

Communist investigations

The central argument of this entire theoretical effort could be summarized as follows: the process of capitalism's peripheralization makes the work of communists even more concrete and necessary, since we can no longer depend on certain exceptional historical trends to produce a structural convergence between proletarian struggles. As we have also argued, this observation does not justify the creation of a vanguard of militants responsible for carrying out special tasks, selected because they have a better understanding of the reality of capitalism than others. Rather, it serves as motivation for us to develop new theoretical and practical tools to recognize why struggles are organized in such different ways and to navigate these differences from these very localized insertions. Thus, the practices that would allow for the construction of the communist movement do not form a totally separate set of tasks, but rather a reformulation of the practices that we already need to account for in our isolated struggles, given the contradiction between our particular political perspective and the perspective of the totality of ongoing struggles. Moreover, this reformulation—which emphasizes experiments, technology, and inquiries, different dimensions of communist practice—is not possible without concrete articulation work, since it is the practical construction of connections and transitions between struggles that effectively produces new compositions, forms of interaction, and perception. It is worth reiterating: there is more communist action in a small articulation situated between two movements or territories than in any radical anti-systemic discourse that circulates exclusively in a single political space.

Even so, it is possible to bring together all of these practices—insofar as they are traversed by the contradiction between the parts and the whole of the revolutionary movement—and call them communist investigations. “Investigations” because the starting point for experiments, technologies, and political inquiries is an engagement with the reality of concrete struggles, equipped with tools both to learn about how they are organized and to situate these processes in the context of proletarian struggles as a whole. “Communist” because the purpose of the investigation is precisely

to highlight the common elements of the different struggles, revealing, when possible, the situations and conditions for the concrete construction of a greater political totality.

The challenge of enchainment and scaling

So far, we have explored this contradiction only as a way of situating the positional difference between the base, militants, organizers, and communists without relying on a hierarchy where different people need to dedicate themselves to each function. As we have often repeated, not only is it common for the base of a struggle to be partially formed by militants and for many of them to be organizers of the struggle—and for many organizers to also be communists—but it is most likely impossible for there to be communists who do not act as organizers or militants in particular struggles. But there is yet another aspect of the dialectic between the parts and the whole of the revolutionary movement that we have not discussed, and that brings together and contrasts the field of communist construction with the logic of social worlds.

We have been quite schematic in our exposition of the different social logics, their mixtures, and ways of integrating and dominating the social fabric. It could not be otherwise, partly because of the space constraints of the text and partly because of the commitment to use abstractions to preserve the need for concrete investigations to fill in the theory based on reality and the thinking of real struggles. But there is an organizational dimension that has been implicit in all of this previous exposition and that needs to be presented more directly now, namely, the fact that social logics need to articulate locally, regionally, and globally to ensure their effective dominance.

In Marxist value theory, this process is formally described in terms of the difference between the “accidental” form of value—which only guarantees a single exchange between equivalents, with no requirement that other exchanges respect the specific ratio of that particular equivalence—and the “expanded” form—which already begins to create some regional coherence between the values of commodities—the form of the “universal equivalent”—which allows for a consistent network of exchanges by electing a single commodity as a general measure—and the “money form”—which embeds this coherence in the very body of the commodity selected as the universal equivalent. This

process becomes even more complex throughout the other books of *Capital*, taking root in the productive sphere, in the creation of “world money,” etc. At its core, what Marx is describing is how the logic of value needs to transform itself to ensure that, as it integrates more and more social relations, it remains capable of exercising dominance and pressure over social life – otherwise, the markets of each city could decide for themselves what to do, disregarding the fact that the price of labor and other commodities elsewhere is different, for example.

This requirement to build consistent networks, at the local level, then regionally, and finally globally, is very important—and also applies to other social logics: property can only become a dominant principle in empires if it achieves its own local coherence—when one community temporarily subjugates another—regional—when this regime gains stability—and global—when it manages to establish forms of control shared by different communities under the same domain, etc. Many have pointed out the similarity between money and the sovereign, both capable of mirroring their common and unifying “substance” back to social fragments. The same is true for affinity, which unfolds into networks of exchange and kinship of the most diverse kinds in order to form social regimes with some internal coherence.

It is important to emphasize this process because, despite not being able to rely on the idea of “logical coherence” that facilitates the concatenation of value, property, and affinity in increasingly larger and more robust organizations, communist construction also needs to deal with the production and reproduction of local, regional, and global networks of articulation. This is a necessity that stems directly from the absence of a convergent structural tendency, organically connecting the foci of struggle everywhere into a great international force. In this sense, we can also unfold the field of communist investigations—of experiments, technology, and inquiries—based on the scale and type of stability that the political forms we invent are able to achieve.

Punctual investigation

In this sense, the first possible form of investigation is the punctual one. This is the simplest articulation—“accidental,” to use Marx’s term—between two organizations: meetings between militants from different groups, joint actions, or conversations with a base linked to both collectives. It is an investigation, at least for the communists involved in these meetings, as they are all opportunities to learn, through momentary articulation, if there is anything between the political processes involved that could serve as material for a common construction.

However, the episodic nature of this type of investigation creates a significant difficulty. We know that the role of investigation is to understand, think about, and practice struggles from a communist point of view, but in such restricted contexts it is difficult to separate the similarities and differences we imagine exist from those that actually exist at the organizational level. An example where this is clear is in the case of specific investigations that take place as meetings between militants from different organizations: in these cases, the presence of the organizations is almost exclusively mediated by what some of their participants have to say about their struggles, and very little of the real dynamics of these processes informs the meeting and is felt directly. Of course, agreements and disagreements between people are not irrelevant—and can be the basis for important bonds of affinity—but the organizational point of view can even reveal another way of understanding the role of these more personal disputes, since in some organizations it is very important to avoid consensus, while in others aggressiveness can be an important indicator of the reproduction of sexist practices. To complicate matters, the effort to understand a structure behind individualized behavior is generally thought of, on the left, as a “critical” effort, which serves to denounce that, behind the grand speeches, conservative and reactionary forces usually operate – and this is not the goal of communist investigations.

Although revolutionary discourses often conceal much less radical practices, the central purpose of communist investigation is to help us find common organizational elements, often hidden behind the extremely saturated ideological and theoretical debates of militants, especially when they present themselves to third parties. It turns out that specific investigation has few resources to produce this productive contrast without reducing it to mere criticism. Frank conversations with people outside our organization, the realization that by acting together we produce better political

effects than by acting separately, as well as the "shock" of discovering that certain workers do not see so many differences between our groups, all of this can in fact help to create a new perspective on what we do and the limits and possibilities of articulation between us – but this new perspective is equally accidental, asymmetrical, and fragile: there is no guarantee that this contrast between explicit differences and forms of organization will emerge, or that it will help to identify a common interest in the organizational field – and even if this common ground does emerge, each organization will evaluate it on its own terms.

Processual investigation

One way to deal with these limits of specific investigation is to conduct procedural investigation – to use Marx's terms: an "expanded" or "unfolded" investigation. Rather than a passing encounter, this is a more lasting immersion in the practices of another political organization. On the one hand, this type of investigative process—whether in the field of composition, interaction, or perception—helps to contrast the representation that militants make of their struggles with the actual organizational structure they help to build. This is because when we submit ourselves to an organization's mode of operation, we begin to feel its constraints and forms of conduct and to better understand why they cut reality in a certain way. On the other hand, the price to pay for this more concrete contrast is that this form of investigation is essentially asymmetrical: it is true that two organizations could, in principle, participate in each other's political processes for a time—and even then, these would be two separate investigations—but there is no guarantee that this will happen, and it is more common for one organization to be exclusively the visiting group and the other the host group in this more lasting exchange.

At the same time, procedural investigation is already beginning to give more substance to the field of common interests between organizations. Whether through experiments, technologies, or inquiries, it is becoming possible to use more continuous articulation as a basis for new links between those moments where something common begins to emerge. Some tensions that previously arose within the host organization can be defused or reworked due to the presence of visiting militants, while the presence of these people, bringing other political experiences, can help

the host organization to be more successful in its own interventions, as well as gain access to popular perspectives that might not directly participate in its usual grassroots work. All of this begins to give concrete form to the political value of communist practice.

In each of these possibilities for articulation, however, the specter of asymmetry always threatens to return. Where the concrete effects of communist practices are not convincing or the distance between ideological orientations is great, the question always creeps in: what do these visitors want here? Is this entryism, dual militancy, espionage, an attempt at sabotage? Where the communist point of view lacks concreteness, and therefore cannot be pragmatically justified to revolutionaries, the objective of the investigations can always be called into question, raising suspicions that behind the search for "common interests" lies the promotion of the particular interests of the visiting group.

Compositional investigation

One way to deal with this tension inherent in procedural investigation is the following form that communist practice can take, which we call compositional investigation. It is not just a matter of trying to make procedural investigation more symmetrical—not least because, as we mentioned, even if two different organizations participate in each other's activities on a lasting basis, this does not eliminate asymmetry, it only doubles it. Instead, it is an effort to find, based on procedural investigations, core issues, problems, and challenges that can only be addressed if we adopt the communist point of view—that is, points where there will either be an insurmountable impasse or a new path that necessarily involves common articulation. Returning once again to the analogy with Marx's theory of value, here we enter the field of the "universal equivalent."

Like procedural investigation, this involves practical and ongoing engagement with another struggle, which includes submitting to its modes of action and political organization—and therefore the difference between visiting and host militants. However, unlike the previous form, compositional investigation does this in order to learn where and how this other political process identifies critical points and problems that could serve as motivation for articulations with other

movements and organizations. In other words: in compositional investigation, we articulate ourselves in order to produce other articulations. It is here that the common interests of different fronts of proletarian struggle begin to take shape and exist, underpinning deeper articulations that can survive the end of this particular investigation, as they become part of the recomposition of these other organizations on their own terms. This capacity of the common task to connect diverse struggles is an example of the constitution, even if momentary, of a “common equivalent” between diverse political processes.

It is not easy, however, to occupy a position in relation to another political organization that allows for the sharing of problems and challenges. When militants offer to contribute to tasks or participate in activities planned by another organization, this foreign presence is limited and, even if received with suspicion, can contribute valuable resources such as time and energy. What right would militants from one political organization have to get involved with the challenges of another movement? Only one thing distinguishes this type of political articulation from a process of instrumentalizing a struggle: the recognition by the “investigated” organization itself that, through a possible composition with other movements, it would come even closer to its own goals. Compositional investigation therefore implies even greater submission to the practical dictates of another political organization—it implies demonstrating an understanding of how another political process thinks, that is, how it formulates its impasses and evaluates what would be good courses of action.

The main advantage of this type of investigation is that it actively helps to build bridges between struggles based on their common interests. It thus offers a first tactical and strategic horizon for communist practice, an objective that can be achieved, evaluated, and that leaves a concrete balance beyond the investigation itself, which begins to transform the asymmetrical relationship present in the previous form of investigation. On the other hand, compositional investigation is unable to represent the point of view of the “movement as a whole” for all the organizations involved: for communists, we have taken a step toward consolidating our political ecology, which has become more interdependent and stronger, while for other militants and organizers, it is their own political goals that have advanced a little further.

Formative investigation

Socializing the communist point of view is the distinguishing feature of the last form of political enchainment, formative investigation. Compositional investigation aims to find, within the processes of articulation, those elements that create, within the host organizations, a willingness to evaluate their common interests with those of other struggles. Whether it is because inquiries with the base reveal that different organizations already form a common ground for the people, or because it would be impossible for certain autonomist groups to stop a process of worker dismissals without the legal support of a group of lawyers involved in another struggle, etc. the tactical horizon of the organization in question begins to expand, as it can now face previously insurmountable obstacles through these new articulations. This does not mean, however, that its strategic horizon has changed—the value of its capacity for articulation and common construction is still measured by the same criteria as before.

Formative investigation, on the other hand, is where the very vision of the struggle changes, to the point of potentially reversing itself: instead of conceiving its particular objectives and agendas as central, and the common construction in which it is entangled as an additional element, this second dimension begins to have a value of its own, to the point of justifying that the effort to build cross-cutting articulations is in itself an important political objective, which its structure, forms of action, and its base can help to link and expand. This is the moment when these concrete articulations begin to appear, for the organization itself, as indicators of the existence and real strength of the revolutionary movement as a whole.

It is crucial to note that this does not mean training militants from other organizations in a particular jargon, program, or theory, supposedly already defended by the visiting organization. As we have repeatedly stated, nothing in our approach suggests that communists necessarily belong to the same organization or think using the same ideas—communists are all those who are traversed, in their political practice, by the contradiction between the reality of their particular struggles and the challenge of building the revolutionary movement as a whole. What formative investigation

effectively does, then, is not to educate people to distance themselves from their struggles in the name of a general vanguardist vision, but to give shape to the compositional, intervention, or perception problems that motivate more and more people to engage in investigation—that is, to make the search for common interests among political organizations a matter of common interest.

How this will happen is impossible to anticipate—and depends largely on the structure of each struggle, how it engages with social logics, etc.—but where it does occur, it certainly creates the means to think about and build increasingly coherent, decentralized, and expansive articulations between struggles. Just as the "money form" is not only a universal equivalent of the value of commodities, but a form that contaminates the production of all things, becoming the very goal of production, social reproduction, and nature, the construction of a common form, rooted in the very materiality of the composition, interaction, and perception of struggles, has the power to challenge the dominance of capital in all spheres, offering means for us to recognize the communist problem of articulation between different organizations wherever material reality refuses to yield to the social world as it presents itself.

From political ecology to communist economics

The different forms of investigation—punctual, procedural, compositional, and formative—mirror, in a way, different moments of the form of value: accidental, expanded, the universal equivalent, and the money form. This does not mean, of course, that there is an obscure similarity between commodities and political struggle—on the contrary, it shows that, like value, property, and affinity, communist practice, defined by the contradiction between the parts and the whole of the revolutionary movement, must also consider how to scale up and how to connect political advances with each other, creating ever larger spaces in the world where all social logics are subject to emancipatory political principles.

Throughout this book, we have endeavored to demonstrate that multiplicity exists in all spheres of revolutionary politics. In the field of political ideas, which arise from the material reality of society and do not respect a universal logic. In the field of political organization, where these principles and

political forms negotiate and strain concrete arrangements of value, property, and affinity, creating diverse organizational structures. In the field of political struggle, where these different organizational structures will produce specific conflicts in the sphere of composition, interaction, and perception between political processes and the world around them. In the field of political thought, where forms of negation of the social world pose tactical, strategic, logistical, and mobilization problems specific to each emancipatory organization. In the field of political transformation, where different forms of political retreats and advances are contested, as well as distinct revolutionary orientations. In a way, our definition of the contradictory position of communists can be formulated in terms of a decision. Either we use our own militancy and political organization as a measure to evaluate all struggles—and in this case there is unity in the revolutionary camp, but it is small and surrounded by deluded, ignorant, or ill-intentioned groups and movements—or we adopt the point of view of this larger panorama—and then there is no unity in the revolutionary movement, but its field is richer, more diverse, and broader than it might seem at first glance.

There is, in fact, a good reason why we generally opt for the first position, choosing to measure the whole based on our own struggles. To put it succinctly, it is because social logics themselves, insofar as they function as the “pieces” of the social world puzzle, lead to very different ideas of universality or totality. The idea of “whole” that stems from affinity can be paradoxical, it can even include what is left out of it, and therefore manages to unify past, present, and future—it is something *cosmic*. It is very different from how the logic of fences constructs a sense of universality: property tends to separate with a clean cut what is and what is not, what is within the totality and what is not, and therefore tends to create units or blocks in time—such as *eras*, dynasties, or regimes that follow one another. The logic of margins, on the other hand, gives rise to a different totality, whose edges seem open, as if every unification or totalization remained capable of transforming into something else—this is what we understand in capitalism as *history*.

The struggles that organize their strategic horizons based on each of these logics tend to have specific visions of the totality in which they are inserted: struggles to rescue an ancestral path, the only one capable of connecting us to a possible future; struggles for the beginning of a new political

era that leaves the past behind; and struggles that aim to exploit the gaps in history, forcing their openings. The communist contradiction, in this sense, is not experienced by militants of different struggles as a choice between particularity and totality, but as a tension between a whole where our specific struggle makes sense and illuminates the revolutionary path, and an overall vision that does not guarantee the prior meaning of any political effort.

This is why communist investigations do not start “at the top,” that is, they cannot be justified on the basis of easier access to the totality of the revolutionary movement, an overview that would already reveal additional demands and tasks for the different political processes. Political multiplicity even influences conceptions of this “totality.” On the contrary, it is the situated struggles, with their tactical, strategic, and general political worldviews, that best visualize the totality in which they are inserted—even if always in a specific way, relative to their organizational structure. It is therefore not up to communists to bring concepts and images that unify everything that goes on within the revolutionary movement, but – perhaps paradoxically – to abandon these images and concepts in order to better find, in the material reality of the different organizations, the resources and motivations to sew together and build this common space. We hope this clarifies why this book is not so much a political program as a set of tools for approaching the different languages and forms of political thought that make up the field of contemporary struggles—the only material capable of shaping something like a real communist political program.

We mention very briefly and enigmatically, at the end of chapter thirteen, that there is something in the process of communist construction that resembles the concrete discovery of a new mode of production. That is, connecting struggles and creating new forms of interdependence between them would not only be a way of strengthening revolutionary forces in their confrontation with the capitalist world: if this network also allows struggles to advance further and further, integrating the reproduction of social life more deeply into the new political forms they promote, then this process would not be restricted to producing a negative force, one of rejection of the current social reality, but would also bring about an affirmative force, the construction of another possible way of organizing ourselves in general. This idea sheds new light on communist investigations.

We introduce the idea of investigation based on how communists deal with the different dimensions of political struggle. Articulations between political compositions transform the struggle into an experiment that reveals potentially unthought aspects of organizations, articulations between forms of action create the field of technologies, both to reduce the cost of particular interventions and to create aggregate effects greater than the sum of the parts, and articulations in the field of perception allow the base and popular political thought, which has no reason to respect our ways of presenting ourselves, to illuminate and inform struggles in new and surprising ways. This way of thinking about communist practices already implies a certain principle, an interesting approach to the contradiction that defines this position: to seek, in the concrete reality of struggles, ways to reduce isolated and redundant efforts, increase cooperation, give productive destinations to conflicts, and root the direction and construction of a revolutionary movement in the strength of popular power. There is, therefore, an economic principle at play in the articulations promoted by communist investigations.

This dimension was further reinforced in this chapter, where we addressed not only the difference between different forms of investigation—punctual, procedural, compositional, and formative—but also suggested that each of these types of articulation prepares the ground for construction on a larger scale and to a greater extent. Hence the usefulness of comparing investigations to the form of value: just as each moment in the logic of value constructs an increasingly robust mediation to integrate the parts of the social world into a capitalist totality—with money serving as the primary mediator—investigation can be treated as a process through which different struggles can find ways to link together, creating increasingly complex circuits of interdependence and mutual reinforcement. The variety of forms of investigations corresponds precisely to the variety of forms we need to produce a communist economy from the diverse political ecologies in which organizations are necessarily embedded.