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# Organization and Political Invention

## ***Circle of Studies of Idea and Ideology (CSII)***

This year we celebrate 150 years of Marx's *Das Kapital* and 100 years of the October Revolution. This coincidence, however, only further highlights the utter *incommensurability* between these two events, between the theoretical and the practical achievements of Marxist and communist thinking. As Slavoj Žižek suggests, there is something of a "parallax" between the critique of political economy and the political activity in Marxism, so that the proper engagement with one of the two tends to reduce the other to an inconsistent or even hopeless endeavour. Usually, this is not taken as problematic, mostly because we are used to understanding Marx's work as concerning the social organization of capitalism, while the work of revolutionaries would concern itself mostly with the dis-organization of this same society – so, for a while, we could compatibilize the objective temporality of the crises of capitalism with the subjective temporality of the political opportunity, the cyclical and the periodical points of view. However, today when the management of perpetual social and economic crises has become a form of government and we can no longer afford the luxury of concerning ourselves solely with how to undo or deconstruct pre-established orders and norms, the problem of social organization suddenly emerges – perhaps for the first time – as an urgent and central concern of anti-capitalist militant practice. Rather than wait for us on *the other side* of an insurrection, the problem of how to relate our critical theory of capitalism and a constructive,

affirmative view of social relations poses itself now, as a contemporary challenge. To recognize the emergence of this problem is, however, to also recognize this incommensurability, identified by Žižek, between Marxist theory and communist practice: between our conceptual resources – developed in view of rendering capitalism intelligible – and our practical experience – focused mostly on the interruption of pre-existing social orders.

In this essay, we would like to share the partial results of the research that has been conducted in the last five years<sup>2</sup>. CSII functions as a laboratory for collective organization: we gather together to study different critical theories of organization, distill some principles or hypotheses from this investigation which we then apply to our own organizational structure, transforming our process of deliberation, experimenting with different ways to organize the division of labor, modes to evaluate the success or failure of our projects, and so on. When these experiments lead us to interesting results we formalize these findings into projects and models which we offer to trade unions, social movements and political parties. In the following, we would like to present three general principles which we have extracted from our practical investigations, and which might contribute to our understanding the role of collective organization in our contemporary conjuncture.

Firstly, we might condense our current findings into three points or principles, which we shall expand in more detail:

1. It is possible to reposition the problem of how to think the relation between theory and practice in Marxist thinking through the inclusion of a third term which is symptomatically absent from the classic binomial: collective organization. A series of oppositions based on the conceptual pair “theory/practice” – such as the abstract and the concrete, the intellectual and the manual, the ideal and the material, etc – might be reconsidered once we approach them not from the standpoint of “praxis”, but rather through the ontology of collective organization, which transforms this dualism into a complex and historicized articulation. This first point might be capitulated as the *principle of immanent articulation*, through which we conceive the articulation of theory and practice as a real imbrication which is localized in a given concrete historical moment and whose singularity is the very form of a given organization.

2. Furthermore, our theory of ideology critique might also be extended through an important addition, the consideration that an ideological identification is not simply the process of assumption of an ideal that is overdetermined by the social

situation, but is also an operation through which we are brought to abdicate from certain aspects of social reality – amongst them, tools for effective social

transformation which, once rejected in the name of an identification, become the exclusive property of our political adversaries. From this standpoint, we could read Marx's famous affirmation that the "dominant ideas are the ideas of the dominant class" not so much as the statement that certain ideas dominate us because they inherently reflect the interests of the dominant class, but rather as the proposition that the dominant class has the monopoly of ideas which have the power of social domination – specifically, of transformation, construction and maintenance of a social order. This process of abdication is what we call *the principle of institutive ignorance*: the proposition that the consistency of an ideological space relies on a gesture of abstraction, on a certain not-wanting-to-know about the traumatic genericity of ideas and practices.

3. Finally, when we recognize (1) that collective organization is the site where theory and practice are intermixed in a localized and experimental way, and (2) that the critique of ideology includes a practical dimension based on the recuperation of certain transformative means that we are interpellated into letting go, then it becomes possible to affirm that the domain of organization is the properly inventive dimension of politics. Because this principle states that there is a mutual conditioning between the future overcoming of the capitalist mode of production and the present capacity of collective organization to experiment with forms of articulation between theory and practice that offer alternatives to the formal principle of the division of labor we can conceptualize it as the *principle of anticipated invention*. That is, we are allowed to construct our strategic political vision out of something *more concrete* than our conjuncture analysis or our political commitments: the very interiority of collective organization, its infra-structure, can be taken as the ground out of which our extrapolation into the future can be constructed.

The remainder of this presentation will therefore be dedicated to a schematic exposition of these three principles – one on organization, one on ideology and one on invention.

### **Organization: the principle of immanent articulation**

Today we have access to two general models or schemas for thinking the relation between theory and practice. The first one is, in fact, a corollary of the logic of capital,

which is the schema which follows from the division of labour into manual and intellectual labour, while the second one was developed by Marxist revolutionary theory, starting from its critique of the capitalist model, and is the schema of praxis as the “unity of theory and practice”<sup>3</sup>. We have, thus, one model of division and another of unity. It just so happens that there is a profound asymmetry between them.

The Marxist analysis of the division of labour explains the separation between theory and practice within bourgeois ideology through the division, proper of the capitalist mode of production, between those who sell and those who buy labour force: on the one hand, the labour which truly and effectively produces concrete transformations, but which also, as a commodity, is externally determined by its exchange value; on the other, the intellectual activity which develops the creative potency of man, but which, unproductive in itself, relies on the consumption of alien labour-commodity. In other words, it is an analysis which presents us a historically determined mode of articulating “hand” and “head”, and, as a consequence of this, “practice” and “theory” – and it is a historically determined mode of articulation precisely because the kernel of this analysis is not the binomial such as it is organized by capitalism, but the *form of value* as an organizing principle<sup>4</sup>. What is historicized by the Marxist analysis of the division of labour is, above all, the form of value as what both causes and articulates this division to begin with – in other words, it is precisely a critical attempt to grasp the historicity of that which, from the standpoint of the social organization of labour in capitalism, appears as an immutable principle.

The notion of praxis surely constitutes an alternative to the model of the division of labour, which is why it seeks to place practice in the dominant or determining position in the pair, thus guaranteeing that we do not take as being eternal the very thing that must be revolutionized. Nevertheless, while the Marxist critique of capitalism considers the form of value as a principle of organization of the material and the immaterial which is itself historical – that is, as something which has a beginning and an end, a place, movement, development, etc – the concept of praxis functions as a regulative, transhistorical category, proposing an *idea*/unity between theory and practice. It is important to note that we are not saying that revolutionary praxis is not historical or context-driven – of course, when we place practice as the “determinant in the last instance”, the concept of praxis is guaranteed to steer us through the real socio-historical transformations, and not by mere interpretation of reality such as it appears to us. The point is rather that *the concept of praxis is not itself historical*, that is, it localizes and orders the relation between the

concrete and the abstract, between the effective material and the reflective ideal, but it is not itself localizable and sequential. There is an asymmetry here because, while there is a history of the form of value, of the different moments of organization and social mediation brought about through this form, there is no history of praxis.

An important consequence follows from the lack of historicity in the concept of praxis. What comes to fill this lack is usually a reference to either ethics or science. The concept of praxis substitutes this third, lacking term – which corresponds to the historically determined dimension of social organization – for references to the individual experience of the militant, i.e. one's ethical rigour<sup>6</sup>, since one should avoid to reproduce in one's actions the capitalist division of labour, or to the rigour of Marx's method<sup>6</sup>, and warning us to focus on the concrete analysis of conjunctures so as to avoid the dangers of subjectively deforming one's political orientation. These two conceptual "loans", modelling praxis on ethics or on science, have been useful in the construction of a reference point for militant activity that is affirmatively distinct from forms of labour within the capitalist mode of production. However, it is here we find two important limitations.

The first appears in the field of ethics, given that the spectrum of conduct does not simply oscillate between rectitude and corruption – that is, between the attention and the lassitude concerning an ideal – but also includes the difference between following a principle and following an injunction<sup>7</sup>. When we count on ethics to guarantee the ideal unity between theory and practice we also open the way for the paradoxes of the superego: the inversion through which a subject's ideal stops serving the purpose of transforming reality and it is reality which starts to be transformed in order to maintain one's particular subjective position. It might seem like an irrelevant or secondary question for political practice, but this inversive logic can, sometimes, lead to an antinomy between the identity of the militant and the consequences of militancy. For example, it can render unbearable the suspensive moment in which one might have to leave aside an identifiable revolutionary trait in order to adapt revolutionary theory to novel social and historical constraints – much like a scientist who needs to turn his back on reality, towards the blackboard, in order to better understand reality itself. It is a problem directly connected to the question of identity and identification, and the great examples range from the well-known tensions between the peasants and the workers in the early years of the Soviet revolution<sup>8</sup>, all the way to the contemporary "revolt of the salaried bourgeoisie"<sup>9</sup> and its impotent response when confronted with the reactionary sentiments of working

class people. The “contradictions within the people” always evoke this impasse – and, as we will argue, so does the “antagonistic contradictions” with our enemies.

The second limitation of the paradigm of praxis appears in the alternative reference to science. Here the main concern is not so much practical rigor, but theoretical rigor – the rectitude of the revolutionary in his use of theory. The lack of a history of the different and determinate modes of articulating the material and immaterial aspects, akin in its plasticity to the value-form, appears now even more clearly, for this absence is reflected onto a telling deformation of the scientific model by Marxist theory. It is impossible to understand the historical development of scientific thinking simply in terms of theory and practice: it is also necessary to take note of the evolution of the *experimental apparatus* – that is, the formal protocols through which science makes nature intelligible not for a mere accidental observer of a given phenomenon, but to anyone who places herself in accordance with these artificial parameters<sup>10</sup>. It is truly essential to realize that the universality of scientific results is also conditioned by the universality of the means of production of science. Both the theoretical language as well as the practical restrictions here are intrinsically informed by the reference to the historical and geographical organization of the scientific community<sup>11</sup>: these conditions are neither immutable nor culturally variable, neither indifferent to time and space, but also not reducible to them – this dimension of scientific thinking demands a continuous adjustment of the scientific apparatus, without which it is not only impossible to communicate and verify the results obtained by a given research, but even to produce such results. This is precisely what the deformed model of scientific activity borrowed and transformed by Marxism is incapable of considering: the experimental dimension in science names the impersonal, but localized, ordered and transmissible history of the different articulations between scientific theory and practice. This dimension is absent in Marxism’s understanding of “scientific praxis” because it is, more fundamentally, also absent in our own conception of political practice.

Rather than doing away with this absence by conceptually borrowing from ethics or science, it is up for political thinking itself to unearth its own category of the historically determined mediator between theory and practice. This is what the “principle of immanent articulation” seeks to address: (i) a consideration of the role of the form of value in the division of labour; (ii) a diagnosis of the ahistorical aspects of the concept of praxis as the ideal unity between theory and practice; and (iii) an analysis of the deficiencies which follow from the improper supplementation of the inherent lack in the concept of praxis through extra-political means, coming from

ethics or science. We can now grasp the positive challenge which this principle evokes for us: the restitution of the category of organization as a field in which we experiment, in a transmissible and localizable way, the different modulations of the articulation between theory and practice. However, this entails rehabilitating the political potential of a dimension of organization – the realm of rules, of impersonal mediations, of formal protocols, etc – which is today simply identified as constitutive part of the capitalist mode of production.

### **Ideology: the principle of institutive ignorance**

We can now turn to the second principle we would like to put forward: the “principle of institutive ignorance”. This principle also has a history – a history which, curiously enough, can only be reconstructed once we have accepted the previous principle, the one which affirms the formal dimension of organization to be the concrete mediator between theory and practice. We would like to begin by mentioning an example, before we consider this principle in its generalized formulation.

Our example concerns the relation between the French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution. We all know how the struggle in the name of the modern ideals of freedom, fraternity and equality did not stop France from having many slave colonies, Haiti amongst them. Thus far the story is just like many others in which bourgeois ideals, based on an abstract notion of man, show themselves to be perfectly compatible with the exploitation of the concrete man. What interests us, however, is the other side of the question: not so much the separation of the French universalist ideals from the reality of the Haitian slaves, but the role played by these ideals in the anti-colonial struggle, which led Haiti to become the first free nation in Latin America. In his discussion of the Haitian Revolution, Žižek highlights precisely this question, through recourse to a paradigmatic moment in the revolt of Saint Domingos:

In Haiti, the unthinkable ( for the European Enlightenment) took place: the Haitian Revolution "entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened:'. The ex-slaves of Haiti took the French revolutionary slogans more literally than did the French themselves: they ignored all the implicit qualifications which abounded in Enlightenment ideology (freedom – but only for rational "mature" subjects, not for the wild immature barbarians who first had to undergo a long process of education

in order to deserve freedom and equality ...). This led to sublime "communist" moments, like the one that occurred when French soldiers (sent by Napoleon to suppress the rebellion and restore slavery) approached the black army of (self-)liberated slaves. When they heard an initially indistinct murmur coming from the black crowd, the soldiers at first assumed it must be some kind of tribal war chant; but as they came closer, they realized that the Haitians were singing the Marseillaise, and they started to wonder out loud whether they were not fighting on the wrong side. Events such as these enact universality as a political category.<sup>12</sup>

The central point of this anecdote – one which, we believe, the analysis of the invention of the modern army and the role of militarization in the soviet experience would undoubtedly also confirm<sup>13</sup> – is that the critique of ideology responsible for the spiritual freedom of the slaves was not the one which freed them from the French ideals, but the one which *freed those ideals from the monopoly of the French themselves*. As we have already mentioned, this entails a different reading of the famous definition of ideology found in the *The German Ideology*: the dominating ideas are the ideas of the dominant class not (only) because they are inherently classist, but because the access to some ideas and to certain conceptual tools remain restricted to the dominant class. This domination takes place in many ways – one of them is certainly intellectual property – but the way which interests us here is the one which names our second principle: the “institutive ignorance”.

This principle proposes a supplementation of the apparatuses of ideological critique based upon the premise that contemporary ideology functions exclusively through co-optation, through the production of positive identifications with the capitalist imaginary. There is also a dimension to ideology which leads us to abdicate certain emblems in name of *negative* identifications. Just as a Haitian slave surely would have difficulty to recognize himself freed from the French while quoting Danton or Robespierre, today we have a veritable and unbearable difficulty of putting some of the resources developed by the dominant class to work to our advantage. But just as the Haitian slave managed to free himself at the moment he could separate the mobilizing potential of the universalist emblems from the idea that this potential was indissociable from the colonizers, so too must we learn today how to separate the potential of certain tools and contemporary ideas from the immediate feeling that these resources and experiences indelibly belong to our enemies.



The “principle of institutive ignorance” suggests, therefore, that there is a dimension of ideological alienation which is effected not through the unproductive alienation in a mystifying ideal, but rather through the avoidance of a productive alienation in a rational idea. The dispute for the centrality of organization – the question at stake in our first “principle” – is an example of this “alienation of alienation”: is it not, in fact, precisely this the argument that we use in order to justify our suspicion against the party-form, against discipline, against power, against any serious assessment of the reality of socialist experiences in the 20th Century<sup>34</sup> – in sum, against everything which brings into play the relation between the formal dimension of organization and power? This articulation, we say, is “in itself” bourgeois, it “belongs” to the dominant class – while remaining ignorant to the fact that it is this very consent which institutes the class character of the dominating ideas. Recuperating the role of organization as that which allows us to reorder the history of political emancipation, to return to the investigation of new forms of discipline, to take back utopian imagination – which, after all, refers to the future organization and administration of life – perhaps means to the current capitalist reality what the recuperation of universalism meant for the anti-colonial struggle in 1804.

It is important, finally, to note that this dimension of ideology critique cannot take place within theory, because this “knowledge” which we ignore is eminently a *practical* knowledge: the Haitian slave might very well have known everything about the French ideals, it was not his consciousness which was alienated from the potential at stake in these emblems – the overcoming of this ignorance which institutes the monopoly of the dominant class over certain ideas is a practical one and in this lies its greatest challenge. The practical critique of this ignorance implies the subjective assumption of certain ideals which, seen from the standpoint of the situation, would lead us to sacrifice our identity and “surrender” to the enemy. But, more importantly, this overcoming implies our capacity to criticize the cohesion of the Left built through the resistance to the ideals of the dominant class in the name of the possibility of a rational organization of this same Left. And this critique no one can accomplish alone: a slave who starts to speak of European universalism amidst the suspicious silence of his fellows is just a traitor – and the ethics of praxis could surely attest to this. It is only when this universalism is put to the test of organizing the revolt of these same slaves against their colonizers that this assumption can consolidate its critical potential.

At this precise point, ideological critique and collective organization meet and our first principle, concerning the role of organization as the concrete mediation of theory and practice, is confirmed. The traversal of the institutive ignorance might very well be a militant task, but it must be mediated by collective organization, which is the site of the struggle for the ideas which are capable of social synthesis.

### **Invention: the principle of anticipated invention.**

At first, it seems possible to partially deduce our third principle from the previous two: if the field of organization is the one which offers an immanent mediation between theory and practice, and if there is a dimension of ideology which concerns our capacity to fight over ideas which, from the standpoint of our current identity as militants, are seen as adjective property (rather than private property) of the dominant class, then there exists a terrain – the field of collective organization - where currently unthinkable possibilities – for thinking them is the prerogative of our enemies – might gain reality in the present, and we might verify their innovative potential through the transformation in our capacity to collectively mobilize ourselves effected by this process of separation from the sphere of negative identifications.

Not everything, however, is contained in the previous two principles. This new proposition, which invites us to re-articulate the relation between tactics and strategy, suggests a transformation in our understanding of the relation between means and ends. When we solely work with the classic pair of theory and practice, we lack the necessary resources to escape that which we could call “functional work”<sup>15</sup> – that is, a theory of transformation of the world based on the capitalist notion of concrete labour. Functional work is work which transforms raw material into a product, according to a certain finality and a certain method. Not even revolutionary praxis manages to think itself in terms that are truly distinct from this basic schema: it is a matter of transforming the capitalist world into another world, in accordance with the communist ideal and the Marxist method, such as they are understood and determined today or have been in the past. The problem here is that the only thing we truly know about communism today is that we don't really know anything about it – in fact, almost all the conceptual and experimental tools which we could mobilize to imagine a possible communism require the submission to aspects of rationality and universalism which, in accordance to the principle of institutive ignorance, we have already identified with the submission to the dominant class.

We need, therefore, a way of orienting the militant practice which cannot be reduced to the mere application of an ahistorical ideal, not even to the ahistorical ideal of the “historical praxis”. The relation between communism and anarchism could perhaps be better understood as a symptom of this precise problem: communists, rightly so, do not let go of a future orientation towards power, but end up paralyzed by an unproductive excess of determinations (in our analytical power, use of previous historical models, anamnesis of class composition, etc), while anarchists, rightly so, do not let go of a critique of functional work, but end up paralyzed by an unproductive excess of indeterminations (in the directional force of transformation, in the purely negative space of militant identities, etc). What is lacking in both cases is precisely the return to the centrality of organizational experimentation: as Kant proposes in his analysis of natural teleology “an organized natural product is one in which each part is reciprocally a means and an end”. In other words, “to organize” means to promote an immanent – “intrinsic”, was Kant’s term – interpenetration between means and ends, between the rules of transformation and the transformed product<sup>16</sup>.

This strange inversion or interpenetration between means and ends was in fact already connected to collective organization by Marx himself. There is a famous fragment in Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* which reads as follows:

In order to supersede the idea of private property, the idea of communism is enough. In order to supersede private property as it actually exists, real communist activity is necessary. History will give rise to such activity, and the movement which we already know in thought to be a self-superseding movement will in reality undergo a very difficult and protracted process. But we must look upon it as a real advance that we have gained, at the outset, an awareness of the limits as well as the goal of this historical movement and are in a position to see beyond it.

When communist workmen gather together, their immediate aim is instruction, propaganda, etc. But at the same time, they acquire a new need – the need for society – and what appears as a means had become an end. This practical development can be most strikingly observed in the gatherings of French socialist workers. Smoking, eating, and drinking, etc., are no longer means of creating links between people. Company, association, conversation, which in turn has society as its goal, is enough

for them. The brotherhood of man is not a hollow phrase, it is a reality, and the nobility of man shines forth upon us from their work-worn figures<sup>17</sup>

First of all, Marx distinguishes the “idea” from the “real activity”: the idea of private property from its actual existence, the idea of communism from its real movement. As usual, with Marx, this is not merely a distinction of registers, between the abstract and the concrete presentation of a given thing. The idea of communism can in fact work *against* the real communist movement, insofar as, from the standpoint of an idea that has no effective reality, “the real estrangement of human life remains and is all the greater the more one is conscious of it as such”. The actual communist movement, however, does not overcome the actual relations mediated by private property so easily as its ideal version: communist practice, in reality, moves slowly, step by step, it undergoes “a very difficult and protracted process”. However, Marx suggests that the very shift away from the abstract realm of the idea to the harsh reality of concrete struggle is already “real advance”: being aware of “the limits as well as the goal of this historical movement” constitutes our first victory as communists. There is a great sense of pragmatic realism here, a true conviction that being exposed to our real limitations is preferable to being trapped in a dream of great things, without actuality.

The second paragraph, however, introduces a strange twist into this orientation. Marx stops speaking of communist strategy in general terms and turns to the “communist workmen” gathered together for the purposes of accomplishing some tasks of importance for the political movement: agitation, propaganda, political formation. This active movement, a painfully difficult process of liberation - which is a hundred times more important than the work of philosophers, seating home, aloof, thinking of the idea of freedom - is nonetheless suddenly interrupted or distorted by the appearance of “a new need”.

This new need has a very peculiar structure, because, unlike the “real estrangement of human life”, which can only be superseded by the actual overcoming of private property, it can find satisfaction in the present, in the very process of socialization of workers. This new need inverts the relation between means and ends: rather than organize in order to accomplish certain tasks of interest for the movement, the communist workmen take part in the harsh struggle for actual communism so that they can engage in “smoking, eating and drinking”. In a sense, they become, in their pleasure in “company, association, conversation”, like the lazy

philosophers Marx had criticized, who think of communism for the mere pleasure of thinking. However, here, the free association of men, unlike in the case of the philosopher, freely associating ideas, is a reality. A reality which Marx emphatically praises, even though it does not present itself as an effective contribution to the actually existing communist movement.

This “new need”, which rather appears as a new satisfaction, an uncalled for pleasure, makes in fact a sudden and unwanted appearance. From the standpoint of those who, having abandoned the narcissistic satisfaction of wallowing in the ideal, dedicate themselves to the actual communist practice, with all its grit and frustrations, to suddenly have their hard-earned efforts of collective mobilization turned into a “mere” means for people to gather and talk can only be experienced as a deviation, a stoppage or even a betrayal. But they are powerless against it. As Jacques Rancière puts it:

Here is the problem that is likely to transform the enthusiasm of the communist into the despair of the revolutionary - the nobility of humanity *already* shining on brows that should have lost even the appearance of it in order to produce the future of humanity. [...] The obstacle to the transformation of *Straubinger* communists into revolutionary proletarians is not their status as artisans, but their status as communists - not the heavy weight of their journeyman past but the lightness of their anticipation of the communist future<sup>18</sup>

The principle of anticipated invention seeks to bring to light the *material basis of the future* which the inversion of means and ends promoted by the logic of collective organization, proposing a mutual conditioning of the determinations of the world-to-come and the determinations of what is possible to accomplish today. Against functional work – and with the anarchists – this principle draws our attention to the experimentations concerning the relation between power and universalism today. However, breaking away from the identification of power and the power of the dominant class – and, therefore, siding with the communists – this principle also suggests that we must judge the validity of our tactical commitments from the standpoint of what these actual collective experiments teach us about what we are permitted to expect from the future.

## To conclude: on impersonal emancipation

In order to lead us into some concluding remarks, let us briefly mention the two most common responses to a diagnosis, proposed by thinkers such as Moishe Postone<sup>19</sup> and Anselm Jappe<sup>20</sup>, that the structure of social domination under contemporary capitalism is essentially abstract and impersonal, extracting its power and effectivity from the very impossibility of reducing this structure to the actors which compose its material substratum. When confronted with this position, we usually take one of two positions. The first is to *negate* that domination under capitalism is truly abstract – suggesting, for example, that the abstract domination is just a mystification of the direct and personal domination forces which are truly the root of the social organization under capitalism. The second position is to accept the diagnosis, but to answer that it is precisely because the force of capital lies in abstraction and impersonality that in our struggle against the abstract power of capital *we should negate abstraction* and opt for immediate concreteness and the interpersonality of social relations.

In other words, either the force of capital is not truly abstract, but conceptually reducible to the action of concrete people like us, or it is effectively abstract, and this is why, in order to oppose it, we should also oppose abstraction. The first option seems deficient to us because it cannot properly deal with the theory of abstract domination, but it has the advantage of thinking political struggle in terms of a confrontation where it is not simply a matter of accumulating forces, but also of acquiring the same “form” as that of the enemy: the issue is that this form is taken to be that of direct force – direct relations of domination should be confronted with the force of an equally direct emancipatory movement. The second option, on the other hand, has the advantage of recognizing the paradoxical quality of capital’s power, but it responds to it in an insufficient manner, promoting a properly ontological disparity between the poison and its cure, so to speak: against the efficacy of the abstract and the masterless structures which characterize capitalism, one proposed the power of concrete and localized struggle, of direct mobilization of concrete people, whose efficacy would be guaranteed *by* its “concreteness”.

But there is a third option, which we could call that of “impersonal emancipation”: to recognize the conceptual validity of the diagnosis proposed above, therefore assuming the theoretical stance that abstractions have effective causal power in the mechanisms of domination in capitalism, without thereby accepting the presupposition that to oppose abstract domination means to oppose the domination

of the abstract. That is, to preserve the idea, at stake in the first option, that it is necessary to confront the enemy's forces with a power that is ontologically of the same form as it: against the abstract and impersonal social domination, this position demands an abstract and impersonal social emancipation, irreducible to the actors involved in this struggle or to those who benefit from its results.

In this essay, we have first presented the principle of "immanent articulation", in opposition to the theory of praxis. We criticized this theory on two accounts. Firstly, because it relies on an ahistorical concept which lacks the potential to be affected by its own historical deployment – unlike the unifying principle of capitalism itself, the form of value. However, we also criticized this because the idealist framework that it implies reflects itself historically as an unmeasured trust in the immediacy of the unity between theory and practice (an immediacy that can take the form of a model for revolution as well as a "spontaneist" or vitalist theory of creative unity in practice). The use we make of ethical rectification or of "scientific" positioning, as conceptual loans supposed to supplant the lack of a theory of formal organization, demarcate very well that the "scale" in which this immediate unity is supposed to take place is precisely that of the personal domain. In short, from the standpoint of the "unity of theory and practice" the point of synthesis between actions and ideas is the individual consciousness. It is through an exam of consciousness – be it an ethical or scientific one – that we verify if a given political orientation, in a given conjuncture, has realized what was theoretically anticipated, or if a disjunction between our ideals and reality has taken place.

It is truly quite hard to imagine what other concrete instance could serve as unifying stance rather than one's consciousness. Our proposal is that "collective organization" is precisely the name of such immanent and historical mediation between theory and practice, a field simultaneously abstract and concrete, where the fundamental disjunction between ideas and the effective transformation of reality is not overcome, but put to use through local articulations. These "knottings" do not promote a more intimate or complete interpenetration between our theoretical principles and our practices, on the contrary: it becomes even more evident to everyone – and therefore also more transmissible – how much of what has been professed by a given organization was effectively transposable into its practical reality. This is so because organizing does not strive to unify an experience, but rather to produce an *experiment*. The difference here being, precisely, that an experiment – in art, love, science, and, we believe, also in politics – is conditioned on a violence perpetrated against the properly personal dimension in all of us: the

capacity of anyone to recognize oneself beside oneself – if we can call this recognition – in a procedure that gains in universality what it loses in similitude or transitivity with its actors.

We are left to wonder what sort of freedom could be conditioned by such abstract structure – to logistical solutions, to protocols, to questions of resource distribution, in sum: to the administrative dimension of political life. In our discussion of the principle of “institutive ignorance”, we mentioned an example of how freeing oneself from one’s own identity, itself constructed in parity with the identity of our adversaries, is also to free oneself to appropriate ideas which, in truth, do not belong to anyone. This is surely a vague – but valid – example of how taking collective organization as the site of concrete verification of the articulation between ideas and practice – in the case of Haiti, the site where we verify the capacity of French ideals to mobilize the revolt of the ex-slaves – allows us to experiment, simultaneously, an emancipation from others and from ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup> “Is not the ultimate Marxian parallax, however, the one between economy and politics – between the “critique of political economy,” with its logic of commodities, and the political struggle, with its logic of antagonism? Both logics are “transcendental,” not merely ontico-empirical; and they are both irreducible to each other.” in Žižek, S. (2006) *Parallax View* London: MIT Press, p.55

<sup>2</sup> CSII is an international communist collective, active mostly in Brazil, France and the USA: [www.ideiaandideology.com](http://www.ideiaandideology.com), [www.ideiaeideologia.com](http://www.ideiaeideologia.com). For a detailed presentation of the theoretical basis of CSII, please see Tupinambá, G. (2016) *Freeing Thought from Thinkers: A Case Study*, available at <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/handle/10092/12087>

<sup>3</sup> Vasquez (2003) *Filosofía de la praxis*. Mexico: Siglo XXI, see also the last chapter of Feenberg (2014) *The Philosophy of Praxis*. London: Verso.

<sup>4</sup> A great summary of the position which holds the value form to be a “real abstraction”, a historical, if paradoxical mediation between the concrete and the abstract can be found in Rotta & Teixeira *The Autonomisation of Abstract Wealth: New Insights on the Labour Theory of value*, available at: <https://academic.oup.com/cje/article-abstract/40/4/1185/1987654/The-autonomisation-of-abstract-wealth-new-insights?redirectedFrom=PDF>

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Lukacs, G. (2014) *Tactics and Ethics. 1919-1929* London: Verso. It is also worth considering that one of the greatest thinkers of discipline and party organization would slowly abandon his historical treatment of practice from *History and Class Consciousness* and assume the task of writing “ethics” at the same time as he promoted a new, transhistorical, “ontology of social being”.

<sup>6</sup> Althusser, L. (2006) *For Marx* London: Verso.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the relation between superego and the Good in “Kant avec Sade”, in Lacan, J. (2007) *Écrits* W.W. Norton & Company.

<sup>8</sup> Linhart, R (2010) *Lenine, les paysans, Taylor* Paris: Seuil.

<sup>9</sup> See Žižek’s “The revolt of the salaried Bourgeoisie”, available at: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n02/slavoj-zizek/the-revolt-of-the-salaried-bourgeoisie>



- <sup>10</sup> A good summary of the current recuperation of the “experimental question” in epistemology, see Radder’s *The Philosophy of Scientific Experimentation: a review*, available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2809324/>
- <sup>11</sup> Latour & Woolgar (1986) *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* New York: Princeton University Press.
- <sup>12</sup> Žižek, S. (2009) *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* London: Verso, p.112.
- <sup>13</sup> An interesting view of this “profanation” of segregative technologies in the Soviet Union can be found in Hoffman, D. (2011) *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914-1939* New York: Cornell University Press. See also Jameson, F. & Žižek, S. eds. (2016) *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*. Verso.
- <sup>14</sup> See Hamza & Tupinambá *On the Organization of Defeats*, available at: <http://crisiscritique.org/ccmarch/hamza-tupinamba.pdf>
- <sup>15</sup> A great discussion of this term is presented in Oliver Feltham’s unpublished doctoral thesis, *As Fire Burns: functional work and praxis in ontology* - available at: <http://www.emmabiggscatering.co/file/as-fire-burns-by-oliver-j-feltham.pdf>
- <sup>16</sup> This immanent interpenetration, and its relation to the indetermination of the future is particularly clear in this passage from Kant’s *Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrace*, from 1785: “If some magical power of the imagination... were capable of modifying the reproductive faculty itself, of transforming Nature’s original model or of making additions to it, we should no longer know from what original Nature had begun, nor how far the alteration of that original may proceed, nor into what grotesqueries of form species might eventually be transmogrified” in Huneman, P. ed. *Understanding Purpose: Kant and the Philosophy of Biology* New York: University of Rochester Press. It is worth noting that what Kant considers grotesque is precisely the possibility that the *relation* between the finality and the material – the “reproductive faculty itself” – might also change in history. This would be the necessary step to extract the concept of organization – as the plastic and historical logic of mediation – out of that of organism.
- <sup>17</sup> See “Human Requirements and Division of Labor Under the Rule of Private Property and Under Socialism. Division of Labor in Bourgeois Society” *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p.53 - available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Economic-Philosophic-Manuscripts-1844.pdf>
- <sup>18</sup> Rancière, J. (2003) *The Philosopher and his Poor* New York: Duke University Press, p.82-83.
- <sup>19</sup> Postone, M (1996) *Time, Labor and Social Domination* Chicago: University of Chicago.
- <sup>20</sup> Jappe, A. (2003) *Les Aventures de la Marchandise: Por une Nouvelle Critique de la Valeur* Paris: Denoël.

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