the whole

question of politics, of how we think about the crisis, changes. But the question is, how can we think about that?

This idea was proposed by the autonomists or the *operaista* current in Italy in the 1960s and early to mid-1970s, and gradually spread. The argument was that we start the struggle of the working class. We understand that capital is the constant movement of trying to dominate the working class. We look at the crisis of the mid-1970s, the crisis of Fordism, and it is clear that that crisis is the result of the huge rise in struggles throughout the world from 1968 onwards. Not only student struggles, struggles of all sorts: struggles in the factories, struggles around the factories. And we conclude that the crisis of capital is due to the strength of working-class struggle. The problem now is that even if we still have the same analysis it is, at first sight, more difficult to maintain it in the present situation, just because we haven't had that sort of wave of obvious working-class struggle in the early years of this century. Certainly, there have been important struggles, but there hasn't been the same combination of social and factory-based struggles as there was in the late 1960s and early '70s. How do we maintain today that idea that the crisis of capital is due to us?

Yesterday we talked about capital as a system of social cohesion, but one crucial feature of capital that distinguishes it from all previous forms of domination is that it cannot stand still. It cannot be happy with dominating people the same way now as it dominated them ten years ago. There is a dynamic built into capitalist domination, which can be understood in terms of what constitutes value. Value is constituted by the socially necessary labor time required to produce a commodity and this socially necessary labor time is constantly falling, partly as human ingenuity expands. We find quicker ways of producing things. And that means that capital, capitalist domination, is based upon a constant movement of faster, faster, faster. If you produce something today, a car or a bicycle or a

PhD thesis, at the same pace as you produced it ten or twenty years ago, it will be no good, it won't sell, it won't have value. So there is this constant drive to produce things more quickly. The problem with that is that, if capital is all the time saying to us faster, faster, faster, then it inevitably comes up against our insubordination, our nonsubordination, our incapacity to subordinate ourselves sufficiently for the requisites of capital. Because, even if I'm a worker who really loves his boss, loves the company, says yes, I'm a faithful servant of my company, I will still always tend to assume that doing my job today in the same way as I did it yesterday will be all right. And of course it isn't and capital tells us, often in very violent ways, that it isn't. Inevitably, I think inevitably, we say, "No, that's not the way I did it yesterday. I have certain standards, certain ways of doing things, certain rhythms. I'm too old to learn new techniques." So, inevitably, capital and the constant acceleration that the existence of capital implies comes up against this force of nonsubordination or insubordination. I suppose that what I'm trying to suggest is that if you look at the present crisis, we can say that this crisis is to be understood not necessarily, or not only, in terms of open insubordination but in terms of the force of our incapacity or our refusal to subordinate ourselves sufficiently to the dynamic of capital.

I want to put in a footnote there, a footnote on autonomism or on autonomist theory, on the theory that was associated, in the first place, with the *operaista* movement in Italy but has spread throughout the world since then. I think what distinguishes my argument from what may now be called orthodox autonomist argument is that I think that autonomism traditionally emphasizes overt insubordination, overt struggle. It understands itself as a theorization of the world from the viewpoint of open struggle, from the viewpoint of open activism or open militancy. What I'm trying to say is that that is fine, but that we actually have to go beyond that and understand the world and the tendency to crisis not just on the basis of

open insubordination, but on the basis of nonsubordination, on the basis of the nonsubordination that is an inherent part of everyday life. In other words, it's not that people necessarily proclaim themselves as activists, or become militants, or lead a strike, or lead a protest, or organize a march. It's very often that they just say, "Well, my back is hurting me today," or "I know I ought to go to work, but I'm going to stay at home and play with my children or look after my daughter who's ill." Or it could be just that "I love my boss, but I'm really not capable of or willing to put in the extra effort that would make my boss even more profitable than he is now." So, built into everyday experience there is this kind of reluctance, a dragging of feet, a refusal—this is perhaps the important thing—there is a refusal to accept that we are robots. There is a refusal to become robots, rather. There is a refusal to subordinate ourselves totally. Part of the argument—I only thought of it this afternoon, but I think it runs through the three talks—is that we have to think on the basis not only of insubordination, but from the basis of nonsubordination. And yet, if we think of us, if we think of us here in the room this evening, probably we are all in some way consciously insubordinate. It's not just that we are nonsubordinate, we are in some way consciously anticapitalist. Probably a lot of us think of ourselves as activists. I suppose what I'm saying is that we have to be careful—this is my criticism of mainstream autonomist theory—we have to be very careful to make sure that we don't understand our activism in terms of a contrast with the nonactivism of the people who are not here tonight. In other words, we have to try and think of our own activism or our own political engagement, let's call it, or our own engagement with the idea of changing society radically, in its continuity with the nonsubordination that characterizes the everyday life of everybody. Unless we think of ourselves in that way, unless we think of it in terms of that sort of continuity—that we are activists but our activism is simply the tip of an iceberg, or our activism is part of a subterranean stream

of nonsubordination that runs through the whole of society—unless we think of it that way, then there is a great danger that we reproduce the vanguardism that we had probably started off by criticizing. We reproduce our own image of ourselves as somebody special, and obviously that would probably feed into the way that we relate to other people. That's why, for me, this question of thinking not just in terms of insubordination but in terms of nonsubordination and thinking in terms of the line of continuity between insubordination and nonsubordination seems very important. That was the footnote.

So, what I was arguing is that We, We in the broadest sense, constitute the crisis of capital simply because capital is not still. Capital is a constant aggression. Class struggle, if you like (or even if you don't like, and of course we don't like), class struggle comes from above. That seems to me fundamental as well, it seems to me completely wrong to think that we are the initiators of class struggle. No, class struggle comes from above; capital is a constant aggression. We respond and we overflow in our response. Capital is a constant aggression, we are constantly attacked, so the class struggle is not something we choose. It isn't We the militants are going out to fight the class struggle. No. We are actually all born into a world of class struggle because we are all constantly attacked by capital. And this is a constantly intensifying struggle on behalf of capital; it constantly demands more. When we say no—either we say no or we don't say no but we drag our feet—as a result the rate of profit falls. Then I think capital responds in two ways. Capital responds partly by confronting, by bringing in new managerial methods, by introducing new regulations in the universities and in the factories, the other factories, and partly, and perhaps overwhelmingly, what capital does is it flees. Capital flees constantly from its dependence upon labor, it flees constantly from its own incapacity to subordinate our activity sufficiently to the demands of abstract labor. And it flees, first of all, by flying into machinery. It says, "We'll solve the problem:

get rid of those nasty workers, we'll bring in machines to take their place and the machines will do exactly what we want. The machines won't go on strike, they won't stay at home just because their daughter is ill or whatever, the machines will obey us." So the first flight is into machinery, I suppose this is what is analyzed by Marx in *Capital*. He very explicitly says that machinery is introduced in order to impose order, in order to overcome the rebel hand of labor. But that doesn't really solve the problem, because you still have to use the workers to operate the machines. You don't have as many workers as before, but the workers have to produce enough value and enough surplus value not only to cover their own wages, but also to pay for the operation of the machinery and the cost of the machinery, and profit. And, unless you can greatly intensify the exploitation of the workers, then that doesn't happen. At least that is Marx's argument in his analysis of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. Bringing in machinery doesn't solve the problem, it actually reproduces the tendency to crisis.

What happens then is, from the middle of the twentieth century, capital has a great idea. It finds a new way of fleeing. In effect, it says to itself, "Well, if we're not able to impose sufficient domination, sufficient submission in the production process, then we're going to pretend that we have done it. We'll just escape into a world of make-believe. We'll escape into a world of fiction. We'll escape into a world where we create more and more money, and the money doesn't have to correspond to real profit. That's OK, we'll escape into a world of credit." That's what happened. Keynes justifies it and when Keynes falls and the monetarists come in, then they don't justify it but they keep on doing it. And so there's an expansion of fictitious capital. There's this huge expansion which allows the system to carry on, allows capitals to function, allows as well a certain space for negotiation with the workers, saying, "If you really work hard then we'll give you better social benefits." It allows a space for negotiating with trade unions. Therefore, it also opens up

a greater space for state-centered politics, for state-centered politics from the Left, because it opens up a space in which we can fight for minor changes and, perhaps, get them through the structures within the state system, through making demands of the state.

The problem with it is, of course, that it can't go on forever. It introduces the whole disconnection of money accumulation from the actual process of production, it opens up an enormous area of instability, and it becomes more and more difficult to maintain, until it expresses itself in financial crisis. And that is really what we have been living in throughout the world very openly, very explicitly, for the last four or five years. In this situation, the options for capital are limited. It still goes on fleeing, and it still goes on with a combination of confronting and fleeing, but more and more the fleeing becomes difficult, more and more the emphasis is on confrontation. "We won't negotiate. If you want to go on being unemployed, tough! If you're going to die of hunger, tough! If you can't get free medical benefits, tough!" And of course negotiation still goes on a bit, but the space for negotiation becomes more and more limited. I think what we're seeing at the moment, in Greece and Spain and Italy and in southern Europe in general, is the way in which this space for negotiation has been closed down. You get huge, huge demonstrations, which traditionally have been the basis for negotiations, and the demonstrations are just ignored completely. You get riots and you get the city center burnt down. In Athens in July 2011, they burnt down something like fifty-seven buildings in the city center. And the government says, "Well, we're not worried, we're OK. Let them riot, let them burn the city center down. We'll send out the police, bang them on their heads, let them live in misery." Or, what's her name, of the IMF, Christine Lagarde, she said, why should we worry about what's happening in Greece? Why should we worry about the disastrous fall in living conditions? Starving children in Africa are worse off than they are, so what's the problem?

In other words, it's complete closure. That's why there is an argument that we have entered an era of riots. Negotiation has closed down. It has been closing down progressively, I suppose, ever since the first years of neoliberalism, but what we're seeing at the moment and the last few years is a much tighter closing down of negotiation with the dominated. So there's a closure, an acceptance of riots. It is now assumed that of course parliaments or governments won't respond to the riots. What was so amazing, so completely outrageous last week in Cyprus was that the parliament actually listened to what the protesters were saying in the streets and said, at least at first, "No we won't, we won't accept the austerity package," which went completely against what parliaments have been doing in Europe over the last five years.

In that situation we have two options. If we say this is the core of the crisis, our refusal to subordinate ourselves sufficiently, to subordinate every aspect of our lives to capital, we are the core of the crisis. If we say that, then really there are only two possibilities, and I think these are the two possibilities that are present as a tension in all the anticapitalist movements at the moment, certainly in Spain, Greece, and Italy, and clearly in the Occupy movement here. There are two possibilities: one possibility is to say, "No, capital is to blame. We are totally willing to cooperate, we will subordinate ourselves. We know that if capital is to recover from its crisis then that is going to mean intensification of our subordination to capital. There is no other way in which capital can possibly recover, and that is what we want. Please, capital, please come back, please exploit us more effectively, please, above all, give us jobs." That, of course, is part of the movement. We want employment, we want to be employed, we want to be exploited. We know what exploitation means, we know that any post-crisis capitalism will be based on an intensification of that exploitation, but we have to live, we want jobs! Please, come back, capital. Please let us return to normal domination.

And the other possible response is to say, “No, that’s not what we want. We are the crisis of capital and proud of it. We are the crisis of this relation of domination. We are the possibility of another way of living, of another form of social organization. Therefore we do not want domination to overcome its crisis; we do not want capital to overcome its crisis. We want this to be the last crisis of capital. We want to create a world that is no longer dominated by capital, that is no longer subject to the logic of money, to the logic of profit, to the dynamic of death.” And we point politely to the garbage can over there in the corner and we say, “Please, capital, go and deposit yourself in your proper place.” We see that capitalism has failed. I think this is what is clear in the present crisis, what is being said more and more, especially in those countries that are in the paroxysm of the crisis. They are saying that capital has failed. Move over, capitalism, let’s create something else. And that’s the other side of the whole movement of the last few years, Occupy, indignados, etc.: to say no, we don’t want to go back to exploitation.

My favorite example is the example of the Unemployed Workers’ Association in Solano, on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. In Argentina there was a huge unemployed workers’ movement from about 1995 onwards, where they blocked the roads all over the country and called for the government to introduce subsidies for the unemployed, which hadn’t existed, and also to create jobs. And they were extremely effective. And then some of the most radical groups began to say, “Well, maybe that’s not really what we want. We’ve had jobs in the past, we’re not really too enthusiastic about going back to work in McDonalds or going back to work in the factory. That’s not actually what we want to do with our lives. What we want to do is to do what has meaning for us. We want to do that which makes sense for us. We want to improve our communities, to help each other, we want to create community kitchens, to create community workshops, to create community schools.”

And they said, "No, we don't want to go back to work." They were one of the most articulate groups, the group of Solano. And that's what they did. They said, "Fine, yes, we do want subsidies, but we want these subsidies as a collective, and we will decide what to do with the subsidies. Of course part goes to the people in need but also we will use part of it collectively on the projects that we want."

I think that is the dilemma that has been facing the movement over the last few years. Do we say, "Please, please, please, we want jobs," or do we say, "No, we actually want to create something different"? And I think that, certainly in Greece and in Spain, the movement to say, "No, this is not a movement about more employment; this is a movement against capitalism, a movement to create alternatives," has been extremely strong. And they have been doing all sorts of things, but my favorite example, my favorite crack of all is Navarino Park, which is in the center of Athens. In the riots that followed the police killing of a fifteen-year-old in December 2008, riots for days all over Greece, and in Athens they went into a car park and they tore down the walls and created a garden, there, in the center of Athens. It is a community garden and they have swings and things for children to go and play, and people go and talk and sit there, and they grow vegetables, and they organize concerts and talks, and they discuss how to struggle against capitalism, how to create the basis for a different society, which is just beautiful.

And this sort of thing has been happening, I think, all over Greece and all over Spain; people are being forced to create alternatives. It is to some degree by choice, but people are being forced to develop other ways of living, other forms of social relations simply in order to survive. That is the dilemma that confronts us. Which way do we go? If we want to talk about revolution, then there is no question. Revolution means not asking for capital to come back. Revolution means breaking the system, means developing alternative forms of living. It

means communizing and developing all sorts of communizings. The only question is, can we do it?

My own feeling is that if we look at what is happening in Greece and Spain, then probably for the moment no, we can't do it. Perhaps for the moment we cannot say, "Just go to hell, capital." It's very difficult. For the moment we probably don't have the capacity to survive completely without capitalist things. We are caught in a contradictory situation, and I think that is the experience for all those who are involved in autonomist groups. People have to find some way of surviving. They can say what we really put our energy into is creating alternative radio stations, skill exchanges, or gardens. We really put our energy into developing forms of security that come from ourselves and don't depend on the police—security against the police, safety against the police.

But, at the same time, we are often caught in the contradictory situation that we have to earn a wage or a salary, if we're able to do it, or find some form of funding, some form of financial sustenance. It's probably best to recognize that we are actually caught in this contradictory situation.

How, from here, do we go forward? Partly by asking, by discussing, by trying to think together, by meeting, by having assemblies or whatever. But I think as well we go forward by hoisting a flag. We say, "Well, we can't do at the moment exactly what we want, we can't get rid of capital completely. It will take us a little while, but we can hoist flags all over the place; we can hoist the flag of communizing, of creating the basis for a society with a completely different form of organization." I suppose this is what we are doing here. Today I was in a meeting with the people from Unitierra, of California. That's the idea. Here, in this space, we are hoisting the flag of doing something else, of walking in the opposite direction. We can create gardens, we can campaign to stop foreclosures and to stop the enforcement of debt, we can organize collectively against the enforcement of debt, we can create alternative radios, pirate radios, we can

share software, share music, we can occupy factories—we can do all that, and we are doing all that. That's what's so exciting.

One of my favorite slogans from the Occupy movement was something I saw in a photo of the general strike in Oakland, a placard saying, "The Beginning Is Near." But that's not quite right. It's not that the beginning is near, it's rather that we have already begun. And that's why we're here and thank you very much.

Andrej: OK, so let's take three questions.

Q: *My question is about that being caught in a contradictory situation. I'm wondering if different communities, as they face this contradictory situation, have different cultural and political resources. We've been talking about the Zapatistas for the last three days and thinking about the Caracol and the Junta, but at the same time we're also talking about a sistema de cargo, a sistema de tequio as various kinds of technologies that come from five hundred years of struggle, as a cultural and political resource.*

Q: *It seems to me you've done the big bang not enough service. And I'm alluding to Chapter 17 in Crack Capitalism, where you acknowledge that there's the material universe, as distinct from stuff made by human beings. Plants, nature... And I'd like you to speak to that. And what I mean by that, to be a little clearer with the audience here, is the...*

J: You mean that you think there are some people who haven't yet arrived to Chapter 17?

Q: *Yes! I mean that most of us live in a binary way of thinking: that there's capital and labor. And there is a trinitarian way of looking at the world, and that's that there is nature, and there is capital, and there is labor. And I'd like you to address that third*

element as a distinct aspect of the debt crisis we're in. It's about locational value, debt. I paid \$500,000, for instance, to buy my piece of San Francisco, and most of that \$500,000 in debt is for the location, it's not for the building. Right?

Q: *I think about how we created capitalism in the first place, so that's another part of it, but I'm sure that many of us, including myself, have been involved in trying to make cracks and community projects and collective projects, and a lot of these projects have succeeded to some extent, but what happens over and over again is individual human beings have conflict with each other, and a lot of times that conflict breaks apart whatever the project is, and it happens over and over and over again, so human beings have in us flaws that . . . How do we deal with that? It comes up so much.*

J: I'd like to start with the last question. First, your point about how we created capitalism in the first place. I think it's not just a question of how we created capitalism in the first place, but how we create capitalism in the second place, in the third place, in the fourth place, how we create capitalism today, and how, possibly, we will create capitalism tomorrow. In other words, if capitalism exists, it's not because it was created a couple of centuries ago. If capitalism exists it is because we create it and recreate it. If it exists today, it's because we created it today, and if we don't create it tomorrow then it won't exist tomorrow. In other words, the problem of revolution . . . I mentioned yesterday, but very briefly, the question of time and how thinking of cracks or the change in the grammar of revolution that's taking place, crucially involves a change in the concept of time. Part of that is the realization that we do or do not create capitalism each day. The problem of revolution is not how we abolish this great monster that confronts us, which is capitalism. The problem of revolution is how we stop making capitalism tomorrow, or today in fact.

I know that wasn't exactly your question, but . . . The question . . . Yes, that has been my experience as well. That these attempts to create other things often, not always, but do frequently end up in the most awful conflicts. I certainly wouldn't say that, therefore, this is an aspect of human nature. I think that these things tend to happen in moments of stagnation. As long as the movements are moving—movements that don't move aren't really movements—as long as there is a development, as long as there is a connecting up with other movings, then on the whole the situation will be much more productive.

One of the things I emphasized yesterday was the notion of a crack. The reason why I use the metaphor crack is to think in terms of something that is constantly on the move. Once a crack stops moving and becomes a closed autonomous space, then I think it loses its dynamic, I think it loses its significance as a crack, and I think that is when conflicts start to arise and intensify.

The first point about the Zapatistas and the different resources, yes, I think that's important. If we think of the Zapatistas and their amazing ability to rise up, to involve a huge number of people in a constant process over a very long time, almost twenty years publicly, almost thirty years since they started, it is extraordinary. The ability to do that, I think, has a lot to do with the traditions that existed in those communities before the Zapatistas came into being. It has a lot to do with traditions, it has a lot to do with community solidarity, it has a lot to do with habits of working together, at least in certain situations. Obviously, we cannot simply decree the same traditions into existence, let's say in the context of the city. But everywhere there are certain traditions and certain patterns of working together, certain patterns of solidarity, certain patterns of mutual support, even in the most apparently individualized society. It's no good wishing that we too were an indigenous community in Chiapas; we have to start

from where we are. We are where we are and we have to move on from there.

The other question about nature. I spoke briefly about the duality of and the antagonism between doing and abstract labor, or between what Marx calls concrete labor and abstract labor. In the book I suggest that the abstraction of doing, the abstraction of our activity into abstract labor or the conformation of our activity as alienated labor is not just the basis of a certain way of acting; it also affects fundamentally the way in which we relate to one another and the way in which we think, and it affects, crucially, our relation with nature. It gives rise to an objectification of nature, to a treatment of nature as a thing, and the treatment of other forms of life as a thing. Part of the great movement at the moment, the great diversity of movements, of rebellions against the current dynamic is the questioning of that separation, the questioning of the treatment of nature as an object, the attempt or multiple attempts to recover our relation to nature and to recover and recompose our relation to other forms of life: to rethink the whole question, not just in terms of society but in terms of understanding our human nature as part of natural relations as a whole. You can see that, for example, in the importance of all sorts of ecological movements, of gardening movements, the creation of community gardens, the creation of other gardens that try to recapture or re-form, rather, the relation with nature. That doesn't give an exact answer to the cost of the location of your house in San Francisco, but I do think that the rethinking of our relation with nature and our relation with other forms of life is absolutely crucial for the process of communizing or communizings.

Q: You were talking earlier about the space in negotiation increasingly decreasing, and you named Cyprus last week as a specific example of that, that what was amazing about it being that the government listened and responded, so I'm curious if you've

noticed certain things in place in that context that allowed that to occur. Do you see an exception or are there certain components in place that allow for that listening to happen?

Q: *Hi, John, nice to see you. This is Chris Carlsson.*

J: *Oh, hi, Chris!*

Q: *Thanks for referencing Nowtopia in your book, I was very honored by that. I really love that you're carrying on the conversation around nonsubordination and the notion of overflowing, and that space being what causes the crisis of capital, because I really agree with that and I kind of sheepishly have to think, "Oh, does that mean that here in San Francisco, where there seems to be some kind of weird economic boom going on, we're all very good and subordinate?" Because here it seems to be functioning quite well, even though plenty of people here are miserable as well.*

But the question I wanted to get to is more—you did reference that in your book—about science and technology being one of these areas that can be a potential crack of a conflict, and that's something I've been fascinated by and interested in, that there is an epistemological shift that's going on amongst a lot of people. In a broad way, society knows much more today than we have ever known before about biology, ecology, the reproduction of life, and to put it simply, what you are arguing for is that we can get up tomorrow and make the world very differently than what we do today. But one key element of that is convincing ourselves that we can reproduce a complex society. And you use a lot the language of rupture and breaking and anti-institutionalization, and I'm both enthused about that and then I think, well, but so many people, that scares the hell out of them. Because they feel, well, if we're going to break everything, how is the water going to get here and how is electricity going to keep running? I realize this is kind of flying in several directions at the same time. I'm a little

bit confused, but this notion of the general intellect, which I don't think you mentioned tonight but I believe you bring it up at least briefly in your book, and of course it is part of the whole autonomy thread, and this is kind of what I tend to think as one of the key elements of what we're up to right now, is the appropriation of technological and scientific knowledge at the base of society, and its reconceptualization on a new basis as a way of reproducing life every day. So I thought I'd throw all that at you and see what you have to say about it.

Q: *One of the reasons why I am confused by your argumentation is who is considered within the We? Who is the we that is complicit in the creation of capital, because as a white person with the privilege of living in a big area, I understand how I may be complicit, but I'm not quite understanding those that have been born under the domination and colonization, and communities of color, specifically, like in the USA and so on. And then, with that question in mind, seeing how at the end of your entry you say it's not that moment now, so what we can do now is to raise flags of different sort of projects—community building, whatever that may look like—but I'm afraid of what that means for white liberals and how that actually doesn't make sense in solidarity with deconstructing capitalism and challenging capitalism in meaningful ways that actually change the lives of those that are enslaved under it, that are enslaved to my complicity with it.*

J: *The first question, Sarah's question about Cyprus. I don't really know. I don't know enough about Cyprus. Certainly when the Cypriot parliament first threw out the measures proposed by the president, I think my reaction was, What is wrong? How can we suddenly find a parliament that seems to be responding to the demonstrations in the streets? When, if you think of Greece, you have massive demonstrations right outside the parliament and the parliament just didn't listen at all. I don't know. Maybe because it's a small place, maybe*

because they were caught by surprise and hadn't yet thought out what it really means to be a parliamentarian. I don't know.

Chris's point about science and technology. Yes, I think I agree. Well, it was a question, I don't know how I can agree to a question! It's a bit too easy, isn't it? I think two things. I think I'm more and more convinced, and this is something I want to think out, it kind of comes up in *Crack Capitalism*, but I really feel more and more the need to think out the question of productive forces and how we rethink the whole concept of productive forces, and how we go back to the old concept that was so central to the Marxist tradition of the relation between productive forces and the relations of production. Understanding those productive forces not as technology, not as machinery, not as progress, but as our own creative capacity. And yes, that certainly means trying to understand the importance within that context of science and technology. And the importance within that context of the historical continuity of the We, how We are interrelating, not only with the doings or activities of people who are alive but also with the activities and achievements of people who are dead. One thing that I discuss more in *Change the World* is the importance of the concept of thinking in terms of a social flow of doing or a flow of social doing. The way in which, once we begin to think of our own activities, we see that they are completely inseparable from the whole social flow of doing that constitutes human achievement, if that's the right word.

On the question of the institutions and the idea that to say we are anti-institutional is a bit frightening: my idea is that we probably, at the moment, do not have the capacity to live with the intensity of what a fully communist society would involve. This is something that Adorno says as well, to think of a society where we don't have institutions or identities to hold on to is a vertiginous thought. Maybe we're not ready yet, maybe in some way we do actually need institutions or some sort of patterns of practices in order to be able to cope with living. But, at

the same time, I think that we can say that all these established practices and patterns and institutions are limits on freedom and therefore are limits on the development of our capacity to create. Therefore, at the same time as we may need some sort of institutional framework for our own poor sanity, we are actually committed to fighting against it.

And the third question about We and who are We and the difficulties of We. When I did the summary at the beginning today, I gave this list of We are, We are, We are. But I did start off on Tuesday by saying that, in the first place, We are a question. It's not that We are an identity, we don't know who We are. It seems to me important for two or three reasons.

First, because We is a concept which is being used more and more by anticapitalist movements. More and more they are saying We—without defining that We—they are not saying the working class is, or the downtrodden are. They are saying We are. And I think that opens the question.

Second, I think it's important to say We because we have to break the third person. The third person is the third person of domination, the third person is the grammar of domination. The third person involves the objectification of people, the definition of people as being other than ourselves.

And I think that We is also important because we have to start with our own problems. Wherever we are in this society or wherever we are in terms of thinking of social change, we have to start from We. It seems to me dishonest not to start with We. In other words, if we start off a book or a sentence saying, "the working class is" or "those people are" or "the capitalists are," we are hiding ourselves from view. We are not actually posing ourselves up-front as the problem that we know we are. My We is very much a question. And it's a question with lots of problems, because of course then you can say, "Well yes, but this We is actually hiding all this fragmentation that is enormously important." I would agree with that up to a point, except my We also is based on the idea that there is something

we share in one way or another, which is our negated dignity. Certainly, the negation of our dignity takes place in many different ways. For many people, it means virtual slavery; for other people it involves working in the factory; for other people it means being tied to the home; for other people it means being processed through universities. There are lots of forms that this negation of dignity takes. But, for me, the We is the recuperation of dignity fighting against its own negation. With lots of problems.

Q: I always appreciate good political analysis, but an instance I experienced today made me think that perhaps we also need good psychological analysis, if not good psychotherapy. I don't know if you saw the first movie of The Matrix, but I thought it was wonderfully metaphorical and it was actually good psychological analysis about a political phenomenon, and I will say whatever the screenwriters of The Matrix actually intended, I reinterpreted it to be that the majority of Americans is psychologically dependent upon this Republicrat system that we have. And for people who call themselves liberals or progressives or leftists psychologically depended on the Democrat party or the Democrat fraction of the Republicrats. I mean, we have what some African American friends of mine call Seeking the Biracial Savior, in Obama, which I've always regarded as the ultimate facelift on American imperialism and international neoliberalism. So, what it seems to be here, it seems to me, a psychological dependence on the establishment by people both ordinary and famous, at least amongst progressives, people like Michael Eric Dyson, Cornel West, other people of that stature who are actually longtime casual friends of mine, this desire, basing one's self-esteem on a desire to belong to at least the so-called liberal—what I recall—faction of the Republicrats, or as Dyson said in a debate with Glen Gore, you're either in the tent or you're not in the tent. I mean about the Democrat party tent. And if you're not in the tent, you can't participate. Now, why my friends Michael Eric

Dyson or Cornel West, or to a certain extent even someone like Noam Chomsky would even want to be in that tent and base their personal self-esteem on participating in the liberal faction of the establishment. We can rationalize. I can say I do or don't understand, but I'm wondering what your response—if you have one based on the premise of my—to where so many Americans place their self-esteem. Those who are liberal place their self-esteem on wanting to participate in that sort of establishment as opposed to saying, No, that's not the tent we want to be in and we don't need to base our self-esteem on it.

Q: Hi there. One of the things you spoke about earlier and I think maybe even from yesterday was likening our ruptures to volcanic eruptions. And, given that, I think I would just like to hear a little bit more about the nature of struggles that we're seeing that are erupting in different times and different places with different intensities and which we may not have a very close connection to. I don't feel like I'm very connected to what's happening in Cyprus, other than the larger liberal project that is being responded to. And the fact that the eruption and the anticipation happen in different time frames makes it also hard to keep the continuity. I'm not really wanting to ask you how do we do it, but I do want to have a little bit more insight from you around keeping the momentum going. That momentum is kind of what drives us and what enables that kind of push-against to erupt in a sense. How can we, those of us who do very localized and site-specific and situation-specific—you know, my own situation and then working to rebel against how that fits into a capitalist notion—how do we connect them globally? Because we have these global systems. It's a little bit about local-global and also continuing momentum.

J: On the first question, one of the things—I mentioned it just briefly but I emphasized it more the first day—is that I think we have to start off from the realization that we are inherently schizophrenic. Schizophrenic, at least, in the popular sense of

being self-antagonistic. That we have contradictory ideas, that our ideas move from one moment to another, that our ideas and our actions are in conflict. The Left tradition tends to think of an “us” who are revolutionary and a “them” who are integrated into the system. I don’t think it’s like that at all. I think that if we think in those terms, there’s not much way in which we can move forward, because in the best of cases that means that we must convince *them*, we must tell *them*, how things really are. We’ve done that, we’ve tried that, and it didn’t work. We have to think, rather, in terms of these contradictions being within all of us, so that your friends who are happy to be in the Democratic tent, as you put it, on some level they must also be unhappy with that. At some level, we are trying to address the contradictions within people. The other day, earlier on, when I was talking about the nonsubordinate, rather than the insubordinate, that is of huge relevance for the way we think about politics and the way we think about the possibility of revolution, because it means then that we recognize in the nonsubordinate a hidden insubordination of which they may or may not be conscious. When we talk about rebelliousness or revolution, we are trying to touch that insubordination within them, we are trying to bring it to the light, we are trying to make that which is invisible visible to us and visible to them. We’re trying to make it visible, we’re trying to articulate it or encourage its articulation. It really has to do with two other things that I was going to mention and I didn’t.

One is the idea that came up in the discussion last night of things being on the tip of people’s tongue. It came up in the discussion of hope and whether to talk of hope is not a privilege of this society, whether to talk of revolution or indeed of critique is not a privilege. I was saying that I think that no, in fact, it’s ridiculous; it doesn’t make sense to think that we can bring hope to people, or that we can bring critique to people, or that we can bring consciousness to people. Rather, what we try to do in the best of cases is to draw or help people to articulate

the rebelliousness that is already within them, the hope that is already within them. And that means that what we are trying to do, we the people who sit here on the table, or we as theorists or intellectuals or whatever we are, I'm not sure what we are, but what we're trying to do is to formulate what is on the tips of people's tongues, that which they do not quite express, which they do not quite give articulation to.

It also has to do with something else that is one of my favorites, the initial reaction to the Zapatista uprising. In the first book of communiqués by the Zapatistas, there is an introduction by the historian Antonio García de León, in which he says, "As we heard or read these communiqués coming in one day after another, we gradually came to realize that in fact this rebellion was something that was rising up from inside us," coming up from our guts. That's the point, isn't it? That's the argument against the third person as well: it's not that it's a rebellion of them; it's actually our rebellion. It's something that is there, inside us. That's why we're here tonight. That's why people live, that's what makes people human.

The question of volcanoes. I'm very keen on volcanoes, partly because I live just beside a volcano, Popocatepetl, near Puebla, which is live and constantly smoking. Volcanoes seem to me important; it's this idea of something that we contain, a rebellion within us. We contain a revolt within us that then does come out—it explodes. It explodes individually and it explodes socially in different times and different places. You can think of a social flow of rebellion running through the world and that actually explodes, let's say in 1994 in Chiapas and in 2001 in Argentina and 2006 in Oaxaca and 2008 in Athens and 2011 in Spain and Greece, etc. In other words, there is flow of rebellion, constantly on the move. There's a unity, connections, and people are often conscious of the connections, but the explosions themselves are difficult to predict. It is a kind of bursting out from inside us collectively. And they are probably always responses to the aggressions of capital.

How do you keep the momentum going? I suppose part of that idea is that you don't. Or that you may do, but that perhaps we shouldn't put too much emphasis on continuity, that we shouldn't put too much emphasis on keeping the momentum going. If you think these are explosions of anger, explosions of creation, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are going to last more than a week or more than a year or more than ten years or twenty years, and their success or importance doesn't necessarily depend on their continuity. They can be important as moments of creation, as great fireworks that light up the sky and change the way we think and change the way that we see the world and open up new ways and new perspectives.

Andrej: OK, we have time for one more question.

Q: *I'm wondering if you can say more about the relationship between the We and the overflow. So, for example, you said we overflow in our response to capitalism. And I'm wondering, do you see the We and the overflow as, for example, temporally related? Do they occur at the same time? Are they constitutive of each other; are they grammatically related as one is a verb, the other is a noun? If you can say more about that relation.*

J: For me, We are the overflow. We overflow. We misfit. We misfit because we have no choice. Because capitalism is a system into which we cannot fit. We cannot fit because we don't fit in, because we are not yet robots. Robots, I think, wouldn't have a problem of misfitting. Robots fit, they're fine. Robots are identitarian, they Are. And we have not yet, at least, become robots. So we still misfit, so we overflow whatever category. Robots are nouns. We are verbs. We are verbs because we move, because we overflow, because we are not yet. Because our not-yet-ness pushes us all the time beyond where we are. As I said a minute ago, We is a question. That's the difference, for me, between the first person and the third person.