2. The Concretions of Power

How and where does power become concrete? With these two interrelated questions we delineate the basic forms of power, their most important social fields and conditions of legitimacy as well as their resources and instruments. After discussing the essence of power in the last chapter, this chapter focuses on the phenomenology of power. Since we not only classify and systematize the phenomena here, but also show how power is concretely legitimized and controlled, this section of the book is, so to speak, the hinge between the theory and the practice of power.

2.1 FORMS OF POWER

No other theoretician has systematized the heterogeneous field of forms and manifestations of power with such clarity as Popitz in his classic *Phenomena of Power.*[1] According to Popitz, every power phenomenon – irrespective of its historical and social context – can be classified in one of the following basic categories, with corresponding forms of action: the power of action, instrumental power, authoritative power and technical power.

The *power of action* refers to the ability of a person or group of people to perform actions that harm other people. Popitz regards this as the most direct form of power, and simultaneously the oldest as well, as it has been evident throughout the history of the exercising of human power.[2] The range of possibilities for injury, based on the characteristic vulnerability of humankind (see Chapter 1.2), is almost immeasurable. Accordingly, this form of power includes not only purely physical

1 Cf. Popitz (2017). For more in-depth coverage, see Poggi, Gianfranco (1988): Phänomene der Macht: Autorität-Herrschaft-Gewalt-Technik. Review, *Contemporary Sociology*, 17 (4), pp. 664-556.

2 Cf. Popitz (2017): p. 26.

injury, but also the infliction of social or economic harm. Those who exercise the power of action do not necessarily do so by beating, raping or shooting another person. It is also seen in the calling in of a loan from a debtor or the excluding of individuals from social life by ostracism. All of these subforms of the power of action can manifest in varying degrees. In the case of physical injury, the spectrum ranges from the infliction of pain to mutilation and killing. In the case of material damage, it extends from the mere reduction of resources to the complete withdrawal of means of subsistence – for example, through the destruction of arable land and systematic starvation. The severity of social harm begins with distancing and ignoring, and culminates in confinement and disempowerment.[3] However, the power of action is not just destructive. It also fulfills maintenance and productive functions. Anyone who wants to maintain a society and the corresponding system of rules of non-violent cooperation, will find that the power of action is indispensable. If the state executive bodies (police and military) have no power resources to do harm to opponents of the community (criminals, terrorists, hostile nations), then they can guarantee neither internal nor external security. On the other hand, the power of action has a productive effect when it is utilized to destroy established social orders and at the same time to create new ones. Paradigmatic for this are revolutions in which a social avant-garde, employing the combined use of physical, social and economic action power, destroys an old power apparatus and replaces it with a new regime.

The second form of power, *instrumental power,* is the ability to control the behavior of others through credible threats or promises. Successful threats control behavior because they cause others to fear that the threatening party is capable and willing to do something unfavorable to them. Successful promises have a behavioral effect, because the person doing the promising awakens the hope in others that he or she will act in a way beneficial for them.[4] In short, possessing instrumental power means having the power to dispose over other people's fear and

3 Foucault prominently noted that the ostracization and confinement of ostensibly socially deviate persons as "mentally ill" is one of the most pervasive forms of the power of action. See Foucault, Michel (1995): *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* 2nd edition, translated by Alan Sheridan, New York: Random House.

4 Basically, it would be more accurate to speak of a conditional promise. A conditional promise is distinguished from an unconditional promise by its if-then structure. By comparison: "I promise you that we will have ice cream on Sunday" (unconditional promise) versus "I promise you that we will have ice cream on Sunday, if you clean up your room today" (conditional promise).

hope.[5] Of course, it need not necessarily be founded on a basis of real power or be objectively justified – it is sufficient if the addressee is convinced that the action he or she desires or dreads will occur. Therefore, instrumental power can rely as much on a good bluff as on the real potential to harm or benefit the other. Crucially, however, a threat or promise often has a history: if a state has always lived up to its previous promises of military support to its alliance partners in exchange for regular levies, its allies have reason to believe that it will continue to do so in the future. If such announcements have so far turned out to be so much hot air, their addressees can safely assume that the trend will continue. Thus, instrumental power always depends on the threatening or promising party's balance sheet of past behavior.

According to Popitz, threats and promises have two common structural features. *Firstly,* the threatening or promising party divides all the options for action of the addressees into two classes: compliant behavior and non-compliant behavior. In this way, a situation is created where the choice is narrowed to two exclusive alternatives between which the addressees must decide. Only as long as the addressees have a free choice between two options – no matter how unattractive one of them may be – are they exposed to instrumental power.[6] *Secondly,* the threatening or promising party assumes a dual role, inasmuch as they are always both the issuer of a threat or a promise and the potential dispenser of a punishment or a reward, their own behavior is thus bound to the future behavior of the addressees. The threatening or promising party must react to the behavior of the addressees as announced otherwise credibility is lost and the basis of power forfeited, that is, the effectiveness of future threats and promises. In other words, the addressees of a threat or a promise can force issuers to show their true colors, as it were, forcing them from an active to a passive role. In this regard, we can take the example of the Greek economic crisis. It seemed that the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had considerable instrumental power over Greece. They could compel the Greek state to embark upon a comprehensive economic and social reform program by promising to save it from bankruptcy by loan payments. The catch was that the EU and the IMF must indeed be ready to show their colors with respect to Greece's non-compliance and ultimately bankrupt the state, with all the negative implications for the European economy associated with

5 Popitz (1992): p. 79.

6 However, this talk of free choice must be viewed with some caution. If an option exists which results in the certain loss of one's life, it is difficult to reconcile this with our everyday understanding of free choice; see our discussion of the relationship between power and freedom in Chapter 1.2.

this. As it is dubious that the EU and IMF are willing to take this step, their instrumental power is less comprehensive than it initially appeared, and this inevitably gives the Greek state room to maneuver and gain concessions from its creditors.

Alongside these structural similarities of threats and promises there is, however, a significant difference. Popitz deems this to be a question of profitability.[7] Threats are obviously relatively cheap for the issuer or – less economically speaking – are not associated with any further effort, as long as they succeed. If the threatened party does what the threatening party wants, the latter does not have to make good the threat. The threatening party does not then have to expend any physical or economic resources. It only becomes expensive for the threatening party if the threatened resist, for example, because they believe that the threats are empty. The situation with promises is the complete opposite. Promises become expensive in case of success, because the addressee is rewarded for compliant behavior. On the other hand, such promises can be cheap, as it were, if the addressee acts non-compliantly. In this case, the promising party does not grant the reward. These differences can be well illustrated in tabular form:

Figure 1: Contrasting Profitability of Threats and Promises

		Behavior of the Addressee	
		compliant	noncompliant
Costs for the Issuer	expensive	promise	threat
	cheap	threat	promise

For this reason, threats and promises are used in very different ways. Threats are made when it is very likely that the threatened will comply with the wishes of those in power. It is no coincidence that all the norms governing our daily lives together (prohibition of theft, assault, insult, false statement, etc.) are linked to implicit threats, namely to the legal sanctions imposed on a failure to comply. Because the legislature rightly believes that the majority of the population is willing to comply with these standards, it is not necessary to secure their compliance by reward – such a measure would be downright absurd! However, promises are made when it is unlikely, or at least uncertain, that the addressee will submit to the wishes of those with power. They are not used in the area of the normal and

7 Popitz (1992): p. 92.

everyday, but only in exceptional situations. Anything else would be, as Popitz notes, a completely unprofitable power strategy.

These two principles of instrumental power – *"Threaten, if you can count on compliance!"* and *"Promise, if you have to expect non-compliance!"* – are universally valid. They result from the above-mentioned contrasting profitability of the two forms of instrumental power. However, the question of when precisely compliant or non-compliant action is to be expected can obviously not be given a universally applicable answer. It depends on the social, cultural, economic and political context in which the power strategies are applied. In the modern, generally stable democracies of the First World, whether Western or East Asian, it is sensible to forbid the possession of distinctly military weapons by threatening imprisonment. Indeed, this is an accepted standard in numerous jurisdictions characterized by the rule of law, such as the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Japan, Germany, France, Italy and essentially the entire EU; this applies theoretically even in the USA, notwithstanding the constitutionally and inevitably emotionally charged debate as to the exact boundaries of the 2nd Amendment. Worldwide, at any rate, only a minuscule number of people living in a stable state would even think of hoarding fully automatic assault rifles, fragmentation grenades and anti-tank weapons in their homes. However, in an unstable state, shaken by unrest and ethnic conflict, the situation can be very different. Here, from a power-strategic point of view, it may be appropriate to reward militia members with amnesties or financial contributions for giving up their weapons and submitting to state authority. The possession of military weapons is not the exception in such states, but rather the rule. Accordingly, their surrender to the state is not to be expected.

The third form of power, *authoritative* power, is the ability to control other people through their need for recognition and guidance. People, according to Popitz, not only have a tendency to emulate moral, intellectual, social or spiritual models – they also want to receive praise from them. This need, which runs through all forms of human socialization, can be used by people who are recognized as authorities to influence both the external behavior and the attitudes and beliefs of others, and hence their overall worldview. Unlike instrumental power, for example, authoritative power does not function by setting positive and negative incentives in the context of the existing preferences of the addressees. Rather, it is based on the fact that those bound by authority freely bow to the wishes of the other, fixating the ruler as a role model.[8]

8 Cf. Popitz (1992): p. 26; p. 106. For a further analysis as to how Popitz comprehends the institutionalization of power in terms of expanding its scope, validity and effec-

The preeminent significance of authoritative power for the stable rule of order was discovered over two and a half thousand years ago by the masterminds of Chinese statesmanship, Confucius and Lao Tzu (see Chapter 1.1). Permanent rule, according to both theoreticians, is not based primarily on the ability to control the population with threats of violence or to lure them with promises. It is based, rather, on the exemplary moral character of the ruler and the respect that is shown to him. Confucius even goes so far as to say that the mere example of an honest emperor can sufficiently motivate the population to comply with the law. In this respect, he argues that a good ruler does not need to give orders, while noting as well that a bad, non-righteous ruler will not be obeyed despite a string of commands. When authoritative power is established in such a comprehensive form, according to Lao Tzu, a special form of autonomy arises. By bowing to the ruler's (anticipated) wishes, the subjects only follow their own will: "When great men rule, subjects know little of their existence. Rulers who are less great win the affection and praise of their subjects. A common ruler is feared by his subjects, and an unworthy ruler is despised. If a great man rules, the people barely know that he is there."[9]Thus, life and business can proceed, the people have a sense of freedom, an indeed subjective but nevertheless significant aspect in the relationship between the ruling and the ruled.

Those who have authoritative power have no need to resort to action power or instrumental power. The ruling person can trust that the authority-bound people will follow their wishes because they want to – not because they have to. To maintain this form of power, it is sufficient to proclaim recognition for compliant behavior and to disapprove of non-compliance. Similarly, Popitz, who is a connoisseur of pointed expressions, refers to this 'unarmed' force as the power of 'silent means'.[10] In addition thereto, the bearer of authoritative power does not have to

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tiveness, see also Palumbo, Antonino and Scott, Alan (2018): *Remaking Market Society: A Critique of Social Theory and Political Economy in Political Times,* New York/London: Routledge.; p. 69.

9 Lao Tzu (2009): p. 39. Remarkably, exactly the same idea is found in Hegel's philosophy of law under the concept of "subjective freedom". Cf. Hegel, Georg W. F. ([1821] 2003): *Elements of the Philosophy of Right: Or Natural Law and Political Science in Outline,* Allen W. Wood (ed.), translated by H.B, Nisbet. 8th edition, Camebridge: Cambridge University Press.; p 22; p. 57. However, Hegel adds an "objective" component to this conception of freedom according to which a state system must guarantee essential fundamental rights and pursue a policy oriented towards the common good.

10 Popitz (2017): p. 45.

exercise consistent control over the subjects of power. Insofar as they increasingly internalize the ruler's wishes, values and rules of action and understand them as their own, they are, so to speak, keeping tabs on themselves and serving as their own strict judge.[11]

The fourth form of power is that of *technical power.* It refers to the ability to indirectly influence people by intervening in or modifying their natural and non-natural living conditions. The root of this form of power lies in the fact that human beings are by nature purposeful and intervene in their environment. The British philosopher John Locke pointed out the importance of this trait. According to Locke, human beings appropriate an alien nature by 'mixing' their labor power with it.[12] By successively implementing abstractly envisioned actions on a concrete object – for instance on a tree that requires felling or a stone that is to be hewn – the object is appropriated. The object thus becomes the formed expression of a goal, and if all the actions undertaken are successful then the makers recognize themselves in the object produced.[13] This specific type of action is termed technical action by Popitz. We would also speak today of creating facts on the ground.

11 Incidentally, this is indicative of an interesting relationship with respect to Sigmund Freud's concept of the superego. Cf. Freud, Sigmund ([1923] 1989): *The Ego and the Id. The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* James Strachey (ed.), introduced by Peter Gay, New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Similar to authoritative power, the superego is an ordinal instance internalized by the individual which increasingly replaces external rule-givers and enforcers, in the case of Freud, the parents.

12 Locke, John ([1689] 1988): *Two Treatises of Government,* Peter Laslett (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

13 Hegel and Marx have made this trait the foundation of their entire anthropology. Both are united by the conviction that humankind strives to abolish the contrast between themselves and the world, between subject and object, between inner and outer. This abolition is both theoretical and practical. Philosophy falls into the realm of the theoretical, above all epistemology, which aims to grasp and systematize the external world of spatio-temporal objects under concepts of human reason, and thus to overcome its foreignness and externality. Manufacturing work, in particular, falls into the realm of practicality. By transforming the natural world gradually into artifacts, i.e. artificial objects, through productive intervention, humankind creates living conditions that, without exception, bear their own "stamp." See also Quante, Michael (2010): After Hegel. The Realization of Philosophy Through Action, in*:* Dean Moyar (ed.), *Routledge Companion to 19th Century Philosophy,* London: Routledge, pp. 197-237.

The respective forms of action can be subdivided into three main types or modes: *modifying, producing* and *employing.*[14] The mode *modifying* signifies a mere altering of the existing environment – for example, when clearing a forest, damming a river or fencing a pasture. The mode *producing* marks the creation of a new object, an artifact. Such artifacts range in complexity from the straw hut to the nuclear power plant and in their variety of uses from the sledgehammer to the microscopic laser cutter. Finally, the mode *employing* marks the targeted use of artifacts, either for the purpose of engaging in the living and the inanimate environment or to produce other artifacts.

How can power be exercised with these different types of actions? For modifying action, let's take the example of two neighboring countries through which a river flows, supplying both territories with drinking water. If the political leaders of the country lying upstream decide to divert the river, they have a decisive impact on the neighboring country with just this one intervention in the natural environment. By depriving the neighboring country of drinking water, the upstream country can force the neighboring country into economic dependency and impose its own interests against the will of the other. Thus, the ability to modify the environment is what makes it possible to use natural resources as a lever.[15] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, born in the Swiss city-state of Geneva, rather dramatically described another instance of the power configuration of modifying: "The first person who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, wars, murders, what miseries and horrors would the human race have been spared, had someone pulled up the stakes or filled in the ditch and cried out to his fellow men: "Do not listen to this imposter. You are lost if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to all and the earth to no one!"[16] Whether you agree with this radical critique of the concept of landed property or not, it is clear

14 Popitz (1992): p. 160.

15 As expected, this power technique is a tried and tested means of influencing politics in dry areas. A longstanding bone of contention between Turkey and Iraq is e.g. the Turkish project for the construction of dams on the Euphrates and Tigris. The completion of this so-called "great Anatolian plan" would make the government in Baghdad dependent on Turkey's water policy in one fell swoop. To deepen this topic, see Khagram, Sanjeev (2009): *Dams and Development. Transnational Struggles for Water and Power.* Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press.

16 Rousseau, Jean Jacques ([1775] 1992). *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,* translated by Donald A. Cress, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.; p.44

that Rousseau, one of the intellectual groundbreakers who paved the way for the French Revolution, clearly recognized the potential power offered by the control of land. Whoever controls the demarcation of land and territories decides on the mobility and space allowed to fellow human beings, they can grant right of passage and rights of use, allow people to enter or keep them out, etc.

The fact that the production and use of artifacts holds potential for power is easy to demonstrate. In this regard, we must not only think of the most obvious example of the production and use of superior weapons technology (cruise missiles, stealth jets, Gauss rifles, etc.). The power to produce and, if necessary, to monopolize a coveted product – be it a vaccine or software – is also a form of technical power. The power of Western industrialized nations over developing and emerging countries is largely based on superior technologies and the possibility of either withholding them or restricting their use. It is thus not surprising that the issue of technology transfer between geopolitical areas such as the European Union and China is prioritized by political decision-makers as a matter of power and, in case of doubt, purely economic considerations are subordinated to such power.

The extent of the technical power of an actor depends on three factors. The first factor, which is central to Popitz, is that of perfecting technical means.[17] The more effectively and efficiently someone masters the central modes of modifying, producing and employing in a particular field of application of power, the greater is his or her power. Accordingly, for example, the military-technical power of a nation is a function of its ability to produce and employ military technology. This is obvious and needs no further explanation. However, there are two other factors that Popitz does not address, which we regard as equally relevant. These are discussed in the disciplines of sociology, geography and ethnology under the keywords of 'vulnerability' and 'resilience'.[18] Vulnerability refers to people's exposure and susceptibility to risks, be these environmental hazards such as floods or droughts, or social risks such as impoverishment or crime. Resilience, on the other hand, refers to people's resistance to harm and their ability to adapt to changed, risky living conditions. We can illustrate these core concepts in the aforementioned example of a conflict pertaining to water, in which one state exercises technical power over another by diverting a river. Here, the vulnerability of the neighboring state is assessed by what alternative access to water it has, what reserves it has, how dependent its agricultural sector is on water and so forth. Its resilience depends, moreover, on how successful it is in saving water and dealing with peri

17 Popitz (1992): p. 179.

18 Gallopín, Gilberto C. (2006): Linkages Between Vulnerability, Resilience, and Adaptive Capacities, *Global Environmental Change,* 16 (3), pp. 293-303.

ods of drought by adjusting agricultural production, etc. Obviously, the influence that the upstream country can have on its neighboring state is much less if the lower state has alternative water sources and an adaptable agricultural sector. And this conclusion applies irrespective of whether or not the upstream state has effective and efficient means with which to divert the river in question.

We could cite any number of other examples, and inevitably, vulnerability and resilience have different meanings depending on the context. With regard to the health policy sector, for example, criteria such as mortality rates, supply of medicines, hygienic conditions, etc. are relevant; and with regard to the field of energy policy, aspects such as the availability of alternative energy sources, efficiency of existing means of production, energy consumption of the population, etc. are pertinent. At any rate, without going into more detail here, the following basic principles should be clear. The greater the vulnerability of an actor and the lower his or her resilience, the higher the likelihood that the exercise of technical power against him or her will succeed. The lower the vulnerability and the greater the resilience, the lower the probability of success. Thus, the impact and success of technical power depend not only on perfecting the resources of those holding power, but also on the vulnerability to risks of those potentially subject to power and their ability to deal with them.

Having outlined all four forms of power, we now examine their commonalities and interactions. First, it is obvious that both instrumental and authoritative power direct the behavior of those affected. Instrumental power works by setting out external incentives for action, which dock onto the pre-existing preferences of those subject to power. Authoritative power, on the other hand, has an effect on the inner life of actors and modifies their preferences in that a figure of authority provides them with or withdraws approval. Action power and technical power, in turn, have in common the fact that they affect the situation of those concerned. While the former has a direct effect on individuals as physically vulnerable organisms, social creatures or economic actors, the latter influences their surrounding natural and non-natural living conditions.

Second, all forms of power can be combined with and transformed into one other. Popitz himself gives a striking example of a diachronic variant, in noting that the "power of action can manifest itself in the conquest of foreign lands; the new possessions can become the sites of the instrumental power of exploitation, enduring oppression can be transfigured into authoritative power; and all these processes can find physical expression in walls and fortifications"[19], i.e. as tech-

19 Popitz (2017): p. 20.

nical power. Accordingly, in-depth analysis often reveals established constellations of power to be sediments of power transformations that developed from a simple act of violence. At the same time, different forms of power can complement and reinforce one other synchronously. Technical power, as soon as we enter the realm of inter-state conflict, is a crucial prerequisite for action power. Only those who have the technological and the economic capacity to produce military weapons on an industrial scale also have the potential to harm other state actors or to influence their actions by threatening military force. On the other hand, only those who have the power of action to protect their communities from external and internal adversaries can continue to perfect the technical resources required for superior technical power. These amalgamations suggest that all four forms of power are interdependent and enable one another, and thus are not separate forms, but are elements of a singular, internally differentiated power phenomenon.

By classifying the four forms of power, we have exposed the general structure of this phenomenon and developed a universal systemization for all eras, cultures and areas of society. What remains unresolved, however, is the crucial question of how these forms are made clear and communicable in interaction between persons and organizations, and how they are manifested in concrete terms in the various fields of society. We cannot avoid addressing this issue if we want to understand power as a historically concrete, mutable phenomenon (see Chapter 1.3). In the following sections, therefore, we will first shift our analytical focus to the relation of power and symbolism (Chapter 2.2), in order then to outline the central power fields of the community and their internal logics (Chapter 2.3).

2.2 POWER AND SYMBOLISM

Power and symbolism are closely linked to each other in our everyday language and public perception. When a politician chastises subordinates in front of an assembled press, we naturally speak of a ‘demonstration of power’. A North Korean missile test or a Russian military parade is declared a ‘display of power’, and the glass palace of the European Central Bank in the German banking center of Frankfurt is described as a ‘monument of power’. In his commendable monograph, Niklas Luhmann points out that this interconnection is not merely coincidental. Rather, in his eyes, it is an indispensable requisite for the formation of power.[20] The historian Norbert Elias quickly identifies the reason for this, claiming that people do not believe in power which is not made visible. They have to see it in order to

20 Luhmann, Niklas ([1975] 2003): *Macht,* Stuttgart: UTB.; p. 32.