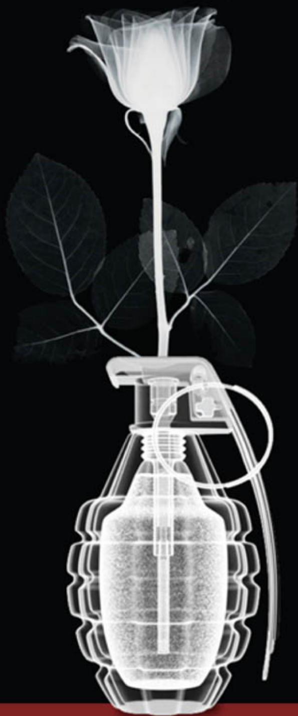
POWER AND LOVE

A Theory and Practice of Social Change



"This profound book offers us a wise way to negotiate our toughest group, community, and societal challenges."

—William Ury, coauthor of *Getting to Yes* and author of *The Power of a Positive No*

ADAM KAHANE

Bestselling Author of *Solving Tough Problems*

An Excerpt From

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A Theory and Practice of Social Change

by Adam Kahane

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Preface

How can we address our toughest challenges? How can we break through our most entangled, stuck problems? How can we create social change?

I have spent the past twenty years searching for answers to these questions. My work has been to help teams of leaders come together from across a given social system to address a particular challenge that all of them want to resolve but that none of them can resolve alone. My role has been as a designer, facilitator, and organizer of these practical social change projects. I have immersed myself in these initiatives, and at the same time have paid attention to what was happening around and inside me.

I have had the privilege of working in this way, alongside my colleagues, with all kinds of teams, on all sorts of challenges, in all parts of the world. We have worked in the United States, to make cities healthier and more livable; in Canada, to accelerate the shift to a low-carbon economy; in Colombia, to create equitable development amid continued polarization; in Guatemala, to implement the peace accords that ended the civil war; across Europe and the Americas, to make food supply chains more sustainable; in Israel, to deal with widening cultural and ideological schisms; in South Africa, to address critical developmental issues in the transition from apartheid; in India, to reduce child malnutrition; in the Philippines, to unblock a political stalemate; and in

Australia, to effect long-delayed reconciliation between aboriginal and nonaboriginal people.

These experiences have given me an up-front view of the dynamics of social change at many levels: individual, group, community, society. I have been a member of tens of diverse teams; working together over months and years; engaging heads, hearts, and hands. I have had the opportunity to participate in much trial and much error and much learning. I have worked side by side with remarkable change agents, social entrepreneurs, and activists, and been able to observe, from both outsider and insider perspectives, what works and what doesn't. Based on these firsthand experiences, I have written this book to share what I have learned with others who are trying to create social change.

Over these twenty years, I have made two discoveries. I reported the first one five years ago in *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities*. In that book I concluded that the key to creating new social realities is to open ourselves up and connect: to our own true selves, to one another, and to our context and what it demands of us.

Five years and many experiences later, I can see that this conclusion was right, but only half right, and dangerously so.

Power and Love picks up where *Solving Tough Problems* left off and reports the second discovery. In order to address our toughest challenges, we must indeed connect, but this is not enough: we must also grow. In other words, we must exercise both love (the drive to unity) and power (the drive to self-realization). If we choose either love or power, we will get stuck in re-creating existing realities, or worse. If we want to create new and better realities—at home, at work, in our communities, in the world—we need to learn how to integrate our love and our power.

Power and Love is both practical and personal. Many researchers—across political science, peace studies, management, neurobiology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, theology—have used

a variety of framings and vocabularies to point out the importance of power or love or both. The purpose of this book is not to reiterate or review these specialized theories, but to explore how in general and in practice we can work with power and love to address our toughest challenges. Furthermore, I have not constructed my understanding of these phenomena out of these theories, but instead out of sifting through and trying to make sense of my own most confusing and challenging experiences of social change.

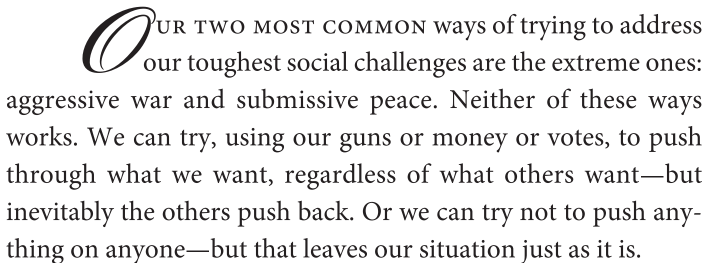
Years ago I was amazed when I read the first pages of the second volume of Lawrence Durrell's novel *The Alexandria Quartet*. Balthazar hands Darley, the narrator, the marked-up manuscript of Darley's first volume: "a paper now seared and starred by a massive interlinear of sentences, paragraphs and question-marks." The second volume then goes on to relate a radically different interpretation of the same events that Darley had described in the first one, and the third and fourth volumes do the same again from two additional perspectives.

Many times during the past twenty years, I have been handed alternative interpretations of my own stories. I am moving along confidently, and then somebody says something that shows me things are not at all the way I think they are. Through such disciplined re-viewing of my own experiences, I have gradually built up my understanding of the dynamics of social change.

The book begins with "Introduction: Beyond War and Peace," which summarizes what I have learned. Chapter 1, "The Two Sides of Power," and Chapter 2, "The Two Sides of Love," describe these two fundamental drives that generate social change. Chapter 3, "The Dilemma of Power and Love," explains why we cannot choose between these drives but must find a way to reconcile them. Chapter 4, "Falling," Chapter 5, "Stumbling," and Chapter 6, "Walking," lay out a progression of three modes of employing power and love—from the most polarized and stuck to the most integrated and fluid—in working collectively to effect social

change. In "Conclusion: To Lead Means to Step Forward," I suggest a way to work individually through this same progression, from falling to stumbling to walking, and so become more capable of addressing our toughest challenges.

Introduction: Beyond War and Peace



Our two most common ways of trying to address our toughest social challenges are the extreme ones: aggressive war and submissive peace. Neither of these ways works. We can try, using our guns or money or votes, to push through what we want, regardless of what others want—but inevitably the others push back. Or we can try not to push anything on anyone—but that leaves our situation just as it is.

These extreme ways are extremely common, on all scales. One on one, we can be pushy or conflict averse. At work, we can be bossy or "go along to get along." In our communities, we can set things up so that they are the way we want them to be, or we can abdicate. In national affairs, we can make deals to get our way, or we can let others have their way. In international relations—whether the challenge is climate change or trade rules or peace in the Middle East—we can try to impose our solutions on everyone else, or we can negotiate endlessly. These extreme, common ways of trying to address our toughest social challenges usually fail, leaving us stuck and in pain. There are many exceptions to these generalizations about the prevalence of these extreme ways, but the fact that these are exceptions proves the general rule. We need—and many people are working on developing—different, uncommon ways of addressing social challenges: ways beyond these degenerative forms of war and peace.

A character in *Rent*, Jonathan Larson's Broadway musical about struggling artists and musicians in New York City, says, "The opposite of war isn't peace, it's creation!"[1] To address our toughest social challenges, we need a way that is neither war nor peace, but collective creation. How can we co-create new social realities?

Two fundamental drives

To co-create new social realities, we have to work with two distinct fundamental forces that are in tension: power and love. This assertion requires an explanation because the words "power" and "love" are defined by so many different people in so many different ways. In this book I use two unusual definitions of power and love suggested by theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich. His definitions are ontological: they deal with what and why power and love are, rather than what they enable or produce. I use these definitions because they ring true with my experience of what in practice is required to address tough challenges at all levels: individual, group, community, society.

Tillich defines *power* as "the drive of everything living to realize itself, with increasing intensity and extensity." So power in this sense is the drive to achieve one's purpose, to get one's job done, to grow. He defines *love* as "the drive towards the unity of the separated."[2] So love in this sense is the drive to reconnect and make whole that which has become or appears fragmented. These two ways of looking at power and love, rather than the more common ideas of oppressive power and romantic love (represented on the cover by the grenade and the rose), are at the core of this book.

Love

Power

Our full world

We cannot address our tough challenges only through driving towards self-realization or only through driving towards unity. We need to do both. Often we assume that all it takes to create something new—whether in business or politics or technology or art—is purposefulness or power. This is because we often assume that the context in which we create is an empty world: an open frontier, a white space, a blank canvas. In general this assumption is incorrect.

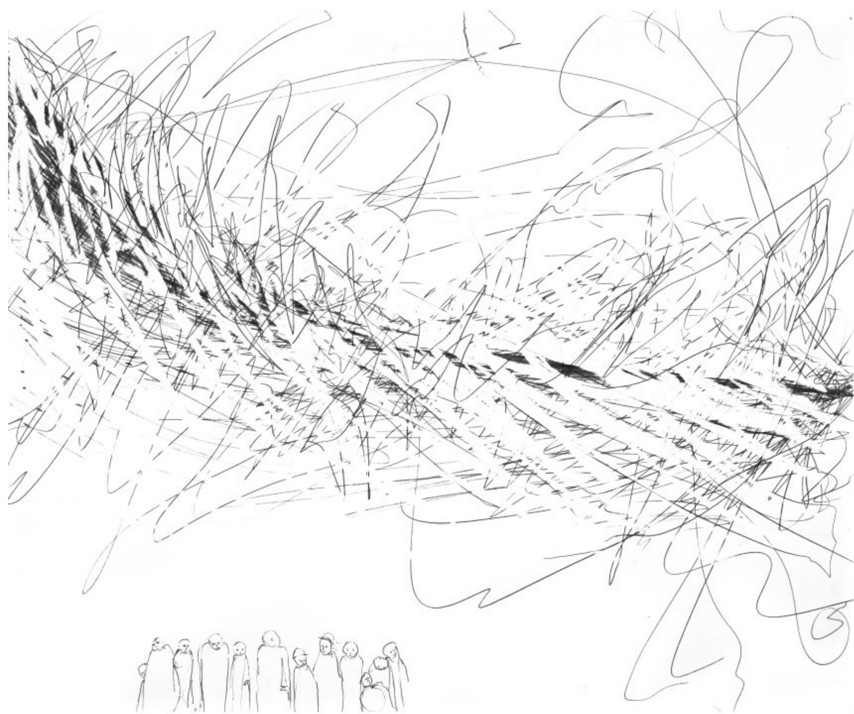
Let's look at a historical example. In 1788, British settlers arrived in Australia and encountered the indigenous people who had arrived 40,000 years earlier. This history illustrates not only the courage and entrepreneurialism of people willing to travel across the globe to create a new social reality, but also the human and ecological devastation that this pioneering mind-set can produce. For more than two centuries, the conflict between settlers and aboriginal peoples in Australia was framed in terms of the doctrine of *terra nullius*, a Roman legal term that means "land belonging to no one," or "empty land." It was not until 1992 that the High Court of Australia ruled that the continent had in fact never been *terra nullius*, and that the modern-day settlers had to work out a new way of living together with the aboriginal people.

None of us lives in *terra nullius*. We can pretend that our world is empty, but it is not. Our earth is increasingly full of people and buildings and cars and piles of garbage. Our atmosphere is increasingly full of carbon dioxide. Our society is increasingly full of diverse, strong, competing voices and ideas and cultures. This *fullness* is the fundamental reason why, in order to address our toughest social challenges, we need to employ not only power but also love.

A challenge is tough when it is complex in three ways.[3] A challenge is *dynamically complex* when cause and effect are interdependent and far apart in space and time; such challenges cannot successfully be addressed piece by piece, but only by seeing the system as a whole. A challenge is *socially complex* when the actors involved have different perspectives and interests; such challenges cannot successfully be addressed by experts or authorities, but only with the engagement of the actors themselves. And a challenge is *generatively complex* when its future is fundamentally unfamiliar and undetermined; such challenges cannot successfully be addressed by applying "best practice" solutions from the past, but only by growing new, "next practice" solutions.

The fullness of our world produces this threefold complexity. We can pretend that we are independent and that what we do does not affect others (and what others do does not affect us), but this is not true. We can pretend that everybody sees things the same way, or that our differences can be resolved purely through market or political or legal competition, but this is not true. And we can pretend that we can do things the way we always have, or that we can first figure out and then execute the correct answer, but this is not true.

When we pretend that our world is empty rather than full, and that our challenges are simple rather than complex, we get stuck. If we want to get unstuck, we need to acknowledge our interdependence, cooperate, and feel our way forward. We need therefore to employ not only our power but also our love. If this sounds easy, it is not. It is difficult and dangerous.



what shall we do?

Two pitfalls

Power and love are difficult to work with because each of them has two sides. Power has a generative side and a degenerative side, and—less obviously—love also has a generative side and a degenerative side. Feminist scholar Paola Melchiori pointed out to me that we can see these two sets of two sides if we look at historically constructed gender roles. The father, embodying masculine power, goes out to work, to do his job. The generative side of his power is that he can create something valuable in the world. The degenerative side of his power is that he can become so focused on his work that he denies his connection to his colleagues and family, and so becomes a robot or a tyrant.

The mother, by contrast, embodying feminine love, stays at home to raise the children. The generative side of her love is that she gives life, literally to her child and figuratively to her whole family. The degenerative side of her love is that she can become so identified with and embracing of her child and family that she denies their and especially her own need for self-realization, and so stunts their and her own growth.[4]

Love is what makes power generative instead of degenerative. Power is what makes love generative instead of degenerative. Power and love are therefore exactly complementary. In order for each to achieve its full potential, it needs the other. Just as the *terra nullius* perspective of focusing only on power is an error, so too is the pop perspective that "all you need is love."

Psychologist Rollo May, a friend of Paul Tillich, warned of the dangers of disconnecting power (which he referred to as "will") from love. "Love and will," he wrote, "are interdependent and belong together. Both are conjunctive processes of being—a reaching out to influence others, molding, forming, creating the consciousness of the other. But this is only possible, in an inner sense, if one opens oneself at the same time to the influence of the other. Will without love becomes manipulation and

love without will becomes sentimental. The bottom then drops out of the conjunctive emotions and processes."[5] May's conjunctive processes also operate on a social level, and we can effect nonviolent social change only if we can engage both our power and our love.

One of the greatest practitioners of nonviolent social change, Martin Luther King Jr., was both a practical activist and a spiritual leader. He demonstrated a way of addressing tough social challenges that went beyond aggressive war and submissive peace, thereby contributing to the creation of new social realities in the United States and around the world. In his last presidential speech to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King—drawing on his doctoral studies of Tillich's work—emphasized the essential complementarity between power and love.[6] "Power without love is reckless and abusive," King said, "and love without power is sentimental and anemic."[7]

My own experience of the past twenty years entirely bears out King's analysis. Power without love *is* reckless and abusive. If those of us engaged in social change act to realize ourselves without recognizing that we and others are interdependent, the result will at best be insensitive and at worst, oppressive or even genocidal. And love without power *is* sentimental and anemic. If we recognize our interdependence and act to unify with others, but do so in a way that hobbles our own or others' growth, the result will at best be ineffectual and at worst, deceitfully reinforcing of the status quo.

Power without love produces scorched-earth war that destroys everything we hold dear. Love without power produces lifeless peace that leaves us stuck in place. Both of these are terrible outcomes. We need to find a better way.

In his speech, King went on to say, "This collision of immoral power with powerless morality constitutes the major crisis of our time."[8] This collision continues because our polarization of power and love continues. In our societies and communities and organizations, and within each of us, we usually find a "power

camp," which pays attention to interests and differences, and a "love camp," which pays attention to connections and commonalities. The collision between these two camps—in the worlds of business, politics, and social change, among others—impedes our ability to make progress on our toughest social challenges.

An imperative

Power and love stand at right angles and delineate the space of social change. If we want to get unstuck and to move around this space—if we want to address our toughest challenges—we must understand and work with both of these drives.

Rather than a choice to be made one way or another, power and love constitute a permanent dilemma that must be reconciled continuously and creatively. This reconciliation is easy in theory but hard in practice. Carl Jung doubted whether it was even possible for these two drives to coexist in the same person: "Where love reigns, there is no will to power; and where the will power is paramount, love is lacking. The one is but the shadow of the other."[9] His student Robert Johnson said, "Probably the most troublesome pair of opposites that we can try to reconcile is love and power. Our modern world is torn to shreds by this dichotomy, and one finds many more failures than successes in the attempt to reconcile them."[10]

I have seen many examples of reckless and abusive power without love, and many examples of sentimental and anemic love without power. I have seen far fewer examples of power with love. Too few of us are capable of employing power with love. More of us need to learn.

If we are to succeed in co-creating new social realities, we cannot choose between power and love. We must choose both. This book explores how.

1
The Two Sides of Power

To explain where I have arrived in my understanding of power and love and social change, I have to explain how I started.

I grew up in Montreal and studied physics at McGill University. In the summer of 1981, as I was finishing my undergraduate degree, I attended a meeting of the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs in Banff, Alberta, where I heard a speech about the crucial energy and environmental challenges arising out of the increasing complexity and fullness—of people and ideas and things—of the world. I decided to shift my studies from physical to social sciences, and I went on to do a graduate degree in economics and public policy at the University of California at Berkeley. After graduation, I worked at a variety of research institutions in North America, Europe, and Asia, and then in the corporate planning department of Pacific Gas and Electric Company in San Francisco.

My father had taught me the value of industriousness—of doing my job well, whatever that job was—and of self-determination and self-improvement. His favorite story was of Henry David Thoreau, who had lived in the woods at Walden Pond and after two years had come out with his axe sharper than when he had gone in.

I was young and ambitious and keen to make my mark on the world.

Generative power

In 1988, when I was twenty-seven years old, I moved from San Francisco to London to take a job in the global strategy department of the energy company Royal Dutch Shell. What I loved most about working for Shell was the power. I enjoyed getting the diplomatic memos: "The government of Côte d'Ivoire has reiterated their request that we desist from referring to them as the Ivory Coast." I once got a mistaken phone call asking me where a $300 million payment for a fuel oil delivery should be deposited. I liked Shell's practical role in providing the world with energy: the company invested hundreds of millions of dollars a year in research and development, drilled for oil thousands of feet underwater, and produced fuels by heating oil sands and cooling natural gas. I reveled in being a small cog in this big and important machine.

I was at Shell at the height of capitalist confidence. The Berlin Wall had just fallen, the Internet boom was starting, Francis Fukuyama had published "The End of History," Tom Wolfe was writing about Manhattan financiers as "Masters of the Universe," and Margaret Thatcher was pronouncing that "There Is No Alternative" to the Anglo-American free enterprise model. The dominant cultural meme was that in all spheres—economic, political, social, legal, international, intellectual—a contest among competing powers produced the best outcome.[1] From my office in a London skyscraper, it seemed to me that if everybody just did their job and pushed forward their part—engaged in civilized, manly jostling—the whole would grow and prosper.

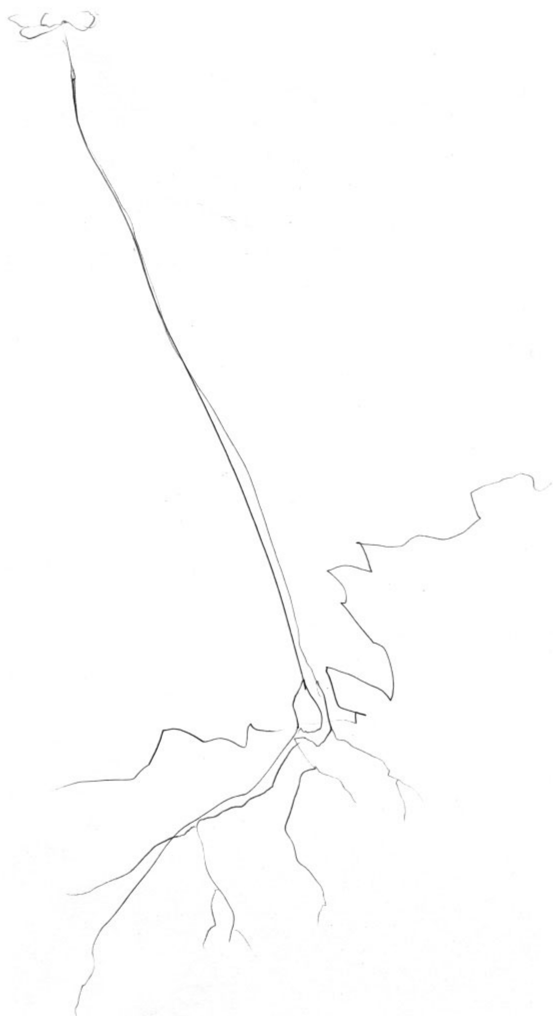
My experience at Shell, and elsewhere in the world of business, was of an almost single-minded emphasis on the pragmatic use of power—the kind of power that a former physics student could recognize. It seemed to me that businesspeople understood power the same way Martin Luther King Jr. did: "Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose."[2] Their actions seemed to accord with Paul Tillich's explanation of

power's generative root: "the drive of everything living to realize itself, with increasing intensity and extensity." This drive can be seen in the force of a growing seed: the force that "guerrilla gardeners" employ to turn vacant urban lots into parks, when they surreptitiously plant seeds that break through the concrete.

At Shell I could see how my own drive for self-realization, along with that of my colleagues, produced furiously competitive intellectual creativity and growth. The head of our department, Arie de Geus, wrote a book called *The Living Company*. This helped me also see how the company's living drive for self-realization, along with that of other companies, produced furiously competitive commercial creativity and growth.[3]

In all of this I saw the generative aspect of power: the universal drive to "get one's job done." Power expresses our purposefulness, wholeness, and agency. Although power is the drive to realize one's self, the effect of power goes beyond one's self. Power is how we make a difference in the world; it is the means by which new social realities are created. Without power, nothing new grows.

At Shell I was head of the strategy group that constructed scenarios—plausible alternative stories—of social-political-environmental contexts in which the company might find itself. In 1991, Pieter le Roux, a professor at the left-wing University of the Western Cape in South Africa, contacted me because he wanted to use the Shell methodology to help a group of South African opposition leaders develop a strategy for effecting the transition away from apartheid. Nelson Mandela had just been released from twenty-seven years in prison, and the negotiations between the opposition and the white minority government had started in earnest. Le Roux's project sounded interesting and worthwhile to me, and my Shell bosses were happy, after years of being vilified for not having divested from South Africa, for the opportunity to rebuild the company's relationships with the opposition. So in September 1991, I traveled to Cape Town to facilitate the first workshop of what became known as the Mont Fleur Scenario Exercise.[4]



blossom

What I found exhilarating in meeting these leaders—from political parties, trade unions, community organizations, universities, and companies—was their powerful purposefulness. Every one of them was committed to addressing, from their particular idological and institutional base, South Africa's tough challenges, and they had already realized that they could be successful only if they worked together. White businessman Johann Liebenberg later remembered, with surprise and pleasure, his conversations with the black leaders who had hitherto been his adversaries: "This was new to me, especially how open-minded they were. These were not people who simply said: 'Look, this is how it is going to be when we take over one day.' They were prepared to say: 'Hey, how *would* it be? Let's discuss it.'"[5] I felt excited to play a part in this important social change process.

What I saw in these workshops, and through the window they provided me onto the dynamics of South Africa's extraordinary transition, changed my understanding of what was possible in the world. I saw that a team of leaders from across a social system could, even in the most complex, conflictual, and challenging of contexts, exercise their power collectively to change that system for the better. I was inspired by what I was learning about this generative power.

What I saw also changed my understanding of what was possible for me. I saw that I had a job to do—a way of making a difference in the world—in supporting such teams. In 1993, I resigned from Shell and moved to South Africa. Since then I have been doing this kind of work there and elsewhere.

Degenerative power

How do we come to notice something that we are not noticing? I was once working in my office, and my sunglasses were in my shirt pocket. I went into a dark closet and leaned over to

pick up some supplies near the floor, when I heard a sound that I couldn't place. As I went out, I unconsciously filed away that anomalous event—the unexplained sound—and went back to what I was doing. Later I saw that I had misplaced my sunglasses and began looking all around for them. Then I remembered the unexplained sound and realized it had been the sound of my sunglasses falling out of my pocket onto the closet floor.

During the first years after I left Shell and started working as a facilitator of social change teams, I kept hearing sounds of a second kind of power that I didn't know how to interpret. My first interpretation of what had happened at Mont Fleur—the interpretation that I was working from—was that the team had decided that their power, their drive to realize themselves as individuals and as a nation, could more effectively be exercised working with rather than against one another. They had used four bird images to summarize their shared understanding of the different ways the future of the nation might unfold: an "Ostrich" scenario of white denial, a "Lame Duck" scenario of an overconstrained new black government, an "Icarus" scenario of the new government flying too high too fast, and a "Flamingos" scenario of rising slowly together. But when Pallo Jordan, one of the intellectual leaders of the African National Congress, heard these scenarios presented at a party meeting, he thought they were ridiculously naïve about the essentially violent dynamics of power in the South African context. "What is all this about ducks and flamingos?" he asked incredulously. "The only birds that matter here are hawks and sparrows!"

It is not surprising that Jordan and I had different perspectives on power. I came from a peaceful and unfettered background, and I had encountered South Africa for the first time in 1991, one year after the hopeful transitional negotiations had started and several years after the hopeless, violent clashes between the government and the opposition in the 1970s and 1980s. Jordan is black, which in apartheid South Africa means he grew up as a second-class person. He had spent decades in exile working for

the African National Congress and had only just returned to the country to engage directly in these tough negotiations. Power looks different to people who have to struggle for it.

Now I realized what I had been hearing: power has two sides. The generative side of power is the *power-to* that Paul Tillich refers to as the drive to self-realization. The degenerative, shadow side is *power-over*—the stealing or suppression of the self-realization of another. Tillich recognizes both sides: "Power actualizes itself through force and compulsion. But power is neither the one nor the other. It is being, actualizing itself over nonbeing. It uses and abuses compulsion in order to overcome this threat. It uses and abuses force in order to actualize itself. But it is neither the one nor the other."[6] Power-over abuses force and compulsion to suppress or oppress or dominate another.

Like Pallo Jordan, my wife Dorothy is black and grew up in South Africa and was involved for years in the anti-apartheid struggle. When later we visited Guatemala together, she noticed something that I didn't. The position of aboriginal people there reminded her of blacks in South Africa: they were treated as if they were invisible. Not to see another person, or to see her or him as a nonperson, is the extreme manifestation of power-over.

The most common understanding of power is as power-over. When Stephen Lukes, a professor of politics and sociology at New York University, wrote his classic 1974 book *Power: A Radical View*, he equated power with domination. But thirty years later, in the second edition, Lukes revised his view: "It was a mistake to define power by saying that 'A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests.' Power as domination is only one species of power."[7] Power-over is a subset of power-to.

Degenerative power-over arises out of generative power-to. When I am exercising my power-to and I feel myself bumping up against you exercising yours, and if in this conflict I have the capacity to prevail over you, then I can easily turn to exercising power over you. My drive to realize myself slips easily into

valuing my self-realization above yours, and then into believing arrogantly that I am more deserving of self-realization, and then into advancing my self-realization even if it impedes yours.

Many whites in South Africa valued their self-realization above that of others, and they deployed an ideology—apartheid—to justify their behavior. We can see analogous dynamics across races or ethnic groups or classes or genders in every society. Thus, the seductively beautiful face of power-to morphs, as in a horror movie, into the viciously terrible face of power-over.

Once I had seen the two sides of power starkly in South Africa, I could recognize them more easily elsewhere. After I left Shell, I consulted to several companies and business associations in Houston, Texas. I found the business culture of Houston unusual and fascinating. The businesspeople there were unconstrained in their enthusiasm for independent, unregulated, entrepreneurial power-to. The can-do property developers I met owned private companies with names like “John Smith Interests,” which I understood to represent an unabashed celebration of the advancing of an individual’s own interests and power.

These same businesspeople were also enthusiastic in their support for voluntary philanthropy and civic engagement. They were more aware than people I had met elsewhere of their role in the evolution of their social reality. Houston had grown from being the twenty-first largest city in the United States in 1940 to fourth largest in 1990. It had become what it was not by accident, but as the result of the intentional decisions made by people such as themselves, and they felt a responsibility to continue this public work. The ideology of Houston businesspeople promoted individual self-realization in alignment with collective self-realization.

In this community, the very epitome of power-to was Ken Lay, the founder and chairman of Enron, the $100 billion natural gas,

electricity, and telecommunications company. Enron had been named "America's Most Innovative Company" by *Fortune* magazine six years in a row, and Lay was admired as an entrepreneurial genius. At Shell, young staff who considered themselves to be sophisticated strategists were in awe of Enron's deal making. The company was one of Houston's biggest employers and charitable donors, and it had sponsored a popular new downtown stadium. When Lay visited our Houston workshops, the other business leaders treated him like a god. Lay symbolized the virtues of the free marketeer whose unfettered power-to produced both private wealth and public good.

In 2001, I chaired a Business Leaders' Dialogue at the Aspen Institute in Colorado. Among the participants, who included international corporate, government, trade union, and nonprofit leaders, Lay was the star whom everyone wanted to meet. By this time, stories about Enron's malfeasance were beginning to circulate. The most prominent accusation against Enron was that it had illegally manipulated California's electricity market, and California attorney general Bill Lockyer was calling for Lay to be prosecuted.

Lay's way of participating in our meeting was striking. He moved in and out of the sessions, which we had all agreed not to do and which no one else did. He seemed to hold himself apart from or above the group. He was the only dissenter from the group's conclusion that corporate social responsibility should be enforced rather than left voluntary. The only time he participated passionately was when, with righteous indignation, he told the story about Lockyer having threatened him by saying, "I would love to personally escort Lay to an 8-by-10 cell that he could share with a tattooed dude who says, 'Hi, my name is Spike, honey.'"[8]

During these sessions, only one other participant, a trade unionist, ever challenged Lay. Everyone else conspicuously deferred to him. I thought that if Lay was so powerful and wealthy, he deserved to be looked up to, and also that if I was polite to him, I might benefit from his largesse.

One year after the Aspen Institute meeting, Enron declared bankruptcy, and five years after, Lay was found guilty of ten charges of fraud and conspiracy. The company's collapse wiped out more than $60 billion in shareholder investment and 6,000 employee jobs, and led to the dissolution of Arthur Andersen, its auditor.

Exercising creative, entrepreneurial, profitable power-to is not hard if you pretend, and are allowed to pretend, that you live in an unregulated *terra nullius*. But Lay and his Enron colleagues did not live in such an empty world, and in defrauding millions of people, they severely undermined those people's power-to. Lay's emphatic rejection of rules that govern the collective, as manifested in his disinterest (enabled by our deference) in the small matter of our meeting's ground rules and the larger matter of U.S. law, illustrated his disconnected, degenerative power-over.

The irresponsible power-over exercised by Enron executives foreshadowed the global financial collapse of 2008. Business journalist Mark Haines was flummoxed when the crisis broke: "We assume that the individual pursuing his or her own best interest will result in the maximum benefit for society as a whole—and that certainly has to be questioned now."[9] The understanding that I had imbibed in London twenty years earlier—that a system driven by the power-to of the parts would produce a beneficial result for the whole—was tragically incomplete and inadequate. Before this became apparent, however, I was to have other experiences that led me to my current understanding of degenerative power.

those hornets feed on self & other

When, after Mont Fleur, I had started working on different tough challenges in different countries—power-over manifesting in inequity and inequality—I carried with me a certain confidence that I came from a country, Canada, that had successfully overcome its own such challenges. So in 2003 I was taken aback to find myself in a conference room at the Department of Justice in Ottawa, Ontario, listening to a group of leaders of government, business, and aboriginal (Native or First Nations) organizations talk about their encounters with the realities of aboriginal people in Canada.

As we went around the table and heard each person's story—of extraordinarily high levels of poverty, addiction, and suicide; decades of abuse by "well-intentioned" governments and churches; conflicts over the extraction of oil and other natural resources; thousands of stuck land and treaty disputes—it became obvious to me that I did *not* come from a country that had successfully overcome such challenges. My colleague Ursula Versteegen says that our most important learnings come not simply when we see the world anew, but specifically when we see ourselves—and our role in creating the world—anew.[10] On that day I saw that I was part of a society that was exercising a terrible power-over.

One aspect of this Canadian situation was the widely held mental model that aboriginal people needed to "be developed." This model had been institutionalized in, among other practices, a policy of aggressive assimilation that since the 1850s had taken children away from their parents to be educated in church- and state-run residential schools. One of the founders of residential schooling in North America characterized his approach as "kill the Indian and save the man."[11] Residential schooling created a legacy of physical, emotional, sexual, and cultural abuse. By the time the last residential school in Canada closed in 1998, this power over aboriginal people had been replicated for generations.

After this meeting in Ottawa, I and a few colleagues began working with a team of national government and aboriginal leaders to try out a new way to unstick this stuck situation. We chose as our entry point the extraordinarily high rate of suicide among aboriginal youth: five times the Canadian average. But after four years of on-and-off efforts, we had hardly moved forward at all. We kept running into roadblocks, large and small. At one point we were frustrated in trying to communicate with the staff of an aboriginal-run conference center. I complained about this to my friend, activist Michel Gelobter, and he chided me: "Why are you surprised that oppressed communities exhibit serious dysfunctions? These dysfunctions have to be recognized and dealt with; they reinforce and maintain oppression by diminishing the capacity of these communities to heal." The degenerative impacts of power-over are resolutely persistent.

I also noticed that within our microcosmic project team, we succeeded in re-creating the stuck relationships that characterized the macrocosm we were trying to change. The government leaders wanted to remain in control and to "fix" the aboriginal problem. The aboriginal leaders didn't want to be controlled or fixed or developed by anyone. And those of us who were consultants dispassionately kept ourselves apart from and above the situation. We all had our own different roles and powers and trajectories of self-realization, which never really moved and never really met. So we made no progress on the challenge that we had set out to address. (Only later, when these roles and power relations were forcefully restructured and ownership of the project was taken over by a local aboriginal community, did the initiative begin to move forward.)

In Canada, as in South Africa and Houston, I had been able to recognize the sound of power-to more easily than the sound of power-over because the former resonated more strongly with

my own privileged experience. Then in 2004 I got a taste of the experience of the underside of power-over. My London partner Zaid Hassan and I were invited to facilitate a workshop in Michigan for a group of U.S. minority activists who were rethinking their strategy for achieving racial equity in light of the just-issued Supreme Court decision that sharply limited affirmative action.

I was unsettled even before the meeting started. Zaid is Muslim and I am Jewish, and on the plane ride he had shown me an article in an activist magazine that pointed out how many of the U.S. neoconservatives are Jewish. He also showed me a letter to the editor that he had written, in which he acknowledged how contentious this assertion was but defended it as informative and fair. We started into a tense discussion, a fractal of the larger Muslim-Jewish conflict, but then cut short our argument to get ready for the workshop.

With this unresolved tension between Zaid and me, the workshop started awkwardly and got worse. The participants were feeling beaten down by the regression in civil rights in the United States and discouraged about the poor results their existing strategies were producing. They didn't think my leadership of the meeting, with my white and foreign colleagues, was legitimate, and they were unhappy with the process we were using. Harsh power struggles swirled around and within the room. Eventually it became obvious that I wasn't wanted in the workshop at all, and so, feeling humiliated, I gave up. I left the group to lead itself and went back to my room.

That night I had a terrifying dream. A gang was harassing me mercilessly—crowding and shoving and hitting me—and I couldn't escape. Eventually I became so hopeless and despairing that I pulled the pin out of a hand grenade and blew myself up with all of them: I became a suicide bomber. Through this dream I experienced the terrible, debilitating feeling of being on the receiving end of power-over.

By 2008, my understanding of the dynamics of power and love was taking shape through such experiences and reflections. Then I had another encounter with aboriginal issues, this time in Australia. I was invited to Melbourne by an Australian aboriginal leader named Patrick Dodson. He is well known for his decades of varied struggles—mobilizations, negotiations, invocations, lawsuits—to address the challenges faced by his people, and specifically for his efforts to achieve reconciliation between aboriginal and nonaboriginal Australians.[12] He knows how hard it is to move forward on these challenges and wasn't surprised by the lack of progress of the effort in Canada in which I had been involved.

Dodson wanted me to contribute to a meeting that he was convening with John Sanderson, the former chief of the Australian Army. They were trying to construct a new set of agreements (including constitutional amendments) that would, more than 220 years after the arrival of the settlers and 15 years after the High Court verdict that overruled *terra nullius*, put the relationship between these two peoples on an equal footing.

The evening before our meetings were to start, I walked by an outdoor cinema and found myself watching two documentaries. The first was *The White Planet*, a film about arctic wildlife and the dangers it faces from global warming.[13] The second was *Kanyini*, about an Australian aboriginal leader named Bob Randall, a member of the "Stolen Generation" who as a child had (like many Canadian children) been taken away from his family by the government.[14] In *Kanyini*, Randall argues that the crisis in aboriginal society originated in their having been dispossessed and estranged from the four aspects of life that are essential to survival: their belief system or law, their land or country, their spirituality, and their families. "The purpose of life is to be part of everything that is," he says in the film. "You take away my *kanyini*, my interconnectedness, and I'm nothing. I'm dead."

I was struck that Randall's yearning was the same as Paul Tillich's love: "the drive towards the unity of the separated."

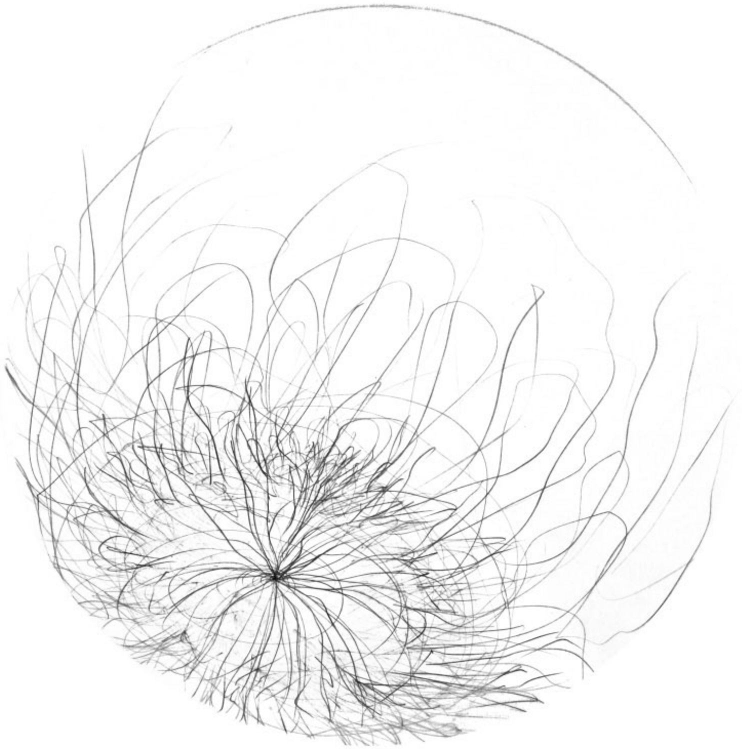
In the juxtaposition of these two films, I could now see what happens when we employ our power without love. Our destruction of aboriginal societies worldwide and our headlong rush towards the destruction of the ecosystems on which all our societies depend arise from our disconnection from one another and from the earth. Environmentalist Julia Butterfly Hill made the same point in describing her unlikely partnership with social activist Van Jones: "I brought the piece that we are not separate from the planet. His piece was that we need to uplift everyone. We were committed to seeing how those pieces fit together. We could see underneath all of it was the idea of disposability: the idea that you've got disposable people, a disposable planet."[15] If we push away or abandon our sense of connection with others—our acknowledgment, our sensitivity, our love—there is no limit to the sadness, terror, and pain that our unchecked power can produce.

We can recognize this degenerative phenomenon of power without love because, in so many contexts and at so many scales, power dominates love. We see this in our homes, organizations, communities, nations, and in international affairs. Patrick Dodson told me a story about Michael Long, a popular Australian aboriginal sportsman who had walked from Melbourne to Canberra to draw attention to the desperate situation of his people. Long met with Prime Minister John Howard and asked him the anguished question: "Where is the love for my people?" We all feel the anguish that results from the deficit of love.

Love is what makes power generative

Based on these experiences, then, here is how I understand the nature of power and its relationship to love. Power has two sides, one generative and the other degenerative. Our power is generative and amplifying when we realize ourselves while loving and

uniting with others. Our power is degenerative and constraining—reckless and abusive, or worse—when we overlook or deny or cut off our love and unity.



opening

this material has been excerpted from

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A Theory and Practice of Social Change

by Adam Kahane
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