

What is to be Done?': Grammars of Organisation

What is to be done? The sense of urgency provoked by this question, its apparent injunction to act, its utterance at times of political upheaval and crises have lent it a privileged political status. What is to be done? is a question that marks the moment when thought appears to be over and action must proceed. As Jean-Luc Nancy has argued, it is the very urgency of the question that implies an exhaustion of thought (Nancy 1997: 157). The question 'what is to be done?' not only punctuates but also separates the realm of thought from the realm of action. As such, this question embodies many knots of theory and practice, of thought and action, and how the relationship between the two might be understood and organised. To begin with this question then may certainly be to invoke Lenin, Chernyshevsky and the specific historical conjuncture in which they uttered these words; but it also focuses attention on the fundamental relationships between thought, language, and action. To begin with this question is therefore also to examine the presuppositions embedded in its grammar – about time, futurity and the (revolutionary) subject. While the question 'what is to be done?' seems to epitomise a clear notion of militant action, bound up with lists of tasks, programmes and revolutionary paths, this framing overlooks what I will call the constituent grammar of the question: that is, the relationship between the linguistic organisation of the question and the political organisation that the question produces. This is not to say that contemporary philosophical approaches to this question (such as those of Deleuze and Guattari or Jean-Jacques Lecercle) are necessarily better equipped to deal with the grammar of political organisation than Lenin or his contemporaries. Indeed, it is worth noting in brief that Antonio Gramsci also touched on questions of spontaneous or immanent grammar in his reflections on the need for a national language in Italy to articulate a 'national popular collective will' (Ives 2004: 40-52). Yet even though Gramsci's annotations on grammar, language and political organisation can be seen to foreshadow the concerns of Deleuze, Guattari and Lecercle, they do not address the complex relationship between the grammar of the question and the logic of political organisation in a sustained way.

The three sections of this article begin with epigrams formed by responses to the question 'what is to be done?' gathered in a seven-year long research project in former Lenin Museums and art galleries across Europe. These responses trace the reactions of

anger, frustration, hope, love, indifference and despair in those who are confronted with this question.¹ One of the problems with asking the question ‘what is to be done?’ appears to lie in how the question interpellates those to whom it is asked. For there is embedded in the question a number of presuppositions, including that of a subject primed to respond to this call for action. But if we cannot assume a revolutionary subject ready to respond to this question, what is to be done with the question what is to be done? Rather than consign the question to the dustbin of history, might another related political force of the question might be set in motion, a force which gestures towards a constituent grammar that is also embedded in the question.

The grammar of the question produces relationships between subjects, action and the future, drawing a relationship between the constituent grammar of the question and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of the collective assemblage of enunciation. For Deleuze and Guattari, the collective assemblage of enunciation denotes amongst other things, an immanent relationship between language and action: a relationship in which politics and language are bound together in a relationship of forces. This approach aims to rethink the urgency and force that is associated with the question through examining and re-proposing the connection between the linguistic organisation of the question and the different forms of political organisation that the question might produce.

In three sections, this article is structured around the grammatical components of the question ‘what is to be done?’ Section one explores how the ‘*Wh-*’ interrogative clause sets up the question as both an injunction, and as a framework for what is already known or presupposed in advance. It draws on the arguments of Jean-Jacques Lecercle and Deleuze and Guattari to delineate an immanent relationship between language and politics, and shows how the question proposes a particular figuration of futurity. The second section takes up the ‘is’ and the ‘is to be’ component of the question to investigate how both the passive subject of the question’s construction and the time frame established by the clause, constitute a particular logic of organisation together with an *a priori* revolutionary subject. This section tracks the effects of this passive form of the question, and proceeds to look at the ways in which the relationship between theories of organisation and theories of the subject are linked through notions of ‘spontaneity’, ‘consciousness’, and the ‘people as they are’. By addressing the relationship between the

subject, thought and action, the section considers what emerges as an empty place for the revolutionary subject in the question, and how this might be re-configured through the notion of the collective assemblage of enunciation. The concept of constituent grammar that emerges through this analysis proposes that language and politics, as well as processes of subjectivation and the practices of social and political change must be conceived of in simultaneity. The final section of the article addresses further the question of temporality and the future through the inflexional verb form (to be) 'done'. The section explores how the question 'what is to be done?' uses mechanisms and modes of address that bring the future into the present in particular ways. The conventional dualism of the 'is' and the 'ought' and the relationship between notions of constituent and constituted power, are investigated in order to assess how a militant practice in the present, a practice that works with what is, might provoke new ways of inhabiting that relationship with the future.

Wh- *question*. Interrogative. Allows speaker to find out more information about topic. Wh- interrogative clauses often followed by to-infinitives with a covert subject.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE? QUESTIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

NAME: Dan	CITY/COUNTRY: Dublin/IRELAND
WEEK ENDING: Feb 5	TIME IN:

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

- Leave the 20th Century behind.
- learn Italian
- get a job (I guess)
- milk
- eggs
- bread
- pick up laundry

Please continue overleaf if necessary

TIME OUT:

Please leave your response here so we can add it to the archive.
Alternatively, you can email it to: whatistobedone@excite.com

Can we exhibit copies of your response in future exhibitions and websites? (If you would like us to contact you first please put contact details on the back)

Figure 1

Questions impose. They assume that a response would not otherwise be forthcoming. For the moment immediately after a question is asked, is always interpreted as a response, regardless of what the respondent says or does. Answering, remaining silent, changing the subject, or walking away are all read in answer, as gestures or responses directed toward the question and the questioner. This situation cannot be avoided in spite of what was asked or what the addressee wishes to withhold, say or not say. The question produces a moment of intensification; a moment in which whatever happens or is said, is inscribed as consequence. These circumstances produced by the question suggest a reason as to why the right to remain silent is so important in law. This right to insist on the meaninglessness of silence after a question is asked operates as a ban, or an interruption of the interpretation of the moment after the question. It is clear that the question contains some kind of force, a force that must be regulated as it frames and inscribes the moment after it is asked so powerfully. What can be done to counteract this force of the question? The simplest solution might be to directly answer the question, to remove the question through answering it. In science, when a question is answered or when a solution to the problem is found, the question becomes redundant. Similarly, in state politics and constitutional law, answers in the form of an election poll or referendum results annul the question. By contrast, in philosophy, the question produces an altered, critical relationship to the thing questioned. Heidegger amongst others has argued that there is no fixed order of questions in answers in philosophy, and that procedures of philosophical questioning prepare a 'free relation' to the thing questioned (Heidegger 1967: 16).

Questions also presuppose. Indeed, it has been argued that in Lenin's utterance of the question 'what is to be done?' an answer is presupposed, even though the question suggests that it is open, as if the answer is not yet known. Similarly, in earlier debates between Bakunin and Marx, Bakunin says that Marx decides in advance and in isolation what was to be done, leaving the rest to merely follow and obey. He declared that: 'As soon as an official truth is pronounced, having been scientifically discovered by this great brainy head labouring all alone – a truth proclaimed and imposed on the whole world from the Summit of Marxist Sinai – why discuss anything? [...] All that remains to be done is to learn by heart the commandments of the new Decalogue' (Bakunin 1973: 302). In referring to Marx as a scientist, labouring alone and away from the 'rest of the world', Bakunin points to how the question 'what is to be done?' can be presented as if it were

an intellectual and political problem that needs to be resolved collectively, when in fact, the answer might already be ‘known’, in the sense that it is already presupposed by the questioner.² Furthermore, one could argue that the scientific form of the question presupposes a transparent relationship between language and action: between the language of the question and the political action that the question calls for. Crucially, in the scientific form of the question, language plays no part in the political act that the question calls for; rather, language always comes before action and is therefore always subordinated to the goals, actions or programmes of those who utter it.

A tension emerges in this initial analysis of the question ‘what is to be done?’ On the one hand, the scientific and rational connotations of the question imply the strategic and provisional function of the question. In this reading, the question would become redundant once the telos of a revolutionary political programme has been realised. On the other hand, the rhetorical force and urgency of the question can be read in terms of the assemblage of forces at work in the situation in which it is asked. In one reading, language is assumed to have a transparent function, while in the other it is caught up in the production of the situation. According to Jean-Jacques Lecercle, the role of language in the writings of Louis Althusser is one of articulation and communication of an analysis of the political conjuncture (Lecercle 2007: 277). Language performs ‘the concrete analysis of the concrete situation’: it defines the legibility of a given political conjuncture, and so prepares the ground for political action.

‘Althusser identifies the core of Leninist science with the concept of the conjuncture: the sole object of Lenin’s thought is the correct description of the conjuncture, of its class determinants, of its *rapport des forces*, and of the exact moment at which the analyst finds himself’ (Lecercle 2007: 278).

In Lecercle’s reading of Althusser, language is of a second order of meaning, and is involved only in the act of analysis; language does not operate directly as a form of action, but rather, as we have seen, takes place prior to action (Lecercle 2007: 280). In this formulation, it is the correct analysis that will allow the correct action to ensue. If ‘What is to be done?’ is read as a transparent or scientific question, it allows us to forget the role of the question in constituting the answer, the subject to whom the question is addressed, and the situation into which the question enters. Language simply articulates the concrete analysis, which in turn determines the list of tasks to be carried out; after

this point thought is indeed over and done with, and a logic of separation and causality established.

Against this understanding of language, Jean Jacques Lecercle uses Deleuze and Guattari to think through a materialist model of language that is inextricably bound up with the practice as well as the theory of political struggle. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that ‘politics thoroughly works language from within, causing vocabulary, structure and all phrasal elements to vary as the order-words change’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 79). It is useless, they believe, to see language as a code: as a simple mode of communication or exchange of information. The elementary unit of language for them is not the statement or the sentence, but what they call the ‘order-word’. Order-words resemble commands, assertions, questions, affirmations, promises or negations. Rather than reflecting or communicating something that already exists in the world, order-words crucially have an internal or an immanent relationship to action. There is, Deleuze and Guattari argue, no transcendent intention of meaning that precedes the utterance, and nor does an utterance transcend the act which it represents. Language is therefore an enactor, conveyor and locus for the clash of *forces*. In these terms, a speaker would never simply exchange information. Language is a ‘site of social forces’, which leads them to conclude that ‘language is a political affair before it is an affair for linguistics’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 168).

What does it mean to define language in this way? This apparent short-circuiting of traditional linguistics, the argument that politics works language from *within*, and the contention that language is directly caught up in social forces, has important implications for the relationship between language and politics. Considered in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s pragmatics, the question ‘what is to be done?’ cannot be subordinated to a secondary-order reflection of a political problem, or relegated to a question that initiates the concrete analysis, which in turn determines the set of acts to be carried out after its utterance. Instead, the question ‘what is to be done?’ participates in this production of forces, and complicates the relationship between language and politics. In so doing, this approach to language also produces another political logic: a logic that is heterogeneous to the more instrumental iteration of the question associated with some versions of scientific Marxist thought.

Deleuze and Guattari and Jean-Jacques Lecercle have made much of Lenin's second science of the slogan and of his short pamphlet 'On Slogans' written in July 1917. For Deleuze and Guattari, the slogan epitomises the order-word, and exemplifies the operation of language in and through the fields of social and political forces. They even go so far as to claim that language is made up of sedimented slogans, an indirect discourse found everywhere, not just in political speech and rhetoric (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 83). Slogans operate in a temporality that pushes and extends their performativity. Deleuze and Guattari argue that in the slogan 'Workers of the World Unite', language is not only performative, but more importantly, constitutive of the class it calls into existence. At the First International, they argue, the slogan did not simply name, but rather invented a new type of class: 'This text constituted an incorporeal transformation that extracted from the masses a proletarian class as an assemblage of enunciation *before* the conditions were present for the proletariat to exist as a body' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 79). As such, Lecercle argues that the temporality of the slogan is incredibly precise. It condenses and embodies the exact political conjuncture, operating not just with a generalised illocutionary force, but with a carefully timed iteration, which both names the moment and anticipates the situation or the class it calls forth. The slogan as an exemplification of the utterance more generally for Deleuze and Guattari, is not therefore just a description of a state of affairs, but operates as an intervention in the state of affairs. The utterance reflects, but also modifies the *rapport des forces* that give it meaning (Lecercle 2007: 275). The timing of the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets' is equally precise. In Lenin's account, '[t]hat slogan was correct during a period of our revolution – say, from February 27th to July 4th – that has now passed irrevocably. It has patently ceased to be correct now' (Lenin 1977: 185). Meaning, therefore, is a result of the *rapport des forces*, the particular configuration of the political struggle at that moment, and not a result of a co-operative language game (Lecercle 2007: 275). Because the *rapport des forces* are never fixed and constantly vary, the relationship between language and meaning cannot be stabilised or relied upon for consistency beyond the conjuncture in which a slogan or question is uttered. Lecercle therefore argues that in Lenin's *Theory of Slogans* language is about struggle: it is about the claim for discursive positions and 'the exertion of force within the political conjuncture' (Lecercle 2007: 275).

Deleuze and Guattari have repeated the statement in several publications that '[a] rule of grammar is a power marker before it is a syntactical marker' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 76). Judgements about whether a sentence is grammatical or not, and dominant ideas of grammaticality for Deleuze and Guattari actually reinforce the idea that language is both a conveyor and a locus for the clash of social forces. But which linguistic elements participate in this production of forces? Writing on the operations of interpellation, Lecerle notes that it is often grammatical markers – modes of address and the use of personal pronouns, such as the use of the inclusive or the exclusive 'we' – that make interpellation happen (Lecerle 1999: 14). In this way, grammar not only marks power through the inclusion or exclusion within the 'we' of Lecerle's example; it is also worked through by politics in its production of affect – the subject is (or isn't) successfully interpellated. Elsewhere, Lecerle argues that as well as being a marker of power, grammar is 'a carrier of affects and intensities' (Lecerle 2002: 240). Crucially, grammar is a mechanism or structure that brings these subjects, actions and temporalities into relation both through a set of logical rules that produce certain positions and temporalities, and through relations of affect, force or intensity.

Can we merely conclude, then, that grammar produces relations through both logic and affect, or through both the order and linearity of rules and through relations of force? To simply point to this is not enough. For if grammar is to be thought of as the mechanism or the device that organises and brings the various elements of the question into relation, then the nature of those relations must be interrogated. By considering the relations that grammar assembles we can see how these connections in turn produce certain relationships to action. And it is in the tracking of these relations that the links between linguistic organisation and political organisation can be identified. A view of grammar as a reflection of certain logic establishes a predictable, stable and linear set of relations between the elements of the question, presupposing what the question will proceed to do. By contrast, Lecerle's view of grammar as a producer of relations of force, affect and intensity would not be able to contain those affects within the clauses and structures of the question, and would have a far less predictable and linear relationship with what is beyond the sentence – and with what comes next. This view of grammar would move in and out of the sentence; it would be forever at play within the production of the *rapport des forces*, changing and repositioning those relations, organising and disorganising the question as it does so. These different grammars would bring subjects, actions and time

into relation in very different forms, allowing multiple ways of acting in and upon the world.

The question ‘what is to be done?’ thus gestures towards another simultaneous grammar: a constituent grammar that sets up relations of force between language and action, theory and practice. The notion of constituent grammar proposed here, draws on the concept of constituent power. Constituent power is often associated with the Latin root of the word power as *potencia*, the dynamic, constituting dimension of power, the power or strength to do something, to affect, to be affected, as opposed to *poder*, the more static dimension of constituted power at work in dominant systems of political representation and government. Giorgio Agamben has described constituent power as the originary ‘source’ of democracy. It is, he argues, the wellspring and the power of the law and of the revolution that struggles to maintain itself in the constituted power of the state (Agamben 1998: 44). Through extensions of suffrage, rules of assembly, referenda and other regulatory activity, constituent power can be seen to operate intermittently, but within a contained framework. While it is the source from which the state and the judiciary draws its force and legitimacy, constitutional law aims to absorb constituent power through mechanisms of representation and to ultimately pose the law and the state as autonomous from it (Agamben 1998: 44).

For Antonio Negri, however, constituent power resists being fully constitutionalised. Although it is a power that stems from ‘nowhere’, its expansiveness, hybridity and strength cannot be contained within this framework or within the hierarchies, norms and representational forms of constituted power (Negri 1999: 3) Both Agamben and Negri describe how constitutionalists and juridical theorists often attempt to parse, fraction and split constituent power into originary and commissionary: to posit constituent power as a transcendent force, or to naturalise it. However, guarding against the sometimes too-easily celebrated irreducibility of constituent power in Negri, and the posing of an oversimplistic dichotomy between these two senses of power, Agamben poses an analogy to Walter Benjamin’s distinction between the violence that posits law, and the violence that preserves it. In doing so, he points to and reiterates the inseparability of the two concepts of power (Agamben 1998: 46). Constituted power, he argues, presupposes itself as a constituent power, and while constituent power does not exhaust itself in constituted power, it can never entirely de-couple from it. Constituent power cannot appear as

entirely separate from constituted power, and therefore cannot also avoid being seen as an expression of sovereignty. Nevertheless, Negri argues that we must ‘avoid a theoretical path that eliminates together with the vicious circle, the very reality of the contradiction between constituent power and the juridical arrangement, between the all powerful source and the systems of law and normativity’ (Negri 1999: 20). In Negri’s argument, we must work to recognise and keep open this source.

There are different notions of power to now track through the question ‘what is to be done?’ On the one hand, constituted power is exemplified by a logic that broadly conceives of revolution in the familiar political imagery of the conquest and seizure of (state) power. In this logic, power is defined as a positive and locatable presence: it is in the Winter Palace, at the seat of parliament or with the monarch, and must be taken in order that it can be put to a different use. Power is already constituted, something that one either possesses, or does not. It is something a small group of people must attain in order to then re-distribute. On the other hand, constituent power as defined by Negri and others as power that is dynamically produced, and which is expressed as strength, force and potentiality, can less easily be located, identified or fashioned into some kind of redistributable form. In the analysis of Agamben and Negri, it is impossible to decouple constituted and constituent power, or to simply relegate the concept of constituted power to older formations of state sovereignty and revolution. The inseparability of these two senses of power can indeed be seen in Lenin’s own writings on the relationship between the soviets and the party, and in the construction of the slogan ‘All Power to the Soviets’ shortly before the seizure of power at the Winter Palace.³ It can also be seen historically in Gramsci’s influential notions of hegemony and ‘a war of position’ (Gramsci 1971). Gramsci’s permanent war of position over hegemonic ideas and values fought via institutions of civil society such as schools, the church and the media is not incommensurate with the concept of constituent power, even though thinkers such as Negri have aligned Gramsci’s notion of hegemony with modern sovereignty, state formations of constituted power, and the dictatorship of the proletariat (Casarino and Negri 2008: 165) Nevertheless, we can track in one sense of the question, a predominant logic and grammar that sets out a list of roles and tasks: a quest to find the object(s) to answer the ‘what’ of the *wh-* interrogative. By contrast, when emphasis is placed on the question as an element at work within the relations of force of a given situation, as something that articulates *and* directly modifies the situation within which it is asked, we

mobilise a notion of power that is immanent to language and action. In other words, we see power as something that is already at work in and through language and action.

Through focussing on constituent power it is possible to see how different forms of organisation are immanent to the structure of the question, and thus, how the proposed notion of constituent grammar might work to amplify different relationships between people, action and time. This constituent grammar would have the capacity to disorganise the logic and rules of the dominant grammar, while producing structures and mechanisms through which we could imagine our actions in the world and into the future anew. If, however, as Negri suggests, constituent power can be understood as a 'subject of production', or a subject that regulates democratic politics, how would a constituent grammar set up the relationship between the subject and action? By turning now to the 'is' and the 'is to be' part of the question, I will investigate how both the passive subject of the question's construction and the time frame established by the clause is key to producing a particular logic of organisation.

II

IS - third person singular present 'to be'. - linking verb, auxiliary verb, helping verb. As auxiliary can be used to indicate something that is *due* to happen.

to: as in, in order to.

be: an irregular and defective verb. Primary auxiliary verb. Has progressive or durative aspect.

to be: to-infinitive. Present infinitive. Infinitive is base. Unmarked base form of verb. *to-infinitive* can be combined with passive constructions. to-infinitives usually have no subject, although its subject is implied by the context. Infinitive is non-finite. Form does not bind verb to a specific subject or tense. *To be* also used to indicate something that is *due* to happen: *bride to-be*. It remains *to be* seen.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE? QUESTIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

NAME: BADIU	CITY/COUNTRY: PARIS
WEEK ENDING:	TIME IN:

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Dans "que faire!", Lénine veut définir une nouvelle conception de la politique. Il s'agit d'avoir comme point de départ, non pas l'Etat ou le pouvoir, mais la conscience révolutionnaire. Le Parti doit résulter de l'organisation de cette conscience.

Nous devons refaire le chemin de Lénine. La forme-Parti est maintenant impossible. Mais la nécessité d'organiser la subjectivité politique en dehors de toute soumission aux règles de l'Etat demeure. En particulier, nous devons critiquer complètement la "démocratie" électorale.

Il faut inventer une politique "sans-parti", soumise à la discipline des processus politiques concrets.

TIME OUT: Please continue overleaf if necessary

Please return to:
 What is to be Done?
 The Lenin Museum
 Hämeenpuisto 25,
 FIN-33200 Tampere
 Or e-mail to:
 whatistobedone@excite.com

Can we make copies of your response for Museum visitors to take away with them? (Please circle)

YES NO

Figure 2.

Rather than describe the time frame of an action, to-infinitives leave time unmarked. The subject of the to-infinitive is covert, and the agent(s) of the question omitted. In addition, this base form of the verb along with the past participle 'done' that follows, gives us a passive formation. Rhetorically, such passive constructions alert us to the fact that there is an implied context, and that there is an implied public who are willing to accept the premise of the construction.⁴ Rather than indicating a strictly absent subject, the subject of the passive construction is tacit. Unlike Lecerle's more overt example of the grammatical marker of the inclusive 'we' used to produce interpellation, this passive formation more subtly implies that the speaker is sharing his or her thoughts and conferring with us, the listeners. In other words, the passive construction produces a tacit ground of communication between speaker and listener. In the case of Lenin's pamphlet, the writer could assume an audience engaged and informed about the range of issues, figures and positions spoken about. He could assume a mass of followers, a defined readership and what Lukács has called the 'actuality of the revolution' (Lukács 1972: 12) In assuming this tacit ground of communication between speaker and addressee, Lenin presupposes that the public addressee is a revolutionary subject, prior to the asking of his question. He assumes this *a priori* revolutionary subject as a subject who is ready to act. Might it not be the case, however, that it is the iteration of the question that actually constitutes the public *qua* revolutionary subject? Is it conceivable, in other words, that the question is founded on a metalepsis, in which the revolutionary subject is presented as a cause of Lenin's political programme, when it is actually an effect of his rhetoric.⁵

If, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, a rule of grammar is a power marker before it is a syntactical marker, the omissions of subject and tense in this passive construction are there to tell us that the question merely reflects the situation in which it is uttered. The implicit context simply 'gives voice' to the circumstances in which it is asked. The question is uttered at the point at which this shared circumstance has already been established, the point at which the analysis has already taken place. The question appears to come in only when the course of action to follow is to be determined, and subsequently carried out. The grammar of the passive formation allows the question to position the subject as assumed, as part of an external context, rather than rhetorically produced within the speech act. The passive formation implies that it is this constituency of address which is ready to act: it is this revolutionary subject who requires the question to be asked and the tasks to be determined. The grammar of this passive construction is

more difficult to identify than Deleuze and Guattari's order-words; it is less obvious a producer of interpellation than Lecerle's inclusive or exclusive 'we' discussed in the previous section; and indeed less forceful than the anticipation of a new social group prefigured in slogans such as 'Workers of the World Unite!', spoken of above. Yet the grammar of this passive construction nevertheless operates as a power marker with great effect. Politics are not simply reflected in this militant question, but are worked in and through its grammatical construction.

The manoeuvre of the metalepsis that produces the revolutionary subject can be traced in Lenin's notion of 'the people as they are'. In one of his many arguments against both anarchists and utopians, Lenin castigates the dream of dispensing with all administration as a postponement of the revolution. He says that '[a]narchists postpone because they need to wait until people are different. Marxism wants to work with people as they are, with people who cannot dispense with subordination, control, the foreman and the accountants' (Lenin 1919: 47). This desire to work with 'people as they are' is repeated by Lenin in several pamphlets and is often quoted by Lukács and others who seek to put forward a certain pragmatics of social and political change.⁶ Again, however, we see in this claim a tone of immediacy and urgency that masks a complex set of moves that both assumes a certain *a priori* revolutionary subject, and reinvents that same subject in the image of the nascent party. Many contradictions and paradoxes ensue. In the 1902 pamphlet *What is to be Done?*, Lenin cites 'the evidence of history' to argue that the working class cannot by its own effort develop beyond trade union consciousness. He concludes famously that political consciousness would have to be brought to them 'from without' (Hardt 2005: 14). The classic dualism between spontaneity and centralism, which in turn poses a dualism between spontaneity and consciousness is firmly established, and with it 'the people as they are' are transformed into a malleable figure that both constitutes and must be constituted by the revolution.

How is this staged rhetorically? The 'people as they are' react and formulate demands based on their 'experience' and palpable conditions. However, Lenin argues in *What is to be Done?* that this spontaneous upsurge of the masses in Russia is only the first part of the process and that the upsurge essentially lays before socialist democrats urgent theoretical, political and organisational tasks. The spontaneity of the masses, in other words, is the cause and the source of the requirement of the party to produce theoretical and practical

tasks *for* them. Consciousness needs to be brought from without, at least in part because the party stage this desire as something that is actually called for by the proletariat, or even by history itself. In a rather comedic moment in *What is to be Done?*, Lenin interrupts the relative neutrality of the passive form and directly takes on the voice of the workers. As part of his railing against the economist's narrow focus on worker's conditions and spontaneous trade unionism, he ventriloquises:

‘But such activity is not enough for us! We are not children to be fed the gruel of “economic” politics alone; we want to know everything that others know, we want to learn the details of all political life and to take part actively in every single political event. In order to do this, the intellectuals must talk to us less of what we already know, and tell us more about what we do not know yet and what we cannot learn from our factory and economic experience, namely political knowledge. You intellectuals can acquire this knowledge and it is your duty to bring it to us in 1,000 fold greater measure than you have done up to now’ (Lenin 1969: 99)

In constructing and ventriloquising this desire, Lenin moves on to identifying tasks that would answer it. He says that the party should organise ‘sufficiently wide, striking and rapid exposures of all of the shameful outrages’ of the time in order that the proletariat be filled with an irresistible desire to react broadly and vigorously (Lenin 1969: 136). The proletariat are constructed as a kind of ideal audience: they are a constituency primed for maximum ‘uptake’ and guaranteed affect. The tacit assumption of this speech act is that the proletariat will react to these outrages. Lenin claims that the proletariat are ‘most capable of converting this knowledge into active struggle, even if that struggle does not promise palpable results’ (Lenin 1969: 136). It is this consciousness, or knowledge beyond immediate experience that facilitates the wonderfully machinic conversion of knowledge into action. Consciousness brings with it therefore the guarantee not only of a more broadly informed worker, but also a worker who is sufficiently primed to carry out the correct action.

There are two interrelated problems here. First, Lenin's statement presupposes a revolutionary subject who is ready to act and second: it assumes that knowledge in the form of consciousness translates neatly and directly into action. Both problems are condensed in the question that Michael Hardt poses in relation to Lenin and Negri (after Lenin): ‘What leads [them] to believe that the spontaneous expression of the masses will be directly in line with the conscious programme of the political leaders?’ (Hardt 2005: 24). Hardt's question confirms and complicates the problem of the metalepsis described

above. It also partly reframes the problem of theory and practice as discussed through Althusser in the first section of the article. Consciousness, like scientific knowledge in Althusser, is seen as a privileged form of knowledge as it guarantees a certain relationship to action, a certain political practice.⁷ This form of knowledge, as we have seen, relies on the broader view of language as secondary representation of the world beyond it. The knowing subject distinguished and separated from his or her 'spontaneous' knowledge of lived or palpable experience is the rational subject who will be the cause of the action that follows. More importantly, however, is the fact that this knowledge 'beyond immediate experience' in the form of consciousness must come from the experts, the intellectuals, the central authority of the party. Lenin manages, in Hardt's words, to 'line up' the spontaneous expression of the masses with the conscious programme of the political leaders through the double move of constituting the masses or the 'people as they are' as *a priori* revolutionaries who are ready to act, and simultaneously as the ideal audience for the 'rapid exposures' and conscious knowledge brought to them, which will make them act in line with the programme. Staging the subject who requests this consciousness to be brought to them relies on the constitution of the subject as already revolutionary, and vice versa. Rather than merely describe this situation, the question 'what is to be done?' and the language and rhetoric of the pamphlets, are again utterly caught up in the production of this situation, and the constitution of this grammar of organisation.

This aligning of the spontaneity and consciousness of the revolutionary subject, referred to by Hardt as the 'Leninist paradox of subjectivity', also produces a particular temporality and logic of organisation. In Hardt's argument, Negri follows Lenin's paradox of subjectivity in his suggestion that there are two moments of organisation: first, the spontaneous movement, and second, the disclosing of this spontaneity in the organisation and direction imposed upon it by the conscious, political leadership. Organisation, Negri argues, is the proof and the affirmation of the spontaneity and the Leninist party form. This double move or seeming paradox is not a contradiction, Negri contends, as spontaneity is not 'free will' and nor is the proletariat's character formed outside of the material conditions that produced them as a class. Spontaneity is something more like determinate will in Negri, formed in material relation to production processes. This means that the spontaneity of the proletariat comes from the same conditions that the vanguard also derives their organisational models and forms – the

model of the factory – and for this reason they will be in line (Hardt 2005: 30-35). Negri's argument, however, re-inscribes consciousness as the 'truth' of the factory, a truth that is latent and can only be rendered conscious through the provision of external, expert knowledge.

The context in which Negri formulates his ideas about the mass intellect, the social factory and the multitude are clearly very different from the political conjuncture in which Lenin invoked his revolutionary subject. As Finn Bowring has argued, Negri's account of the multitude developed out of a discussion among radical Italian thinkers about the relevance of Marx's 'Fragment on Machines' to emergent post-Fordist formations of living labour and mass intellectuality in 1960s Italy (Bowring 2004). It is also important to say that Negri's subsequent collaboration with Michael Hardt in *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004) and *Commonwealth* (2009) has led to a more nuanced set of reflections on the ways in which changes in the class composition of the multitude have altered the historical problem of spontaneity and consciousness that has preoccupied Marxist thought throughout much of the twentieth century. Indeed, Hardt and Negri have tried to counter some of the charges of Leninist vanguardism made against the concept of the multitude, which they formulated together in *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000). In *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri argue that the singularity of the multitude 'does not negate real, local differences' (Hardt and Negri 2004: 222). Furthermore, they argue that '[t]he multitude can develop the power to organize itself through the conflictual and cooperative interactions of singularities in common' (Hardt and Negri 2009: 175) Yet, despite their insistence that '[s]pontaneity and hegemony are not the only alternatives', some of Negri's later works retain the Leninist spectre in 'What is to be Done?' of an intellectual vanguard that will enlighten the masses (Hardt and Negri 2009: 175). In a 2007 essay, for example, Negri argues that in order to 'make the event real, we need an external vanguard, to transform flesh into the body, a body of the General Intellect' (Negri 2007: 305). In statements such as these we can still see a persistent grammar of organisation; the intellectual bringing political consciousness from without: the doing unto the 'subject' from an external position – even though it is expressed in a more contemporary theoretical idiom.

A similar limit arises with the use of the term 'multitude' in the writings of Paulo Virno (Virno 2004). Virno's *Grammar of the Multitude* suggests that it is necessary to imagine a

grammar of action and futurity in relation to ‘the many’, after the vanguards, the party, revolutionary programmes, the bringing of political consciousness from without and so on, had been dispensed with. He suggests that thinking the multitude as a grammatical subject is necessary in order to rethink its grammatical predication. For if the multitude is understood as the many, as a subject of production and not simply as a substitute for the old figure of the revolutionary subject assumed in the grammar of Lenin’s passive question, or as the spontaneous figure of the ‘people as they are’ made conscious in the second moment of the revolutionary programme, then it surely cannot occupy the same place as that subject in the grammar of organisation. The multitude could not be set up to inhabit the same position as the old subject, nor to carry out the same grammatical logic of subject-predication, nor operate through the same conversion of conscious knowledge into action, according to the same logic of the political. There could be no position external to the multitude insofar as ‘it’ could neither organise nor be organised in the same way through language.

We are left with the empty place of the subject in the question, an absent revolutionary subject who has underpinned not only the rhetorical functioning of the question, but also a certain logic of the political. Michael Hardt argues that Negri turned to Lenin because Lenin took as a starting point the fact that revolution is not a process without a subject, but rather followed the organisational reality of the revolutionary subject. Indeed, Hardt suggests that theories of political organisation as they emerged in Italy in the 1970s were ‘only a more practical and volatile form of the theory of the subject’ (Hardt 2005: 14). If this is the case, then what other notions of subjectivity might form the basis of political organisation, and would they suggest a grammar apart from that which currently circumscribes the subject’s relation to knowledge and action? Can Lenin’s paradox of subjectivity be dispensed with once and for all if it is also the same subject that is produced in and through grammar and language? And can this subject be extracted from the passivity and inertia of its place in the question ‘what is to be done?’ Can a different notion of subjectivity produce a different grammar, and another form of predication?

A consideration of language and its relationship to action through a notion of force recalls many of the central tenets of speech act theory. Indeed, Lenin’s assumption of the revolutionary subject produced through metalepsis and the use of the passive construction would also support the familiar idea in speech act theory that it is the

speech act that at least partially constitutes the subject of the sentence, and not the other way round. Martin Puchner examines this relationship between speech act theory and political language through the form of the manifesto. Like Deleuze, Guattari and Lecerle, Puchner suggests that slogans and manifestoes do not merely represent a given state of affairs, but are themselves political acts. Exploring specifically the 'subject of political practice' in these manifestoes and slogans, Puchner draws on Althusser's analysis of Machiavelli's *The Prince* to look at how such documents are written from positions of 'weakness', but with a view to a different future. Puchner argues that like the slogan *Workers of the World Unite!*, *The Communist Manifesto* is addressed to a subject who does not yet exist. Like Deleuze and Guattari, Puchner argues that this split between the position from which the slogan or manifesto is written and the subjectivity that it projects creates the space for language to act and intervene in a specific political conjuncture. Writing from the viewpoint of the proletariat in the manifesto summons forth that same proletariat: it is the performative that intervenes in the political situation and that creates its addressee as agent (Puchner 2006).

However, the way in which this subject who does not yet exist comes into being in Puchner is rather different from Deleuze and Guattari's account of the subject. Puchner argues that the Manifesto in fact projects a political *authority* that does not yet exist: 'Thus Althusser arrives, via his analysis of *The Prince*, at a theory of the manifesto as a genre that writes from the position of weakness and that has to construct the agency that will usurp authority' (Puchner 2006: 29). Puchner goes on to argue that Machiavelli's *The Prince* theorises a political agency by constructing the figure of an ideal ruler, 'the prince', whom Althusser calls the 'subject of political practice': a projection of political authority that does not yet exist in actuality' (Puchner 2006: 34). In the same text, Puchner criticises Austin's reliance on the official authority of the state, the law, and the church for a speech act's perlocutionary effect, and argues that this approach limits our capacity to think through performativity from non-authoritative positions and contexts. The only way out of this double bind that he can see is for this 'imaginary' or projected figure to usurp at some point in the future that same position of authority. In other words, for Puchner, both the place and the concept of authority remains, and so crucially, the force of the speech act relies on an unaltered notion of power. In addition, the place of the subject in the sentence and its role in the production of relations within and beyond the sentence remain largely unaltered. It is also significant that in describing this movement

from the 'weak' position in which the slogan or manifesto is uttered to the figure of authority who will come, Puchner invokes a distinction between the 'latent' and the 'conscious'. Drawing again on Althusser, Puchner argues that the proletariat as the figure to come will only emerge and usurp authority, once it has become a 'self-conscious agent' (Puchner 2006: 31). For Puchner it is this movement that allows the proletariat to take the place of authority.

Language understood as force within this limited framework neither abandons a more classical conceptual apparatus of political subjectivity nor does it do anything to alter a grammar of organisation predicated on that notion of subjectivity. Despite the similarities between Puchner and Deleuze and Guattari's idea of force, Puchner holds onto a notion of the soon-to-be-conscious revolutionary subject who will usurp authority; this subject, like the notion of constituted power, is already presumed to exist. We see in Puchner's formulation a notion of consciousness as a special kind of knowledge that has a privileged relationship to action, bestowed from 'outside'. Consciousness in this context is not a form of new knowledge that is generated through struggle or a collective reflection on experience, but is rather the 'truth' of class-consciousness: a pre-existing state to be uncovered. In the terms of Puchner's account of speech act theory in the manifesto, the Leninist paradox of subjectivity remains intact. The grammar that both produces the *a priori* (latent) revolutionary subject and sets it up for a particular form of action to come remains unaltered, just as the spontaneous actions of 'the people as they are' remain in line with the conscious programme of the political leaders.

In recent writings, Argentinian group Colectivo Situaciones propose that the conceptual apparatus of political subjectivity must be abandoned. They argue that '[t]he production of the world is no longer the work of a consistent and operating subject, capable of directing history at will by knowing its laws scientifically' [...]. (Colectivo Situaciones 2010: 148). Colectivo Situaciones see the use of particular notions of political or revolutionary subjectivity to underpin forms of political organisation as useless and counterproductive; instead, they propose a radically different notion of (political) action: a 'production of the world' as an ethics without a subject: as a de-localised process: a multitude of experiments that do not have or need conscious or voluntary co-ordination (Colectivo Situaciones 2010: 160). Such proposals are certainly provocative, but they

raise important questions about the grammar of political organisation. For example, what kind of grammar would emerge in the absence of this consistent and operating subject, capable of directing history at will, and what conceptual apparatus can be thought beyond this notion of political subjectivity?

As we have seen, Deleuze and Guattari argue that language, and the slogan *Workers of the World Unite!* is not only performative but also *constitutive* of the class it calls into existence. At the First International, they argue, the slogan did not simply name, but it invented a new type of class: '[t]his text constituted an incorporeal transformation that extracted from the masses a proletarian class as an assemblage of enunciation *before* the conditions were present for the proletariat to exist as a body' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 79). While there is a temporality that appears to prefigure a subject in a way that is similar to that which we find in Puchner, the slogan is said not only to be performative, but also constitutive. But what exactly does it constitute? Rather than prefigure the subject of the slogan that does not yet exist as a *future subject* who will occupy a position of power, Deleuze and Guattari point to a proletarian class as an *assemblage of enunciation* that is 'extracted' from the masses by the slogan. They do not elaborate on what this might mean, but we see immediately that there is no simple move from a position of weakness toward an authority to come, where the agent will have usurped the speaking position of power. Nor is there in Deleuze and Guattari's proposition a re-separation of language from the class that will be constituted by the slogan. Rather than see the role of language as opening up another inhabitation of the position of authority that is beyond language, the class to come is conceptualised as an 'assemblage of enunciation', a term that does not separate language and the moment of enunciation from the collective formation that utters it.

How might we understand the grammar of this assemblage of enunciation? It is clear that it would not be possible for an assemblage of enunciation to take the place of the 'consistent and operating' subject of the sentence. The assemblage of enunciation, or the collective assemblages of enunciation as they are interchangeably referred 'don't speak of things, but speak among things, in the midst of facts, states of affairs and subjective states' (Lecercle 2002: 92). Their relationship to action is not a before or after; and nor are they directive or reflective in nature. Deleuze and Guattari argue that 'there is no individual enunciation', not even a subject of enunciation, and yet these assemblages of

enunciation are nonetheless elementary units of language. The speaker for Deleuze and Guattari, 'is not the author of her communication (expression reflecting intention), but is at best an affect of the operation of collective assemblages of enunciation'. Crucially therefore, as enunciation itself implies collective assemblages, 'this is what accounts for the social character of language, not a relation to something extrinsic' (Lecerle 2002: 92). Not only does such a term depart from a dominant logic of grammar, it also departs from the individualism of speech-act theory, from the intending subject who is grammatically set up to be the cause of her thoughts and actions. The collective assemblage of enunciation moves us towards a theory of language in which the subject is situated along the same plane as action, and amongst other regimes of signs (Lecerle 2002: 156).

What would happen if we were to allow this concept to displace the subject of grammar, the subject who is placed in a logical relation to action and the future in the context of our question 'what is to be done?' What if the 'source' of power in the speech act did not come from the authority of that subject, or even the subject to come, but from an assemblage of enunciation at work in the midst of a whole set of social, political, subjective, material and linguistic forces? The notion of assemblage, first found in Guattari's early writings, organises systems of relations according to another logic. This is a logic of variation, of circulation and intensive multiplicities, where words have material existence and exert material force in much the same way as objects. For Guattari, the logic of the assemblage of enunciation allows the conjoining of words and their referents in what Lecerle has called an 'unholy mixture', where rather than simply replace the referent, the word 'consorts' with it. (Lecerle 2002: 74). The logic of assemblage that underpins collective assemblages of enunciation in Deleuze and Guattari, is always related to the logic of the *AND*, an undermining of the logic of representation, and a certain protest against the separation of the referent from its sign: 'neither the *INSTEAD OF* of representation, or the *IS* of essence can deal with the intensive multiplicities that make up language' (Lecerle 2002: 75). They argue that '[t]he *AND*, the conjunction that names the logic of assemblage, is the indication that the straightforward relation of representation gives way to the mixture of assemblages, and consequent stuttering of language' (Lecerle 2002: 75). This logic of the *AND* produces a very different set of relations within and beyond the sentence. The conjunctures that it produces are not those of causality, stability, or straight and linear relations between thought and action.

The conjuncture AND produces a logic that is heterogeneous to that of the dominant grammar, a logic that is no longer bound solely to the rational and intending subject.

More specifically, in relation to the grammar of our question, it is the clause ‘is /to be’ that crucially gives us not only the passive form and the resulting metalepsis of the revolutionary subject, but also the conjunction of equivalents, the closure of language as separate from and prior to action. In *Pour Parlers*, Deleuze comments on Godard’s use of the AND: ‘The key thing is Godard’s use of AND. This is important, because all our thought’s modelled, rather on the verb ‘to be’, IS. Philosophy is weighed down with discussions about attributive judgements (the sky is blue) and existential judgements (God is) and the possibility and impossibility of reducing one to the other. Even conjunctions are dealt with in terms of the verb ‘to be’ – look at syllogisms’.¹ If the logic of the AND central to the notion of the assemblage were to displace the ‘is / to be’ of the question, it would set in train an entirely different set of relations within and beyond the sentence; it would also produce a situation where we are no longer looking for a replacement for the revolutionary subject, or another figure that would neatly fill its empty place. We could open out the question of constituent power as a subject of production, not limited by some figure or another producing or projecting an authority to come. If revolutionary theories of organisation are only more practical and volatile versions of theories of the subject, as suggested by Michael Hardt earlier, then what might the collective assemblage of enunciation help us to elaborate? Would the displacement of a notion of subjectivity through the assemblage of enunciation allow us to produce another grammar of organisation, a constituent grammar that could work towards Colectivo Situacione’s production of the world as an ethics without a subject? Would it allow us to dismantle the conceptual apparatus of political subjectivity once and for all? The final section of this article will now take up these suggestions in relation to questions of temporality and the future through the (to be) ‘done’.

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson, Barbara Habberjam and Eliot Ross Albert (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 44.

III

done: past perfect, over, completed. Can also function as adjective. Gerund.

to be done: inflexional form of verb: to do. To accomplish, finish, bring to a conclusion. Expresses a state and not an action. Present infinitive using past participle.

[wh-] **IS TO BE DONE**: passive voice because of 'be' before verb phrase in past participle. Passive voice omits the agent. Agentless passives. Used to focus attention on target of action rather than performer.

passive infinitive

WHAT IS TO BE DONE? QUESTIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

NAME: <u>FARGUES X</u>	CITY/COUNTRY: <u>DUBLIN</u>
WEEK ENDING: <u>SAT 7/2/05</u>	TIME IN: <u>7 PM</u>

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?
THE WAY THAT LENIN FRAMED
THE QUESTION ALIENATES US
FROM THE RESPONSE. WHAT
IS TO BE DONE? BY WHOM?
ON WHOSE BEHALF? WHAT
LENIN MEANT WAS, WHAT MUST
THE 'VANGUARD' DO TO 'LEAD'
THE VANDRANT MASSES IN THE
RIGHT DIRECTION. LENIN WAS
JUST ANOTHER POLITICIAN.

A BETTER QUESTION WOULD BE:
"WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW?"
"WHAT CAN I DO?"

STOP LISTENING TO POLITICIANS
A DON'T GIVE THE BASTARDS
ANY MORE POWER.

Please continue overleaf if necessary

TIME OUT: 8 PM

Please leave your response here so we can add it to the archive. Alternatively, you can email it to: whatistobedone@excite.com

Can we exhibit copies of your responses in future exhibitions and websites? (if you would like us to contact you first please put contact details on the back)	
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO

Figure 3.

The word 'done', in collusion with the passive to-infinitive of the previous clause produces in the question this strange situation of a verb behaving like a state. The 'done' embodies more than any of the previous words, the contradictions embedded in this question. The urgency of action is so great and immediate that it must already be done, completed, accomplished and over with. Yet simultaneously, its place in the sentence points to the future – to a time, a situation or a state that cannot yet be known, and that we cannot have any guarantee of reaching. If the question 'what is to be done?' brings the future into the present through marking this moment between now and what will come, then how does the grammar that gives us the form of this last word of the question, point to how these relations are organised? Is the future called forth urgently to be re-placed in a framework and course of action already decided on in the past? How is the situation in which the question is asked, re-organised through an iteration that circumscribes this relationship to the future? The force of the interrogative, as discussed in section one, propels itself into the future in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. The previous sections have suggested several ways in which this question of temporality might be tackled differently. But how might some of these approaches to the question allow us to imagine a different relationship to action and the future?

The potentially contradictory urgency of the inflexional form of the verb *to do* suggests one way in which the future is called into the present: it asks in what ways actions in the present can be understood as passages or routes to that future. The verb form implies a notion of action that is conditioned by, and would guarantee a certain relation to the future. It implies a notion of action not only as a stable carrier or form of passage to the future, but also as something that works from a relatively stable ground in the present: a ground that is known and worked from on the basis of knowledge of what must be done, and therefore of what is sure to come. How then, does action that is predicated on reaching this point of being done and over with act upon and produce its present? The relationship that is established in the question between what is – the present here and now that is acted upon in order to bring about what must be done and over with in the future – and what is to come, bears many resemblances to the meta-ethical debates around the dualism of 'the is' and 'the ought'. The term ought refers to not only what ought to be done as inflexional verb, but more importantly to an ideal condition in the future that should exist, a future that should be worked for. How might the problematic

of the 'is' and the 'ought' help us to push further our understanding of the inflexional form and complex temporalities of the question?

Arguments around the classic distinction between 'is' and 'ought' have been raised in many contexts from Kant to Hume, and Bernstein to Lukács.⁸ The debate primarily revolves around how the deduction or the prescription of 'an ought' from 'what is' invariably accepts or even reinforces what is. In saying that something ought to be done, there is an implicit assumption that the situation as it exists is not right or not how it should be. It implies the necessity of change, even if this move towards change is predicated on the acceptance of the given empirical reality. Lukács elaborates on this paradox through Kant: '[...] in the philosophy of Kant it remains true that the "ought" presupposes an existing reality to which the category of the "ought" remains applicable in principle' (Lukács 1974: 160). And so, 'every theory of the ought is left with a dilemma: either it must allow the meaningless existence of empirical reality to survive unchanged with its meaningfulness forming the basis of the ought – for in a meaningful existence the problem of the ought would not arise' (Lukács 1974: 161). In positing an ought, on the basis of a desire to move away from the given reality, the subject is caught in the paradox, or what Lukács has called the *riddle* of the is and the ought: '[w]henver the refusal of the subject simply to accept this empirically given existence takes the form of an 'ought', [it] means that the immediately given empirical reality receives affirmation [...] (Lukács 1974: 160). Several related problems emerge here. Accepting 'what is' as a given empirical reality, as something that can be known objectively is anathema to the many early Marxist thinkers. As Lukács argues, to implicitly accept what is, is to accept the Kantian noumena – things as they are, and not of man's making. To do this would not only disavow the constructed and social nature of man's existence; in Lukács' view it would also lend support to the naturalised standpoint of the bourgeoisie and ensuing empiricist debates around notions of the objective and subjective. In what appears as an early theory of ideology, Lukács argues that reality is always mediated and conditioned from particular standpoints. The proletariat, he argues, must evaluate 'empirical reality' from their particular mediated standpoint, whereas the bourgeoisie claim reality as a given, as something that can be considered objectively. On this basis, Lukács and others have argued that thinking the future through the is and the ought works to reinforce what is. The is and the ought remain irreducibly antithetical: perceived as states or independent objects that are forever external to each other.

If the dualism of the is and the ought points to the impossibility of an ought modifying current existence, then a question remains about how it is possible to think this passage to the future from what is. How is it possible to express a form of futurity in the present that does not fall into the trap of either prescribing that future or reifying and naturalising the given reality? John Searle tried to get around this problem by positing other ways in which an ought might be derived from what is. Searle argued that the ought could be thought of as an obligation instantiated through the form of the promise. Yet, while this proposition may alter the mode of passage to the future, it keeps in place both the idea of a future as a kind of ideal, and as something that one is somehow obliged to work towards. Colectivo Situaciones argue that it is crucial to work precisely against such ideals when they function as promises. They claim that the ought is inevitably tied to the ideal: to some kind of model of the future that is conceived as separate from social struggles in the present. They argue instead that it is vital to work 'with the power of what is, and not of what ought to be', and to work from 'a commitment to power in the present' (Colectivo Situaciones 2007: 79). But how does working with the present, and with a commitment to what is, bear on the future? How and in what form does the future pass into the present under these conditions? It seems here almost impossible to think the future from a position of action in the present, from this immanent social reality without a kind of transcendence, an ideal in the name of which action is carried out. Within the grammar of futurity afforded by the question, and within the framework of the is and the ought, the kind of action in the present described by Colectivo Situaciones, and the relationship to the future that it might hold, seems condemned to be characterised by the same kind of 'spontaneism' as the social movements that came before.

To understand how this movement from the present to the future might be conceived of beyond the terms of the is and the ought, it is important to look again at the notions of power that are at work in such a movement. If the ought designates a form of relation to the future, it does so by reproducing an order of constituted power: that is, power that is conceived as already formed and to be attained once the necessary actions have been carried out. In other words, that which ought to be done in order to change the present situation is something that already exists prior to any action that would move towards it. Negri has called this the order of *Sollen*, of what ought to be. This is opposed to the order

of the *Sein*, or what is. In traditional constitutional theory, he argues, one of the primary ‘solutions’ to containing constituent power in the law is to posit it as a transcendent source that must necessarily *precede* the constituted order. Constituent power remains therefore not only prior to, but also external to the constituted power. More importantly, Negri argues, constituent power is destined to remain defined in the terms of the constituted power. In order to institute this separation and ordering, the constituted power classically destroys the link between the ‘transcendent source’ and its own forms, and in doing so poses itself as autonomous (Negri 1999: 4). It is not difficult to see why then, it seems impossible to grasp an idea of futurity from within the terms of this immanent social reality and those forms of action that do not work toward or with an ideal in mind. Defined as merely a moment in social or political change, these forms of action in the present are contained, put in their place and stripped of any conceptual apparatus that would lend them a capacity to produce a future. Yet, as Negri argues, ‘constituent power and the collective subjectivity that gives it shape are first of all a social reality – a productive social reality that cannot be negated. Power feeds on this strength: without this strength it could not exist’ (Negri 1999: 325).

Is it possible to think the force of the question away from the *done*, away from the ought and constituted power as the only guarantee of the effect of action on the future? How to bring out and work with the power of what is, with a commitment to power in the present without either an implicit or explicit ideal or promise in operation? Negri points briefly to a temporal dimension of constituent power when he says that: ‘[...] constituent power by continuing to live as strength and reorganise itself as multitude presents itself as the paradigm of a temporal dimension open onto the future. This opening onto the future, this collective imagination in action, is a factual element that is always *repeated* and always re-proposed by constituent power. On this terrain, again, it cannot be neutralised’ (Negri 1999: 325). This way of understanding power as an opening onto the future, bears many resemblances to Giorgio Agamben’s notion of potentiality (Agamben 1998: 39-49).⁹ Indeed, constituent power, as stated earlier can also be understood as *potencia*, the dynamic, constituting dimension of power, the power or strength to do. Potentiality for Agamben does not designate the generic sense of a person or situation’s potential, but rather a *capacity* to act. *Potencia* as capacity bears a relation to a possible future, but is simultaneously entangled in the ongoing negotiations that define collective political organisation in the present. Such an idea of capacity offers a different temporal logic

though which to understand the subject's relationship to political action. When a political act is 'done', the implication is that such an act has been completed, and is therefore relegated to the past: it is 'over and done with'. Yet this dominant political grammar ignores the force of *potentia* with which it is entangled; indeed, as Agamben suggests, potentiality 'precedes the act and conditions it' (Agamben 1998: 42). Potentiality as *a form* of passage takes place along with the temporal logic of the ought; and yet it crucially maintains itself in a different kind of relation to the future.

Through the concept of potentiality, it is possible to clarify how in its repetition and re-proposition, constituent power cannot be restricted to a finite moment in the present or past, but rather maintains a different form of relation to the future. The ought separates the present from the future and paradoxically fixes what is in the process of doing so; if we re-conceptualise the production of the power of what is as *potencia*, however, we can begin to see how the capacity to act in the future is inseparable from what is. Agamben reminds us, however, that the problem of constituent power is bound up with the problem of the constitution of potentiality. While the concept of potentiality allows us to open out this temporal dimension of constituent power, displacing the ought and the sole claim of constituted power on the future, it is nevertheless tentative and points only to some of the ways in which we might dismantle the forms in which the future is shaped and determined by the political exigencies of the present. It is well to recall here Agamben's caution discussed in section one about the impossibility of constituent power ever decoupling itself entirely from the constituted power. For the paradox that is at the heart of constituent power will never allow us to simply replace one concept with another (Agamben 1998: 44). In pointing to the paradox of constituent power, however, we can begin at least to keep this contradiction alive and insist on another notion of futurity also at work in the question. For bound up in the 'done' of the question is a grammar that reduces and circumscribes action in the present to the performance of tasks that will bring about a future that is formulated elsewhere. Opening out the dualism of the is and the ought to another temporal logic begins this work of moving the force of the question away from the 'done' towards both an affirmation of the power of what is, and a notion of futurity that is not exclusively defined in the terms of the constituted power.

The 'done' of the question does not however act alone in producing this temporality. In many ways it simply adds another complex layer to the temporality set out in the passive form 'is to be' discussed in the previous section. In section two, we saw how Negri's paradox of subjectivity required the temporality of phases, where the process of making the 'people as they are' conscious required an exterior and centralised position. This two-stage process of spontaneity and consciousness mapped onto the argument that the spontaneous movement constituting the first part of revolutionary change must be formalised in a later phase of organisation: a phase which is also framed as the 'proof' of spontaneity. A similar logic of organisation underpins Puchner's account of the manifesto and speech act theory, as we have also seen. For Puchner, the speech act of the manifesto projects itself into a future that is already defined by an authority figure that is paradoxically anterior to the action or the utterance of the manifesto. By looking at the metalepsis of the passive form that produced the revolutionary subject in section two, we saw how the production of this subject is bound to a certain temporality of organisation.

What all of these moves have in common with the dualism of the is and the ought is the staging of a separation between what is and what is to come, and the invocation of a power that is seen to be outside, a power that is already known and constituted, in order to guarantee the effect of action on the future. The ought, consciousness, centralised organisation, and the idea of an authority to come, work to reproduce 'what is' as something known and something that must be overcome, not only to get on to the next stage but also to produce the future as something that is 'foreseeable' from a determinate position in the present. It is therefore the (passive) subject together with the verb phrase of the question that embeds this temporal sequence of phases in a question that also implies urgency and immediacy. Indeed, the rhetorical force of the question 'what is to be done?' – its tacit injunction to do something – seems antithetical to the slowness of organisation.

The 'done' of the question is also caught up in a production of forces, garnering its meaning from the conjuncture in which it is uttered. As suggested in the discussion of Deleuze and Guattari above, there can be no transcendent intention of meaning that precedes the utterance, and nor does an utterance transcend the act which it represents (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 79). The force of the question does not come from a realm

separate from action, but rather from carefully timed iterations that are produced in and through the precise linking of the conjuncture and the utterance. The question as enactor, conveyor and locus for the clash of forces would never simply call forth the future into the present in the readymade form of a 'done' or a temporal sequence of phases. Deleuze and Guattari's view of language as something that is immanent to action would ask us to look instead at how the grammar of the 'done' is a marker of power before it is a syntactical marker, and how politics has thoroughly worked the temporality of this question from within.

It seems clear enough that much is at stake in defining constituent power: a power that has its time and place in the present and can have no purchase on a future. As suggested in section two, the force of constituted power corrals and manages constituent power by assigning it a political 'role' in a chain of cause-effect relations, and thereby limiting it to a stage or an 'element' within the revolutionary movement. Lenin's proposition in *State and Revolution* that one kind of power 'withers away' when another takes it over; Negri's wrangling with the paradox of subjectivity; and John Holloway's call to contemporary social movements to 'change the world without taking power' exemplify the various ways in which a hierarchical notion of political power is embedded in the causal logic of the grammar of organisation. By structuring the relationship of the revolutionary subject to the future as a series of stages, such grammar also separates that subject from the future.

If we acknowledge that language is also a political affair, and that grammar is not mere linguistic competence but rather something that is forever at play in the production of the *rapport des forces*, we can begin to re-think power in the present. This is not to suggest that a constituent grammar stands apart from dominant constituted grammars of political organisation in a simple binary relation, however. For as we saw in the discussion of constituent and constituted power, the relationship between these terms is one of complex entanglement. A constituent grammar might have the capacity to bring subjects, action and time into relation in different ways. Yet such an approach would also entail a persistent negotiation with the constituted structures of political grammar implicit in questions such as 'what is to be done?'

The logic of assemblage referred to in section two hints at what this constituent grammar might be. This logic, as we have seen, is one of variation, circulation and intensive

multiplicities, and is named by the conjunction *AND*. The *AND* introduces a multiplicity that sets in motion another set of relations that are immanent to the elements of the sentence and what lies beyond it. In remaining uncontainable within the sentence, the *AND* necessarily disrupts and disperses the given relationship of separation between these elements of the sentence, and between language and the world. For as Guattari asserts, the logic of the assemblage allows the conjoining of words and their referents in this ‘unholy mixture’, where rather than simply replace the referent, the word ‘consorts’ with it. (Lecerle 2002: 74). The causal logic of normative grammar organises systems of relations that fix the conjunctions between subjects, action and time, and also asserts a particular relationship between language and world. The conjunctures that it produces, as suggested earlier, are those of causality, stability and linear relations between thought and action. Deleuze and Guattari however, specifically criticise the way in which grammar and language models our thought on the verb ‘to be’, with its attributive judgements and syllogisms, as we have seen. By introducing the *AND*, and playing with the *AND* and the IS (*et/est* in French) through Godard, Deleuze and Guattari claim that they want to look at how language actually works: to work with *paratax*, rather than *hypotax* (Lecerle 2002: 60). Parataxis, or the placing or arranging of elements side by side, is a juxtaposition of clauses or phrases *without* the use of co-ordinating or subordinating conjunctions. This is conventionally opposed to hypotaxis, which indicates the dependent or subordinate relationship of clauses with connectives (or syntactic subordination). In paratactic phrases and clauses, the *AND* continues to function as a co-ordinating conjunction, which makes possible an open form of assemblage without subordination. This paratactic logic of assemblage produces in turn another grammar of organisation, where language does not represent the world, but acts within in and upon it by mixing with it through this mode of conjuncture. The conjunction *AND*, in other words, allows us to focus on the concrete operation of grammar through the operation and displacement of specific conjunctures. In doing so, this conjunction suggests another structure or modality through which to assemble other kinds of relations between language, action and the world.

We have already seen in section two how a constituent grammar, structured around the logic of assemblage, questions and complicates the linguistic predication of the subject – a convention that is exemplified in the linguistic predication of the revolutionary subject implicit in the question ‘what is to be done?’ In producing a grammatical logic that is no

longer bound to the rational and intending subject, the collective assemblage of enunciation points to a notion of power produced not by an authority to come or a constituted power, but by a whole set of social, political, subjective, material and linguistic forces at work in the assemblage itself. Accordingly, a constituent grammar, or a grammar of organisation conceptualised in terms of the logic of assemblage, would take these intensive social, political, subjective and material forces that make up language into account. As a grammatical structure, the collective assemblage of enunciation does not separate the speaker and the utterance; instead, it assembles the subject and language on a plane that circumvents the logics of causality and linear separation. And by allowing for these complex and simultaneous operations through the assemblage, another heterogeneous temporality is produced. This was hinted at earlier via Lecercle's observation that collective assemblages of enunciation do not speak of things, but *among* things, 'in the midst of facts, states of affairs and subjective states' (Lecercle 2002: 92). Such assemblages cannot come either before or after action; they are therefore neither directive nor reflective in nature.

Moving away from the specificity of the collective assemblage of enunciation, we can see that the general logic of assemblage also identifies a complex temporality. This temporality allows space for an overlapping, concurrent concept of action: a notion of action as something dynamically produced in the present, but that nonetheless maintains itself in relation to the future, that nonetheless *amounts to* something. Action, conceptualised in terms of constituent power opens out onto a future through its continuous re-iteration, but more importantly through its refusal to separate this action in the present from potentiality as the production of the capacity to act. Constituent power is not only to be understood as *potentia*, the dynamic and constituting dimension of power, but also as something that is necessarily caught up in the formation of something – without knowing in advance what that 'thing' would be. In this understanding of the term, constituent power partially retains its sense as a noun, its definition as a component, a constituent element that is considered part of a construction. Perhaps then, the conjunction *AND* provides us with a conceptual tool to imagine how the re-iteration of constituent power in the present might produce an opening out to the future. If language is caught up in the production of forces, then the force of the constituent grammar of the *AND* would seem to have two discrete effects. One of these effects is to disrupt and disperse the subject-predicate structure of

propositional logic; the other effect is to construct new relations and forces by assembling subjects and actions, utterances and circumstances in and through the structures of propositional logic. The logic of assemblage would therefore disrupt *and* construct, it would disorganise the casual and hierarchical logics of grammar while producing a structure through which to inhabit the relationship to the future differently. In the case of the question ‘what is to be done?’, constituent grammar would delink the force of the question from the *done*; and, by doing so, it would question the assumption implicit in the logic of the question that the ought and constituted power are the only means by which action will have a guaranteed effect on the future. By attending to the constituent force of the question and the lines of assemblage that operate through and beyond it, we can begin to mobilise this militant question toward a notion of futurity that is not defined exclusively in the terms of constituted power.

Conclusion

Too often, the urgency of the question ‘what is to be done’ is immediately captured by divisions, hierarchies and modes of operating that limit our capacity to act. As Deleuze comments, ‘[t]he constancy with which revolutionary groups have betrayed their task is well known. These groups operate through detachment, election, and residual selection: they detach a supposedly expert avant-garde; they elect a disciplined, organised, hierarchical proletariat; they select a residual sub-proletariat to be excluded or re-educated’ (Deleuze 2004: 198). At the many conjunctures where the question is asked – and in the meetings of social forums, gatherings of the social movements, political research groups and art and activist collaborations that I have experienced over the last number of years – the question’s sense of urgency is quickly summoned, but often locked straight back into limited structures of thought and action, performed as an empty ghost of past revolutions, or hollowed out through its reproduction as a thematic.

Yet, the uttering of the question at these precise conjunctures names and indicates something that is important. The force of the question emerges from a breakage point, a crisis of some kind, or often from a passionate desire that a situation must change, now, immediately. As suggested in the introduction, responses to the question are not only to be read as symptoms, but also as registers of experience of the question and the circumstances that produce its utterance. It would be a mistake to abandon this force of the question, or to view the desire for change contained in it as a pointless struggle

against inevitable recuperation by the totalising logic of capitalism or dominant forms of political organisation. It would also be a mistake to create a new set of false oppositions between thought and action, the present and the future, organisation and spontaneity, consciousness and knowledge, or constitutive and constituted power. In working through the constituent grammar of the question, I have tried to address precisely how it is that when these concepts are brought into relation in particular ways, they not only fix and define certain terms (e.g. consciousness as something that comes from outside, spontaneity as something limited to the present), but also and more importantly, they also replicate a certain embedded logic in which the revolutionary subject is framed as the single cause of a predetermined action that will produce a specific political outcome in the future.

It is against this logic that Gilles Deleuze argues in his introduction to Guattari's *Psychanalyse et Transversalité* that the revolutionary task is to suppress these distinctions between proletariat and avant-garde, between proletariat and sub-proletariat towards 'the effective struggle against all mechanisms of detachment, election and residual selection – such that subjective and singular positions capable of transversal communication may emerge instead' (Deleuze: 2004 198). In working through grammar, and more specifically the grammar of this militant question, I have attempted to focus on what I see as one of the key mechanisms of detachment: a fundamental linguistic as well as organisational structure that brings subjects, action and time into relation in ways that replicate the foreclosure of constituent power, and might preclude the transformations the question seems to call for. Central to Deleuze's speculative proposition above is a different re-linking of a theory of organisation (transversality) with a theory of subjectivity (these subjective and singular positions). In calling for the suppression of distinctions between these groups through the struggle against *mechanisms* of detachment, he takes the fight away from one group versus another, and away from an investment in a new revolutionary subject that will be capable of bringing about this social and political transformation. Against the foreclosure of constituent power that takes place in the production of a new revolutionary subject, Deleuze speculates that a series of singular positions capable of communicating and re-assembling along transversal lines may emerge instead. It is important to emphasise here that the struggle against these mechanisms of detachment through the production of singular positions, and this other mode of assemblage is not a blind or directionless movement, or a banal gesture to an

open-ended future. Nor is it a condemnation of all forms of political organisation as inherently Stalinist, or of plans for the future as inevitably authoritarian. The disruption and dispersal of given modes of operation, through the careful construction and institution of another set of relations that both take apart and re-assemble subjectivities, intentions, and causality along other lines, is a highly organised, motivated and constructed set of moves. It involves a different understanding of what would constitute political activity, and a shift of focus to another plane of action.

Notes

1. First note. The author gathered over a thousand responses to the question between 2002 and 2007 through discussions, correspondence, installations, meetings and reading groups in museums, artist run spaces, public seminars, micro-summits and social forums, beginning in the last remaining Lenin Museum, Tampere Finland (2002), continuing in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia (2003), Vilnius (2003), Weimar (2003), Dublin (2005), Prague (2005), St Petersburg (2006) and Tallin (2006).
2. Second note. For discussion of Marxism as a science see Frederick Engels, 'Socialism: Utopian and Scientific' in *Marx/Engels Selected Works* (1970), Volume 3, London: Progress Publishers, pp. 95-151, and more recent debates in John Holloway (2005), *Change the World Without Taking Power*, London: Pluto Press, pp. 118-140.
3. Third note. See discussion of this debate in Negri, Antonio (1999) *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, trans. Maurizia Boscagli, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
4. Fourth note. See Leith, Dick and Myerson, George (1989) *The Power of Address: Explorations in Rhetoric*, London and New York: Routledge, and Joan Mulholland (1994) *Handbook of Persuasive Tactics: A Practical Language Guide*, London and New York: Routledge.
5. Fifth note. For discussion of the concept of metalepsis, see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London: Verso, 1985, and Judith Butler (1997), *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, New York, London: Routledge.
6. Sixth note. See for example, Georg Lukács (1972), *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought*, trans. by Nicholas Jacobs, London: NLB; Vladimir Il'ich Lenin's, 'The April Thesis' and 'Letters from Afar' in *Lenin Collected Works*, Volumes 23 and 24 (1977), trans. by Joe Fineberg, M.S. Levin et al, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
7. Seventh note. Consciousness, beyond the intuition of spontaneity for Lenin, is to be read in workers movements in very practical and straightforward ways: for example in movements that carefully time their strikes, or that discuss their cases and develop systematic actions that show the possibility of a programme, a militant tactical line. In other words consciousness, as the cliché says, is spontaneity reflecting on itself, except it is reflecting on itself here through the specific terms of the party.

8. Eighth note. See: Gerhard Schurz (1977), *The Is-Ought Problem: an Investigation in Philosophical Logic*, Dordrecht and London: Kluwer Academic Publications.

9. Ninth note. Note that in this edition of Agamben, what I refer to here as ‘constituent power’ is translated as ‘constituting power’.

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Figure 2. Response Card from installation of 'What is to be Done?', exhibition at Lenin Museum, Tampere, Finland 2002 (Source: author)

Figure 3. Response Card from installation 'What is to be Done?', Communism group exhibition, Project Arts Centre, Dublin 2005 (Source: author)