

Investigate, Compose, Continue

Common Space of Organizations

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Introductory Note

The material we present here is the result of a long collective journey: an effort to elaborate, systematize, and disseminate the ideas that emerged from the militant experience of many people, groups, and situations scattered across the world over the past decade. However, our main goal is not to provide a retrospective balance of what has already happened, but to find in the lessons we have drawn from this path the means to take new steps forward.

That is why we chose to address ourselves primarily to collectives and political movements. On one hand, because we want to introduce ourselves to other organizations and militants, in the hope of creating new political connections. On the other, because we believe that the essential part of our proposal only truly makes sense from the perspective of the problems and challenges that militants collectively face. This is a principle that, after reading this book, we hope will become clearer: collective processes are better understood and transformed collectively.

This way of seeing things explains our decision to publish this book first on our website. We are interested in ensuring that the ideas presented here circulate among collectives and political militants, so they can be evaluated, analyzed, and debated in internal spaces—whether with us or within new political articulations that might be sparked by this discussion. In this way, we want to be able to engage in conversation without necessarily having to go through a “public debate space,” which can end up making our ideas—born of our practice—more rigid and inflexible than they really are. The theoretical elaboration developed here is not, therefore, an end in itself. This form of publication also makes it easier for groups interested in deepening their engagement with our practices and ideas to access CSO directly. In addition, as we will comment later, our website was designed to help mediate this relationship with those interested.

The presentation of our ideas in this book was conceived with this premise in mind. For example, we chose to divide the material into relatively short sections—even in the longer chapters—to facilitate the formation of study groups. We also preferred to avoid footnotes or traditional bibliographic references, since we want the validity of the argument to be judged by its usefulness

for militants, collectives, and movements, not by criteria of authority or authorship. We also decided to include, as the final chapter, a presentation and discussion of our own organization, the Common Space of Organizations, or CSO. Not only because one of the objectives of this book, as we said, is to serve as a “calling card” for the work we are doing and our way of thinking, but also because knowing a little about the political context in which this work emerged can help assess its merits and limitations.

As readers will quickly notice, although we seek to address militants and, as much as possible, to present our ideas didactically, this is also a very dense—and at times very abstract—book. We wrote an entire chapter, the fifth, to justify why we believe that a communist theory, precisely because of its commitment to investigating concretely the form and specificity of each struggle, sometimes needs to maintain an unusual distance from detailed descriptions and from the classic question of “what is to be done?”. But the side effect of this choice is that the conceptual argument often lacks specific examples and concrete analyses.

It is because of these difficulties that we decided it was not enough to simply publish our book on a website and let it circulate among militants. Our interest is not for it to be a balance sheet or an endpoint, but for it to serve as an occasion to construct devices similar to CSO, to bring together different practices from already existing collectives, or to stimulate new political articulations. The central idea of this text is that the content of a communist practice—its very substance—is the multiplicity of concrete forms of organization and struggle, and it is therefore impossible to bring this dimension to light without confronting a particular political position with others. It is almost certain that reading the book in isolation—or even discussing it collectively within a completely closed ideological context—will fail to make the most of what is important or relevant in the ideas we present, since it is all too easy to confuse this work with yet another theory seeking to judge which struggles and strategies are correct and which are not legitimate. It is only against the background of a series of different political experiences—and the need to, at the same time, take them all seriously while committing to only one of them—that the outlines of this proposal truly become clear.

The very process of collectively revising this publication demonstrated the necessity of taking this plurality of political experiences seriously. The book, therefore, is meant to be read collectively. Indeed, even if no reading or study group exists beforehand, we understand that this material can serve as an opportunity to gather together people interested in its questions, serving as a starting point for engagement with the practice we propose here. To address these concerns, we decided to accompany this publication with two resources that allow for deeper engagement with the text: (1) a website hosting the book and supporting material, and (2) a forum for exchange among readers interested in delving deeper into the text together with our comrades from CSO.

The book itself is divided into four major sections, which will be made available online serially as we finalize the revisions. The first part is dedicated to an analysis of the transformations of contemporary capitalism from the standpoint of the challenges these historical changes pose for communists. The guiding question for this section is: *what would communist practice need to be if we could not rely on any internal tendency within capital to facilitate the convergence of different fronts of struggle?*

The second part addresses this question from a theoretical perspective, introducing some ideas that might help us face this new historical context. Here, the central question is different: *is it possible to elaborate a theory of communist practice that provides us with useful tools to investigate contemporary struggles concretely, searching for points of articulation and composition, but without assuming we already know in advance how they are organized?*

Once this new theory of political organization is introduced, the third section builds tools for us to follow contemporary political struggles in their diversity of forms and strategies. The guiding question here is: *in what ways are struggles within the context of peripheralization becoming more diverse—and how does this heterogeneity allow us to reconstruct the key concepts such as organization, struggle, strategy, and political transformation?*

Finally, the fourth and last section focuses on communist practice, with particular emphasis on the role of collective investigation in cultivating a common ground shared by different struggles,

capable of serving as the basis for building a larger revolutionary movement. In this last part, we are guided by another question: *how can we describe the practice of investigation and its role in communist construction, knowing that the material, methods, and immediate objectives of each investigation must arise from within the political contexts in which they are embedded?* The final chapter concludes this last section with a description of our organization and the path we have taken so far.

In addition to the book, our site will feature bibliographies, exercises for collective reading groups, comments and notes of assistance, and reports of readers' experiences. Our expectation is that the circulation of this work will end up helping to build supplementary material that facilitates its understanding.

As we said, this text is intended for collective reading. We recommend that at least one person from each study group complete the full reading before the collective process begins, to help others distinguish between questions we could not address in this book and those that are answered in more advanced chapters.

Since we know that in this process of engaging with the material—whether totally, partially, individually in preparatory moments, or during group meetings—questions may arise, CSO has also created a discussion forum to help those interested in deeper engagement with the text. This forum is organized by CSO's theoretical practice group. It is the space where we have sought to work and develop the theoretical investigation connected to our investigations. Through the site, it is possible to access the "integration channel," where CSO comrades will be available to answer questions, talk about reading processes, help with specific difficulties that may arise, and support the organization of collective work around the book. In this way, the forum will not only serve conceptual deepening or clarification of exegetical and theoretical questions. The aim is to provide support for those interested in building a group around the text.

Today, most books of political theory position themselves outside the political processes they discuss. Whether by imagining that the theories and ideas they present will inspire future struggles,

by offering explanations for the failures of past struggles, or simply because it is easier to both mourn and celebrate struggles that are happening far away from us. But this book does not fit into any of those categories—and anyone expecting political direction, an explanation of the conjuncture, or praise for a particular model of struggle will surely be disappointed. The successes and failures of this work should be evaluated considering that it is a book positioned within an ongoing process. We want to insert ourselves into a conjuncture still without resolution, collectively waging that we are in need of better ways of thinking about what happens in our organizations. We want to facilitate the dissemination of practices of articulation among organizations—whether through direct articulation with the Common Space of Organizations, the creation of new similar experiments, or through the promotion of a new political sensibility within different existing fronts of struggle. And finally, we want to link the lessons of past political experiences to a new collective horizon, for only new political processes truly settle accounts with the history of struggles. Hence the three imperatives guiding us here: investigate, compose, continue.

It is because of the effort to find a place for this publication in a history that is still unfolding that we address ourselves here not to readers in general, but to our comrades—even if they do not yet know who they are.

I

What Does a Communist Do?

The definition of what it means to be a communist found in the *Communist Manifesto* is surprising and somewhat paradoxical.

It surprises, above all, for saying almost nothing about what a communist is, and rather focusing on what a communist is not: communists “do not form a separate party,” they “do not set up any sectarian principles of their own,” their immediate aims “are the same as those of all other proletarian parties,” and in theory, they “merely express, in general terms, the actual relations springing from an existing class struggle.” That is: they do not organize separately, do not defend principles different from others, nor do they focus on distinct political agendas — and their theory serves to express ideas that are already present in struggles carried out by other political forces and organizations.

The only unique feature Marx and Engels attribute to communists is a special concern with articulating the different fronts of proletarian struggle into a whole: communists “point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat,” and they “always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.” Even the communist horizon of the abolition of private property is not presented as a goal that would only be pursued by communists — rather, the abolition of private property is understood as the expression “of a historical movement going on before our eyes,” that is, as the explicitation of a political orientation already at play across the field of proletarian struggles. The abolition of private property would also be an attempt to express the common interest underlying the various existing fronts of struggle.

This definition is also surprising because it suggests that the radical “common” in “communism” does not primarily refer to a future society — it is not the shape of the society to come after the abolition of private property — but rather to a political position in the present. This insight is

important, for without it we might easily and mistakenly conclude that the vocation of communists is to form a historical vanguard uniquely capable of directing struggles due to a more advanced theoretical understanding of the society to come.

Without attention to the fact that communists seek, above all, to investigate the common interests across the different fronts of proletarian struggle, it is impossible to understand in what sense they constitute “the most resolute section of the working-class parties of every country.” Their decisiveness does not come from the individual morality of militants or from some superhuman commitment, but from the conviction, derived from their practice, that proletarian struggles — even when centered on particular interests — can be connected, potentially forming a broad international movement. Without understanding that the goals of communists “are the same as those of the other proletarian parties,” it is also impossible to grasp in what sense the communist fraction “pushes them forward,” as Marx and Engels write in the *Manifesto*.

Communists would not necessarily be better leaders, since they possess no special quality that distinguishes them in the collective effort to achieve the goals of each struggle. Their particular attribute, as we have seen, is their concern with “the movement as a whole,” and therefore their ability to push a struggle forward could only come from this simultaneous attention to other fronts of struggle, from which each part of the proletarian movement may effectively draw additional strength. Even the statement that in theory, communists “have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement” must be understood in this context; otherwise, it leads to contradiction. As stated earlier, in their theory, communists only “express, in general terms, the actual relations springing from an existing class struggle” — and therefore their “clear understanding” of reality and of the aims of the movement could not stem from an intellectual capacity to see farther than other proletarian militants, based on a future that does not yet exist. The communists’ clearer theoretical understanding could only come, in fact, from their ability to look *sideways* — that is, to test any analysis of social reality by considering the various political experiences of the proletariat.

Where, then, does the idea come from that communists form a group that is essentially ahead of the others, defined by their ability to anticipate the fate of capitalism and direct proletarian struggles? This is where we encounter the paradoxical aspect of the definition presented in the *Communist Manifesto*.

Before discussing the relationship between the proletariat and the communists, which we have followed above, Marx and Engels describe the relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie — the theme of the first chapter. It is a very complex analysis that assesses multiple dimensions of the formation of capitalism and the modern bourgeoisie. For our purposes, we can focus on just one aspect of this analysis, encapsulated in the following phrase: “the advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the laborers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association.”

This statement is supported by two arguments. The first is the observation that the bourgeoisie could not become a ruling class without “constantly revolutionizing” the productive forces, the relations of production, and all other social relations — a transformation that cannot be limited to one country or region. The bourgeoisie must “nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.” If this process was already remarkable in Marx’s time, it is even more visible and consolidated today. But the quote above adds a second element. Observing class struggle in the mid-19th century, especially in Europe, Marx and Engels conclude that this process would not only favor the consolidation of the bourgeoisie and the organization of modern capitalism, but also the self-organization of the workers themselves. They claim that “the weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself.” That is, the same process of capitalist expansion and consolidation — the use of machines, the division and militarization of labor, the concentration of workers in factories, the destruction of community and family ties, etc. — would also prepare the ground for the expansion and consolidation of the working class as an international and organized political force. The *Manifesto* describes, for example, how “the interests and conditions of existence of the proletariat are made more and more equal, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labor.”

There lies the paradox: it is as if one could count on capitalism itself to create the “common interests” of the various proletarian forces, since the transformations in the capitalist economic base would necessarily lead to increasing unification and homogenization among workers. But if this process is a side effect of the “constant revolutionizing” of industrial progress, then what role would communists serve? Their practical role would be small, in fact, since it would fall to capitalism itself to materially reorganize social life, drawing the realities of different groups of workers closer together and thus producing the necessary conditions for proletarian association and political awareness. The communists would be left with an essentially theoretical task: to understand, better than anyone else, the inherent tendencies of capitalism, deciphering the revolutionary future already embedded in the fabric of capitalist production and mobilizing this horizon to better guide the strategy of every radical struggle.

This is an even deeper paradox: the subservience of the communist orientation to capitalism’s leveling devastation would ultimately justify a strange political arrogance — the militant who knows how to hear the rumors of capital would no longer need to listen to anyone else. But are communists truly doomed to prospect in the ruins of capitalism for clues to the future?

II

The Challenge for Communists Today

Much has changed in the world since 1848. However, contrary to what one might imagine, these changes have not rendered communism an outdated idea. Much like a glacier that, upon melting, reveals a creature preserved in the ice, the increasingly blatant realization that industrial progress does not level the social terrain — nor prepares the worker for revolutionary struggle — slowly dissolves some of the most enduring political beliefs of modernity. And as the illusion of progressivism fades, the need resurfaces to once more develop our own collective capacity to investigate, construct, and articulate the common interests of different proletarian struggles, since we now know that such convergence will not occur spontaneously.

Over the past two centuries, capitalism has not only become a more complex and multifaceted social system — proving capable of integrating the most intense social conflicts, economic crises, and natural catastrophes into its operations — but has also rooted itself in unprecedented ways into the fabric of the planet. At the same time, many of the social tendencies associated with industrialization and the expansion of capitalist sociability — those said to “equalize” the conditions of the global proletariat — have shown their limits. Instead of abolishing or replacing “pre-capitalist” social relations, capitalism has learned to reinvent them. Instead of bringing workers’ experiences closer together, it has learned to manipulate these material and cultural differences. It invented new forms of slavery, reappropriated gendered violence and personal domination for the impersonal aims of capital, and turned even the planet’s metabolic stability — on which it itself depends — into new frontiers for financial speculation. The expectation that “industrial progress” would prepare the ground for growing proletarian association and politicization has not been fulfilled.

The main effect of this divorce between industrial progress and proletarian modernization is visible on the margins of the capitalist system. Today, the peripheral countries of global capitalism —

formerly called the “third world” — no longer represent a “backward” or “undeveloped” phase of capitalism. On the contrary, it is precisely from the point of view of the periphery that we can most clearly see how the mixture of the advanced and the archaic, technological progress and political reaction, democratic institutions and dictatorship in the favelas, financialization and extractivism... all conspire to produce increasingly sophisticated forms of capital accumulation. One of capitalism’s most astonishing social transformations has been its ability to increasingly unify the circuits of value and commodities without needing to unify workers’ experiences and living conditions — indeed, the fragmentation of the world of labor has become a condition for maintaining its domination.

This new historical dynamic — in which social fractures and conflicts do not obstruct but rather fuel capitalism — runs counter to the analysis presented in the *Manifesto*. This does not mean that, in 1848 Europe, there were no valid reasons for the conclusions drawn there. What hindsight reveals as problematic is treating that specific historical situation as if it pointed to a universal tendency that revolutionary movements everywhere could count on strategically.

Moreover, faith in this supposed tendency led many communists to abandon their primary task. Instead of investigating all the concrete struggles moving against capitalism to identify their points of convergence, many communist currents focused only on those struggles that appeared to carry the “progressive germ” of capital itself, focusing on the organization of wage-labor assuming they would be capable of transforming industrial and cultural progress into weapons against capitalists. This excluded a vast political tradition of different peoples — a diversity of struggles that, throughout capitalism’s history, have resisted the transformation of people and communities into waged labor — as well as struggles that occur beneath the surface of the formal workplace: in the sphere of social reproduction, care, domestic labor, etc. Even when such struggles were acknowledged, the analysis in the *Manifesto* was often used as a metric to determine which of these conflicts should be prioritized in strategic considerations. In other words, instead of identifying common interests from the real diversity of proletarian struggle, communists increasingly judged which struggles counted as real and important based on a few pre-identified traits presumed to represent capitalism’s inherent revolutionary tendencies.

If contemporary capitalist transformations render obsolete any hope that capital might prepare the ground for its own supersession, this does not mean the communist horizon has been lost. On the contrary: it is precisely now — as the fantasy of capital's self-sundering loses its historical grounding — that the *Manifesto's* definition of a communist becomes more comprehensible and relevant. More than that, only in this context can the practical content specific to communism really be formulated, once we abandon the illusion that the convergence and articulation of anti-capitalist struggles could be delegated to capitalism itself. Yet this belief is difficult to let go of, and it often reappears in various forms in the strategic and theoretical horizon of revolutionaries.

It is not our goal to critique this or that radical political current. As we have seen, communists are not supposed to offer an alternative revolutionary theory that competes with others, nor to immediately disqualify any strategic vision arising from contemporary political struggles. What interests us is to point out how a belief in a spontaneous process of convergence can remain active even in radical political orientations that explicitly seek to respond to the recent transformations of capitalism. In its raw form, this belief delegates to the social world the task of unifying the many fronts of resistance against it — but this can take different shapes, producing entirely different political visions.

For instance, one way to preserve this belief is to accept that contemporary capitalism does not prepare the working class to become an international revolutionary force, but to claim instead that another quality — shared across struggles — still exists and can be relied on to ensure convergence. One way to assert this is by appealing to abstract ideas about the essence of political processes and social dissatisfaction. If all political struggle is ultimately a demand raised by a portion of the population in response to something lacking, and if what people lack — such as better living conditions — only exists for them as ideas, words, or images, then political unity could be forged through language and symbols. Here, the spontaneous convergence of struggles is underwritten by the popularity of shared demands: “the people” would be a political subject formed by various groups whose demands find unity through a leader, a narrative, or a slogan capable of aggregating them. This argument abandons the expectation that capitalism will unify workers' experiences, but replaces it with the belief that the very nature of political demands makes them converge eventually

under a broad enough discourse — no need for actual organizing, just the skill to stitch these political demands into a coherent political vision.

The same logic can be followed to arrive at the opposite conclusion. One could argue that the working class as a revolutionary subject is in crisis, and that broad agendas and coalitions are part of the problem — a control mechanism that traps popular revolt in the state and its electoral processes. Referring to another abstract political philosophy, one might then argue that humans always need to cooperate and invent ways to survive collectively. This innate creative power would be the source both of rebellion and of spontaneous convergence: the people, once freed from capitalism and the state, would naturally unite and cooperate. Though different from the previous argument, this line also assumes a hidden homogenizing force, our social creativity, that will eventually lay the groundwork for political unity — without conscious effort.

If the two views above rely on philosophical generalizations about humanity to preserve the belief in convergence, there's a third approach that avoids abstraction: a political view that, while recognizing the crisis of progressivism, still bets on the unifying power of capitalism's own crisis. It accepts that capital no longer organizes workers, but asserts that this merely relocates the universalist potential of labor. Instead of seeing it in workers' struggles for better jobs or higher wages, this view locates it in struggles against work — protests with impossible demands, wildcat strikes, spontaneous uprisings — which express a deep rejection of the deadly spiral of labor and capital. These seemingly isolated acts would signal a shared refusal of the system, connecting them to a universal anti-systemic horizon. This line of thought seeks to extend the *Manifesto's* original thesis, seeing a continuity between capitalist modernization and its current collapse: capitalism still prepares its own downfall — not by absorbing workers into a homogenizing logic, but by expelling more and more people, forming a global mass with nothing left to lose.

Another possible response to capitalism's crisis argues that the promise of social development tied to formal employment was always historically narrow. It finds the basis for radical unity in the global archive of the subaltern: enslaved Black people, survivors of Indigenous genocide, women under patriarchy, and all those who have lived — since the origins of capitalism — on the margins of formal labor and its “civilizational” promise. Trusting the shared potential of excluded peoples'

resistance, this perspective sees a common interest in the subversive traditions made invisible by capitalist modernity — a superposition of interests among those subjugated, exterminated, and oppressed to make European modernization possible. Like the previous position, it claims that the basis for a global radical alliance will come from outside formal labor and traditional mediations (parties, unions, etc.). But here, it's not only about disruptive acts: these forces have their own traditions, social structures, and ways of fighting, and these point to a shared horizon of post-capitalist life.

A final way to preserve the belief in spontaneous convergence — oddly similar to the *Manifesto's* original argument — relies on the existence of a scientifically proven global climate crisis to unify the proletariat's common interests. Though it replaces the *Manifesto's* focus on labor with a denunciation of planetary destruction, both invoke scientific evidence (political economy in one case, climate science in the other) as the shortcut from fragmented struggles to coordinated international front. Even strands of environmentalism hostile to Marxism often task science with revealing structural facts about capitalism and making visible the common stakes of global political action. A global climate crisis becomes a call for a global struggle, even recuperating class struggle logic, since its effects are distributed unequally along lines of class, race, and gender. Even the vanguardist role once assigned to communists appears again, now inhabited by climate scientists and academics — those with the “clear understanding” needed to lead us forward.

These arguments are rough sketches of possible ways to respond to the current crisis. No one likely identifies fully with any of them. But they show how easy, and common, it is to defer reckoning with the fact that we cannot rely on any structural tendency of capitalism — or of its crisis — to ensure the proliferation, articulation, or accumulation of proletarian struggles. The fragmentation of the left will not be resolved through a short-cut. It falls to all of us to stitch together this patchwork however we can.

Ironically, the existence of these conflicting strategies is itself an index of a paradoxical multiplicity — all interpretations opposing each other, yet all betting on a common shortcut to bridge the particular and the general. As noted earlier, our aim is not to critique the achievements or theoretical rigor of these propositions. Every movement that produces real political gains carries a

truth we must take seriously. Moreover, movements who think strategically in terms of such a spontaneous convergence nevertheless operate in the real world, which is not structured in that way. This means that, in practice, they likely already engage in the work of political “stitching”, even if these practices are obscured by their professed belief on a converging horizon.

Still, taken together, these visions reveal a landscape as fragmented as contemporary capitalist society itself. In theory, each imagines itself as a new global vision for struggle. But in practice, they confirm that “the real relations arising from an existing class struggle” — that is, today’s various proletarian fronts — produce different, sometimes antagonistic conceptions of our social totality. Thus, there is no other starting point for communist practice today than to begin from this multiplicity — from this “historical movement going on before our eyes” — and to reflect on what it means to construct, under present conditions, the perspective of the proletarian movement as a whole.

III

The peripheralization of the world

But what is "happening under our eyes"? We need to better understand this historical transformation in capitalism if we want to rise to the challenges that confront communists today.

One way of understanding the erosion of the social terrain in contemporary capitalism without reducing this process to a mere question of individualism or ideology is what we call the *peripheralization* thesis. Its most immediate and well-known formulation is that, today, the social conditions on the peripheries of capitalism are expanding towards the center of the capitalist system. In more detail, what this thesis argues is that there is a growing split between economic and social development, an effective disintegration of the living conditions of the proletariat, rooted in the transformations of their material conditions of survival, which makes any naive attempt to appeal to class unity and solidarity anachronistic and idealistic. In other words, it's not that, by isolating themselves from each other, workers today are acting against their own interests: it's their own interests - what people actually need to do to survive - that don't necessarily align today with the formation of a broad political group, guided by common demands and needs. What we call the "peripheralization thesis", however, does not treat this situation as the effect of a terminal crisis of capitalism. This interpretation of contemporary capitalism suggests that social conditions that were once relegated only to the periphery of the system - where social democracy and capitalist modernity never fully took hold - are now being adopted even in the so-called "first world" countries. In other words: on the one hand, this is indeed a new historical moment, on the other, the content of this novelty is not really that new.

It is therefore clear why this process is called "peripheralization": it refers to the expansion of social conditions from the periphery of capitalism towards the center of the system. It's no wonder that in the 1980s, the word "Brazil" ceased to refer only to a country and became, in the mouths of some sociologists and economic analysts, a verb. The "brazilianization" of the world would be precisely

the social process that brings out, from within advanced and modern economies, characteristics that would be associated with "backward" countries like Brazil: cities broken by blatant social inequality, the symbiosis between direct violence and the impersonality of the forces of capital, a police force responsible for maintaining a racial apartheid, the perpetual crisis of democratic institutions, etc. It is important to note that the peripheralization thesis does not suggest that there is a new force or trend in capitalism, leading all countries to imitate what is happening on the periphery - on the contrary, it argues that this effect is what happens when capitalism is allowed to return to its normal functioning. Historical processes such as the European modernization of the early twentieth century, the "golden years" after the Second World War and the Japanese boom of the 1980s actually represent exceptions to the regular dynamics of capitalism and depend on the intervention of other forces to be explained, such as the use of the spoils of colonial expansion to create a social security system, or the need to react and contain the advance of the communist movement throughout the twentieth century.

This is an important difference, because the thesis that we are experiencing a collapse of capitalism requires a detailed and complex explanation: after all, what would have happened, what would have been the insurmountable limit that capitalism encountered and that would be responsible for the state of perpetual crisis in which we now live? Although it doesn't contradict any argument of this kind, the peripheralization thesis affirms something simpler. It is possible that capitalism has found a limit to economic growth based on the productivity of labor - be it an internal limit or an external one, such as the destruction of nature - but that is not what is essential. The really important historical change is that it has become possible to accumulate value and exploit labour power without having to organize workers as a collateral effect, that is, it has become possible to treat workers within capitalist social relations in the same way that capitalism had already been treating those it kept on the margins of those same relations. This change - which certainly depends on the technological advances of recent decades and other recent social transformations - may even have been accelerated in response to different obstacles to productive growth, but it should not be treated as a mere temporary effect, something that a new cycle of innovations or material abundance would reverse. There is something about the peripheralization of the world that allows capitalism to operate with fewer obstacles and detours - which is why explaining the logic of

peripheralization is not very different from explaining how capitalism has always operated in many places.

As a result, instead of the slow expansion of the welfare state, liberal ideology and low-intensity democracy, bringing characteristics of advanced capitalist countries to the periphery, it is social hybridity, conflictual heterogeneity and the typology of informal work, fostered in the peripheries of capitalism since its emergence, that are now expanding towards the center. In short, the peripheralization thesis states that there has never been a necessary connection between capitalist development and the creation of a modern social space - the alignment between capitalist economy and social development has been local and circumstantial, and conditional on the deepening of social and natural destruction everywhere else. Not only that, but the hybrid forms of domination cultivated in countries, neighborhoods and slums where this alignment never existed, now emerge as the set of social technologies most adaptable and applicable to capitalist control and production. The process of peripheralization therefore indicates that the more the social space becomes fractured, hybrid and heterogeneous, the more capital can circulate without the obstacles of human inertia.

But if this way of describing the recent transformations of capitalism goes in the right direction, then it should be able to shed light on the political challenges we mentioned in the previous chapter. Let's see if this is the case.

The vulgarization of social space

A crucial consequence of the process of peripheralization - and one that directly affects any politics concerned with the common interests of the proletariat - is what we call the vulgarization of social space. By "social space" we mean, here, the space where we share our social experiences - not a geographical space, but the communicative dimension, which encompasses things like public space, the circulation of discourses and information, etc. The simplest way to define this process is by comparing vulgarization to the opposite process, "popularization". When we say that an author popularizes an idea, it may well be that the idea in question is being simplified, as in a popular

science book, but its essential content is being preserved and the popularization is making that idea accessible to a greater number of people. The vulgarization of something, however, goes in the opposite direction. When we say that an idea has been vulgarized, it doesn't just mean that it has become more accessible, but also that it has been trivialized - something has been lost in the process of disseminating its content. In popularization, the more an idea circulates, the more it ceases to be private and becomes public, many people understand the same thing, while in vulgarization, the more something circulates, the more its public dimension becomes private, i.e. everyone uses and understands it as they see fit.

Now, the condition for the interpretation of each person, or each social group, to be sufficiently different from one another for the circulation of an idea or discourse in the public space to become vulgarized is precisely that the experience of the world is not being leveled, creating a shared social environment with the same references. The social references - the real components of social life - determine whether we are experiencing a process of popularization or social vulgarization. We are undoubtedly living in a time of the greatest connectivity and circulation of information that humanity has ever seen, but this does not mean that there is any degree of homogeneity in people's social experience, and therefore the conditions for an idea or discourse to circulate, producing a new common sense or a new political vision. There is no point in the wide circulation of an idea or resource of interest to the people if what really makes a difference to each person's life, the concrete environment with which we interact on a daily basis, is increasingly fragmented, creating very different forms of appropriation of what connects and crosses these different contexts. Vulgarization is one of the effects of a common material circulating through a fragmented social terrain: it will be absorbed and refunctionalized according to the needs of each social fragment. The vulgarization of social space is, in this sense, an important consequence of the process of peripheralization, a way of describing how a class structure can continue to exist - a common circuit, connecting life, work, capital and surplus value - without this producing a common class experience, since the social environment of each worker, category or group can be quite different from one another, even incompatible in terms of values and the way they organize themselves.

It is very common to approach this issue from another angle, arguing that neoliberalism simply alienates people from collective life, promoting an individualistic and atomized life. The paradox of this way of describing the effects of contemporary capitalism is that, at the same time as it denounces a crisis of public space and the end of a certain sense of collectivity in the working class, the final effect of this process would still be social homogenization, a great levelling: capital would still be responsible for equalizing us all through a new experience of atomized individuality.

A fundamental problem with the thesis that neoliberalism has simply forced everyone into the position of individuals in competition with each other is that it doesn't take into account the real effects of capitalism's abandonment of the organization of workers' lives: in practice, this process not only means a greater disintegration of the collective experience of the proletariat, but also a greater reliance by workers on alternative forms of survival, such as support networks, extended families, churches, etc. It is only a very particular social group that, still managing to guarantee its social reproduction almost exclusively through money, now finds itself truly isolated and atomized. For many people, the effect has been the opposite, with an increased degree of dependence on others - often aggravated even by the contrast with the prevailing discourse, which values competition and independence. Not surprisingly, the crisis in the world of work has also led to a crisis in the work of social reproduction, intensifying the care work carried out almost always by women within the family structure, in the shadow of monetary exchange.

For us, it is important not to be content with treating this process of fragmentation of the working class as if it were just an ideological effect of neoliberalism, which would have tricked workers into retreating into cultural bubbles or fighting only for their private interests. This way of thinking doesn't help us for two reasons. Firstly, because it makes it seem as if very little would be needed to reverse the situation politically: a critique of the neoliberal discourse would be enough and workers would once again start looking for their association and recognize their common cause. Secondly, because this explanation also feeds the belief that we criticized in the previous chapter, giving the impression that, once we remove this disintegrating force - supposedly responsible for the decline of class consciousness and the emergence of so-called "identity" politics, for example - we could simply return to the revolutionary politics of the last century.

What's more, part of the reason why this reading of contemporary individualism continues to be promoted without much criticism has to do with the very process of vulgarization that we mentioned here. Even though there is indeed a discourse that increasingly promotes the centrality of the individual in competition with others, its absorption and use in different social contexts can vary greatly. For example, even though it is visibly hegemonic, the discourse of entrepreneurship is socially "vulgarized": in some places, popular entrepreneurship creates bonds and brings people together, in others, it actually establishes unbridled competition, even becoming a model for subjectivity. But as the referents of each of these fragmented contexts are different, it is not possible to register these variations without making some effective change of position. Without observing how the referents of each social space differ, everything happens as if individualism were really a leveling process, since it is truly dominant in the field of discourse and images.

The vulgarization of social space therefore creates a new kind of political impasse: it is possible to observe very general trends, which seem to cover and structure the whole of social life, and yet not observe any of the consequences we would expect from a discourse having become hegemonic. The particular appropriation of widely circulated content creates a kind of obstacle to the political challenge of connecting particular struggles to a larger collective vision, obscuring, behind the great mass of more or less similar materials that everyone consumes and produces, how diverse social experience has become. And this superficial impression that we are all going through the radical transformations of peripheral capitalism in a similar way can reinforce the expectation of a great popular political convergence, blinding us to the real extent of our challenges. In a context of vulgarization, it is not enough to name different social demands in the same way in order to create a common political field; we need to rearticulate social reality itself and build, from the articulation of concrete struggles, a common social ground capable of supporting an effectively shared revolutionary vision.

The saturation of political forms

The difficulty of navigating and interacting with a fragmented social terrain brings us to another effect of peripheralization, more explicitly political, which we can call saturation. The term comes from chemistry, where it describes the moment when a solution can no longer dissolve any substance in its medium - for example, when we pour sugar into a glass of water and, after a certain amount, the crystals just settle to the bottom, unable to mix with the liquid. We call political saturation the moment when a given political form loses its traction in reality, becoming incapable of naming real processes, of interacting with them and transforming them - it's the moment when the form no longer mixes with its social environment.

This saturation effect is noticeable in several of the political orientations that were formulated on the premise that the social terrain in modern capitalism would always tend to produce a greater homogenization of workers - whether these orientations were left-wing or right-wing. In a way, the process of peripheralization introduces another political opposition in addition to the well-established one between "left" and "right": the difference between political forms that depend on a spontaneous process of convergence and those that already take into account the existence of a vulgarized and divided social space. Not surprisingly, there may be much more similarity between conservatives and progressives who depend equally on maintaining an institutionality that is already in tatters than between a left that ignores peripheralization and the potentially radical political energy that arises from peripheral social fractures.

In fact, the problem of political saturation could help us understand why debates about the "left" or "right" character of the June Journeys in Brazil have never led us to any interesting strategic conclusions. Analyzed from the angle of political saturation, the famous dispute over the role of June in the consolidation of reactionary forces over the last decade could be re-evaluated. Instead of the game of mirrors where one part of the left blames the other for adopting the wrong tactics, opening up space for the strengthening of our political enemies, we could describe 2013 as a turning point where an entire progressive political system - made up of institutional, reformist, revolutionary, autonomist, anarchist forces, etc. - found itself unable to channel the social forces of a fractured social terrain not because of an incompatibility of values, but because of the forms of political organization that underpin this entire system. The right wing that gained ground,

therefore, was not the one that expressed the supposedly latent conservatism of the people - nor the one that would be effectively "revolutionary" in its objectives - but the one that managed to take advantage of the circumstantial alignment between its ideals - such as criticism of democratic institutions, praise for individualism and private life, the centrality of the market in the face of the weakening of public forms, etc. - and the new cleavages in this socio-economic terrain. A right wing that has found ways to interact with its social environment, regardless of the specific political outcome of this interaction. The hypothesis of political saturation will thus allow us to distinguish the impotence of the left in adapting to the new historical conditions from the real power of the "bolsonarista" right, avoiding a series of sociological fantasies about the rise of an almost omnipotent Brazilian extreme right.

Moreover, the inverse tendency to try to live up to the political energy of our time by describing contemporary revolts and forms of struggle as essentially "formless" - usually correlating the crisis of formal labor to the crisis of political forms - can also be put into another perspective. After all, it is from the exclusive point of view of modernist left progressivism - whether of a more moderate or radical flavour - that contemporary revolts explode as if they had no specific form: it is an effect of the contrast between an already saturated political vision, incapable of interacting with these new processes, and new political forms already shaped by a vulgar social terrain, with their own normative and organizational commitments, which look nothing like the convergent and homogenized class struggle we expected to find.

Political autophagy

In a context of political saturation, in which the interaction between the political forms of the left and the social terrain is compromised, what happens to this system of radical political organizations and ideas? One possibility is that, unable to be guided by the concrete effects it produces in social reality, the left turns against itself. This is the paradox of "autophagy", the grotesque gesture of ingesting one's own body: the same desperate act of feeding oneself in order to stay alive is what accelerates one's destruction.

In its most extreme version, the autophagy of the left appears as an active effort to eliminate and sabotage other political sectors of the same camp, under the premise that they constitute a real obstacle to political transformation, but in general, this dynamic presents itself in a milder form, as a constant critical evaluation of all other forms of action and political theory within the left. But what would lead an explicitly emancipatory political tendency to decide to focus its energies on criticizing - and, in more serious cases, actually fighting - other fronts of struggle that are relatively close to it? The simplest way to understand this process is by mobilizing the theses we have presented so far.

Let's make a quick summary. The process of peripheralization allows capitalism to unify and homogenize the circuits of value without, however, having to organize workers' lives in such a way as to bring their social experiences closer together. In this context of fragmentation, in which the social terrain is divided up based on the different ways in which groups, categories and even geographical regions manage to guarantee their survival, their concrete referents are also differentiated, the social environments with which each fraction of the working class interacts both at their workplaces and outside of it. We call vulgarization the way in which everything that circulates in common throughout society is appropriated differently by each of these social fragments. We then call saturation the consequence of this process on political organizations and movements that try to interact with the working class as if they still shared a common social environment, the fruit of the social homogenization produced by labor in capitalism. In this context, radical ideas and actions no longer produce the same effects, either because not even popular agendas are able to bring the masses together, or because we have become incapable of evaluating the reasons why the people seem to align themselves with reactionary forces.

What we can conclude from this summary is that, in the context of peripheralization, the political system of left-wing organizations itself becomes a small fragment of the social fabric. Left-wing political organizations - whether they like it or not - share many common referents: similar ideas, behaviors, stories, and this when they are not made up of social strata that are also somewhat homogeneous, further expanding the reach of this shared context. It follows that the last reliable indicators that any left-wing orientation can access are those produced by other fractions of the left

itself. Not surprisingly, it is easier to analyze the contradictions between a revolutionary political organization and the social class of its militants than it is to apply this type of criticism to other social spaces. This is because the left is more familiar with the particular social context, culture and political economy of its own sector. On the one hand, because of vulgarization, the lefts can only look at their own shared context, and on the other, because of the saturation of their forms of struggle, political failures and defeats are growing in number, making all left currents easy targets for each other. The necessary social conditions are thus in place to turn political autophagy into the last source of energy available to the already politically saturated left.

As the internal conflicts between left-wing tendencies and projects become the most relevant regulators of political action, some side effects begin to emerge. On the one hand, it becomes very important for each political line to differentiate itself from the others - since the only available strategic indicator we have comes from the mistakes and failures of other movements - which leads organizations to overvalue their differences and hide their contradictions, compromises and impurities. This process, in turn, makes it even more difficult to interact with the new social terrain, which is increasingly conflictual and full of contradictions - further reinforcing the political saturation and subsequent autophagy of the left. On the other hand, since practically the entire left-wing camp ends up depending on these minute internal criticisms and differentiations, the aggregate effect of this internal process is a generalized disenchantment of people with the entire revolutionary camp. In other words, exactly the same dynamic that confirms each political position at the expense of defeating the others signals to outsiders that the entire leftist camp is wrong and lost. This, in turn, also reinforces political saturation and restarts the whole autophagic process.

A third harmful effect of this process is that the more it intensifies, the more it seems that the only way to stop it is to give up on finding a common political goal for the revolutionary movement and instead appeal to the need to unite against an enemy. Despite the appearance of pragmatism - putting aside differences to face a common threat - this solution carries with it a very great danger. This is because no real political strategy can depend on overestimating the strength of opponents: we can't underestimate it, it's true, but there can be no benefit in representing the opponent as all-powerful either - not least because if no victory is possible we will simply lose the reason to fight.

However, in the context of left-wing autophagy, references to the extreme right, fascism, the forces of capital cooptation, etc., often don't stem from real confrontations and evaluations, but from the rhetorical need to create a motivation capable of momentarily interrupting the fratricide so that some particular political line can be heard. The more intense the autophagic process, the greater the temptation to represent the right as an overwhelming and limitless force. And if it has no limits, then its presence would potentially encompass the entire working class, which we then look at with deep suspicion.

The thesis of the peripheralization of the world, however, is not a pessimistic or defeatist thesis. In fact, by introducing a series of political dynamics that can be explained by the difficulty of the revolutionary left adapting to our historical moment, this thesis also recovers our capacity for action and response, avoiding ways of describing our situation in which all force and agency is on the side of capital and growing reactionarism. Instead, the peripheralization thesis proposes a hard bargain: it is possible to reopen the communist horizon - but on the condition that we take responsibility for inventing and maintaining what, until now, we considered to be a burden of capital itself.

IV

The peripheralization of the Lefts

We began the book by proposing a return to the definition of communists in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. We argue that, in essence, the position of communists is determined by their practical concern with the connections and articulations between the different fractions of the proletarian movement - that is, by the investigation of their common interests and the construction of a totality based on these concrete interests.

We also explained that the image of communists as a dirigiste vanguard does not stem so much from what is said about communists in the Manifesto, but from Marx and Engels' specific analysis of the tendencies inherent in industrial progress. At the time, they concluded that there was an internal and necessary dynamic to capitalism itself that would lead, as a side effect, to a growing homogenization and association among workers - a crucial shortcut in consolidating the proletariat as an international revolutionary force. And, from the point of view of this analysis, it would even be easier for communists to learn about the common interests of the different fronts of proletarian struggle by studying the general movements of capitalism, rather than starting from the fragmented reality of these political movements. As we have seen, what seemed to be a necessary dimension of the capitalist mode of production turned out to be a dynamic confined to a certain time and space in the history of capitalism. Eventually, industrial and technical progress, which feeds the spiral of capitalist accumulation, managed to get rid of the need to form a working class that was increasingly united in its values and experiences - and with that, the strategic shortcut that these communists were counting on fell apart.

We have also seen how difficult it is to give up the belief in this sort of "factory defect" that capitalism carries within itself. To demonstrate this, we have described - albeit in a somewhat caricatured way - different political orientations that, in essence, function as compromise solutions: that is, political visions that, on the one hand, recognize the limits in the analysis of capitalism presented in the Manifesto, but which, on the other hand, aim to find some other justification for

why, even so, we could still count on a convergent historical tendency that would transform our particular struggles into a common, global movement. Going in the opposite direction, we claim that it is precisely the end of this illusion, as a result of the recent transformations of capitalism, that today highlights the effective content of the definition of communism as a set of practices aimed at articulating and consolidating the different struggles of the contemporary proletariat. In fact, it is because there are no shortcuts that there must be communists.

The following chapter then proposes an analysis of the historical changes we are experiencing based on what we call the peripheralization thesis. This way of understanding the disintegration of the working class is interesting because, at the same time as it recognizes that we have entered a new historical moment, with new social and economic structures, our thesis refers this change to a return to the way capitalism has always operated in the peripheries of the world system. In peripheral capitalism, there is no denying the existence of the working class as a contingent of labor constantly mobilized and expelled by capital. However, the ways of life of the proletariat remain extremely diverse, often forming irreconcilable social fractures.

Using the thesis of peripheralization as a general framework in this new context, we introduce three concepts to qualify what can happen to a revolutionary movement that still remains dependent on the belief that capital would flatten social differences and connect the entire proletariat by itself: vulgarization, saturation and autophagy. The first concept explains the illusion that, just because commodities circulate extremely easily, there would also be great homogeneity in the social terrain through which they pass. In fact, the vulgarization of social space describes a disconnection between the circuit of value and the different social environments of the workers who consume and produce commodities: things may circulate as never before, but they are appropriated and understood according to the particular referents of different contexts. The second concept, saturation, describes the disconnection between the left and this new fractured social terrain. In a context of peripheralization, in addition to the already consolidated opposition between "left" and "right", a new type of split is created: it is the opposition between, on the one hand, modern or "progressive" orientations - which, whether left-wing or not, still depend on the belief in a

homogeneity of the working class - and, on the other, new political forces that try to operate within this new framework of the shattering of the common proletarian experience.

Finally, we introduce the concept of autophagy to describe what happens within an already saturated radical political system, when left-wing organizations have no other way to orient themselves than by the failure of other movements in the same field. We describe three effects of this process of mutual self-destruction: a tendency to eliminate any contradiction in our representation of our own political line, as this makes it easier to differentiate ourselves from other left orientations; a tendency to reinforce popular disenchantment with the left as a whole, as all our energy is spent on raising criticisms against ourselves; and a tendency to conjure up a powerful reactionary threat as motivation to overcome this internal crisis.

It is true that learning to deal with the remains of the twentieth-century left is part of the challenge for communists today, but it is not our main task. What is even more important is that we learn to navigate the fractures and dynamics inherent in the process of peripheralization, because it is the political struggles that manage to interact and advance on this new terrain that will pave the way for the renewal of the proletarian movement as a whole. But what specific contradictions does this new historical condition bring to the fore?

The multiplicity of Lefts

The first of these contradictions intensified by peripheralization concerns the very plurality of lefts. After all, it is very different to approach the multiplicity of political orientations against the backdrop of social unity or fragmentation. If we assume that there is a fundamental unity between all left-wing struggles, then the plurality of struggles will be understood as a superficial phenomenon, determined by circumstances: there are many immediate agendas, many fronts of struggle defined by institutions, places of housing and work, etc. - but the more anti-systemic and structural a struggle really is meant to be, the more it should have an effect on the entire social space and, therefore, the more gregarious and unitary it should be. A particular movement, organization or agenda that resists integrating itself into a collective effort to attack the most central structures of

capitalism could only be working to reinforce those same structures and disarticulate the revolutionary camp. However, if we assume that, in a fragmented social space, the very structure that links the production of commodities to workers' lives is also more heterogeneous and varied, then things take a different turn. This is because this shift from the most immediate agendas to the common anti-capitalist horizon will not necessarily lead us from plurality to unity - and an organization's resistance to this integrated political vision may actually be the expression of a structural aspect of this very social formation. Returning once again to the example of June 2013, which we mentioned in the previous chapter: it is true that, beyond the fight against the fare increase and the more ambitious agenda of zero fares, there was also the vision of "a life without turnstiles" - but even this general and agglutinating vision found different resonances across Brazil. For example, although there were significant protests in Bahia during the June Journeys, directly adhering to the "passe livre" agenda, it was the demonstrations against the genocide of black people by the police that provided more ballast for the struggle in the region in the following years. Does this mean that one of the two orientations represented a "superstructural" struggle, while the other confronted a more fundamental structure? Slavery and the overexploitation of wage labor cannot be effectively dissociated in the history of capitalism in Brazil - but neither do they overlap in the same way everywhere.

Taking the multiplicity of lefts as an indication of the very fragmentation of the social fabric doesn't mean that there aren't common interests, shared structures and deeper dynamics in capitalism that demand unified efforts and concentrated strategies. It doesn't mean that we should simply keep each struggle separate. Rather, it means that "getting to the root" of the problems does not guarantee that we will make the differences disappear, since the very "deep" structure of peripheral capitalism is full of edges and fractures. We still have to go through the immediate presentation of struggles and their limits in order to build the communist movement, but in this process, some superficial differences will dissolve in the collective political struggle, while others will not - and these can teach us about the structural fractures of the peripheral terrain, demanding new strategic and organizational arrangements.

Political ecology

One concept that helps us change our view of the plurality of the left is that of political ecology, that is, approaching the field of organizations as if they formed a kind of ecosystem. It is very common to explain the difference between "ecology" and "economics" based on a difference in focus: ecology is about nature and economics is about relationships between people. But there is a deeper and more important difference than that. An economy is, above all, a way in which people's lives - and especially their survival - are connected through an established network of causes and consequences. For example, it is part of the field of economics to study how changes in labor productivity in one sector or in agricultural conditions in a given region will influence the price of food or the value of wages elsewhere in the world. When we talk about economics, we're talking about something like a unified field where changes and disturbances in one place can affect many others - like a stone thrown into a pond, producing ripples that spread in all directions.

An ecology is something a little different. Unlike the economy, where things are already connected and only survive because of that connection, an ecology or ecosystem is a unit where the connections are not all given in advance. A habitat where plants, different fungi and animals coexist is certainly shaped by these creatures and the different connections they establish, but it is possible that one of these beings migrates to another place and starts to connect with another habitat, leaving the previous one behind. It's also possible that beings inhabiting the same place have such different characteristics that they belong to completely different ecologies, because they depend on different creatures and natural processes - like fish that depend on a specific degree of water salinity that, for other creatures in that region, is totally irrelevant. In an economy, we are born entangled in this network and cannot escape it, whereas in an ecology, we need to adapt in order to connect, or find another system that suits us better. There is something about the idea of ecology that forces us to consider the specific quality of the connections and forms of dependency at play, as these are not universal and can break down or transform.

This distinction is relevant to us because one of the consequences of peripheralization for left-wing organizations concerns the need to develop an ecological "intuition" as part of their different strategic visions.

In fact, one of the most important ways in which the belief in what we previously called the tendency towards convergence or social homogeneity presents itself is as a promise that all structural anticapitalist struggles would be connected through political economy. Because of the economic connection between all parts of the capitalist system, a disturbance in one part of the world of workers could, in principle, reverberate in others because of the underlying economic unity that connects all of us. It is undoubtedly true that capitalism forms a world economy and that it is therefore impossible to consider patterns of accumulation and circulation of commodities without taking into account this international network of causes and consequences. However, from a political point of view - which is not only concerned with the fall or rise in prices, the shortage or greater supply of labour, etc., but with creating new forms of popular organization and power - peripheralization signals a break with this essential connectivity. Instead of being able to resort to the economic substrate as a guarantee of articulation between different struggles or of continuity between a particular struggle and the anti-capitalist horizon, organizations now need to think more actively about how they connect with others and what the aggregate effect of their actions is on the correlation of forces. In other words, we need to understand our particular place within a larger political ecology, a space shared with other concrete political actors where their actions and those of other actors influence each other.

The first difficulty that this produces - and that each organization needs to invent how to confront - is internal. If capitalist political economy guaranteed that a local political intervention could spread and potentially disrupt the entire system, then every political organization would have reason to consider itself a protagonist in the revolutionary movement. It's ironic, given that the vision of the fathers of political economy, such as Adam Smith, was precisely that economic exchange would reconcile self-centeredness and the common good, with each citizen contributing to society by caring only about themselves. There is something of this spirit that is preserved in the idea that, because we are all connected through the political-economic effects of a given group's

actions, that group could formulate its own path without direct concern for how it affects others political actors, since one organization's fight for revolution would already be the fight for revolution for everyone. If we start from this assumption, the news of social and political fragmentation that we are analyzing here could produce a wound in our political narcissism: after all, what does it mean to preserve a revolutionary horizon when we depend on other organizations to connect our actions to the structural effects we aim to produce? Under these conditions, how is our conception of militancy transformed, our justification for adhering to a particular strategic orientation, our way of conceiving the successes and failures of other forms of struggle with which we don't agree, but on which we depend, at least indirectly?

This change in perspective leads to a decentering of political action, forcing us to consider not only our interaction with other political groups, and how this interdependence can both intensify and neutralize the actions of particular actors in a given ecology, but also the concrete means by which these interactions take place. It is possible, for example, that several organizations are competing for the politicization and adherence of the same small portion of the proletariat - so that a successful membership campaign by one group means the failure of another, even if the two groups act from totally different agendas. It can also happen that political actors with whom we have profound disagreements, and who act on very different fronts, nevertheless produce beneficial side effects for our struggle, such as when "influencers" on social networks make agendas and slogans more palatable to the general public, somewhat reducing workers' resistance to certain discussions, even if, in our practice, these terms mean something completely different.

Divergent political environments

However, including in our strategic considerations the networks of interdependence that connect different political organizations does not mean uncovering any harmonious or conciliatory tendencies between them. In fact, the problem of political ecology allows us to understand why the vulgarized peripheral terrain exacerbates some of the impasses and contradictions faced by contemporary political organizations.

When we discussed the idea of vulgarization, we mentioned the contrast between the space of commodity circulation - which is increasingly globally unified - and the social environments on which workers depend to survive - which are increasingly fragmented. A social environment is made up of all those concrete markers that make a real difference to a person or organization, beyond the representations and ideas we can entertain privately: what we can and cannot do and talk about, who we rely on, how we relate, etc. An environment is not the same as the social structure in general, but rather how that structure exists specifically for us, filtered by our living conditions, our goals and real needs. The police may be an institution that exists in the four corners of the city, but the way it exists in different social environments varies radically along racial and class lines that we know well - and even if a white middle-class intellectual is extremely critical of the role of the police as an effective part of his social environment, the presence of the police is most likely a marker of safety and not of harassment and risk to life. In other words, we are not talking here about the opinion or theory that a person or organization defends: a social environment is a snapshot of reality, considered from the point of view of how things in that environment interact concretely with a specific social actor. Now, just as peripheralization divides social space into fragmented contexts - whose referents form potentially conflicting environments - it also affects the political processes that emerge from this fractured terrain. In other words, even if a number of political organizations depend on each other, this does not mean that they belong to the same political environment and therefore share the same referents and cut out social reality in the same way. On the contrary, navigating the effects of this divergence between environments is a particularly important difficulty that peripheralization poses for interaction between political organizations - and between organizations and their social bases.

In general, this divergence presents itself as a contrast between perspectives, between what we consider important in our way of organizing and acting and what appears to us as part of another organization's environment. Even when this contrast is not the basis of open conflicts or irreconcilable dissent, it can silently lead to disagreements and inconsequential articulations between groups that, on paper, would seem to be interested in getting together. From our point of view, meetings can be important because of the decisions we make, preparing activities and political interventions. Whereas, from the point of view of other workers present, what really counts and

makes a difference is the conviviality provided by the meeting, or even the opportunity to eat or rest after work - so that, after the meeting, no one devotes themselves to doing anything that was agreed. Similarly, it happens that we think that people who occupied a piece of land are not interested in doing political training or taking on important tasks for the advancement of the land struggle because of their lack of commitment - but the actual threat of eviction soon reveals that it was actually a mismatch of perspectives: their iron commitment is not to the revolutionary future, but to the occupation itself, for which they would fight until the end. In other cases, it can be frustrating to realize that from the point of view of another movement, say an "equipe" of delivery app workers, which we respect and would like to work with, we are not so different from some other groups that we consider reformist sellouts: while for us, the often costly decisions we make to distance ourselves from institutional politics marks a very important difference, it is possible that the fact that the social composition of our group and that of a bland NGO is practically the same is something much more relevant to that group of workers. These are incompatibilities and conflicts that become even more contradictory and difficult to recognize because of the supposed unity or closeness that we expected to be guaranteed by all belonging to the same revolutionary political field.

If the idea of political ecology serves to draw our attention to how peripheralization demands a new type of strategic mapping, the issue of the divergence in the way different organizations "see" each other introduces a problem of a different order. This is because what is at stake is not the strength of bourgeois ideology or even the particular intentions of militants, but effectively the way in which each political organization needs to cut out and evaluate social reality in order to be able to produce effects in their respective political environments. This means that the basis of this conflict of perspectives is the very difference of concrete political action - and that there is therefore something to learn about other organizations from these disagreements, when we are able to perceive them. The effective transformation of this type of conflict ultimately depends on the production of struggles and forms of action that concretely demand new ways of "slicing" reality, new political environments: shared references that serve as the basis for another common political "language" between the organizations in question.

Survival, life and militancy

As we have noted a few times throughout the book, the process of peripheralization of capitalism is closely linked to a growing dissociation between the organization of commodities and the organization of workers - or between the progress of industry and social progress, in the sense of the development of people's living conditions. It's no wonder, then, that in order to talk about some of these impasses we need to resort in this chapter to ideas coming from the life sciences, terms like "ecology" and "environment": after all, at the heart of the process of peripheralization is a new relationship between labor and life - which means that we also need to rethink the relationship between life and militancy.

We've insisted a lot so far that the crisis of capitalist modernity has put the task of connecting and articulating different fronts of struggle back on the agenda, because this won't happen spontaneously. This has led us to consider, regionally, the question of political ecologies and, in the more local register, the mismatch between political perspectives, the result of divergences in the environments of each organization. But the main way in which peripheralization appears for a political struggle does not involve the composition between two or more organizations, but the articulation between the social and political dimension of any given struggle, that is, the way in which the social reproduction of life and its transformation are related within a particular political process. To see this, we need only think of the risks that the struggle poses to people's lives. In a modern, urban context, where political conflict is almost entirely mediated by rights, the state itself is responsible for guaranteeing some degree of harmony between the drive for political transformation and the reproduction of life, either by recognizing the instruments of workers' representation - unions, parties, etc. - or guaranteeing rights of protest as part of the expression of citizenship. All of this changes outside of this exceptional little regime. In the evergrowing periphery, stopping work to take part in a protest can mean not only a significant loss of income, but a real risk to one's life. It's a simple example of how the demands of the political struggle can come into direct conflict with the struggle to continue living.

It seems almost obscene to point out the existence of this kind of contradiction - especially to those who are not new to the periphery. However, one of the consequences of the process of peripheralization of capitalism is that it has become impossible to try to get around this impasse - or worse, to try to take advantage of the way in which the contradiction between economic and political life pushes the middle classes and all those who are still able to reconcile life, work and militancy, to the center of the struggle. The crisis of the "society of work" is causing precariousness to advance everywhere, increasing workloads, the difficulty of separating work, rest and leisure, intensifying the exploitation of the sexual division of labor... and therefore spreading, in varying degrees, the conflict between what we need to do to survive and what is needed to transform our lives.

In the midst of this crisis, it becomes clear that there is no need or guarantee that political struggle will lessen the burden of living. Even if it is true that collective struggle is the only way to transform the world, this does not mean that the personal cost of fighting is always less than that of persevering alone. On the contrary, what we see is that joining protests, organizations and political movements can bring a series of new demands, new burdens in terms of time, money and health - physical and mental - and new anxieties, creating conflicts in the family and at work and potentially alienating us from the social environments we depend on to live. None of this needs to happen, but an organizational and political effort becomes indispensable to prevent these contradictions from silently shaping our political spaces.

However, thinking about the political economy of militancy is counterintuitive for many of us. It's no coincidence that there is a very clear difference, at least in the Marxist tradition, between the theoretical tools we use to analyse the logic of capitalism - concepts like "commodity", "value", "capital" - and the way we describe political action and organization, with terms that generally come from military theory. It's as if discussions about strategy and tactics are already shielded from questions about their social and economic costs for militants - and if someone brings up this kind of consideration, they are depoliticizing the debate, preoccupied with personal gains.

It's worth noting that military strategy itself has long been thought of not just in terms of strategy and tactics, but includes at least four terms: strategy, which defines the general objectives to be achieved; tactics, which defines the specific path to be taken and how it should vary depending on the setbacks we encounter; logistics, which describes the costs of different tactics and the means we have to effectively take one path rather than another; and control, which concerns the ability of those involved in a given tactical mobilization to carry out what has been determined. In the case of armies, this is quite easy to illustrate: one's strategy might be engaging in war with an enemy in order to better position oneself geopolitically, tactics can be the selection of battles and specific ways of confronting them, logistics has to do with the material conditions of bringing food, ammunition and other resources to soldiers in battle and control, the ability of generals and strategists to effectively inform these soldiers of what to do and to receive relevant information from them in order to revise their plans. Note that logistics and control are not minor elements: if it is impossible to guarantee the feeding of a troop and good communication, a given tactical path may have to be abandoned - all four of these elements influence each other in today's military thinking. With this in mind, we can say that the political economy of militancy, the concern with the effects of the struggle on people's living conditions, is one of the main ways in which logistics and control emerge as central issues in the contemporary revolutionary movement. Political organizations that only want to propose ways out of a situation of oppression and exploitation, ignoring how much different strategies and battles consume the lives of workers, will be unable not only to carry out their plans, but to understand why they are viewed with such suspicion and contempt.

A theory for communist practice

We have raised a series of challenges that confront the revival of the communist movement today. Among them, we highlight the difficulty of redefining what it means to be a communist in light of the end of certain expectations about the shortcuts that the revolutionary struggle could find in the tendencies inherent in global capitalism itself. We emphasize the renewed importance of practices of political composition, aimed at building concrete articulations between different fronts of struggle, in a context of the peripheralization of the world and of the left—that is, at a historical moment when capitalism seems to be reconciling itself with its origins, abandoning any process of organizing the lives of workers beyond what is necessary to ensure the organization of the circuits of capital.

To argue in favor of this approach, we discuss the effects of peripheralization on left-wing organizations—both those that remain attached to an outdated historical ideal and those that directly confront the fragmentation of the social terrain. In summary, we oppose any expectation of spontaneous unification of proletarian struggles, pointing to dynamics such as vulgarization, saturation, and autophagy, in addition to highlighting some of the impasses resulting from the inherent multiplicity of struggles and political forces that make up peripheral capitalism. Among these impasses, we emphasize the need to recognize when plurality expresses structural fractures in capitalism, the challenges that political ecology and the divergence between organizational environments present for action and strategy – as well as the demand that organizations learn to respond to the growing tension between the social and political lives of their militants. In general, we present a historical picture in which all political unification and articulation becomes more laborious—while at the same time becoming even more necessary. And this certainly has effects on the process of theorizing and understanding reality.

In our initial discussion of the *Manifesto*, we mentioned that one of the difficulties in recognizing the practical tasks of communists, as militants concerned with "the common interests of the

proletarian movement as a whole," is precisely the way in which Marx and Engels' analysis of capitalism offers a purely theoretical path to recognizing these interests. In other words, if there were, in fact, a necessary side effect of all industrial progress, capable of preparing the ground for revolutionary forces as it reorganizes the productive forces, it would be much more convenient for communists to acquire a theoretical understanding of the fundamental dynamics of capitalism. This would allow them to anticipate the missteps of capital and point out the direction that different fronts of struggle need to take in order to constitute an internationalized revolutionary movement. The vanguard, as a category of militants who would see "further ahead" and therefore have better tools to direct the processes of struggle, would thus maintain a very particular relationship with theory—and, in particular, with the critique of political economy, conceived as the scientific basis of our understanding of the movements of capitalism.

In contrast to this particular conception of communists, we suggest that, once the hypothesis of a spontaneous convergence between proletarian struggles is eliminated, it becomes evident that the true position of communists is not to look ahead, but to look sideways. Communist practice is guided by the effort to move between political organizations and movements, always attentive to their articulation and the common elements that arise from within the processes of struggle. But if communist theory no longer serves to anticipate the unifying tendencies of a revolutionary subjectivity, what could its role be?

Let us note from the outset that the thesis of peripheralization—in asserting that there is no force inherent in capitalism capable of unifying the experiences and interests of workers—does not imply that it would be impossible to construct a rigorous theoretical understanding of our social reality. Peripheralization does not maintain that each person would live in a particular reality, nor that there would be no laws and dynamics specific to capitalism and peripheral sociability as a whole. It merely argues that these structures may be more complex and diverse than previously assumed, allowing for a much greater degree of diversity among the social environments and experiences of the proletariat. Thus, theories that tend to level such experiences, or that disregard these specificities, end up becoming politically useless. As we have seen, this seemingly small change has consequences for the function of theory in communist strategy—starting with the fact that this

theory can set aside the megalomaniacal ambition of explaining the collapse of global capitalism to focus instead on the conditions for exercising a specific practice: the communist practice of investigating and articulating different struggles.

However, if we take seriously the double thesis that there is no such spontaneous convergence between struggles and that the social terrain of political struggles today is structurally fragmented, some rather severe requirements are imposed on a new theory of communist practice. First, this theory must have the means to recognize how different social fragments in peripheral capitalism can lead to the emergence of struggles whose forms of organization and strategic thinking are potentially incompatible with each other. At the same time, given that communist practice aims to weave and compose these different political fronts, our theory must also offer means to recognize—if they exist—the points in common between different organizational forms, articulations that could lead to the construction of a larger and more consistent political “mosaic”. These requirements therefore suggest the construction of a theoretical framework quite different from the one we are accustomed to.

First of all, our theory could not maintain the traditional separation between the critique of political economy—the source of all the main categories used to analyze capitalism—and the theory of political organization— which we employ when thinking about collective action. If the connection between different political processes requires understanding how different social fragments influence the forms of struggle, then we need to be able to move between an analysis of this social terrain and a discussion of the forms of organization that develop out of it. Without this kind of transition between economy and organization, it would also remain impossible to assess how each political process responds to the contradictions between the reproduction and transformation of life, mentioned in the previous chapter.

A second important difference between the theory of communist practice and more traditional forms of political theorizing lies in its starting point. Rather than starting from a theory of the structure of capitalism—of what would confront all workers in a similar way—we need flexibility in our theory to keep up with the different ways in which this structure presents itself in each social

context. This flexibility implies that more aspects of the workers' situation must be grasped from this diverse reality than a general theory of capitalism could directly offer. But if the content of our theory must emerge from the struggles themselves, we nevertheless cannot just start from scratch every time. We need some fundamental determinations in order to investigate reality without fixating on immediate appearances—and, at the same time, we need to avoid these markers replacing or distorting concrete investigations carried out on a case-by-case basis. These concepts should rather serve as the basis for questions that guide concrete investigations, facilitating consideration of the challenges that peripheralization poses to political struggles and preventing us from taking a particular political experience as a general model for all situations. In this sense, the “social theory” that communist practice requires is not so much a theory of social reality, but a theory of how to investigate social and political reality.

It turns out that this effort to contextualize social structures theoretically produces a curious effect: the greater the diversity of the phenomena we want to analyze, the more abstract the general theory we use needs to be. Try it out: create a list of different objects—the more varied the list, including animals, ideas, dreams, objects, etc., the more abstract the answer to the question “what do all these things have in common?” will be. Similarly, our theory needs to include in its list of political processes the difference between struggles in the countryside and in the city, in the peripheries and in urban centers, in peripheral and developed countries, and so on. A more traditional solution would be to select two or three examples as paradigms of the struggle in general and, based on them, compare the rest of the list. In the case of the example above, it would be like having a list that includes various animals—cat, dog, chicken, mouse, insect—and defining that the dog is the “ideal animal,” so that cats are “dogs that drink milk” and chickens are “dogs that lay eggs.” But if we really want to differentiate between animals, we need abstract concepts such as “mammal,” “amphibian,” etc. Similarly, if we want to take the differences between struggles seriously and, at the same time, discover what they may have in common, we need more abstract concepts than we are used to when we talk about class struggle, parties, unions, etc. – which does not mean that these elements have no place in our analysis.

Finally, our theory of communist practice would also need to break with the traditional conception of theory in another important way. It is not just a matter of assessing or describing how each political struggle is rooted in different social conditions and contexts; we must recognize that only from the reality of each of these fronts of struggle can the means for effective articulation between them actually emerge. This is a direct consequence of admitting that there is no hidden tendency that theory could discover and then bring into different political processes. In the absence of such a shortcut, all the concrete material from which common articulations and political bridges could be built must be contained within the organizations and concrete struggles themselves. It makes no sense to expect people who study the reality of revolutionary politics to have the political or intellectual capacity to contribute, through the makings of their individual minds, to the strategic direction of this common weaving. The reasons for any articulation, its terms, and the conditions for its effectiveness arise from within these struggles themselves. In other words, it is not just a matter of describing a multiple political reality, but of recognizing that different political forms also prescribe something about reality and the means of its transformation, even indicating possible paths for communist composition. The object of our theory, therefore, is not "raw" social reality, but social reality as conceived by the different political movements involved in a given political composition. This point is subtle and deserves more careful analysis.

The break with theoretical tradition that we are proposing here is, in a way, a reversal between knowledge and political engagement, or between understanding and action. From the point of view of communist practice, there is no general theory of capitalism—or of any social system—that can be derived from conceptual elaborations and then mobilized for political struggle, either by pointing out its paths or by justifying the need for capitalism's overcoming. It is not capitalism that needs to be understood by communists, but rather the common interests that emerge from proletarian movements. It is certainly in the interest of various radical struggles to analyze and understand different aspects of what they are fighting against; however, this does not guarantee that they will focus on the same aspect of the capitalist system, nor that they will do so in the same way. The subject matter of communist theory is precisely these different ways of mapping the terrain of struggles. Does this mean that communists are not concerned with developing a theory of the capitalist system as a whole? Of course not. Rather, it means that a theory of capitalist

totality can never be more true than the actual composition of different political organizations that unite under communist guidance. In short: from a communist point of view, our view of capitalism is determined by the totality of proletarian struggles. Thus, the theory that allows for the best articulation and composition between different proletarian forces across the globe will also be the best way to understand the enemy we are fighting.

In this sense, the process of articulating and composing different struggles is also an effort of “collage” that might transform their particular political visions, the result of comparing their experiences and ways of analyzing reality. The richer and more diverse this totality of struggles is, the more expressive and accurate its ability to describe the very form of capitalism will also be. The best general theory of capitalism is, therefore, the one that best articulates anti-capitalist forces—not only because that is its function, but because it is precisely the forces that rise against the capitalist world that can most clearly identify its contours and limits. It is a bit like the parable of the blind men around the elephant: each one, upon touching it, perceives a different shape. However, in our case, it is a matter of articulating these fragmented perceptions in order to jointly surround and defeat the beast.

The requirements we impose on a communist theory are therefore very demanding. It is necessary to create a unified theoretical framework capable of dealing simultaneously with political economy and collective organization; but it is also necessary to take a step back from specific analyses of social reality in order to better investigate how capitalism presents itself in different political contexts. All this so that it might be possible to learn, from the real movement of articulation and composition of political struggles, a vision of capitalist totality that is truly concrete—and therefore surmountable.

With all this in mind, it is time to try to build the foundations of this theory by introducing some fundamental concepts.

VI

The organizational point of view

As we have seen, the concepts we need to help us recover communist practice must, first, allow us to deal simultaneously with both political economy and political organization. Second, they must be abstract enough to preserve the differences between forms of political struggle, and third, they must still allow us to look at the world through these struggles, seeking ways to articulate them, as well as to articulate their visions of reality. The idea of the *organizational point of view* does exactly that.

Adopting a point of view

The first thing to note is that we are proposing a way of analyzing, a perspective. Observing things from *the point of view* of organization is not the same as fixing our attention on this or that part of social reality—for example, focusing exclusively on workplaces—but to learn to consider the organizational dimension of any social activity we analyze. A possible analogy would be with geometry: when we adopt the perspective of geometry, we do not choose some objects to analyze at the expense of others—everything has some form, simpler or more complex, and what we do is abstract from other characteristics (such as color, smell, etc.) to focus on the angles, contours, number of vertices and edges, and other geometric aspects of any given object.

In a way, some versions of Marxism have tried to propose that labor could serve as such a point of view, since everything could be analyzed based on the labor that each thing requires to be produced and maintained. However, this led to an eternal dispute over the meaning of the term: is “labor” the name we give to all human activity that concretely transforms reality, or should we reserve the term to describe only those activities that become commodities in capitalism? The first case could give rise to a general perspective on any action—but we would lose the ability to differentiate between work that produces value and activities that remain outside the dynamics of

capital—while the second tends to treat labor as a specific form of action, even if hegemonic in capitalism—but in this case it ceases to be a generic perspective, such as the one we seek here.

The idea of an organizational point of view is somewhat counterintuitive, as we normally understand organization as a specific type of activity. There would be organized and disorganized political actions, often considered more spontaneous; and there would be specific political organizations and everyone else would be disorganized, etc. If we look closely, this more traditional conception of organization almost always has three characteristics. The first is to assume that organizing is the same as “ordering” or adding more structure—it is no coincidence that many anti-authoritarian movements claim they are against organization, as they are against imposing any external order on people. The second is to assume that organizing is something we do consciously, on purpose—and it is no coincidence that many militants call on people to “organize,” because organizing would be an intentional act of engagement. And the third is to assume that there are some specific types of social ordering that deserve the name of political organization—for example, many Marxists will say that class organization occurs only through specific instruments, such as trade unions and parties, and will say that protests, uprisings, and other types of collective action are disorganized or spontaneous. Because of these characteristics, this more traditional conception does not consider that everyday social life is also organized: after all, there is not so much order in people's chaotic daily lives, and the order that does exist is not something consciously chosen, but imposed from outside, and none of the collective spaces in which we participate socially are comparable to the types we have already identified as political organizations.

When we say that we will adopt an organizational point of view, we are breaking with all these claims. Against the first one, we affirm that even though there are social activities that are more or less hierarchical, more or less stable, they are all organized in some way—they have structures, dynamics, and restrictions. Even the most spontaneous urban protest has some organization, if only the fact that all participants look in the same direction, remain bound by the buildings around them, behave in a certain way, etc. Against the second point, we affirm that organization exists even when we do not decide to organize and—perhaps even more importantly—that even when we decide to create collectives, parties, and other organizations, our intentionality does not guarantee

that we know precisely how we actually organize ourselves. It is perfectly possible, and common, to organize ourselves around certain principles only to discover later that our organization has other dynamics that influence us against our will. Finally, we also question the third claim: for us, there are no specific types of groups that would necessarily be political organizations, while other forms are necessarily not. It is the *effects* of social activities that will help us characterize whether they are indeed political organizations. In principle, a communist party may not be a truly political organization if it does not produce any effects worthy of the name, while a popular street fair may produce important political consequences.

The focus on organization

But why focus on the organizational aspect in particular? Remember the requirements we listed in the previous section: communist theory is the theory of a practice, and this practice involves the *concrete* composition of different movements and struggles. The organizational dimension is, first and foremost, the dimension where this composition could take place: articulating struggles means inventing ways for different political actions to reinforce each other, so that militant actions do not produce unwanted side effects in their ecology—it means learning to better navigate the way a given collective is seen by another group based on a consideration of its particular constraints and challenges. In short, our focus needs to be organizational, because that is the sphere where communist practice must produce transformations.

But it's actually more than that. We have also seen that one of the main requirements of communist theory is to be able to move between political economy and political organization. One path already taken to try to unify these two poles has been to reduce collective organization to economic analysis—for example, by arguing that the history of capitalist forms is, in essence, the history of workers' resistance and of capital's subsequent readjustments to it, or simply by assessing the extent to which revolutionary struggles merely corroborate the permanent revolution of the capitalist mode of production. It is a path in which Marxist critique of political economy absorbs the entire discussion on organization. Our approach is a little different: we believe that it is the theory of political organization that has the means to ultimately absorb political economic analysis.

This proposal may seem strange, as it is difficult to understand how the point of view of collective action—something more fragile and rare—could encompass and clarify what is happening in the gigantic machine of the world economy. But nothing prevents us from observing the circuits of value, at their different scales, from an organizational point of view. For example, we can think of what we call “value form” – the form that anything must adopt in order to be integrated into commodity circuits – as a certain way of organizing different people, things, relationships, and processes. Paradoxically, although the field of collective organization seems more restricted than the field of political economy, the key concept of the former—organization—is more general than that of the latter—labor. Working, even in a very general sense, is a way of reorganizing some material, while not all organization is a form of work. When we look closely at social reality in terms of forms of organization, some of these forms can be described as forms of work, but others cannot—and, as we have seen, this kind of flexibility is important to us, because peripheralization fragments social life in ways that a unified view of what labor is can no longer patch up. Gig work, online work, self-employment, informal labor, formal labor, domestic labor, slave labor, labor that is “analogous” to slavery, free labor, labor that we do not experience as such — there are so many forms of labor in the capitalist world that, instead of seeking a single meaning for the term, hidden behind all these forms, we adopt the point of view that they all organize the life of the working class in some specific way. And it is these different forms of social organization that we need to deal with.

Composition, interaction, perception

But what does it mean to observe reality from an organizational perspective? Terms such as “structure” or “dynamics” are important, but too vague, so we propose a slightly different approach. We consider that the organizational perspective is one that is interested in three interconnected questions. How is a given thing *composed*? What is it capable of *interacting* with? And what is *perceptible* to it? Let's analyze each of these questions.

How is a given social activity composed? That is: what are the parts that constitute a given activity, how do these parts relate to each other, how do they limit each other? A party is composed of a

certain number of instances, such as local groups, committees, sectors, leadership, etc. – each of these instances is composed of different people who relate to each other in particular ways. The same person may be in a local cell and be part of a regional committee, and need to behave differently at each of these levels. The question of the composition of an organization is subtle, as it mixes an analysis of how the parts relate to each other to form a whole with an analysis of how these relationships define what counts as a meaningful part to begin with. As we said, the same person can count as a militant and a leader—that is, as different parts—depending on the relationships that structure each party instance. At the same time, the difference between a local meeting and a more general coordination instance is given by the specific relations that occur in each of these spaces: for example, in one place the person acts as a militant, like the others, in another as a directing officer, making decisions on behalf of other people. At the same time, analyzing activities based on how they are composed means realizing that the organizations themselves are composed of organized parts.

What can a social activity interact with? That is: given a certain structure or way of acting, what can this organization effectively transform? I may think that my leafleting in the subway is capable of producing effects on the class consciousness of all workers, through a cascade effect, and thereby affecting the more general correlation of forces in my city—but we are not interested here in the invisible transformations we seek or intend to produce. In the case of leafleting, we would say that our organization is able to interact with a certain number of passersbys, alter their routine a little, offering them reading material, a quick conversation, and—with luck—a critical perspective that they may be interested in reflecting on and sharing with others.

The question of interaction is difficult, because we are often unable to separate the effects that a given practice is actually capable of producing from a whole series of future events that we would like to see happen and that are often the real reason for adopting that particular tactic. When we manage to distinguish our real scope of interaction from the more general field of effects to be produced, we also rediscover here the subtlety at play in the previous question: depending on the relationships we establish with other things—whether we hand out flyers or speak through a megaphone, for example—this also changes how we define the entities with which we interact—it

is possible that the flyer and the speech reach the same people, but it is as if in each case we need to define these people in different ways, as interlocutors or as an audience, for example.

What is perceptible to this social activity? That is, what aspects, what features of reality, matter, make a difference, to the activity in question? We already anticipated this type of question when we discussed the idea of social or political environment and saw that the same elements could matter in different ways to different groups. For example, consider the meeting between a radical anarchist collective and a group of street vendors. From the point of view of this anarchist organization, what makes a difference in this meeting is that street vendors are workers oppressed by the state—their names and lives in particular may not be so relevant, and many of the militants will not remember them afterwards—and that the content of the meeting will remain confidential—the militants may not pay attention to the workers' names, but they will certainly wonder if there is an informant among them. From the workers' point of view, it is not the state that is important, but the presence of the police specifically, and as much as they are suspicious at the meeting, it is possible that this is because of the militants' pretentious and arrogant manner, and not because they think the meeting may be being recorded. Basically, these are the same conversations, the same people, and the same space, but depending on which organization we consider, we also need to consider how this changes what will be noticeable – what makes a difference.

Composition: how the parts of the organization relate to each other; *interaction:* how the organization relates to others; *perception:* what makes a difference in the organization's environment. Now, it is not difficult to see that these three questions are related: the answer to each one influences the answer to the other. The way an organization is composed conditions what it can interact with – and the type of interaction the organization is capable of also conditions what it considers perceptible, what makes a difference to it. Finally, what makes a difference helps determine what will count as part of the organization, and with that we return to composition. For us, considering something from an organizational point of view means considering that activity based on these three interconnected questions.

Returning to the example of a small left-wing party: its internal structure determines the type of

action the organization is capable of undertaking. If a series of approvals and hierarchies determine the levels and activities that the party sanctions, and if the party is of a certain size—say, a few thousand militants spread across capitals in the southeast of Brazil—then there will be a certain repertoire of ways in which the party can interact with the world around it. It may be able to interact with residents of different neighborhoods through its local meetings, it may be able to interact with people on the street in protests and leafleting, or it may be able to compete with other organizations, such as student councils and union slates. And all these ways of interacting with social reality condition how the party understands that reality: what matters and what doesn't matter in the lives of workers, which aspects of the university and trade unions are relevant, what is the meaning of elections, etc. Now imagine that the party suddenly grows from thousands to millions of members, covering hundreds of cities throughout the country. Its structure will need to change—new internal mechanisms will be created, such as congresses, currents, tendencies, new partnerships with other social movements, etc.—and with that, its way of interacting with reality will also change—suddenly the question of whether or not to contest elections will become a practical rather than a speculative question—and the way of seeing this reality will also change. We would very likely begin to hear leaders talk about “the Brazilian people” and their broader needs, worrying less about the role of workers and their self-determination. In short: composition conditions interaction, which conditions perception... which in turn conditions what elements we consider capable of other compositions.

The perspective of an organization

Here we find a very important consequence of the concept of organizational perspective, an aspect that offers further justification for why it is a good approach for communist theory. Note that the three questions that define the organization's point of view invite us to consider *that organizations themselves form points of view*. After all, our definition ends up proposing that each organization acts as a kind of “sensor” of reality, conditioned by its internal structure, the elements that compose it, and its relationships. A good analogy here would be an eye, which allows us to register certain colors and shapes because of its material composition, since this composition of chemical elements, forming certain tissues such as the retina, allows this organ to interact with different frequencies of

light. Changes in the structure of the eye or brain can alter the frequencies with which this organ interacts or registers, and therefore the colors it can perceive. Similarly, for us, a collective organization also interacts with its environment based on its composition, which limits what can be “seen” of that reality—and changes in the organization lead to changes in what makes a difference to it.

This idea is not as easy to understand as it seems. We are not just saying that individuals who participate in organizations come to see the world differently; we are saying that the organizations themselves embody these perspectives.

Of course, individuals—being organizations themselves: biological, historical, psychic, etc.—see the world in their own ways, which are not completely transformed depending on the space they are in. When I join a political group, I continue to see the world through my own eyes, but at the same time, what I pay attention to, what makes a difference, and what I need to take into account can change dramatically. If I begin to develop my skills as a coordinator or organizer of certain tasks and learn to see the activities of my comrades in this way, I will also be able to look at other processes from this different point of view. And if I start looking around with my organization's tactics and strategic vision in mind, suddenly I no longer see just everyday situations, I can also begin to see ways and opportunities to advance our work.

However, it is not just about changes that affect individuals—new things we learn in an organization and then take with us into our lives—but often about perspectives that we can only adopt while actively participating in a specific collective process. A surgeon looks at the human body while performing an operation in a more cold and dispassionate way, but when he leaves the hospital, he does not continue to look at people in this way—and even if he does, this perspective no longer has the same reality: it is the hospital itself, its environment, its protocols, and the surgical practice itself that makes it easier to adopt this position. Violent combat may force militants to pay less attention to risks of life and death than they would in other situations—it is not people who decide to attack their enemies without thinking about the consequences, it is the practical organization of combat itself that makes this perspective important, at the risk of increasing our

chances of dying if we don't. In this sense, perhaps the ideal analogy is not so much the eye—which, as our primary means of vision, seems irreplaceable and always central—but a spyglass or telescope: something that, because of its specific structure, allows us to overcome the limits of individual vision, but which we can leave aside – and even if we carry new representations with us, the specific perception we had access to through the telescope is lost.

Understanding that the organizational point of view also helps us understand organizations themselves as concrete points of view is important for communist practice. First, because it makes it quite natural to consider that the disintegration of modern society creates the conditions for diverse proletarian perspectives, conditioned by the different ways in which each space will need to organize itself in order to survive. Second, because it reinforces the need to take seriously the way each organization or political movement describes the reality of contemporary capitalism—it makes it easier for us to find, in the different theories and explanations that each struggle presents, signs of their different forms of organization. And finally, because it shows that the very idea of an "organizational point of view" as a way of approaching communist practice is itself the result of a particular form of organization, that is, it is what remains *perceptible* to a movement concerned with *interacting* with different revolutionary political organizations in an attempt to *compose* the proletarian movement based on their common interests.

VII

The logics of social organization

The proposal that a theory adequate for communist practice must adopt an organizational point of view is an important first step. As we have seen, it is a way of formulating questions that allow us to concretely investigate the reality of different struggles and learn from them about how they are structured, how they act, and how they see the world they seek to transform. Without this rigorous yet flexible way of analyzing what goes on within struggles and movements, it is impossible to subsequently examine the common aspects of these diverse political processes and how to articulate them into a more general proletarian movement.

On the other hand, this proposal is still insufficient. After all, everything in the world is organized in a different way, and this could lead us to conclude that each organization has a unique and isolated form, type of action, and vision of reality—which is clearly not true, neither in the case of the organization of social life in general nor in the case of organizations engaged in political struggle. So, we need to introduce some criteria here that limit the scope of our analysis a little and help us ask better questions when investigating different political processes.

The three social logics

We mentioned earlier that when we deal with a very wide variety of phenomena and do not want to choose one of them as the ideal type, we need to use more abstract descriptions. We anticipated that communist theory, insofar as it needs to consider different fronts of political struggle, would have to find comprehensive abstractions if it wants to preserve this diversity without assuming that, at heart, all struggles are more or less similar versions of an ideal revolutionary struggle. The organizational point of view is an abstract idea in this very sense: it takes such a general position that, even though it provides important guidance for our investigation, we still need to investigate each particular organization to better understand its structure and the type of struggle it is capable of waging.

However, we do not live in a vacuum populated by singular and scattered organizations, but within a global mode of production called capitalism, where most social relations take the form of value. In this model, the main selection criterion that defines whether an organization will survive—be it a person, a family, a collective, or a country—is its ability to facilitate the accumulation of surplus value in the hands of a dominant political class. In other words, social life and political life are certainly organized in many ways, but not in just any way. And what we are going to propose now is a way of conceptualizing the forms of social organization that we find in capitalism, in peripheral capitalism, and also in every social formation that we know of so far. It seems like a megalomaniacal proposal, but we will soon see that, even though it is indeed ambitious, it does not replace concrete investigation and analysis, but only helps us in this process.

Let us begin, then, with the most abstract and general description possible. We postulate that every social formation—whether a capitalist world economy ruled by imperialism, an ancient Chinese empire, or a federation of indigenous peoples still untouched by European colonizers—is structured by a mixture of three distinct social logics: the logic of affinity, property, and value.

We will explain each of these logics separately—to then focus on capitalism and finally on peripheral capitalism—but it is important to note from the outset that this is an extremely abstract description, in the precise sense that we proposed earlier. That is, we call these modes of organization “logics” precisely because, taken separately and outside of concrete contexts, they present an idealized functioning that we will never find in reality. However, this distance from specific phenomena is what gives us the necessary space to concretely investigate how these logics mix in each case, bringing us closer to the specificity of each social formation—and even of each collective organization within a given society.

We could justify the choice of the three modes we present—affinity, property, and value—by appealing to the theoretical fortune of anthropology, sociology, and economics, the three “great disciplines” that academically study our social relations, each one mainly concerned with one of these three logics. We could also propose a more speculative argument, attempting to demonstrate

that, when we conceive of these three logics in a general and abstract way, it is actually impossible to conceive of any others, since they practically exhaust the forms that sociability could take. In other words, affinity, property, and value would be the three great “matrices” of the concrete and much more varied social forms that we find in history—an argument that seems overly ambitious, but one that has already been proposed by many philosophers, historians, and social scientists. Another possible argument would perhaps be to start more directly from the foundations of historical materialism, or even more so from revealing passages in *Capital* or Marx’s writings on “pre-capitalist formations,” to justify our focus on the three great dynamics of known modes of production. However, there is another way to justify our proposal, more consistent with the organizational point of view.

The justification that really matters to us as communists is that if we try to take the long history of revolutionary struggles seriously, paying attention to how different movements have conceived their obstacles and enemies throughout the ages, what we see emerging is neither a unified conception nor an infinite series of different descriptions. What we find—across the most diverse struggles and historical moments—are, in fact, a few recurring ways of conceiving what must be fought and transformed in the social world: different forms of segregation, expropriation, and exploitation. What we call “social logic” is merely the systematization of each of these general forms of social power—affinity, which organizes kinship and communities; property, which organizes hierarchical domination; and value, which organizes class domination. These forms became apparent precisely because they were confronted by struggles that rose up against them, for it is only from this point of view—of an organization structured as if another social world were possible—that some features of the current social reality will appear as *historical*, that is, as subject to change. Of course, it was often intellectuals who were able to devote themselves to studying and describing these modes of organization, but this would certainly have been impossible without the prior existence of struggles which, because of the way they were composed, and therefore the way they interacted with the world, made these forms perceptible. As many Marxists know very well, *Capital* would not exist without the international struggle of workers, in which Marx also participated.

In this way, we can treat the abstract description we propose below as an attempt to organize the "theoretical" balance—the representations or snapshots of social reality—accumulated throughout the history of insurgencies, revolts, and revolutions into a unified but extremely flexible conceptual framework. It is a bit like trying to theoretically represent "the interests of the movement as a whole," inventing a creative way to condense different visions of society produced by thousands of political movements that preceded us. From the point of view of those who fought and believed that the world could be different, how is our social world organized?

Logic of affinity

We are interested in offering the most general description possible of each logic, aware that its concrete presentation varies depending on other important factors—such as, for example, which logic is dominant in that social formation and how each of these modes mixes with the others. In the case of the logic of affinity, its most notable form is the gift, the subject of hundreds of ethnographic studies in different societies. We suggest taking a step back and treating it more abstractly as a form of organization through affinity, as we believe that gift-giving, reciprocity, and kinship are particular and varied developments of this more general logic—therefore, it is not possible to study kinship or reciprocity in one society and say that all others are organized in the same way.

One way to describe the logic of affinity is to define it as a way of organizing society where we divide people and things in such a way that, if two parts are separated, they can still share something in common. Even more schematically, we can say that affinity works by separating the inside and the outside, but connecting the two sides because they have the same boundary. We call this shared boundary a *frontier*, because something in common remains even between two totally distinct parts. It is a dense and abstract definition, but it is worth reflecting on because it will help us much later on. Let's now see if we recognize this form of organization in some different social phenomena.

For example, when you receive a gift, the object is now yours, but it carries something from the person who gave it to you—if you get rid of a family heirloom, like an album of photographs, it will say something about your relationship with your family members. Something of the other remains there with you, even though you and the other are separated—and even if one of the parties has already passed away. This presence can also be uncomfortable; it can create an unwanted connection, like a debt. Not surprisingly, in the logic of affinity, *giving* can be a form of power, from which we can only escape or control by repaying what we receive, in a never-ending process.

Simple examples of this type of “frontier” organization can be found everywhere, not only in societies that are structured primarily through reciprocity or kinship. We mentioned the exchange of gifts, but the formation of affinity groups in modernity also mobilizes this same procedure: a certain collective forms a social part, but at the expense of sharing something with those who are outside the group. For example, it is impossible for the Flamengo football fan club to exist if there is not also something in common with the fans of other teams, from whom Flamengo fans eagerly distinguish themselves—that is, there must be a common passion for football. This shared element can either be disruptive—and fans can argue about which team truly represents real football—or serve as a basis for reconciliation—someone can try to avoid a fight by reminding everyone that they are all there for the love of the sport.

Furthermore, people do not need to be divided solely between those on one side of the frontier or the other; the logic of affinity also allows someone to occupy the place of the border itself. In the case of football, we have both the ball and the referee occupying this place: the former becomes almost enchanted, a symbol of this common love for the sport, while the latter becomes the object of all misfortune, constantly under suspicion by fans of “leaning” more to one side (as the law always does, as we will see shortly). In societies where the logic of affinity is more determinant, the function of occupying this frontier-like place can also become very important. Figures such as shamans, in some societies, find a social place from this position—and many communities have a space reserved for drunks, “madmen,” and “lost souls” that is neither inclusion nor exclusion per se. It is important to mention that the logic of affinity has three positions—inside, outside, and on the frontier—because it is very common in modernity to assume that every community is just a matter

of friends against enemies, of the included against the excluded, inside and outside. As we will see later, this concerns the specific mixture of affinity and property that characterizes modern states and communities.

At a very fundamental level, the logic of affinity is the form of social organization through which we form not only communities, but also ourselves as *persons*. This dynamic of creating frontiers, of differentiating while recognizing something in common, is the basis without which it is impossible for an individual or group to be seen by others as having a separate interiority—a distinction—which, however, is equal to ours—a shared common substrate. This is what we call a person: someone endowed with a distinct point of view, but one that is relevant to others. That is why one of the effects of total segregation, of breaking this connective boundary between communities, is the *depersonalization* of the other: when others are removed in this way from our networks of affinity and recognition, they cease to count as people, as beings endowed with a perspective capable of illuminating what is happening to us as well. This silencing or invisibility does not necessarily mean that others cannot speak or express themselves, but the social value of what they have to say disappears. One of the effects of gender oppression within families, communities, and political organizations is often this kind of erasure of the person as a being endowed with a point of view connected to others.

As we have already mentioned, none of the three logics we are presenting appears alone in a social formation. However, we can identify cases in which different logics gain a dominant role. In societies where this is the main form of social organization, we see that those characteristics of life that best adapt to the logic of frontiers are also the ones that gain predominance and serve as the basis for the social structure. The most striking example is certainly kinship. Although the logic of kinship presents itself in very different ways from society to society, kinship is, in general, a form of social organization that stitches together a series of divisions that preserve common substrates. A father is different from a son, but this difference is what we call family, what they both have in common. And one family is different from another, but they can still be linked through the kinship structures they share. And in the case of encounters between totally separate groups, we can unite

them through the exchange of gifts, or by building bonds of affinity or kinship, through marriages, for example.

In the case of social formations where affinity is not the dominant logic, it still continues to organize different aspects of social life, from the interaction between individuals as people who recognize each other, through the family structure, communities, and even our relationship with nature and the spiritual world. In capitalist modernity, kinship plays a very specific role, as capitalism willingly inherits the structure of the dominant communities and families of European feudalism, but restricts most forms of community to those forms of organization that will respect the logic of property and value. Nuclear families, for example, are extremely restricted forms of creating kinship, as they only serve to ensure the formation of the workforce, the perpetuation of the sexual division of labor, and the control of property transfers. The nation, on the other hand, forms an imaginary community of equals, incapable of organizing its own territories and social relations, as it must adapt to the modes of organization of the modern state and international capital—which even prevents nations from having shared frontiers, creating profound instability.

Ultimately, the only form of organization of affinity that is flexible and mobile enough to keep pace with the transformations of capitalism seems to be individualism itself, where each individual would be a kind of “one-person community.” In capitalism, we are only truly recognized as people when we present ourselves independently of any community or kinship. Being an adult in modernity means becoming independent from the family and depending only on work and property relations. In a way, individualism is the reduction of the community to a minimal unit, which is only really possible to experience within work environments, as sellers and consumers of commodities. But even this form of organization encounters obstacles, because the logic of property and value in capitalism is not neutral; it does not allow for a leveling of individualities. Since capitalism is structured by class, racial, and patriarchal domination, in order for distinct individuals to be recognized as such, they must also assume traits of the bourgeoisie, whiteness, and heteronormativity.

The logic of affinity is somewhat secondary in capitalism, as very little of what determines the course of the world passes through the communities we form or through organizations driven primarily by reciprocal exchange and the establishment of common frontiers. However, as we will see later, affinity plays a crucial role in the process of peripheralization, as it governs the organization of many of the support networks on which workers increasingly depend, as well as the form of different fragmented communities that do not share frontiers with each other.

Logic of property

We have seen above that the logic of affinity, in its most general form, is one that divides the parts of organizations in such a way that, even though they are separate, they still share something in common. The general logic of organization by property—and here we use property without the additional qualification of private property, so we may also be talking about collective property—works differently. It divides organizations asymmetrically: one part will contain the boundary between them, the other part will have no boundary of its own. The common point between the two parts is restricted to only one of them. We cannot therefore call this boundary a frontier, as in the case of affinity, because it is not shared. We propose to call this form of limitation, which only exists on one side of the border, *a fence*, because it is like a wall placed around a piece of land: the wall itself belongs to the property in question, not to what is kept outside.

A fence does not divide the two parts of an organization in the same way. If, on the one hand, it increases control over one of the parts—since the property leaves nothing "left over" at the mercy of the other part—on the other hand, it characterizes what is left out in a different way, as if there were no clear boundaries or contours. When I buy a piece of land and have the documentation proving my ownership and a fence demarcating the land, this does not define any attributes or connections with what is outside – it may belong to someone else, it may not have an owner yet. This type of organization is well exemplified by the fencing of land, but it actually applies to any social relationship where the demarcation of boundaries is clear and internal to the agreement or exchange at stake – as in contracts, pacts, or even in the establishment of rights and duties. For example, a contract that unifies two parties includes exactly what is described therein and is fully

valid once signed and acknowledged – the parties bound by the contract have clear boundaries, described in the contract, and everything else is irrelevant to the agreement. For example, if you are unable to deliver what we agreed upon in the contract due to a tragedy in your family, you would still owe me a penalty—and you could not rely on our contractual bond as if it created a community relationship between us, as we remain completely unrelated to each other.

The essential asymmetry between the two parties divided by property deserves to be analyzed in more detail, as it is the source of the type of power inherent in this logic. At a first level, we can see that the idea of alienation—whether through exchange, plunder, or control—depends on there being a clear cut between the parties involved. It is only possible to extract something from nature and call it a property if the connection between the property and the space from which it was extracted is completely severed—as is the case with fencing and the extraction of natural resources in general. Similarly, effective exchange between owners is only possible if, at the moment something became yours, it completely ceased to be mine. You can acquire something that belonged to me and then destroy that object without it having any relation to me. And there is alienation in the act of working—not only in its products, but in the very way we labor—because the division of labor can also separate the “unlimited” power of the worker from the management that controls those limits. Social organization based on alienation therefore depends on this asymmetrical social logic.

But alienation, in the sense of an asymmetrical cut or enclosure, is also at play in the domination of one community by another; it is what effectively defines this domination. For example, the formation of a social stratum that is taxed in exchange for protection—whether by the mafia, the militia, or the state—also follows a division of social parts where the dominant stratum dictates the rules and limits and the dominated stratum must be limited and controlled by the rules of others. In addition to hierarchical domination, the logic of property is also at play in the social form of violence. Of course, states and social formations organized by property did not invent aggression, rivalry, and killing, but in societies organized by the logic of affinity, where frontiers operate, damage can incur in retribution—that is, the possibility of revenge, which can play an important social role. In the case of the logic of property, it becomes possible to attack, punish, and kill

without creating such a reciprocal bond or a possibility of reversal between the dominated and the dominant, and this is a possible definition of violence, which redoubles its harmful character: violence is an act of asymmetrical aggression, where only one of the parties has a monopoly on the reasons and means of aggression.

Another important aspect that also depends on this asymmetry is the production of a dual system of organization. On the one hand, among people who belong to the same dominant community, everything happens as if the relationship between owners were egalitarian and symmetrical—which is why people do not consider themselves primarily owners, but rather citizens of a state, subjects of law, for example. On the other hand, among the parties belonging to the dominated community – that is, a community from which goods, labor, and resources are extracted and alienated – the hierarchical dimension is evident and everyone is organized as a “limitless” or untamed strata that needs to be controlled and managed; they are subjects, subjugated. In this sense, the logic of property is closely linked to the category of *subject*: to be a subject is to be recognized by a property regime either as a limiting part—a sovereign who makes the laws—or as a limited part—a subject who is subject to the laws. The promise of the modern state and its political system is precisely that every individual could occupy both places, which is obviously impossible in a colonial and hierarchical social formation.

A common impasse in understanding the logic of property arises from taking its functioning in the modern state as a general example of how it operates. The functioning of capitalism requires that most market relations also be relations of private property—because this guarantees, among other things, the state’s assistance in managing and maintaining class divisions. Because of this, modern states form gigantic, interconnected bureaucracies that simultaneously govern a range of aspects of social life. The problem with taking the modern form of property as a model for this logic in general is that, when we do so, we lose sight of the plasticity of this form of organization—which has been the dominant logic for most of recorded human history, functioning very differently in different empires and social formations.

The challenges of organization by property vary greatly from case to case, as do the ways of dealing with the asymmetry inherent in the logic of alienation and violence. And while, on the one hand, the logic of property appears to us as constituting an enormous legal “superstructure,” almost a fictional world detached from reality, this cannot serve to disregard the fact that one of the main forces of this mode of organization comes from its silent presence *within* other logics. Perhaps this aspect is only really visible when we consider the abstract schemes we present here, but a quick comparison between the creation of “frontiers” and “fences” already allows us to conclude that a fence is “a frontier on one side only,” that is, it is *less* than a frontier. Similarly, an exchange between owners is an exchange of gifts *minus* the reciprocal bond created by affinity. And an act of violence is an aggression that *removes* the social possibility of retribution, of revenge. Now, if property is a “simplified” form of organization, everywhere there is an exchange based on affinity there could potentially be a process of alienation—all that is needed is for social forces to organize themselves in such a way as to disregard or eliminate any common ground between the two parties, consolidating an asymmetry. The very possibility of using the law as a means of mediating conflicts and disputes between communities—or, on an interpersonal level, of using politeness as a way of establishing an interaction with others that does not create real bonds, preserving the separation between people—depends on this ability of the logic of fences to operate “within” the logic of frontiers, deactivating the sharing of something common. It is no wonder that ancient China devoted much effort to developing legal systems, bureaucratic devices, codes of ethics, and spiritual guidance to help “stitch together” a huge empire made up of a hundred different ethnic groups and cultures. In this sense, property is a logic “internal” to the logic of gift-giving, which is why it can be mobilized to mediate conflicts, regulate relations between communities, or completely corrupt this other form of organization—and in many imperial social formations, its primary function was mediation between distinct communities, not preparing the ground for unbridled capitalist exploitation.

The question of the flexibility of organization by property, and the importance of distinguishing this logic from its modern, but notorious, form, will both be relevant when we turn to better understand what is happening in the process of the peripheralization of capitalism. As we shall see, the crisis of the modern state—the crisis of citizenship and other legal devices—does not lead to pure anomie or lack of order, but to the emergence of various regimes of dispossession, particular

laws, forms of domination and subjection centered on the same logic but dispersed across territories.

Logic of value

We use the expression “logic of value” in Marxism to describe specific dynamics of capitalism, the result not only of the exchange of equivalents, but of the existence of a global system of production of commodities for sale, with the specific goal of capital accumulation. In other words, capitalism is indeed a universal system organized by value, but it is called “capitalism” because it is through value that the accumulation of capital is possible—and it is capital that defines our social system. Recognizing that the historical dominance of value as a general form of social organization is specific to capitalism does not prevent us from recognizing that the logic of value predates capitalism, constituting a very general social logic.

The logic of value, in its most abstract form, can also be defined by the way it divides the parts of an organization. Instead of frontiers or fences, organization through value creates *margins*, since the boundary between one part and another is diffuse, as if neither had clear contours or limits. A good example is a factory floor. How is this space organized? How are machines and people divided? Well, in the most profitable way—that is, there are no fixed boundaries: people can squeeze more into the same space, and distances that previously made no difference suddenly need to be shortened because those minutes gained are now relevant to competition. The whole theory of surplus value depends on the possibility of shifting the margins between parts of the production process.

If, on the one hand, the existence of margins between both social parts reintroduces a more symmetrical social relationship, on the other, it creates another type of power. How will the boundary between the parts of an organization be determined if it is originally diffuse or granular? Two people who are not starving or in need of anything else and who find themselves with surplus objects to exchange can bargain and find a ratio between the things they have brought that would justify calling the exchanged objects equivalent—without coercion and without any other bond

being established. But it is enough for one of them to be desperately thirsty for the proportion between what that person is willing to give in exchange for a glass of water to change radically. There was no coercion in the sense of a dominant force intentionally determining how much the glass of water would be worth – nor will a debt be created between the person who sold the water and the person who gave almost everything they had for the chance to survive – but it is clear that the margins delimiting the proportions of this exchange – which remains equivalent! – have been distorted by other factors.

In fact, the exchange of objects according to equivalent proportions of value did not wait for capitalism to appear. For example, the practice of “silent trade” is well known, where peoples who did not share the same language or culture exchanged goods based on a bargain of what would be objects of equivalent value. It is a way of creating momentary links with communities with which we do not share borders, without the need to connect with them through reciprocity and without the need for a process of domination to emerge. Money also emerged in various societies long before capitalism arose—and in some places it was a secondary means of ensuring exchanges of surplus objects, while in others it became an object of accumulation. Capital itself—as a quantity of value that is reinvested to generate more value—also exists in pre-capitalist societies, even if in these cases it did not become the main form of social organization.

In any case, our more “fluid” definition of value as division by margins begins to take on the characteristics recognized by Marxist analysis when we begin to try to organize larger parts of the social fabric based on this principle. That is, when these different equivalent negotiations need to be consistent with each other. The famous “simple or accidental formula of value,” presented in *Capital*, already makes it clear that the equivalence between two commodities actually hides a specific type of power, since the difference between the seller and the buyer, which is difficult to define at such a simple level, is the basis of the difference between who can determine the marginal limit between the parties and who will have to adapt to the established limits. Many interpreters of Marx point out that there is a conflict already inscribed in the analysis of the commodity form, but they usually have to perform theoretical acrobatics to explain whether commodities only exist when there is already a fully structured class struggle. From the point of view of our analysis, this conflict

inherent in value can be simply described as the conflict over the demarcation of the proportions of equivalent exchange: in the case of loose or "accidental" exchanges, this conflict can be circumvented by agreements, can be casual and reversible, and can be marked by forces of domination or cultural forces. In a society where the majority of people survives by selling their labor power, this conflict becomes structural to the whole society: whenever a worker arrives to exchange their time for money, they find themselves in the situation described above—they are like the person with intense thirst in the desert, constrained by "circumstances" to sell lives for a glass of water. This way in which the power of value insinuates itself, silently altering the conditions of buying and selling, is the force that produces and maintains what we call social classes.

The power of value is different from the power of affinity and property – it expresses itself precisely in this "marginal" way: even without the presence of an executioner or a coercive force, the proportions – the boundaries – of value shift more to one side or the other depending on everything that pressures and alters the ability of buyers and sellers to define how much they need what they do not yet have. Community and property structures—frontiers and fences—can also influence this process of delimitation. For example: from a legal point of view, work has a limit, whether it is a type of activity or a number of hours, and it is the property of those who work and decide whether or not to sell it, while from a value point of view, human activity has no determined social limit and can be shaped by other forces. Thus, if someone's working time is purchased for the purpose of accumulating capital, the limits of the activity will be determined by this process of valorization—a process that is protected by the logic of property, which places the margins of labor activity under the control of capitalist exploitation.

This game of delimitation, made possible by the division of diffuse margins, is central to understanding why some types of human activity gain an indispensable place in the capitalist system, to the point where we say that, in capitalism, only labor is capable of "creating value." The challenge of creating value is as follows: given a certain way of defining the equivalence between two things—be they objects, people, etc.—is it possible to reorganize the elements involved so that this proportion is altered? In other words, among the commodities purchased for the production of other commodities, there must be elements whose limits can be stretched—and labor power is

socially limited as a commodity by the logic of property, but its value can still be subjected to new "bargains" that the production process and the purchase of labor impose on it.

We mentioned above that when something or someone is part of an organization based on affinity, they become a person in that context—a social entity that shares something in common with what is outside of themselves—and when they organize themselves based on property, they become a subject—a social entity that has rights and duties, limits others, and has its own limitations. When we divide social space in terms of value, that is, in terms of parts whose margins have no predetermined limits, we organize people and things as *commodities*. But what is a commodity? Our first intuition is that a commodity is anything that can be bought and sold—but in light of what we have already presented here, we know that this does not only mean that it can be replaced or alienated. Being something that can be bought and sold means, more specifically, that the equivalence established is momentary, the proportionality is occasional, since the commodity can have its limits reinvented soon after: whether by market fluctuations, by an unusual negotiation, or by new forms of management and organization of the productive sphere. To alienate a property is to define a new limit—no one else owns that object but the owner—but to buy a commodity is to acquire the means to change a limit—capitalists buy labor power to exploit it, that is, to subject it to uses that transform its lack of limits into more value.

This comparison between alienation and selling allows us to return to a point we mentioned earlier, when we said that the logic of property exists, so to speak, "within" the logic of affinity. In that case, we saw that a fence is something like a defective, asymmetrical frontier. But property has a different articulation with value, since the logic of margins contains no limits, only diffuse edges. However, we saw that the logic of property divides organizations into different parts, one that contains the limit and another that is unlimited—the first is the defining part, the second is subordinate, it takes its limits from elsewhere. Now, every commodity, in this sense, appears to the logic of proprietary domination as something to be demarcated, managed—the commodity presents itself as if the owner were always outside it. On the other hand, as we have also seen, the asymmetrical domination of property creates entire communities stripped of their own boundaries, subject to the rules of the dominant community—in this sense, domination by property prepares the ground

for the commodification of that which is subjugated. This description is very schematic, but it can help us understand in a more structural way how the logic of property, by breaking down symmetric boundaries, prepares the ground for the hegemony of the margins of value.

In light of this explanation, we must return to our initial comment: our world is not dominated solely by value, but by capital—which, in turn, depends on the organization of the world based on value. It is only when most social relations are defined in a marginal way that the capitalist class can instrumentalize all equivalent exchange in favor of capital accumulation—which, in turn, constantly alters these marginal limits: the time we have to rest, the intensity and forms of work, and the very shape of the planet. Once we are aware of this circuit, we can no longer naively believe that where exchange is considered equivalent and fair, exploitation has ended, because it becomes clear that the very delimitation of this equivalence is where capitalist exploitation operates. On the other hand, it is still important to be able to separate the social logic of value from the way value exists in capitalism, because a new society will also need to deal with this general form of dividing its organizations, even if global money and other means of systematic exploitation of labor in the name of capital accumulation are abolished.

VIII

Concrete organization and social dominance

Over the last two chapters, we have introduced some crucial ideas that we believe help us to construct a theory of communist practice. The concept of organizational point of view proposes a way of analyzing social activities that invites us to be more attentive to how each process is structured in order to better understand its scope of action and why different groups take on very different approaches to a shared social reality. The three logics of social organization—affinity, property, and value—allow us to give more specificity to this type of analysis, proposing that we focus on the way each organization articulates these three general ways of dividing its components: affinity dividing social parts by their frontiers, property by fences, and value by margins.

We therefore have a new foundation for our theory, that is, a proposal for which perspective we will adopt when observing the organization of social phenomena; and we have three very general categories that help us differentiate between them, three ways of composing these organizational structures. We now need to introduce another crucial aspect, without which it will be impossible to discuss political struggles and revolutionary politics further—that is, the question of dominance. As we shall see, one way to avoid defining politics by banners, discourses or personal values is to analyze the effects that different actions are capable of producing—and, above all, whether these effects alter anything in the current social organization. Understanding how different forms of social organization intermingle, and what it means for one of these forms to be the dominant logic of a society or organization, is therefore very important for our way of investigating political practices.

Articulating the three logics

We initially warned that the three social logics we would examine are abstract versions—as abstract as possible—of the forms of social organization we know: affinity, property, and value. However, it

is difficult to make these logics more palatable without introducing historical examples – which, in turn, could also lead to confusion, since concrete social organization is, in fact, the result of a specific mixture of these three modes.

As we mentioned, the organization of territories into nations helps us understand how affinity operates in the capitalist world, but the nation is already, in fact, a complex organization—a way of subjecting the logic of frontiers between communities to the dictates of the state, with its fences, and capital, interested in extracting value from all possible margins. It is because of this particular mixture, where value is dominant, supported by property, that the space left over for forming communities is so restricted. The same applies to the description, for example, of the functioning of laws in a pre-capitalist empire—say, in the Chinese Qin dynasty: we can certainly learn a lot about the logic of property by observing how legality can be used to mediate conflicts between communities, preserving much of their autonomy, across a vast territory. Chinese philosophers devoted much effort to understanding how it would be possible to preserve frontiers—that is, customs and cultures—while at the same time establishing dominion over an entire territory, however, what we call “order” in this social formation is not only an expression of the logic of property, but also a mixture where trade—and therefore value—facilitated non-conflictual connections between cities and communities, also facilitating the implementation of a government bureaucracy, with a system of salaried officials. Even the sphere of the circulation of commodities—often treated in Marxism as an internal dimension of the logic of value—cannot be understood solely by this logic: commodities, as we know, cannot bring themselves to market, and need to detach themselves from any cultural limits, which is why the logic of property alienation is constitutive of capitalist commercial organization.

The interest in presenting the three logics in a schematic and general way now begins to justify itself. For, armed with these three forms of division of social organization—frontiers, fences, and margins—we have the means to unify our analysis from an organizational point of view without failing to evaluate, on a case-by-case basis, how the determining articulations and mixtures of a specific social formation are formed. And note that the idea of “mixtures” would be very difficult to understand and analyze if we had not found a way to describe each logic as a very abstract type of

social division, almost like small drawings or building blocks, which we can combine and overlap in different ways, evaluating how these compositions alter their basic characteristics.

Even if they help us to advance our organizational understanding, it is clear that simply combining the three modes would not be enough: determining which of these modes is dominant, through which organizations it is sustained, what aspects of the material organization of the planet, animals, and people this form of organization propagates itself—all of this helps us to better examine how organizations are composed. Whether they are small, momentary groups or huge national economies.

In any case, we have greatly enhanced the tools of our theory by stating that we need not only to consider social and political activities from an organizational point of view, but we also need to ask ourselves how each organization mixes, in its composition, the logics of affinity, property, and value. We should not underestimate the consequences of this intermediate step, because we can now say that—according to our three fundamental questions of composition, interaction, and perception—the way each organization uses these three logics in its composition will affect which other organizations it interacts with and how the social structure will appear to it. For example, an organization that divides its members and actions based on the logic of affinity, fighting against proprietary divisions, may not have the means to assess how value influences its structure — nor have the means to alter its flows and effects on its political environment — while an organization that uses legal tools to alter the correlation of forces that defines the margins of value may ignore the forms of community it produces. It is not a matter of saying how everything is organized, but of having better means to distinguish the various forms of organization we investigate.

Social dominance

We need, then, to take one last step in relation to the idea of different modes of social organization. After all, the idea that these different modes are articulated is not sufficient to distinguish the main contours of each social formation, or different modes of production. To do this, we need to understand what it means for one social logic to dominate the others. To understand the idea of

domination from an organizational point of view, we need to pay attention to the form of interconnection or integration of different organizations.

In fact, we can say that a social form is dominant when it organizes most of the social fabric, ensuring most of its connections and differences. For example, it is clear that there is commercial trade and a series of cultures and communities within an empire, but the logic of property and state domination is what determines the integration of everything that happens in the four corners of this social world. The same is true of capitalism: there is no capitalism without private property, without white supremacy, and without heteronormativity ensuring social reproduction—yet it is through the logic of value that the entire world economy is interconnected. This approach is a direct extension of our more schematic way of defining social logics and their combinations: if each logic is treated as a way of dividing social organizations, and if concrete organizations combine these three forms in specific ways, what we are now discussing is how these organizations, with their particular formats, connect with each other—which forms facilitate this connection most in a given historical context? If I go out on the street offering my labor in exchange for favors—or even demanding that the state employ me, since the right to work is in the constitution—I will have less chance of being socially integrated than if I sell my labor. It is the way in which the organization of my life most easily connects and interlinks with the rest of the social organization around me.

This does not mean that everything in the world needs to be organized directly under the dominant logic; what dominance determines are the means by which even other organizational forms are woven into the whole. A family can relate through kinship, affinity, and even love, but if it wants to be part of capitalist society, it will need to somehow deal with the fact that most consumer goods cost money and that most occupations and ways of earning money come through the exchange of commodities. Similarly, there may even be commercial exchanges between isolated peoples, but if they want to relate to each other as part of the same social reality, they will have to find ways to relate to each other through gift-giving and kinship. Even activities that are not social in the sense we are dealing with here—for example, the process of creating a work of art—will need to adapt if they have ambitions to circulate socially in a given historical context: they may need to take on ritualistic or sacred traits in some cases, or find a place in financial speculation in others. Acquiring

this form so that a process is socially integrated does not mean that everything that happens in that process is absolutely determined by that form—only enough for the integration to be effective.

The crucial point here is that, in general, the process of integration into the dominant logic does not happen after activities and processes are already locally organized—as if we created new things and then tried to understand their place in a social puzzle. This simpler and cruder type of integration is what Marx called “formal subsumption,” an adjustment to try to integrate social components created without this integration in mind. For example, the integration of artisanal workshops into the functioning of the capitalist market, or the integration of indigenous lands into the legality of a state. However, the dominance of a social logic is only truly consolidated when the new pieces of this puzzle are already created or organized locally with this challenge of fitting into the whole in mind. Here, the totality is already anticipated in the form of its parts: I already cultivate food with the intention of selling the harvest, I already educate my children in view of how they will enter the job market—here, other human logics and activities try to conform to the board rules even before the game begins. This is what we call “real subsumption,” and we can easily observe it operating in modern cities: look around you and almost everything around you was produced to be sold as commodities—and what’s more, it was produced using other things that were themselves produced in this way.

If social dominance depends on this profound transformation of the organization of life—ceasing to be a principle of posterior connection between things to become a more active and internal force in social processes—it still needs a third type of process to truly consolidate itself.

Material dominance

In addition to the integration that attempts to glue together diverse social parts—formal subsumption—and the integration that already guides the creation of new pieces of the puzzle—real subsumption—there is also the question of how social logic will deal with processes that it cannot sufficiently control or absorb. After all, there is a limit to how far we can determine whether we organize ourselves according to this or that social logic. Faced with the pressures of

capital and competition, I can decide no longer to sell only the surplus production of my farm and start choosing what to cultivate based on what will sell more, even if I no longer eat what I plant, and I can even change the way I work and treat the soil because of this – but there is something in the earth that has been there for thousands of years, will continue to be there after humanity, and is indifferent to this whole process. Here we encounter forms of organization of reality – whether of life, physics, or whatever – that we cannot fully absorb in the form of a society. This introduces a third challenge to social dominance, which is the domination of material reality.

By “material reality” we mean here everything that participates in the integration and dominance of a social logic, but which cannot be entirely controlled or guided by it. The organization of life and physical phenomena are the most obvious examples of this type of materiality: even if capital puts a price on the minerals it extracts from the ground, it cannot synthesize these substances “out of thin air”; it must find ways to integrate them into the social world. The chemical and physical properties of a certain stone cannot be fully absorbed by the market, but they can be used in different ways—for example, the rarity of a metal can be used as a criterion for its pricing or monopoly, even though its disposition in the ground, millions of years ago, was not conceived with the luxury market in mind.

Material domination does not occur, in this sense, through a social rearrangement of how things are organized, since we are dealing here with elements that we cannot directly alter, but mainly through the instrumentalization of these uncontrollable aspects in the name of social reproduction. It is as if the most advanced form of domination were one that delegates to non-social processes the task of creating conditions for the perpetuation of the dominant social form. Say we live far away from any source of clean water, in a region where it rains little—and this is no coincidence: it was the only place where we could find housing, given the way our society is organized. Now, geographical distance is not in itself something that capitalism controls, but it can imbue this spatial organization with the task of reproducing class relations, since the lack of access to water puts me in a position where I need to buy bottles of water, at exorbitant prices and contaminated with microplastics, in order to survive. Capital is not capable of creating physical space, but it knows how to propagate capitalist relations by instrumentalizing this material

dimension.

Material dominance is essential for the reproduction of a social formation; it is what ensures not only that a society creates new "pieces" that fit into its totality, but also that even that which it cannot create continues to ensure the integrity of this social whole. This negotiation with materiality can take place through selective processes of reorganization—such as the choice of partners for sexual reproduction, in the case of kinship; the restriction of access through logistics, in the case of states and empires; or the "productive consumption" of goods, in the case of capitalism. These are all cases where we actively reorganize processes that exist independently of our social organization. But there are also cases where this reorganization is more passive, for example, transforming a natural disaster into a "business opportunity" that exploits the desperation of climate refugees. Certainly no process of material domination is as frightening and complete as the way contemporary capitalism integrates the planetary metabolism today: on the one hand, it actively destabilizes life on Earth, and on the other, it transforms this instability into new spaces of accumulation and exploitation.

There is one aspect of this conception of material reality that we do not discuss in detail here, but which will play a crucial role later in this book. It is the fact that, for us, what counts as material reality is *relative* to a given organization. We define material reality as follows: it is everything on which a social organization depends, but which is indifferent or independent of it to some extent. In other words, it does not need to be a process that is totally alien or external to the human world in general; it suffices that it be indifferent to the social formation we are analyzing. We use examples here that contrast the organization of people—which can be more easily changed socially—and the organization of natural processes, as these cases make clear the challenge at stake in material domination, which is to propagate itself through means that cannot be entirely controlled. But this differentiation is only for didactic purposes.

There are natural organizational processes that do not present great resistance to social integration—think, for example, of the chemical processes that capitalism has "domesticated" to the point of controlling them with unbelievable precision, synthesizing all sorts of materials that

exist only for industrial purposes. And there are also forms of human organization that—like the material reality we described above—do not meekly conform to any social logic or any mixture of them—and which therefore exist for a given society as an “anti-social” threat, a source of resistance and refusal of immediate integration. This is the case with egalitarian collective organization: people who come together to act under a political principle that cannot be reduced to community, property, or value are a source of both fear and social fascination, just like a storm or a meteor tearing through the sky.

IX

The worker and peripheralization

The previous four chapters were possibly the densest so far. It could not be otherwise, as they introduced three of the main ideas we will use to construct our theory of communist practice—the idea of the organizational point of view, the idea of modes of social organization, and what it means for one social mode to dominate the others. As we anticipated, the principles of a theory that aims to accompany and learn from very diverse practices and struggles need to be very general and comprehensive—and this really makes it difficult to present them in a concise and didactic way. But now, armed with these concepts, we can begin to revisit the arguments we presented at the beginning of the book—about peripheralization and the challenge facing communists today—presenting them in a much more integrated way and, most importantly, in a way that is more appropriate for a practice that needs tools to investigate the forms of organization of different political struggles today and the possibilities for their composition.

If we want to return to our initial discussion of peripheralization as a historical process that has transformed the terrain of political struggles, we need to be able to define three things. First, we need to be able to describe in this new theoretical language the dynamics of industrial progress that Marx and Engels analyzed in *The Communist Manifesto*. Next, we need to be able to define, within this capitalist formation, what the figure of the worker is—because, as we have seen, it is this figure that, for us, enters into crisis with peripheralization. Finally, as expected, we need to define what a peripheral capitalist social formation is. Let's get started.

Capitalist alignment and modernity

We define capitalist social formation as one in which social organization by value dominates the other two modes—which must still be present—and determines the material dominance of that society, centered on the labor force and the exploitation of nature for the purpose of capital accumulation. We thus approach the famous definition of capitalist social formation that Marx

presents when he defines the social “base” and “superstructure,” the base being composed of the confrontation between productive forces and relations of production, and the superstructure containing the entire legal, cultural, and spiritual organization of society. In light of what we discussed in the previous chapter, it is not difficult to recognize the dominance of value in the material base – with labor mediating between the material and the social logic of value – and the organization by property and affinity constituting the social “superstructure” as secondary forces, but also articulated within a specific social formation. It is important that we recover this scheme from Marx, but it is more important that our theory has room for other possible arrangements, as it may be that the main contradiction of a given society is not organized by value, but directly by the logic of imperial violence, or by forms governed by affinity, with value being reduced, in these cases, to a superstructural element.

However, in order to define more specifically that central characteristic that we identified in Marx and Engels' analysis of capitalism in the *Manifesto*, we need to introduce another new idea here. As we have seen, there was something in the dynamics of industrial progress that seemed to link the constant transformation of the conditions of production to a corresponding advance in the conditions of association of workers, as a historical force that pushed us toward a unified international movement. How can we define this connection between value and the organization of workers?

When we talk about the mixture of different modes of organization, we have already seen that it is important to consider which mode dominates the others. But it is also important to consider whether this mixture is *aligned* or *misaligned*.

Alignment, in our theory, means that these three forms of organization are highly integrated and function almost as one—misalignment is the opposite and, in fact, is also the most common case. When there is alignment, the way we organize ourselves to meet the requirements of value—as workers, consumers, etc.—also meets the requirements of property and affinity. Social organization is such that the main social divisions of each mode overlap: the difference between law and crime also divides what is productive and unproductive—such as the protection of private property,

which guarantees the possibility of selling commodities—and good family and community norms are defined based on these same divisions—so that raising a child is synonymous with preparing them to respect authority and to work hard. In this context, being a “good person” in the eyes of our peers, being a hard-working person and a law-abiding citizen... it’s all more or less the same thing. Institutions themselves can also be organized in an aligned manner – for example, in a school, where the processes of personal development, discipline, and job training are extremely integrated. Now, an “aligned” capitalist society will be one where changes in the organization of value will inform changes in the field of laws and communities at every point. Everything that capital does in the field of commodity production relations would lead to a similar, or aligned, transformation in the field of the legal superstructure, forms of consciousness, and affinity, thus transforming the conditions of workers’ organization.

Another name for this social alignment in capitalism is *modernity*. Modernity can be understood as a form of capitalist social organization where industrial progress would also lead to a broader type of social development—that is, concomitant transformations in the field of property and community norms—that cut across all the contradictions of society. In the modern context, when capital reorganizes the forms of management and exploitation of labor, communities and legal regimes would accompany these transformations, facilitating the social expression of this economic tension in terms of rights and the formation of bonds of affinity among workers. For example, new forms of exploitation at work, by affecting similarly organized people, could lead to new forms of union organization and a renewed sense of solidarity around the same issues of struggle. This is the origin of the process of “spontaneous” convergence that we indicated at the beginning of this book.

In this sense, we can define modernity as a force that produces a growing alignment of organizational forms, a kind of “simplification” of life through the reinforcement of some institutions responsible for this organizational homogenization: the workplace, school, families, elections, etc. And at the heart of modernity is the figure of the worker, a kind of minimal unit of affinity and property, dominated by value—socially and materially.

The figure of the worker and the senses of work

When we present the logic of value, we talk about the workforce as a commodity whose limits are negotiated within the production process—but a worker is not just their labor power, a commodity. It is also a figure that transforms an individual into an independent person who can belong to communities—that is, a way of being recognized as a person through sharing a common substrate with others, a nomadic disposition—and a way of existing for the State—as a legal subject, an owner of oneself. It is a figure that already combines the three logics of affinity, property, and value in a single individual, capable of building new communities, constituting themselves as citizens of the State, and—above all—integrating themselves into the circuits of production and consumption of commodities. The formation of the working class—through the enclosure of land, the dispossession of the means of labor, the criminalization of “vagrancy,” the segregation of women into the domestic sphere, the centrality of the individual in modern culture, the reinvention of slavery under the rule of international capital, among many other forms of social reorganization – not only produced an economic regime centered on the extraction of surplus value from labor, but an entire social world where the figure of the worker functions as a privileged form of sociability.

It is by presenting ourselves as someone who is their own master and freely chooses to sell their labor power that we can exist in the face of capital. But, of course, not everyone who works and is exploited under capitalism constitutes a worker in this sense, even in modernity. And this is no coincidence: not being able to exist socially as a worker is in itself one of the forms of domination under capitalism, especially on its periphery. And, as we mentioned earlier, both domestic work and work under a slave regime contribute structurally to the capitalist economy without, therefore, presenting this alignment between the formation of communities and proprietary regimes, thus existing in the shadows of the modern regime.

The figure of the modern worker, therefore, is not only the position of all who work—in the sense that their survival is tied to the dictates of value and capital—but the position of those who can

transform this work dynamic into the foundation for claiming their rights and their place in the family and communities they form.

This brings us to an important question: what is the reason for the centrality of the working class in Marxist analysis, the figure of the worker in modernity, or the role of labor in capitalism? The argument we find in *The Communist Manifesto* identifies the proletariat with the figure of the worker, that is, the worker as an individual "aligned" in the field of value, property, and affinity—after all, it is the worker who would be able to socially accompany the transformations produced by the expansion of industrial progress, forming ever larger political communities with other workers exposed to the same social conditions. This is a first reason for focusing political analysis on the situation of workers: the worker would be the general figure of oppression, which capitalism promotes everywhere as it dissolves all other types of collective and individual existence. Therefore, if the patterns of accumulation and exploitation change, the forms of work and, therefore, the forms of life of workers would also change in general.

But the hypothesis that capitalism produces the conditions for workers to recognize themselves everywhere as a dominated class is not the only reason why labor has a strategic place in revolutionary political thought. There is also the fact that the dominance of capital, as we saw in the previous chapter, depends on the reorganization of material reality, that is, on the capacity of human action to transform itself and other things into commodities. Labor, in this sense, is situated at the very threshold of capitalist social relations: at the point where value confronts everything that is indifferent to "relations of production" – and, not surprisingly, this limit is a point of unavoidable conflict between "productive forces" and the social forms of capital, a dispute over the extent to which labor power will have to push its own limits into matter and return with more value, and the extent to which something will resist this thrust. This dimension of labor under capitalist domination continues to operate even where the figure of the worker no longer has the same centrality.

We have therefore seen two dimensions of the working class that are relevant to revolutionary politics: the "homogenizing" dimension of the figure of the worker, which capital would promote

globally, against its own interests, and the conflictive dimension of labor under capitalism, a social place where an endless battle between human activity and the logic of value is repeated. The first dimension is indebted to modernity, as it depends on the alignment between value, property, and affinity in the formation of individuals. The second depends solely on the social and material dominance of value.

But there is still a third dimension that we associate with work and that is often lost under these two other aspects: beneath the idea of the worker there lies a more diffuse or indeterminate human creative capacity, for humanity is not only capable of dedicating itself to the reorganization of material reality based on the criteria of commodities and value. We can, after all, also subject this reorganization to other social forms—transforming reality according to the dictates of affinity or property—and to forms that simply do not fit into any recognizable social regime. Art, science, love, and politics all mobilize this inventive dimension that hinders social integration. Of course, artists, scientists, psychoanalysts, and political militants sometimes earn money from what they do—and need to orient their activities to ensure this income—but there remains a tension between what they actually do and the available modes of social integration, because they are all ways of reorganizing life and matter that, instead of integrating reality into existing social forms, attempt to subject society itself to essentially "anti-social" forms – that is, to forms that are indifferent to good taste, current opinions, romantic types, and established social divisions. There is something in what we call "labor"—and which for centuries has fueled the revolutionary imagination—that points to a capacity to subject the social world to something else, to other principles, often difficult to explain. For our part, we do not need a single name for this dimension of human activity. As we shall see, the way in which this inventive capacity is named varies in each political process, depending on how it articulates different social logics.

It was the great Promethean dream of modernity that the alignment of value, affinity, and property could guarantee the unity of these three meanings of work: work as the homogenization of social experience, as the tension between the transformation of the material world and the reproduction of capital, and as the creative capacity to subject society to other forms. It turns out that this unity is, at best, an exceptional and historically determined phenomenon.

Capitalist misalignment and peripheralization

We mentioned that the alignment of affinity, property, and value in capitalism gives rise to the modern capitalist form of organization, with the figure of the worker at its center. With this description, we are able to recover the analysis presented in the *Manifesto*, which we consider to represent only a particular historical moment. In fact, with the tools we have developed, it is not difficult to understand why capitalist modernity could be nothing more than a geographical and temporal exception.

We spoke above about the alignment of the three logics—and what happens when they are not aligned? Well, first of all, it is worth noting that misalignment is the normal situation, the general case: there are many more ways to organize without having to overlap affinity, property, and value than there are ways to align these forms of organization everywhere. In fact, it is worse than that: it is effectively impossible to guarantee the total alignment of the three forms of organization. Consider the case of so-called “fictitious commodities,” that is, those commodities that are necessary for capitalist production but are not created through that production process. This is the case with land—which we do not produce—labor—since workers are born, they are not produced in factories—and money itself—which is also not created by commodities, but by relationships that are beyond anyone’s control, as changes in languages and ways of speaking exemplify very well. These commodities must undergo a specific type of process in order to exist as value-bearing commodities: they must be fenced off, their community ties broken, so that they can then be presented on the market. To return to our abstract language: common frontiers are replaced by fences—only then can things be exploited and traded marginally. If this happens, then capitalism must necessarily operate in a misaligned manner somewhere. It is no coincidence that it has always operated in this way in places where it has concentrated the massive enclosure of land and people, that is, in the colonies.

Life on the peripheries of capitalism is—and always has been—misaligned. We mentioned above the figure of the worker as a paradigm of the integrated organization of affinity, property, and value,

but it is difficult to find this type of alignment both in peripheral countries and in the peripheries of large central cities. Instead of this homogenizing trend, the periphery is where we constantly need to alternate which form of organization we should prioritize: often, in order to secure some work, we need to go against the law and against our own community ideals; to fight for rights, we need to put our economic survival at risk; to defend our families and communities, we need to go against our economic interests. Nowhere in the world do people work as hard as in the periphery, but paradoxically, everyone is always striving to *become* a worker, as if this status were never real enough. And in fact it is not: the circuits of capital absorb as much labor as they can, but they do not need to reorganize people's lives in such a way that the state and the nation absorb and integrate the entire population in the same way. In Brazil, for example, there are many more people working than there are formally employed and than there are citizens whose interests have a place on the national stage.

We can finally give a more technical definition of what we call peripheralization. If modernization is the historical process through which industrial progress would increasingly produce an aligned and integrated social organization, peripheralization is the reverse process: the greater the expansion of the domain of capital, the more it produces a misaligned and fragmented social world—and benefits from it. And according to our theory, this would be a much more spontaneous and much less costly trend than modernization. Not only because there must always be regions of the capitalist system where these modes of organization do not fit together harmoniously, but because the logic of value and capital becomes much more “pure” when it does not have to be compatible with just one form of law and one general form of community.

This way of defining peripheralization makes it much more natural to understand why we initially stated that it is both an important transformation of capitalism and a return to a well-known state. Of course, life on the periphery of capitalism is different when we interact with more central regions of the world where some organizational alignment still exists. However, the form this experience takes when this modernizing trend dissipates is not entirely new, as it closely resembles the way capitalism has always operated on its margins.

Another thesis that can perhaps be clarified now concerns how this process affects the left. As the social terrain becomes increasingly fragmented—that is, increasingly misaligned in terms of how affinity, property, and value structure our lives—the composition of each political organization also varies more. And when the way they are constituted in the struggle against capitalism varies, so too do the ways in which they interact with their environments and the way they will cut out pieces of this world, producing very different perceptions of our social reality. Of course, it is still possible to rally people as workers, but perhaps now we can understand why this strategy does not work like as before: it is the social terrain itself that is not organized in the same way, even though, due to vulgarization, we may have the impression that everyone understands the same thing when we invoke this figure.

Does this mean that peripheralization implies the end of classes, the crisis of value, or the end of the revolutionary horizon? Not at all. Social organization based on the accumulation of capital has never encountered so little friction as it does today, which means that the ability of value to shape the terrain of economic exchange has never been so absolute. The figure of the worker dissolves, but labor conflict becomes even more widespread when the inertia of legality and human dignity does not impose so many obstacles. It is true that we cannot count on the transposition of the missteps of the process of capital valorization in terms of general laws and rights or in terms of mutual recognition and spontaneous solidarity, as there is no longer an alignment between these logics. But it is also true that the creative and transformative potential that we have learned to recognize in the figure of the worker never belonged exclusively to that figure—it merely embodied, at a specific historical moment, the much more general contradiction between social organization and the proletariat's potential to extract its own form from that which lies beyond the dominance of capital. Today, it is up to all of us to recognize this creative dimension—the source of popular power—wherever it appears.

Political organization

We now enter the third part of the book. The first four chapters served to map out our current situation and what we need to do. We talked about the peripheralization of capitalism, the challenges facing communists today, and the requirements for a theory that would help us advance our practical tasks. The second part of the book was devoted, first, to understanding these requirements and introducing three ideas that help us build a theory appropriate to them—the idea of the organizational point of view, modes of social organization, and their dominance. We then used these ideas to revisit our initial diagnosis of peripheralization and assess whether our theory was indeed capable of thinking from our historical moment. We thus reconsidered the *Manifesto's* analysis of the spontaneous tendencies of capitalism, discussed the role of the worker in the organization of capitalism, and offered an organizational definition of what the process of the peripheralization of capitalism would be based on the difference between the alignment and misalignment between these social logics. With this, we completed the necessary foundations for taking the next step.

We now arrive at the central dimension of this entire effort. After all, in light of everything we have discussed so far, what is a political organization? What does it mean to fight politically? We know that we need to approach struggles without assuming that they take place in a modern capitalist society, as we cannot count on the supposed organizational “shortcuts” that modern alignment would provide us. But is it possible to deal with these questions without automatically creating another ideal model of radical politics, which we would then use to compare and judge all other forms of struggle? A recurring tendency among communists is to elect their model revolution, their preferred political actors, creating a criterion for evaluating where struggles follow and where they do not follow the “common interests” of the proletariat—would it be possible to escape this? As we discussed earlier, when we listed the requirements for a theory of communist practice, what we need is a way of thinking about political struggle that is not confused with any particular movement or process and that invites us, at the same time, to investigate concretely what is

happening within different real struggles. It is only from within these concrete processes that the motivations and means for a common proletarian articulation can spring.

Political organization

So far, we have not really talked about political struggles and processes. We have described organizations only in terms of three interconnected questions—how they are composed, how they interact, and what is perceptible to them—and in three modes: affinity, property, and value. With these two tools, we have already been able to investigate our social reality from an organizational point of view with great flexibility, considering the different forms of social organization that inhabit the “misaligned” terrain of peripheral capitalism. What we need now is a means of differentiating which of these varied organizations could be considered political organizations.

Let's start with an example. A small church on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro establishes a certain frontier relationship with its members and its surroundings—sharing a common neighborhood culture—and deals with value both by offering job opportunities to its members and by charging dues—which implies a particular relationship with labor power, its reproduction, and the reproduction of the church itself—and has a relationship with the state, rights, and property that can be conflictive—if, for example, it offers a type of protection and social security that the state is unable to provide, while at the same time its accounting is not in compliance with current laws. This form of organization leads the church to interact with some things—the neighborhood, families, the economic difficulties of its followers, etc.—and not others—for example, the exchange rate of the dollar, the opening of new civil service exams, or who was elected in the United States are of little importance. If it were a branch of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a huge international church complex in Brazil, perhaps some of these other factors would be more relevant. But because it interacts with certain organizations in its environment—the result of its particular composition—this church, as a social organization, is also sensitive to some specific variations, that is, there are specific references that make a difference to it and the people it organizes.

What interests us specifically in this example is to realize that the point of view of this organization—what it is capable of doing and what it “sees” of reality—is ultimately part of what there is to see in the already established capitalist reality. In other words, participating in the church certainly changes the reality of the people who gather there, but what this point of view makes visible to them already existed, was already accessible as a horizon, regardless of whether they organize there or not. This does not prevent a person, by organizing there, from having access to relationships and ways of thinking that they did not have before – but this change is new to the individual, it does not imply something new for the world.

A similar analysis could be made in the case of a school. Of course, through classes, students have increasing access to something they would not be able to access without going through that formative process, but this horizon was already available, as it is part of capitalist social organization: it is an education consistent with the position they will enter in the job market and with the culture expected of their social class. And this is to be expected: if the forms of organization involved in that church or school are restricted to affinity, property, and value, they will not allow us access to much more than that. We say that an organization is “social” when what it makes accessible is already part of the social world in which we live.

Now consider another church or religious association. Although it is also composed of community ties, property, and value, this organization subjects all these forms of relating to another principle—for example, it uses the Bible as a means to combat homophobia and protect women from harassment and aggression, encourages solidarity and thereby combats competition and economic precariousness among the faithful, uses the idea of the sacred to create moments when it does not matter who owns what property. This church may not consider itself political—perhaps the discourse that circulates there is explicitly antipolitical, since politicians are considered part of the problem—but by participating in this congregation, a person has access to a point of view, the result of the way this organization interacts with its environment, which does not reiterate the horizon that was already accessible to the person independent of that space. This discrepancy between what is experienced in this church and the world around it is even felt in the flesh, as it is difficult to communicate this experience to others without inviting them to participate in this

space, and any believer who tries to spread the word to their family and coworkers will feel that they are going against the grain.

The novelty in this case is not only a novelty for those who participate in the church: by participating, people are helping to create something that is in conflict with the way the social world itself is organized. This church is a political organization because it is irreducible to the social logics of affinity, property, and value, subjecting all three to other principles—and, in doing so, interacting with reality in a new way and unveiling another way of looking at social reality, where there is not only what is already established, but the possibility of greater transformations. From a distance, this church and the one from our first example would be indistinguishable, but an investigation must be able to recognize this difference—and must be able to learn something from it.

The same situation applies to the example of the school. Compare its usual functioning with what happens during a student occupation. Of course, a school occupied by students continues to be organized by relationships determined by the three social modes we have studied – but it subjects all of them to something else. Relationships of friendship and enmity are crossed by another type of commitment, revealing another type of common substrate among people. The differences between students, teachers, staff, and management also continue to exist, but at the same time they are clarified and transformed as new pacts are created and the “untamed” students start to define the boundaries of that space. The role of the school in training workers, as well as the relationship between the school's own workers and the means of production available there – all of this is also reorganized through another use of space, the kitchen, classrooms, courtyard, etc. It is a political transformation of this organization, because the perspective that unfolds from its point of view also reveals a horizon that is irreducible to the possibilities of education under capitalism. This is why this perspective is not so easily shared with those who are not engaged in this process. From the point of view of other social organizations—government, family, neighbors, police—a school occupied by other principles is indistinguishable from a disorganized school.

To describe the difference between social and political organizations, we use the idea that there is “something else” capable of restricting the scope of the three forms of social organization, placing them at the service of another principle. It is this “something” that differentiates the use of the Bible as a means of integrating the faithful into the capitalist social world from its use as a means of promoting another collective life, and it is this “something” that guides a student occupation that gives new purpose to the school space and apparatus. We have been deliberately vague about the name of this other element, but not because it is something mystical and unnameable—after all, both the faithful and the militant high school students would have much to say about their reasons and forms of action—nor because it is always the same thing—after all, a spiritual motivation may even clash with the justifications of politicized students. The need to avoid specifying too much what would guide this process of political reorganization stems from the fact that, for us, the content of this principle and form of action is itself the result of the process of political organization. In other words, this new horizon that becomes visible through a process of political organization, this new way of looking at social reality, paradoxically includes the creation of the means to name and think about what principles, norms, and ideas we are effectively following when we organize ourselves in this way. A political organization, in this sense, is also a way of reinventing what it means to engage in politics: we subject social life to other ways of doing things, often without much awareness of what we are doing, but as we organize, insist, and reorganize the reality around us, we also create a new language to describe our actions and what they allow us to see of the world. And what we learn through this process cannot be derived or decided in advance; it must be investigated concretely.

We chose a church and a school as examples, and we chose to compare them to politicized versions of the same organizations, to demonstrate that our approach does not require us to define in advance what types of organizations would, by their very nature, be political organizations, nor to be able to clearly explain what principles, ideas, and worldviews guide these political processes. We can certainly apply this type of analysis to unions, anarchist collectives, and socialist parties, but its scope and flexibility become more evident if we show that it also applies to any other form of organization, including more ephemeral processes such as popular uprisings or collective acts. As we know, this type of flexibility is crucial for communist practice in peripheral conditions.

Where do political ideas come from?

We define political organization as any social activity that is capable of subjecting the logics of value, property, and affinity to other collective principles. Let us call these principles, or forms, political ideas. It is worth remembering that we are still in the field of collective organization and practice and, therefore, we do not use the term “idea” to describe something abstract or conceptual: the term serves only to describe forms of organization that cannot be derived by the mere application or mixture of social logics. It is a very colloquial sense of the term: “I had an idea!” is a very common way of saying that we have found a new way to solve a problem or to do something different. When we use the term in this sense, it is not the difference between something abstract or concrete that matters, but that between a new way and an already known, routine response—an idea is, here, the opposite of an ideal plan: it sets us in motion, but without necessarily having much clarity about where we are going. A political idea, in this sense, is precisely what allows, at a given moment, an organization to submit value, property, and affinity to some other way of doing things—a different way that was not prescribed by any of these three modes of social organization and that therefore brings into play other possibilities that have not yet been explored.

That said, we must now ask ourselves: where would principles of collective organization that are not derived from value, property, or affinity come from? Are the ideas at play in different political organizations the result of a fourth “logic,” with a fixed and recognizable structure, that has not yet had a chance to become the dominant social mode?

Considering everything we said initially about the need to resume communist practices without any expectation that there would be a tendency toward spontaneous convergence between struggles, it is easy to answer this question. Even if we come to understand, one day, that all of humanity’s emancipatory political struggles were in fact only attempts to implement the same form of social organization that has been given different names throughout history, adopting this position at the moment would only lead us back to the impasses that arise from this belief in an underlying unifying revolutionary force. For us, there is much more to be gained by affirming that

there is nothing that guarantees unity among the different political forms of movements and organizations, no logic that facilitates the connection between them, and by forcing us to learn about and engage with these different political dynamics and strategies—and to deal with the problem that this poses regarding the origin of these different forms.

To address the question of the origin of political ideas, we need to return to a discussion that we have so far only touched on obliquely. When we discuss the forms of "dominance" of a given social mode—for example, value in capitalism—we distinguish three types or ways in which this domination occurs. The first two—associated with what Marx called formal and real subsumption—concern the direct reorganization of the components of social life. That is, when value dominates, it either connects things it has not organized in its own way, or it forces things to reorganize themselves to facilitate their integration into the world of commodities and capital. The third way in which a social mode exercises its domination – which we call "material domination" – works a little differently. Here, value is trying to integrate into its functioning everything that remains on the threshold of social organization, that which cannot be totally forced to reorganize itself directly according to the criteria of value. It is, therefore, a form of domination where the dominant logic needs to "propagate" through substrates it does not control. This type of organizational substrate certainly includes forms of organization of biomes, physical systems, climatic phenomena, but it can also include human organizations that are relatively indifferent to social integration, such as artistic processes, love, and other forms of creative association.

In the following chapter, discussing the fate of the worker in the periphery, we again touched on the question of what happens at this threshold between social organization and everything that is indifferent to it, since this boundary defines one of the main characteristics of work, which is to be the site of a conflict between the existing social form and the material reality on which we depend, but which remains alien to us to some extent. One dimension of this conflict is central to the definition of work and labor in capitalism, since it is up to labor, for capital, to transform this material reality according to the form of value, producing new commodities. But there is yet another dimension, with which we conclude that discussion, and which concerns the opposite path: the case when we do not transform reality to adapt it to a current social form—for example,

transforming clay into bricks that can be sold for civil construction—but when we stress this social form by adequating it to aspects of the material reality itself—such as when an artist says she learns from the properties of clay itself what a sculpture could be, forcing the artistic community to think in a new way. In this second case, we have a reversal: material reality does not give content and social organization to form, but it is the collective organization of humanity itself that is strained by another way of doing things, which emerges from elsewhere.

It is much more intuitive to link the idea of this “other place” contained in material reality, indifferent to the way we organize ourselves socially, to nature and biophysical processes. It is easy because we are accustomed to defining nature and the laws of nature as the field of everything that has its own laws that do not depend on us. It is almost a definition: society is the domain of laws that we can change, nature is the domain of laws over which we have no control. And, still staying in this more intuitive field, we can even use this case as an example of how the agroecological struggle aims to subject the organization of value, property, and affinity to the determinations of nature, recognizing the importance of political principles of reorganizing life based on the energetic limits of our planet and the threat that industrial progress poses to ourselves and other species. Even though it is useful, this more intuitive division between society and nature does not serve us, because, as we have already discussed, there are both human and non-human organizations that operate “below” the threshold of what a society can control and integrate into its functioning—just as there are also many non-human processes that capitalism has managed to integrate almost completely into its dynamics.

If we want to define a little more rigorously this intuition that new political forms and principles can emerge beyond the material dominance of a social form, it is important to be clear that by “material” we do not mean what is physical, objective, and separate from the human. It is not about what is the object of an exact science – even though much of what the sciences investigate is part of material reality. To make this clear, it is important to remember that our definition of material reality is relative, that is, it concerns everything that behaves like the matter of a given social organization in particular. Nothing is “in itself” material; things are the material of something.

One way to unravel this definition is to think that the material substrate of an organization functions as a “black box” for that particular organization: we break down and analyze the parts of that phenomenon, how things relate to each other... until we come up against something that we cannot evaluate with the same tools, a kind of threshold for those particular analytic means. We know that this something we cannot analyze is crucial to the functioning of what we want to understand, but from that point on we enter another territory, because what lies below that threshold works in a totally different way from what we have been analyzing up to that point. Think of a mechanic: he knows how to disassemble an engine, separating all the parts of the car, naming and analyzing each one—but there are processes and components that are crucial to the functioning of the car, such as thermodynamic combustion processes, the structure of the carburetor's metal alloy, and a whole reality underlying the parts and functioning of the car that, if the mechanic wants to name and analyze, he will need to stop talking about car models, engine operation, and even whether something is broken or not, because these things do not matter so much to physics. All of this makes a difference to the repair and functioning of the car, but does not immediately make a difference to the mechanic himself, operating like a black box, concealing processes that nevertheless participate in that organization. Material support is composed of all the processes and structures that operate in this way in a society: we depend on these “black boxes,” but social logic cannot completely integrate what occurs there into its own functioning.

Consider a party for rich people: drinks and appetizers circulate as if by magic, spilled drinks on the floor disappear, doors are opened and closed without the hosts' intervention... everything happens as if there were no backstage cooks, waiters, and doormen performing all these tasks. These people form a “black box” in relation to the party: the party depends on them, but they do not exist for the party—to understand what is going on with the work team, it would be necessary to consider racial domination, the sexual division of labor, the exploitation of informal labor... a whole series of issues that the party serves precisely to ignore. This set of relationships that sustain the party, but do not fit into it, forms its material support. Now consider one of these invisible workers: this person walks up and down, eats, expends energy, interacts with others—as if it were magic for their body to do all this. Physiological and metabolic processes are a black box for the worker himself: he depends on these processes, but much of the physical organization of his body and his environment

remains essentially alien and invisible to his daily work. In this sense, what we call material reality is something relative to the organization we are considering.

The material support of an organization can thus be defined as everything on which an organization depends but which exists and operates in a manner that is partially independent of the form of the organization in question. There is a certain autonomy in these processes: they are generally indifferent to what is happening in the organization that interests us—the work regime of the waiters and cleaners at the party follows a different logic than that of the elite who enjoy themselves at their expense, for example—but which, because of their own organizational characteristics, serve as a substrate, a means for the propagation and expansion of the form of the organization in question—because without the staff, the party would not happen. This certainly includes the human effort expended in the work, but it also allows us to recognize many other processes as material supports of society, depending on which organization we are evaluating. A polluted river, for example, has nothing social "in itself" – the river does not care about affinity, ownership, or value – but in a capitalist society, the pollution of the river helps to reproduce capitalist relations, since the lowest social cost to clean up the river comes from paying a company to do so, since neither the state nor the affected communities have the means to do so. Pollution reproduces capitalist organization, despite being indifferent to it, as it spreads throughout the world a problem that is now more easily solved by capitalism itself. Materiality, in this sense, is a type of relationship between the organization of society and the organization of the non-social things on which it depends.

It is crucial for us to revisit this definition, which was already at stake in previous chapters, because it is precisely from the material reality of social organizations that flashes of insight, examples, and ideas can emerge about how we can reorganize ourselves politically in a given situation. After all, what happens in the material support of an organization has power over it—because the organization depends on these processes—but does not exist for it—because it functions differently from the organization in question. Practical knowledge of work and its hardships, the needs of the soil, climate cycles, the ways of survival of those who exist in the gaps of society... all of this constitutes, at the same time, the substrate of our social reality and the source of new forms of

political organization. An emancipatory political process is an effort to transform the material reality of society into the source of new social forms, new ways of organizing collective life. But since the forms that inhabit the black boxes of social organization are not completely compatible with that organization, this process of creating, consolidating, and expanding new forms necessarily points to a profound social reorganization—and therefore requires a struggle.

And here we find some advantages of having proposed a definition of material reality from an organizational point of view. The first is that we can preserve the classic Marxist principle that forms and forces with revolutionary potential should not be sought in “ideas or principles invented or discovered by this or that world reformer,” as the *Manifesto* criticizes, but rather in what constitutes concrete reality. This is possible because, for us, the crisis of the modern figure of the worker does not mean that there is nothing left that strains or transcends the limitations of capitalism. Instead, we argue that the material reality of capitalism has also fragmented, since different social organizations will find support in different material processes. And for that, we need to recognize this “black box” relationship between social organizations and their material supports, and the forms of organization of these obscured or invisible processes.

The second advantage is that, since the organizational point of view does not treat politics as a particular type of activity, but as a dimension of any activity that can be collectively articulated by principles that break with modes of social organization, it matters little to us how these new forms present themselves in particular. It is possible for popular struggles to be articulated in terms of moral and utopian ideals and, over time, adopt a more “materialistic” revolutionary discourse—as was the case with part of the Catholic grassroots movement in Brazil in the 1960s – just as struggles may enter the scene appealing exclusively to military and economic issues of land seizure and end up reorganizing themselves according to “immaterial” principles learned from indigenous peoples and quilombolas – as has happened with other important political processes more recently. Analyzing from the point of view of the content of the principles and forms of organization, we might find that some of these principles are “idealistic” because they are conceived in spiritual or moral terms, but, according to our definition, if this spirituality is part of how black people already organize and resist in the fractures of Brazilian racist and capitalist society, if it is part of what

occurs in the shadow of the organization of society around whiteness, there is no reason to consider this origin and motivation of the struggle less "materialistic" than any call for the organization of factory workers.

But why, ultimately, would it be important not to base our struggles on far-fetched ideas, theoretical abstractions, or personal utopian visions? The reason is pragmatic and becomes more evident from an organizational point of view. When I propose something I have thought of on my own, whether it is a slogan, a suggestion on how to reorganize a process, or a new strategic objective, all the work of transforming that idea into a concrete organizational dynamic still remains to be done—nothing prevents it from being a good suggestion, but there is still a long way between what is said or thought and the existence of social relations that have that structure. When we find ways of organizing ourselves that already operate among us, and therefore have some social power, but remain restricted and invisible, the idea already exists as a form of organization, and the path is shorter to synthesize this dynamic and share it, reproduce it, or transform it into something political. Furthermore, if the material reality from which we extract new forms of organization is the material support of a large social structure, the greater the chance that other places that are also socially structured in this way will be able to access these forms as well—unlike what happens with my inventive but personal suggestion. This also explains why not every political idea coming from "outside" is equivalent to idealistic motivation: many political organizations in the world are created or guided by principles and forms of organization that they did not invent on their own, but learned from the history and accumulated experience of the movements and struggles that preceded us. If the material support of another political process is still similar to the material reality of our own form of social organization, then the ideas do not really come from somewhere else; it is our social world that is bigger than it seemed.

This way of defining the origin of forms of political organization does not imply that they arise ready-made, that they are political by their very nature, that they have any chance of spreading socially against conservative and reactionary forces, or that they are compatible with the political form of other struggles around the world. All of this depends on how this "political matter" will transform into an orientation for a reorganization of collective life, how we will be able to

experiment with these forms through struggles for composition, interaction, and perception, and, above all, whether we will be able to weave these new, specific, and localized forms into larger and more powerful articulations.

Emancipation, conservatism, and reactionism

In the previous sections, we discussed what makes any organization a political force: the submission of its forms of organization to some other collective principle, extracted from the material reality of social life, and which, however, is irreducible to the current forms of organization of our world. It is by structuring themselves differently that organizations are also able to see the world differently—and "see" in a very practical sense: what makes a difference in reality is what changes. We also mention a very important characteristic of political organizations, because this additional principle is enriched and clarified by the political process itself: it is also with the unfolding of a new reality that we also find better concepts and words to name where we are going and who we are.

It turns out that this characteristic seems to be a specific aspect of emancipatory political organizations—that is, of struggles to transform reality in the name of equality and justice. It is because we seek a world that does not yet exist that we also cannot be completely clear about the principles, strategies, and ideas that guide us. Even words like "equality" and "justice" carry this nebulosity: they point to potentially new social forms—since it is not possible to have equality under affinity, property, or value—but for this very reason they cannot tell us exactly how we should act in each situation; they are not ideals or scripts that we can merely apply. We can—and must—draw on the histories of the struggles that preceded us and connect as much as possible with larger political movements, as this helps to give substance and direction to this central enigma of radical politics. But neither the study of great revolutions, battles, and traditions of struggle, nor even our own previous political experiences, can eliminate the creative dimension of revolutionary political struggle and the need to learn not only from the past, but from the effects of our actions and the actions of our comrades.

We affirm that this creative dimension is a feature of emancipatory political organization, as this problem does not arise in the same way for the two other possible political orientations, conservative and reactionary.

Being a conservative, as the name implies, means using the way the world is already organized as a guide for new actions and groupings. Conservative political organizations—which make up the vast majority of organizations in the world—rarely raise political banners and constantly appeal to what is “correct,” “fair,” and “appropriate” according to the social structure in which they are embedded. This does not mean that they do not adopt a political position, because even in situations where there would be opportunities for transformation, conservative organizations insist on repeating and reproducing existing forms of organization—they cover every social “hole,” every crisis or moment of invention, with patches made of value, property, and affinity.

It is common for conservatism to emerge as the result of a fairly reasonable bargain: it is better to resist any major transformation of reality because, by leaving things as they are, we at least know what we are dealing with and what we have to defend ourselves against. And it is worth remembering: it follows from our theory of organizational perspective that, from the point of view of conservative organizations – that is, organizations purely articulated from the prevailing social logics – any other organizational principle is indistinguishable from disorder, which only reinforces the motivation to avoid any major disruption of social life. In short, conservatism relies on a mixture of the three social logics that organize our world to promote the continuation of the social order as it is: in the case of extremely aligned and integrated social formations, it will support this form of organization; in the case of fragmented and misaligned societies, it will do its best to find its place in this other mixture—for example, trusting that it is not worth enforcing the law where it does not work, because it knows that it is still possible to get by in other ways. It is different from reactionism.

Reactionary organizations, like conservative ones, have no problem describing the principles that regulate them. Unlike conservatism, however, reactionism is guided by political principles that conflict with the three general social logics. The crucial difference is that these reactionary

principles are not beyond the current social world, but fall short of it: reactionary politics chooses a piece of the dominant social form already given as a model for its new organizations. That is why, unlike the diffuse and often difficult-to-understand principles of emancipatory organizations, reactionary organizations appeal to well-known and established ideals—more than that: they elevate small pieces of concrete reality, such as the opinions and particular traits of elites, individuals, and specific social forms, to the status of major causes. White supremacy, the protection of banks and economic austerity, the restoration of order in the streets, patriarchy, homophobia, and transphobia, etc., are all banners that neither coincide with social life in general—since society contains much more than that—nor point to the transformation of the world in the name of something new. They are emblems for organizations that would like the world to be smaller than it already is—which is why reactionism inevitably identifies parts of the world that do not fit these restrictive ideals and declares that these people and forms of organization should not exist.

It is worth noting that the presence of reactionary forces tends to create confusion between emancipation and conservatism: from the point of view of a destructive impetus, which effectively seeks social particularism, even the plea to stick to the breadth and diversity of forms of value extraction, proprietary enclosure, and community cliques seems like a passionate defense of political "universalism"! Obviously, this is nothing more than confusion, and to realize this, one need only note how the signs are reversed and alliances are broken when such a conservative appeal has to deal with the novelties that emancipatory politics brings to the fore—since, for the conservative, these novelties are indistinguishable from disorder, they suddenly begin to wonder whether a fascist order might not be preferable to the supposed revolutionary chaos...

This way of distinguishing between emancipatory, conservative, and reactionary politics does not depend on the specific content of the political emblems adopted. It is a way of analyzing that—remaining consistent with our theory of communist practice—distinguishes these political orientations from an organizational point of view and from the relationship that each of these orientations has with the material reality of society. There are struggles that subject the current social organization to other modes of action, drawn from the material basis of our world, creating a

circuit of invention and transformation of social life into something new; there are struggles that strive at all costs to patch up the material basis from already established social practices; and there are struggles that rise up against groups and ways of life that they consider "unfit" for the world, and which therefore organize themselves in the name of destroying social reality, that is, of relegating even more ways of life to invisibility. Considering this difference—between forms of political organization that aim to increase, preserve, or decrease the size of what is possible to live—it becomes easier to understand why, even if every political process implies the submission of social logics to some other principle, only emancipatory politics depends on an orientation that cannot be fully explained, described, or socially accepted—an orientation that becomes clearer as the struggle unfolds. This is why the revolutionary struggle is inseparable from the demand for self-determination of peoples and the proletariat, that is, from the political struggles that invent the world for which they are fighting.

XI

Political struggle

We have proposed that a fairly comprehensive way of thinking about political organization, which serves the purposes of our theory of communist practice, is to understand as political any collective process that puts the logics of affinity, property, and value at the service of a principle, practice, or idea that is not merely a mixture of these three more general modes of organization. We have seen that this definition remains open to different orientations—we can, after all, reorganize social life in an emancipatory, conservative, or reactionary manner—but that only the emancipatory orientation truly confronts the impasse of needing to structure itself collectively in ways that are effectively in conflict or tension with our current reality. What we are going to do now is try to unravel a little how this conflict can be expressed in different dimensions of political struggle.

The idea of political struggle is relational; it forces us to consider not only a given political organization, but how it interacts with other organizations and with its environment more generally—that is, with structures that are organized in other ways and therefore resist integration into political processes. This relational and conflictual character is what makes it more intuitive to associate political transformation with struggle than with the idea of organization—which, for many people, seems like something self-absorbed and removed from the *raison d'être* of revolutionary politics. But, as we have already seen, the organizational point of view does not really allow us to separate these two dimensions: the way political organizations and their social environments are composed informs and conditions what types of struggles can be waged and what effects they are capable of producing. Struggle is, in this very general sense, something like the clash and grinding between different forms of organization, like tectonic plates in an earthquake.

When we approach political struggle from this angle, we can distinguish different possible focuses of struggle. As we will discuss in the next chapter, the typology we will now present could be infinitely expanded if we also consider the specific modes of organization of each struggle. However, using only the three organizational dimensions we are working with—composition,

interaction, and perception—and the three political orientations we introduced above—emancipatory, conservative, and reactionary—it is already possible to present a fairly diverse panorama of organizational conflicts that deserve to be qualified as potential foci of revolutionary struggle.

In reality—which can only be truly grasped through investigation—these forms mix in different ways, so we will offer here only a schematic overview. To do so, we will divide the political process into general types of confrontation: the confrontation between emancipatory politics and conservative organizations, and then between emancipatory and reactionary politics. In both cases, what interests us is to analyze some of the possible points of conflict between political organization and the social world in which it is inserted—and there are at least three, as might be expected at this point: the fields of composition, interaction, and perception.

The struggle for composition

Let us consider, then, the struggle between a process of political organization and the other forms of social organization in which its own members and militants are embedded. An important example of this type of conflict, which we mentioned in a previous chapter, is the tension between work and politics: the former guarantees survival, bonds of affection and friendship, and some immediate stability, while political life brings new responsibilities, new social relationships, new costs in terms of time, energy, and money—and sometimes considerable personal risk. This is a conflict between the reproduction of life and the production of struggle that is often invisible because it initially presents itself as a kind of "inertia," an almost automatic resistance that we face simply because we try to come together and relate in ways that go against the current social dynamics. In other words, it is a struggle between emancipation and conservative forces.

Collective self-organization is certainly the only effective way for the proletariat to accumulate strength and power, but new forms of political organization often increase the contradictions of life before they are able to address and transform them. The simple redistribution of responsibilities in a more egalitarian way within a group, in principle something politically desirable, can create

anxiety and conflict, as it forces us to sustain a tension between how we behave in the rest of our lives and how we act as an organization. As we mentioned, this inertia can also be expressed in economic terms: it is clear that political organization cannot be determined exclusively by calculations of work and value, but by subjecting these issues to other principles, we often disregard the cost of time, money, and work that militancy places on people, sometimes making their participation in collectives unfeasible and reinforcing the impression that individual solutions will better accommodate each person's constraints.

There are many tactical and strategic ways to wage this kind of struggle. Some political processes manage to address this conflict by organizing people whose lives "push" them into politics out of necessity, for example when collective organization manages to secure more protection from the police for street vendors, or immediate housing in an urban occupation. These are situations in which people's lives are in such a state of instability that the political struggle itself can immediately offer more order and security. Other movements do their best to include the very reproduction of social life within the political process, centering their struggle strategy on land seizures and the ability to build forms of autonomous organization for food, housing, and lasting social ties. Still others avoid this conflict altogether—intentionally or not—by restricting their ways of organizing collectively in view of the social lives of their militants, reducing the need to face this conflict of composition directly.

But this is not the only struggle that takes place in the field of organizational composition. For in addition to conservative forms of organization—which resist the political reorganization of militants through economic pressures, appeals to laws, and community and cultural values—it is often necessary to deal with tensions with reactionary forces within emancipatory organizations.

Here, we are not talking about informants, sabotage, or any actions by third parties against a political process—all of which concern the interaction between different organizations. After all, spies organize themselves differently than militants! The confrontation with reactionary forces in the field of composition concerns the tensions created within the same organization, that is, tensions between different ways of organizing among the same people. And, as we have seen,

reactionism is defined above all by the process of electing something already well known, a concrete part of reality, and elevating it to the status of a principle of general political transformation, at the expense of everything that remains outside this reduced model of social life. The emancipatory process, on the other hand, draws its ideas from material reality, which makes its political principles capable of guiding a transformation of the social world towards something new, while at the same time making these ideas more fragile and difficult to justify or explain completely.

This paradox specific to emancipatory forms of organization—the need to point to a new collective path, but on the condition of depending on forms without guaranteed social recognition—is also a source of internal conflicts with reactionism. When a political process loses the means to sustain this creative openness, linked to its material reality, two options arise. The first possibility is to rely on conservatism, on the rules, laws, and principles that already govern society, but thus losing its explicitly political character. This is when, without knowing how our revolutionary principles relate to a given situation, we decide to treat a case of theft in the organization as a common legal problem, for example. To treat it as a "police matter," we don't need to invent anything; we just need to rely on what is already socially in place.

The second, more reactionary option involves a different procedure, often chosen precisely to avoid admitting that, on this particular point, we have no means of reorganizing social life. This involves emulating the logic of political conflict, but in a displaced way: instead of inventing new ways of dealing with the problem or situation, we select already established people, groups, or models to determine what is going on and what to do. This is when the power of reputation, intellectual authority, or the availability guaranteed by the economic means of a particular individual takes precedence over collective political orientation—we continue to act on the margins of the social world, and therefore do not appear conservative, but in practice we cede the power of social reorganization to a particular group or individual, which defines the reactionary operation, as we defined it in the previous chapter. This second option involves replacing openness to something new and unknown with something already established and partial, which cripples the composition of that organization—and can lead to expulsions, punishments, rifts, accusations of all kinds—but has the benefit for the identity of militants of emulating the form of political conflict, as it preserves

a tension with the social world. It is, therefore, still a reactionary solution.

The struggle for interaction

The second dimension in which the struggle takes place is also the most recognizable – the field of interaction. In general, when we talk about political struggle, we immediately think of some kind of confrontation between different groups or forces – and, not surprisingly, it is to describe the interactions between political organizations and reactionary forces that we use concepts of war and military strategy, literally or metaphorically. But before discussing this type of struggle, we need to consider another type of political intervention: one that does not interact with opposing political forces, but with conservative organizations. Unlike the previous case, we are not talking about the pressure that social life under capitalism exerts on political militants, but about the interactions between political organizations and their social environment in general.

The struggle to transform existing social structures — this is almost the very definition of emancipatory politics — and intervention in our social environment can take many different forms: training and conversation activities, protests, petitions, demonstrations, barricades, marches, promotion and support for other workers' organizations, creation and maintenance of kitchens, campaigns, denunciations, artistic interventions, propaganda, publications... However, from an organizational point of view, these actions are not inherently political—what makes them political is the fact that they are subject to principles that exceed the logic of affinity, property, and value and, therefore, produce consequences that lead the world to reorganize itself in a new way.

This more traditional dimension of the fight against the conservation of the world is accompanied by another, less visible one. After all, every connection, material resource, and human effort mobilized by a political organization from its environment—whether its interaction with the owner of its rented headquarters, with the bills that arrive at the end of the month, with printing and fuel costs, with neighbors, with the market, crime, laws, institutions, etc.—is also part of this same field of struggle, where conservative resistance confronts our forms of organization. This is another crucial aspect of the struggle, because the more fragile our organization is—that is, the

greater our dependence on other communitarian, economic, or legal processes—the greater the pressure that the social world will exert so that its own structures also dominate the political forms of emancipatory organization. The need to pay for militants' travels – for effectively political purposes – can lead an organization to prioritize the dispute for party funding – and thus end up privileging issues of property or commodities over its own strategic objectives. The struggle to transform the world is thus accompanied by the struggle against being transformed by the world.

In a way, the struggle against conservative forces is where political organization most directly touches the structures of the capitalist world: it is where we feel the effects not so much of our opponents' moves and strategies, but of the very fact that we are playing the game "away from home," on hostile ground. It turns out that this dimension is confused, and often obscured, by the presence of explicitly reactionary forces. The political struggle as a confrontation with reactionary forces involves forces that seek not only to resist emancipatory transformation, but also to impose another type of transformation, one that is reductive and mutilating—and they seek to subject even, and especially, emancipatory organizations to this destructive process. After all, if there is one thing that a reactionary can accuse of being "out of place" in the world, it is political organizations that fight for something that does not yet socially exist.

Most of the time, it is conservative organizations themselves that become reactionary forces when confronted by emancipatory political organizations. This is because even if conservatives want to keep the world as it is, the world they want to keep usually does not include people trying to transform it. The police are certainly the first of the supposedly conservative forces to be affected by the presence of political action—and the reactionary methods they normally use most devotedly to preserve white supremacy suddenly become more comprehensive models of containment of militants and organizations. But this reactive process also impacts people and other institutions, as long as it is possible to identify who is disrupting the order. In the presence of a transformative political force, the market itself quickly reveals itself to be a political arena, setting aside the trappings of the free flow of goods and becoming an instrument of embargoes and trade wars when necessary.

The political struggle against reactionism is the most difficult, as it accumulates the impasses of the transformation of conservative structures with the deliberate attack on the emancipatory field—it is like playing against a stronger team on a sloping field that tends against us. And it raises a unique question, crucial to the political struggle, which is to understand what, in a given political context, an emancipatory victory against reactionary forces means: does it mean destroying their organizations, effectively eliminating the existence of these groups and ideas, or does it mean emptying them of their social and political support, rendering this reactionary process ineffective? As a political force that “particularizes” social reality, reactionism offers itself as a concrete and less structural target – which can hinder the tactical analysis of what would be an effective long-term combat.

In this sense, in addition to the dangers it poses—as it turns militants into targets of different types of silencing, dismissal, imprisonment, ostracism, murder, etc.—the struggle against reactionism faces an additional “temptation.” Because it is a type of political reorganization of social life guided by the particular, which leads to demands for the destruction of some other part of the world that hinders the interests of this specific group, reactionary forces open up the possibility of also reducing the emancipatory political struggle to the preservation of the world itself, to the avoidance of the “greater evil.” There is a risk here that the struggle against an enemy will end up replacing the emancipatory political principle—the struggle for another way of life—with another direction, offering a much clearer and simpler direction for our struggles, despite abandoning a horizon of deeper and more real transformation.

The struggle for perception

When we discussed the problem of social and political environments a few chapters ago, we talked a little about the conflict of perspectives that emerges when two organizations are rooted in very different social fragments. At that point, we did not have our theory of modes of organization or our definition of peripheralization as a process of misalignment of these modes, but we could certainly use these ideas, along with our theory of organization as a point of view, to better understand why this kind of divergence of perspectives is happening more and more. And, as we

have seen, we are not talking about divergence of opinion or political ideology, but about differences large enough in the way the social terrain is organized in different places to justify and influence the production of political struggles and organizations that are even incompatible with each other.

It is important to remember this dimension because it is at the heart of the main form of dispute that occurs in political organizations and that depends on political perception: what is called in Latin America “base work” – “grassroots activity” in other places. Base work can take many different forms, and although we are accustomed to thinking that only the poor workers qualify as the “social basis” of a movement, politics can have very different bases. The base of a parliamentarian is their loyal electorate, the base of a student movement is the students—and both the electorate and the students may not belong to the most impoverished strata of the working class. Thinking this way, we see that many revolutionary organizations do not suffer so much from a lack of a base as from a particular composition of their social bases, which is not the same thing.

In organizational terms, we can define the base as follows: the base of an organization or movement is that part of its environment for which it makes a practical difference that the organization in question is political. Whether it is because the movement’s actions make a difference to those people in the domains of value, property, or affinity, or at all levels at the same time: from the point of view of the base, the political actions of the organization count and make an effective difference in life. This can appear in many ways, beyond voting and openness to participate in activities and calls: clandestine movements can be covered up and hidden among the people, economic networks can be created and buying and selling conditions facilitated to allow the creation of solidarity kitchens, organizations can be welcomed by different communities and peoples, etc. What is common in the formation of a base is the promotion of practices that facilitate recognition and interaction with what the organization has to offer politically—that is, what exceeds affinity, ownership, and value in your organization. If the political organization only makes a difference to its environment in terms similar to any other organization—say, because it sells t-shirts at a community fair, like any other business—we do not consider this link to constitute the basis of that organization. We will return to this idea of a base in a later chapter.

Base work is a different kind of struggle from the conflict that is waged through interventions: it is not just about transforming social reality, but about changing the way social actors see themselves and political struggle. The famous theme of “class consciousness,” one of the desired effects of grassroots collective action, points to this special effort to transform not only how the world is organized, but other people’s and groups’ perspective on the world and the emancipatory struggle. In our view, however, this effect is not a matter of persuasion, clarification, or education per se, even though these can be important components: it is, above all, a matter of creating conditions that make it materially feasible and opportune for more people to engage, as they can, with emancipatory struggles—it is by changing the environment and making interaction with revolutionary politics something beneficial and interesting for others that one has, as an effect, the production of points of view that also recognize the value of this struggle. To paraphrase Marx, we could say that it is the change in the social being of the class that alters the social consciousness of the class.

There are two ways in which base work can encounter resistance and difficulties. Where the emancipatory struggle comes up against the conservatism of its environment, the central clash is over the reality of political principles when compared to the harshness of social life. How can we know, after all, that the political component of a given movement is not purely a facade to ultimately reinforce the gains in status, control, or money for a few? The legitimacy of political organization is at stake: is it really guided by a different principle, or is it just another group of opportunists or lost idealists? As we have said, this struggle for the perception of emancipatory politics does not take place intellectually, but as a consequence of practices where the existence of that political group and its principles makes a difference.

The struggle against conservative ways of seeing and interpreting political processes depends deeply on the social conditions of that environment. If people’s survival is only viable if everyone strictly adheres to the way everything is already organized, there is very little chance of creating any new political base, because political engagement makes everything risky and even more precarious. But

these conditions for the formation of a base are even more crucial when they are contested by reactionary organizations.

In this case, reactionism actively hinders the creation of conditions for the experience of new relationships and forms of organization that could lead to the formation of an emancipatory political base—such as the establishment of new rules of isolation between workers in a company, the fostering of a climate of suspicion and threat of lay offs, or the offering of benefits to those who tell on others. Making betrayal, giving up, snitching, and violence ways to make social life easier are some of the ways reactionism changes the social environment according to its destructive political ideals. Reactionary politics also affects this process when it manages to transform the profound asymmetry between reactionary and emancipatory politics into a competition between two political ideals of equal quality, as if fighting for the transformation of the world and fighting for the supremacy of a piece of the current world were the same thing. This often happens in the electoral process, when the difference between left and right is reduced to the difference between two candidates competing for people based on charisma and mutual accusations—but it also happens a lot in the field of mass communication, when left-wing campaigns aim to “learn from the right” how to present themselves and compete with ideas. When this happens, radical political organizations may continue to attract supporters, but they are no longer able to form effective bases.

XII

Political thought

Throughout the last two chapters, we have begun to explore the field of political action. We have presented a way of distinguishing the organization of social life from political organization, differentiating those social activities that are governed by the logics of value, property, and affinity from those that subject these three forms to other organizational principles, drawn from material reality—principles that we call political ideas. It is worth noting that this distinction between the social and the political is purely organizational—it concerns how things are structured and related, it does not define specific forms or agendas that would be inherently political: it is perfectly possible, as we anticipated at the beginning of the book, that groups that talk about politics do not produce real political effects, and others that do not think in these terms fit our definition.

Next, we distinguish between emancipatory, conservative, and reactionary political orientations, differentiating each based on the criteria they use to organize themselves. Emancipatory political organization, for example, has to deal with the conflict of being guided by ideas that are not well established socially, as it draws its organizational principles from the investigation of material reality, that is, from social and natural processes that belong to the “black box” of a given social situation, from that which does not count and has no social place. Conservative organizations, on the other hand, aim to subject every new problem or collective impasse to the social forms that are already in place—not surprisingly, conservatism can always appeal to pragmatism and skepticism against the “idealism” of emancipatory politics. Its horizon is the absorption and integration of whatever it may be into already established modes of organization. Finally, reactionary political organizations short-circuit emancipatory and conservative politics: instead of drawing their ideas from the material reality made invisible by current social forms, they elect the forms of sociability operating in already established parts of society as ideals for social functioning as a whole, effectively seeking to restructure society based on these particular already dominant models. This is why reactionaries operate through social ideals rather than political ideas.

In the following chapter, we use these conceptual distinctions to define, in the most general terms possible, what a political struggle or conflict would be. Struggle exists when a form of political organization comes into conflict with the forms of organization of social life—that is, a struggle is always a conflict between different forms of organization. This definition follows directly from the concepts we introduced earlier: if emancipatory politics attempts to reorganize reality based on criteria other than value, property, and affinity, then this process will constantly encounter resistance, forces that seek to preserve the organization of social reality or reinforce the functioning of dominant structures.

What the degree of abstraction of the proposed definition allows us to do is to pay attention to the different ways in which this friction can appear in political struggle. This is what we did next, mobilizing the difference, introduced in the second part of the book, between the dimensions of composition, interaction, and perception of an organization. Using these three concepts, we also distinguish three dimensions of political struggle. First, the struggle in the field of political composition—between the organization of life aimed at the political transformation of the world and the organization of life guided by social reproduction, by the need to survive. Next, the struggle in the field of political interaction—between political processes and the world around them, which politics aims to intervene in and transform. Finally, the struggle in the field of political perception—between two ways in which political organizations are seen by the rest of the people, as legitimate forms of transformation or merely illusory groups and ideas, deceptively reproducing reality behind false promises. In each of these dimensions, we briefly analyze the conflicts between emancipatory political organizations—which aim to introduce something new, beyond value, property, and affinity—and conservative forces—which aim to keep things as they are—and reactionary forces—which aim to reduce reality to a particular ideal.

So far, we have talked about the emergence of political ideas from material reality, the specificity of emancipatory political organizations, and the different forms of struggle that these organizations may face. But how do we wage a struggle? What means does a political process have to decide, at each moment, which paths will allow us to advance and which are dead ends? And, above all, how

can we approach the field of political action from an organizational perspective, without relying on ideas of tactics and strategy that can be reduced to intentional planning, which only apply to some specific political processes?

Social negations

It is impossible to talk about emancipatory political activity without considering that political struggle is, first and foremost, the struggle to negate something that exists. That is, we must start from the fact that every political conflict, every effort to reorganize society, is also an effort to negate a given mode of functioning of value, property, and affinity. This is where the dense presentation we made of each social logic—in chapter seven—really justifies itself and takes on an active role in the theory of communist practice.

Let us quickly recapitulate the abstract form in which we initially defined each of these logics. The logic of affinity was introduced as a logic of frontiers, that is, of the division of organizations into separate parts that nevertheless share something in common. The logic of property, in turn, was presented as a logic of fences, in which the division separates the parts asymmetrically: one part contains the boundary between itself and what is left out, so that the other part does not share this dividing line—one part is limiting, the other limited. Finally, the logic of value was defined as a logic of margins: the difference between two parts of an organization is diffuse and can shift more to one side or the other, depending on other factors.

In the chapter in which we introduced these different ways of organizing the social fabric, our main interest was to observe how these three logics can take many concrete forms in different societies, depending on how they articulate with each other. This is a very general and rich way, despite its simplicity, of thinking about the variety of forms of social organization that we find both in human history and in the history of capitalism in particular. What we did not mention at that time, however, is that each of these ways of organizing the world also corresponds to a special type of negation.

This correlation is easy to establish. Let us begin with the logic of affinity. What is a negation determined by this social logic? It is a negation where “yes” and “no” have a common frontier. When I deny a community—for example, by emancipating myself from my family, or by joining a group with values opposed to those of the place I came from—I still share something with what I denied, either because my origin continues to be part of who I am, or because an enemy community continues to be recognized as a community by others. Denial that allows for boundaries is a denial that allows for contradictions, because the common boundary element was and was not denied at the same time. When I give you a gift, it is no longer mine – but, in a way, it still is. There is not only “this” or “that”: in the logic of community, it is possible to occupy this hybrid place where one is “this and that” as well, as we discussed in the seventh chapter.

The logic of property determines a much more conventional type of negation. If the fence separates two parts without leaving anything in common, the negation at play here is also one that separates “this” from “that” without any remainder. If a contract is signed, it is either valid or it is not – there is no third option. If the property of a piece of land belongs to so-and-so, it does not belong to such-and-such or anyone else. The negation internal to the logic of fences creates a sharp cut between what is true and what is false, between what is affirmed and what is denied, and gives precedence to the first term over the second. Either it is, or it is not—and the opposite of what it is, its negation, has no reality.

Finally, the logic of value produces a third type of negation, which corresponds directly to the functioning of margins. This is the case where between the total “yes” and the absolute “no” there are degrees – a “maybe,” a “more or less.” When a manager observes an employee working with average efficiency, he does not ask himself whether or not the person is working. It is neither a contradictory question—where the answer can be “yes and no”—nor a direct question—where the answer is either “yes” or “no”: the whole point is that they could be working “a little harder” or “a little better.” There are degrees of truth in the logic of margins, shades of gray between true and false.

Why is it important for us to understand these differences? Because, when transforming a given

form of social organization, a political process will necessarily become entangled with these different forms of negation. And why is this necessarily the case? Because, logically speaking, these forms of negation are the only possible options. Given a situation and different paths we can take, there are really only three ways to deal with the decision: either we choose "this and that," or "this or that," or the path of "more or less," that is, a little of this and a little of that. If transforming the world means concretely negating a social form, then the reorganization promoted by political struggle—the submission of value, property, and affinity to another collective principle—will necessarily involve replacing one type of negation, internal to a given logic, with another form of negation that opposes the previous logic.

When we try to replace private property with another form of political organization—for example, by returning to communal forms of land sharing—we are denying the social logic that organizes space in terms of fences through the mobilization of a logic of frontiers, which reestablishes something in common between separate parts. It is a denial that comes from the logic of affinity and helps us to structurally transform the logic of property. This is different, for example, from fighting for property to simply change hands: in that case, we would have denied property using the very logic of fences: what was not mine became mine and ceased to belong to anyone else. We can also fight against the fluctuating negativity of the margins—which dominates the intensive exploitation of labor—by mobilizing the negation of the law, which attempts to strictly delimit what belongs to the worker and what can be bought by the capitalist, for example by determining a number of hours or a certain standard of effort that would be acceptable by law. It is a denial of the logic of margins using a resource that comes from the logic of fences. Where each of these forms of transformation will intervene, however, is defined neither by value nor by property—after all, both modes are already at work in the buying and selling of labor power: the decision to alternate the mode of decision, the shift from "more or less" to "this or that," comes from a political principle drawn from the material reality of workers.

Anti-social negation

This last point invites us to introduce another form of negation. We affirm that the three negations

we have presented from the totality of alternatives “logically speaking.” But if a political process constructs new forms of social relations, then at some level it must also reject all available social paths. A political process thus also depends on a negation of the type “neither this nor that,” a rejection of the entire social arrangement. Faced with injustice, we refuse to justify it, like reactionaries, or to “cover it up,” like conservatives, with patches of value, property, and affinity—none of the paths offered are suitable: neither this way nor that. But this moment of refusal, without which there would be no space to bet on new forms of collective organization, is not just a step backward or an abstract rejection of society: it is a rejection in the name of what exists materially in reality but has no social place—and which, therefore, would find no place in the very structure that exists in spite of it. To build another society, emancipatory politics must first reject the current social arrangement. It must prefer the truth of society’s material reality to the integrating power of value, property, and affinity, even if that truth is “illogical.”

It is important to remember that “refusal” here does not refer to a subjective disposition—people may be dissatisfied and organize their anger according to the logics we have already seen—nor to explicit discourse—we can reject existing social forms in the name of various idealizations and philosophies, this does not necessarily mean that we have opened a breach for the reorganization of a community. This fourth form of denial—which we could call “anti-social negation” or “material negation”—is an organizational process, like everything else: it is a gesture of refusal of a social form based on the collective organization of something that has no guaranteed social existence. Not giving in to an eviction order or removal process because the sense of history and belonging to a territory is something real that cannot be resolved with relocation and a title deed. Not being satisfied with the community defense mechanisms we have developed to deal with the dangerous and unhealthy nature of work, because the intensification of exploitation is real and will not cease with the creation of a new ritual of suffering. Not remaining silent in the face of the selective extermination of the Black population, because promises of security and justice are equally selective and social apartheid is real. In all these cases, refusal is not based on desire or values, but on organizing ourselves in the name of an undeniable material reality.

Even if it is not an abstract or idealized negation, refusal is a fragile moment in a political process.

Since, by definition, it does not correspond to any already formed social principle, these moments of refusal run the risk of being domesticated, if they can only endure through annexation to existing social forms, or of becoming fanciful ideals of political purity, when we elevate this negation to a general and immediate principle for every collective process.

The enchainment of “anti-social” negation with different logics and their respective forms of “social” negation is an essential challenge of every political process—and one that does not appear only in an initial, explosive, and spectacular moment. Not only because there is no guarantee that collective refusal will take an intense and aggressive public form, but also because this anti-social moment never remains entirely in the past. It needs to be reinvented and reaffirmed whenever the fundamental basis of emancipatory politics in material reality threatens to be undone.

Political negation

We hope it is clear by now why it was so important to introduce this radically schematic version of the three social logics. We need a way to distinguish the use that a political process makes of these forms of organization, when subjected to new collective principles, from the way they operate as affinity, property, and value in a specific social formation. Negating organization by private property using “marginal” denial, that is, passing on to each person what is due to them according to how much work they have contributed, is not the same as simply reaffirming the logic of capital and its mode of exploitation—but both forms of organization make use of the ability to move proportions according to an equivalence. Negating organization by commodity form through a communal sharing of goods is not the same as simply reaffirming identities or communities as capitalism establishes them—even though the logic of frontier is at play in both cases. For those who do not recognize the political form that guides these decisions, it is indeed difficult to distinguish between any other form of linking production and consumption and the form of value, between political discipline and state bureaucratization, between community care and the maintenance of individualistic identities—the difference becomes more evident when we consider the form that is guiding decisions in the aggregate, the constant shift from one logic to another,

which does not respect the mode of integration proper to the dominant social form.

This brings us, finally, to a fifth type of negation. We have seen that there are three “logical” negations—social negations—and there is also a fourth—anti-social negation—which rejects integration into existing social forms in the name of a “black box” of the material reality of that society. The first three not only divide or separate, but also serve to articulate and concatenate social relations, while the fourth, on the other hand, is a refusal, a moment of rejection of social totality as such, sustained by material reality. But there is yet another negation at play in political transformation, which is the product or result of the submission of social negations to this disruptive principle that allows us to politically reorganize reality.

When we contrast an entire ecosystem of organizations, fronts of struggle, and forms of reproduction of life made possible by revolutionary struggle with the social world against which we rise up, what kind of relationship is established between the political process and social reality? In other words, what is the relationship between a space that is reorganized by political ideas and principles and the rest of society? This is clearly another form of negation. One need only consider how conservatives and reactionaries describe an emancipatory political process—inventing all kinds of justifications to explain the “erratic,” “suspicious,” and “disruptive” behavior of political organizations—to realize that the principle that guides the collective decisions of a political process, that elusive “something” of political forms, simply has no place in the social world. Yes, we enforce the law, or we stop production, or we talk to the population—but to what end? Guided by what motivation? It is the general structure of this process that is in question, and what the social world does at this point is to say that either there is no rational orientation for emancipatory politics, or that this orientation is, at heart, only a private and obscure interest, reducible to the already known games of power. What is at stake here, therefore, is the existence of contours of concrete political totality—is there something that unifies and illuminates our actions or not? This contrast between the political process as a whole and the rest of the world constitutes another form of negation, which operates at a more global level, in the confrontation between the dominant logic of the social world and the set of political actions and effects that we produce.

It is not, therefore, a matter of simply refusing to create social relations – “neither this nor that” – nor of a general confirmation of one of the three modes of social organization – for there is a space dominated by emancipatory politics, and political ideas are not merely the application of another dominant logic. Taken as a whole, the patchwork of different decisions of a movement – sometimes opting for one type of negation, sometimes for another – or the aggregate field of proletarian struggles at a given moment – composed of very different organizations – does not fit into the logic of value, property, or affinity, but it is also not reduced to pure refusal, because it has its own structure, which we can contrast with the social structure. This concrete negation of the dominant social logic is what really deserves the name of political negation: not because it would be the only political moment in this whole process, of course, but because it indicates the composite or accumulated effect of the struggle, the capacity of a political process to embody another form of organization of human life.

An impasse that we often encounter here concerns the status of this contrast between the social world and the political process, a moment in which a concrete political form is consolidated, even if only temporarily. The fact is that, by imposing themselves socially as a structured collective force, political processes run the risk of “covering up” the material reality of other subsequent struggles, reinforcing the illusion that anti-social negation is always, in fact, political negation, that is, a recovery or continuation of political forms that have already managed to guarantee this more global negative contrast. It is the effect of thinking that, since Soviet socialism existed and opposed the capitalist world on some level, every revolt against work would already carry the seed of this same previous form of struggle—which makes it difficult for new political ideas, cultivated from this concrete terrain, to emerge and guide effective decisions and reorganizations of this reality. The moment we begin to believe that the conflicts that exist in the material reality of a situation are only an opportunity to rediscover already consolidated political forms is also the moment when a given political idea reaches its saturation point—a concept we discussed briefly in the third chapter. It is the moment when forms of political organization lose traction in reality.

Dimensions of political thought

The set of negations we have introduced—anti-social, social, and political—does not follow a unified logic that we can apply or anticipate. There is no guarantee that we will be able to move from a refusal based on material reality to a series of decisions that bring together different logics, guided by a political idea that also only takes shape in contrast to the current social organization. How does an invisible piece of reality become a principle that allows us to make consistent collective decisions? How do these heterogeneous decisions relate to each other? What kind of coherence do they produce, and how can this new political clarity serve to reorganize the continuation of our political activities? How can we deal with the potential divergence between the goals we plan and project for the future and the form and results that a struggle actually produces? All these questions exist and recur, demanding new answers at every moment, precisely because there is no general emancipatory political logic: if politics, in its goal of transforming the social world, must deny it at every moment, it also denies the possibility of simply following predetermined rules or scripts. But this is precisely why each political process is also a collective way of thinking, that is, a way of inventing new links between all these forms of negation.

We are accustomed to dealing with this field where action and thought meet in politics through the concepts of tactics and strategy. The problem is that it is very difficult to disassociate these terms from some sense of prior planning and explicit agreement: we decide on an ultimate goal, our strategic objective, and then we choose to follow a path to get there, our preferred tactic, etc. Defined in this way, we can conclude that a popular uprising without explicit direction or a set of dispersed autonomous organizations acts without a strategic horizon or has no preferred tactics. This is a problem similar to the one we encountered in chapter six, when we discussed the consequences of associating “organization” with only a certain type of collectivity: whatever does not conform to this predetermined type is designated as “disorganized.” We are therefore interested in understanding the dimensions of tactics and strategy in an organizational way, that is, without the assumption that they are always explicit principles, intentionally planned, based on an analysis of the objective situation, itself the result of a prior theoretical foundation. For us, tactics, strategy,

logistics, and mobilization (also called "control")—the four terms that form the backbone of concrete collective action according to contemporary military theory—are interdependent dimensions of the thinking of an organization or political process. They concern how each political process solves practical problems, whether in a planned and intentional way or not.

We briefly mentioned these components at the end of the fourth chapter, arguing that they represent an expanded understanding of what constitutes a goal (strategy), the path to achieving it (tactics), the conditions for traveling that path (logistics), and the ability to enact all these decisions in a practical way (mobilization). In light of what has been presented so far, we can now define these dimensions in organizational terms, that is, based on the different "illogical" moments that call on a political process to invent new ways of linking them together.

The tactical dimension is perhaps the easiest to define. We have seen that between anti-social denial—which attests that something in material reality refuses to be socially integrated—and different forms of social denial—ways of using borders, fences, and margins against the logics of value, affinity, and property—there is a gap, because this refusal does not determine what to do next. Tactical inventiveness concerns precisely this gap and the problem of how to transform a refusal into something lasting, how the emergence of an invisible piece of material reality could give birth to a principle that helps us make consequential collective decisions. Given that an injustice has occurred and there is no social solution for it, where to go? How can we know how far the path we have chosen is working and when we should opt for new measures? Tactical thinking invents ways for antisocial negation to spread through organizational rearrangements that turn social logics against themselves: knowing when to appeal to the law, how much to bet on sharing, when to trust in the cold light of work and effort, etc. It is worth noting that this "thinking" does not imply that there is a group of militants who evaluate and invent these solutions—of course, this can happen, but even spontaneous collective processes, which act and react in a more dispersed or decentralized way to conservative and reactionary forces, also need to find solutions to this disconnect between material reality and the forms of action we build from it.

If the tactical dimension is usually thought of as the "local" level, strategy is identified as the field of

“big” issues: political programs we want to implement, more radical horizons of social transformation, a movement’s list of objectives, etc. But here we encounter an important paradox: the definition of a political program or project, the sharing of a goal we wish to achieve—all of this can in fact play a tactical role in organizational terms. Despite its more ambitious content, its effective function may simply be to motivate militants to carry out certain established tasks or to help prove to a disputed base that it is worthwhile to join a certain organization, assisting in the process of stitching together and advancing a given struggle locally. After all, talking about strategy, talking about future goals, is something we do in the present, in a situated way – whether this projection of larger and distant goals will have greater relevance than a consensus around shared images and values is something that cannot be guaranteed. And when we define the strategic dimension in organizational terms, it is precisely this gap between the present and the future, the local and the global, that is at stake, an obstacle that every political process must face. It is the distance between social denials—the tactical decisions we make at every moment—and political denial—the more general contours that emerge for the political process from its localized activity. The strategic dimension of thinking concerns the ability to anticipate the contours of the totality of a political process from its situated dimension and to rethink what we do locally based on features of this more general vision.

The most common understanding of strategy suggests that the connection between tactics and strategy naturally goes from the global to the local: we start with our general goals and then analyze the steps to get there. But, as we have just seen, this process can be purely intellectual or just a specific way of delimiting tactical progress. From an organizational point of view, the field of strategy concerns both the accumulation that the concrete steps of the struggle produce in terms of a larger vision and the means that this struggle has to take advantage of what is consolidated as a horizon to better inform future local decisions, its next steps. There is, therefore, a circuit that connects the socially mobilized negations and the more general contours of the movement or struggle, which form the contrast to the political negation of the social world: it is clear that we can be guided by programs or strategic visions recorded in documents and consensus among militants, but the real contours of the political process are built step by step by the political form that this organization consolidates for itself—and it is the circuit that connects this more general

form and the next localized steps of a struggle that really constitutes the organizational core of the strategy. It may even be strategic for a struggle to give up programs or the promotion of clear objectives at times when this has no mobilizing power. This does not mean that it no longer has greater objectives or a strategic function, but that it may be strategic – in the sense of preserving political negation and its connection with tactics – to recognize a moment of true disorientation.

Another fundamental component of political thinking is logistics. Much of our efforts here—especially in the chapter dedicated to political struggle and the different dimensions of conflict in the struggle—are aimed at suggesting that the “political economy” of militancy is a crucial issue in emancipatory political organization, especially under historical conditions of peripheralization. When capital does not guarantee minimum conditions for association among workers, collective organization can become extremely costly, for example. This is reflected in an organization’s political thinking in the logistical dimension of action. Many proposals for action and many political objectives are valuable and interesting, but if they do not find concrete conditions for their realization, they will either be impractical or depend on the intensification of the conflict between the political and social forms in which the militants are inserted. This not only destabilizes the composition of the struggle, but also weakens the capacity for intervention—we can withstand conflict with enemy forces for less time—and even the perception of the struggle—because everyone realizes when a political process is incapable of taking into account the reality of the people it aims to mobilize.

We can define the field of logistical inventions as one in which political thought must link anti-social negation and political negation, that is, articulate the objectives that shape the political process and the specific constraints and characteristics of the material reality that motivates and underpins this struggle. There is no pre-established roadmap for reconciling the political energy of a refusal of social integration with lasting forms of reproduction for this new struggle – and it is often logistical constraints that first force a political process to surrender once again to the available forms of social reproduction: value, property, and affinity. As the slogan of an important struggle for food sovereignty says: “the pantry of a territory measures its strength” – that is, logistics grounds political objectives in material reality.

Finally, there is one last component of political thought, which in military theory—so steeped in the hierarchical logic of the state—is called “control” or “chain of command.” Leaving aside this unnecessary trappings, the issue here is the ability, in a collective process, to carry out collective actions at the tactical, strategic, and logistical levels. After all, there is no point in an army commander being able to devise a brilliant strategy, with well-thought-out and plausible steps, if the order to attack is not carried out by the soldiers on the battlefield. In the field of emancipatory politics, this issue appears in a slightly different form: it concerns the capacity to mobilize political processes—mobilization not necessarily in the sense of following a chain of command, but of actively adhering to and acting on ideas. The problem arises for party cadres and militants, for protests organized by struggle fronts, for revolts that erupt suddenly, or for long processes of peasant guerrilla warfare—in all these cases, mobilizing means transforming tactical viability into concrete action. An army can compel people to mobilize through contracts, laws, patriotic ideals, shame, sadism, or money—many political organizations rely to a greater or lesser extent on similar mechanisms—which align the logistical cost with the tactics and strategy of a given combative process, but these means or ways of ensuring mobilization through control are only particular forms of collective action giving concrete form to political forms.

For us, the question of mobilization as a dimension of political thought therefore corresponds to the chain of all these negations that we have seen, simultaneously. There is political mobilization or not according to the tactical capacity to link the refusal of new collective decisions, according to the strategic capacity to link these decisions to the balances and objectives of the struggle, and according to the logistical capacity to link this political vision to the limits and aptitudes that make up the material reality of this process.

Where these denials pave an alternative political circuit to the limits of the social world, there is mobilization. And conversely, where there is mobilization, whether planned or unplanned, based on party discipline or not, the result of anger or conviction, there is political thought—even if silent—creatively leaping from negation to negation.

XIII

Political transformation

We have reached the last chapter of the third part of the book. So far, we have discussed the emergence of political ideas from material reality and how this helps us distinguish emancipatory politics from its conservative and reactionary forms. We have also presented different dimensions of the conflict between political organizations and the social world, that is, different fronts of conflict in a given struggle: conflict in the fields of composition, interaction, and perception. Next, we introduced the idea of negation to try to understand how a political struggle could affect the world around it—by negating the way that reality is organized.

We have seen that a struggle does not deny reality in an abstract or blind way. A political process includes moments of refusal—which we call “anti-social” negation—where aspects of material reality underpin the rejection of simply addressing problems and situations using the social forms already available. We have seen that there is also a whole field of decisions and movements that use the form of a given social logic against other prevailing social logics: we adopt the logic of the margin to negate a community frontier, or the logic of the fence to negate a false equivalence of value, etc. These are moments of what we call “social negations,” and they involve a constant stitching and rearrangement of these social logics in the name of this material reality that we refuse to erase. Finally, we also talk about the aggregate effect of these decisions and chains of social negations—the more general form that this process takes, which consolidates the emergence of a collective political structure that does not fit into the social world. The very existence of a movement, a commune, an alternative political bloc, is a political denial of reality—concrete proof that another life is more than possible, it is real.

We made a point of clarifying that these different forms of negation—or ways of acting “negatively”—do not form a cohesive whole that follows its own logic that would guarantee their connection. There are gaps or distances between each of these negative moments or forms, and without creativity and invention, it is impossible to link them together. It is important to highlight

these gaps, as they help us to link the theory of the five negations to the more classic concepts of tactics, strategy, logistics, and mobilization—the four components of what we consider to be the thinking behind a political process. Whether planned or unplanned, intentional or unintentional, centralized or decentralized, political processes need to invent their own solutions to “patch up” these different negative moments, and each of these challenges helps us shed light on the tactical, strategic, logistical, and mobilizing thinking behind a given struggle. This thinking will not necessarily be written down in documents or on the tip of the tongue of a militant or cadre, but it is recognizable when we adopt an organizational point of view and closely investigate what happens in concrete political action.

But we still need to talk about the most important thing. After all, the revolutionary struggle is not an end in itself: we do not fight to think collectively—we think together in order to win. We need to understand, therefore, what a political victory means.

Retreat and advances

Considering everything we have presented so far, we now have a way to describe what it means for a struggle to politically transform society. A political process takes a step forward when it manages to mobilize the “anti-social” negation that founds political organization in the name of making decisions that subject the three “social” negations to a new orientation. So that the social fabric, thus reorganized, is irreducible to the dominant form of social concatenation—a contrast we call “political negation,” the negation of the world embodied in the advance of a new political process. We have seen that it is impossible to understand this process of transformation without mobilizing the specific content of each of the social logics we presented earlier. Not only because it is necessary to know what is being transformed, but because subjecting value, property, and affinity to another form of political organization also involves making decisions that mobilize margins, fences, and borders.

But to analyze what the outcome of a struggle might be—its consequences in terms of advances, retreats, and victories—we need to consider more than just the different social logics. After all, this

process of transformation can have different scopes, and its capacity for reorganization can be more or less limited. This forces us to consider something like the “depth” of political transformation in order to define what kind of progress it actually produces. In general terms, we will call political advance those situations in which emancipatory politics manages to politically deny the world around it to some degree. We will call political retreat those cases in which it is social reality that manages to transform emancipatory politics, uncoupling social logics from anti-social denial, undoing political denial to some extent, and reestablishing the integrity of the current social formation.

The typology of political retreats is easier to assess, as the outcome is always a situation where emancipatory political ideas lose ground and organize fewer aspects or components of social reality than before. This can occur through a victory of conservatism, which reduces the conflict between radical politics and its social environment, reintegrating part of material reality into some form of known value, property, or affinity. Compositional struggles, in the field of interaction or perception, are reduced and stabilized through the effects of money, law, or cultural recognition. This can also occur through a transformation of political conflict into a conflict between conservative forces—which struggle for the social integration of these displaced components—and reactionary forces—which struggle for their elimination. This is often the case with the indigenous struggle in Brazil, which “disappears” in the electoral dispute between a left wing of “social inclusion” and a genocidal right wing. Finally, it can also be a direct effect of the victory of reactionary forces: this is the case with the murders of leaders and militants, removals and evictions, as well as the ideological resentment that leads left-wing individuals and groups to strive to restrict the existence of other factions of the revolutionary camp. In all these cases, there is a setback, because the outcome of conflicts in emancipatory struggles—whether in terms of composition, interaction, or perception—is a reduction in the scope of this political reorganization of social life.

Emancipatory advance, on the other hand, is more complex and nuanced, as it operates “against the social grain” and involves the expansion of political forms that do not have a guaranteed social existence. Positive political transformation can have different degrees of scope and traction: it can be fleeting and sporadic, profound and lasting, it can affect many aspects of social life at the same

time, or have a limited scope – and it is expressed as a victory in the field of composition, interaction, or perception, or some mixture of these three dimensions. In a way, we could also evaluate the typology of setbacks in all these ways, not least because the destruction and co-optation of complex political processes often occurs in parts, or influences specific dimensions of a collective process: for example, transforming a political idea into a group identification, or into a pretext for authoritarianism or new forms of management and intensification of work. Even so, we will focus the rest of this section on producing a brief typology of forms of emancipatory political advancement.

Political persistence

In a way, the smallest possible political advance is the very persistence of an emancipatory political organization, that is, the persistence of a conflict between that organization and the social organization from which it springs. Even if it is unable to advance or expand, the transformation of some aspect of material reality into a new form of collective organization that is not reduced to value, property, and affinity is an effective political transformation, even if it remains isolated and inconsequential beyond its own existence.

This does not mean, of course, that the mere duration of a political group is a necessary sign of transformation: what indicates persistence as a minimal political advance is the resilience of a political form that is irreducible to social logics, not the continued use of a banner, discourse, or a specific group of people. Compare, for example, all the small inventions and creative efforts necessary to preserve the regularity of the simple practice of being at a fair on the outskirts of the city every week, talking to passersby about neighborhood problems, with the demobilizing effect of a struggle being taken up by an NGO that professionalizes all activists and subjects the organization's existence to contractual and financial commitments. In the first case, the problem of mobilization—which we saw in the previous chapter—is solved through a connection between tactics (talking at the market), their place in a larger strategic vision (militant inquiries contributes to understanding new popular political forms), and their material feasibility (it is a small but feasible action). It is a political solution that is repeatedly reinvented and sustained by militants.

Meanwhile, the NGO that solves the problem with contracts and salaries relies exclusively on the logic of value and property to persist—and even grow—its operations. There is no political thinking there and, therefore, no advance.

Social achievement

A second form of political progress, which goes beyond the persistence of a political practice, is one in which the struggle leads to a transformation of social life, but this change bears no relation to the political form at stake in the struggle. For example, a political process may succeed in enforcing a law that was not being applied to a powerful person, sending a corrupt government official or businessman to jail—but this result, although effective, bears no trace of the political struggle that produced it, so much so that it could be the effect of very different forms of organization. It is, in fact, a transformation greater than political perseverance, for the existence of the struggle leads to a change in social reality, but this political transformation remains restricted to a social achievement. Not surprisingly, social achievement offers a type of transformation that potentially reconciles emancipatory and conservative politics, since the force of change may have come from radical political organization—whose existence represents a threat to order and therefore an incentive for change—but its form remains integrated into the vocabulary of the market, the law, and communities, just as conservatism demands.

In light of what we saw in the previous chapter, we could say that social achievement requires political thinking to frame the problem—how to bring injustice to light, something that exists materially but had no social existence?—but does not involve political thinking to solve the issue. The solution is more law enforcement—an avoided but already prescribed use of the logic of property and the state. This does not mean that nothing happened, because the arrest of the corrupt would never have happened were it not for the force of antisocial negation and its subsequent mobilization to pressure a social structure content to turn a blind eye.

Political victories

A third type of political advance is one where the struggle produces consequences that are no longer reducible to the mere application of the three social logics, but which do not directly threaten the dominant logic in the social formation. On the one hand, it is no longer a mere social achievement that could easily be appropriated by conservative forces, as it is impossible to justify the new mode of social organization that has been produced without mentioning the material reality and political form at stake in the struggle. On the other hand, the social reorganization promoted by political struggle remains essentially compatible with value as the dominant social and material form in capitalism.

Perhaps the most notable examples of this type of transformation are the reduction of the working day, the abolition of slavery, and women's suffrage. In all these cases, it is not just a matter of applying what was already socially accepted in a particular case, but of effectively establishing new contours for social logic itself, restricting the reach of the commodity form, property rights, and family segregation over entire social groups. These are truly political victories that lead to the limitation of the power of capitalist domination and even make clearer the true terrain of the revolutionary struggle, its anti-systemic character, by staging a conflict between emancipatory politics and the dominant social structure. But they are also relative political advances, as they are not capable of replacing value with the political principle that led to the reorganization of laws, communities, and, indirectly, the market itself.

If, on the one hand, political victory is more profound than social conquest, as it is composed of consequences that help to disseminate the political form of this struggle, on the other hand, the scope of this transformation remains restricted to logics that do not have social dominance. The three examples we gave above demonstrate this: they all involve the effective transformation of laws and communities based on principles that cannot be reduced to property and affinity, but they do not subject the form of value—the dominant logic in capitalism—to a similar restriction. Limiting the workday is different, after all, from replacing the principle by which human subsistence is socially guaranteed, since the scope of the commodity form remains essentially the same. The abolition of slavery, as a legal and community process, can mean the absorption of a new contingent of people into the wage labor market under conditions of extreme impoverishment, just

as the new social condition of women, guaranteed by rights such as voting and divorce, can also lead to effects that do not prevent the adaptation and continuation of capitalist domination.

In the case of political victory, political thought goes beyond the motivation for an already established social solution, actually introducing a new rationality into the social world, grounded in material reality. Universal suffrage, the abolition of slavery, and the reduction of working hours are ways of reorganizing social life that force capitalism to yield to what is materially attested, beyond the constituted social reality. What political thought fails to achieve in these processes are the means—tactical, strategic, logistical, and mobilizing—to ensure that these victories are reproduced. After all, the guardians of these victories are laws and institutions external to the political process—conservative or reactionary social forms that sustain these advances, either out of fear of the political mobilization that would otherwise arise, or because capitalism has already found ways to adapt to these defeats and it is not necessary to try to undo them.

It is crucial to note that neither social conquest nor political victory are retreats or missteps – both transform humanity, sometimes in glorious ways. But each carries a particular side effect because of its limitations. If social conquest allows the political struggle to be confused with a conservative retreat—since political force does not translate into political advancement, which remains governed by the three logics—political victory, being relative and subject to the dominant logic, can be understood as a sign of the structural impotence of struggles. In a context where there is no articulation or continuity between political victories, the persistence of the dominant logic in the face of the victory of emancipatory politics is often taken as a sign that the real victory was that of capitalism itself. Hence the paradoxical correlation between a period of scattered political victories and growing despair in the face of the supposed power of capital to absorb and integrate any collective novelty. In periods of absolute retreat, it is easier to fantasize that a victory would bring the entire system down, while in historical periods where there are victories but no spontaneous convergence of struggles, we are surprised by the resilience of capital and fantasize about our own resounding defeat.

Revolutionary triumph

Finally, there is what we might call revolutionary triumph. This is the situation in which the outcome of the political struggle is the transformation of emancipatory political forms into dominant principles that reorganize all social logics. A triumph does not have to be total—it is not a matter of replacing the dominant logic throughout the world, all at once and everywhere. The crucial point is that the political form extracted from material reality becomes capable of determining and even subjugating the dominant logic. By becoming the general organizing principle, the political form gains an incomparable degree of concreteness, becoming the form of reproduction of social life itself, even if in a restricted space and time – as is the case of the Paris Commune, the Quilombo de Palmares, specific regions and moments within socialist state experiments, and great cooperative and community triumphs around the world. What all these political advances have in common is not the specific content of their politics—as we saw in chapter ten, there is no guarantee that an indigenous commune in Venezuela will follow principles compatible with an anarchist experiment in Greece—but the ability to embed this political orientation, irreducible to value, property, and affinity, in the very material dimension of social life.

Like all forms of political advancement, revolutionary triumph is a localized form of expansion of the political struggle—it cannot happen everywhere at once or in the same way. The idea that there can only be triumph in emancipatory politics if our advance is total and complete, extinguishing the struggle against capitalism at once, is a fantasy based on the thesis of a spontaneous convergence of struggles. According to this fantasy, national proletarian struggles would lead us to political victories, and these victories would add up to an international revolutionary triumph. Once this illusion is dispelled, we see that one of the consequences of revolutionary triumph is to reveal that the last adversary of communist politics, once the supremacy of value is undone, is the very material reality of emancipatory politics. For this material reality brings to the fore the main challenge of political thought—that is, our ability to struggle by means of materially propagating and expanding our own forms of association, reproduction, and production of collective life. In other words, the struggle does not end with revolutionary triumph: what we gain when we triumph is the right to struggle against our own limits, and not just against the limits of capital.

This more radical form of transformation, like the previous ones, can also carry an unwanted side effect, which is the confusion between its situated character and the impression that—since there has been no total planetary revolution—there are only isolated gains of freedom and egalitarianism. This is the criticism that many make of even the most impressive political triumphs in human history, diminishing their importance or validity by contrasting them with the reality of the rest of the world. If social conquest is confused with conservative capitulation and political victory with a fantasy of capital's omnipotence, the situated quality of revolutionary triumph often leads to the characterization of revolutionary struggle as an ephemeral clearing, a respite doomed to exist only in a momentary manner. We will return to this point in the next chapter.

A good way to summarize this typology is to consider the four forms of political advance in the context of a struggle for land. The struggle against forced removal threatened by the state is a political advance, a form of persistence. The struggle for the legalization of occupied land through legal means, with the aim of expropriating land without social use and enforcing the constitution, is a social conquest. The struggle for land that manages to secure occupation through military and community conflict, but still depends on selling production to the market, is a political victory. The struggle that manages to reorganize the relationship with the territory, allowing people to live off what they grow and establish other relationships of association among themselves and with other spaces, is a localized revolutionary triumph. We can also evaluate each of these cases in terms of the advancement of political thought over the rest of the world: persistence is the mobilization of tactical, strategic, and logistical dimensions to maintain the existence of a given organizational process; social conquest manages to mobilize a political process to rearrange existing social logics; a political victory manages to transform mobilization into a submission of social forms to material reality, but without altering the dominant social logic, while revolutionary triumph transforms mobilization into active thinking about the forms of reproduction of another collective life.

Revolutionary orientations

From an organizational point of view, all components of political thought act and respond to the specific social arrangement in which a given struggle takes place. It is the concrete negation of a form of social organization, motivated by disruptive negation, that effectively allows political transformation to produce something that is not a mere repetition of the social form in which we are inserted. But a side effect of this concreteness is that struggles also borrow forms that resemble those they are fighting against. And, in fact, we can confirm this intuition by verifying that there is indeed a correspondence between the main orientations adopted by the revolutionary movement and the way in which each of them constructs the political negation of reality.

For example, there are political movements that rely mainly on the logic of affinity to confront capital and the state and find in the organization of frontiers the contours of a general strategy that we could call, returning to the Marxist tradition, *dual power*. Now, the strategy of dual power is a way of building a new world that is at once separate from, but within, the capitalist world—an autonomous space whose strategic ambition is unthinkable without considering the rest of the world, which remains dominated by capital—and this political logic also presents a form of organization by frontiers: it also divides the world into separate parts, but with a common substrate, since we separate ourselves from capitalism in order to better combat it. Many revolutionary enclaves and models of struggle based on the creation of spaces of autonomy that can be used as refuges and points of attack against the capitalist system are organized in this way. It is a strategy of "this and that": outside capitalism in order to better fight within it.

Political movements and struggles that rely on state power and the force of property logic to measure political forces against capitalism and national domination tend to organize themselves based on the insurrectionary strategy. This approach—which ironically shares something with electoral logic, despite despising it—is also articulated by the asymmetrical organizing principle of fences and barricades, as it aims to create a clean break, a before and after, in social functioning. In the case of insurrection itself, this clean break represents a change of regime; in the electoral case, it represents only a change of representative—but the basic form of both is to establish a limit beyond which everything will be different. Either capitalism or socialism. Either this party's government or that party's. This same logic can be seen in the idea of taking over the state, of "expropriating the

expropriators": once taken from our enemies, these social institutions and political instruments are ours, we plant our flag there. This does not mean, however, that the insurrection seeks a mere reversal between the dominant and the dominated, as if it were only a matter of changing the "owner" of the state. After all, the dictatorship of the proletariat is not symmetrical to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie: while the former is governed by a restricted group, identifiable by a particular characteristic that defines membership of the ruling class, the proletariat inhabits the twilight zone between society and its material base, so that a people-oriented government would be infinitely more diverse and democratic than any bourgeois democracy could ever be.

Finally, struggles that are waged directly in the field of value—strikes, boycotts, the creation of cooperatives, etc.—also acquire characteristics of the division of parts in terms of margins. This is the strategy of communization. Here, we do not build something separate, but within capitalism, as in dual power, nor do we directly bet on the seizure of state power to reorganize the dominant principle asymmetrically, as in insurrection, but we constantly measure forces with our adversaries, in a constant and direct process of transforming the material conditions in which both parties find themselves – to the point where it becomes more costly to insist on the capitalist organization of labor than to transform the relations of production. Struggles involving negotiations with the boss—such as demands for higher wages—are specific examples of how workers' organizations "push" the margins of value toward the valorization of workers. But even more systemic transformations—such as the creation of cooperative networks, the immediate collectivization of the means of production, the establishment of self-management experiments and forms of democratic economic planning—also operate as processes, creating a field of forces between the form of value and a common and collective way of life.

We thus see that the three social modes can be used to form three major revolutionary strands: the strand of dual power, which brings together many of the struggles centered on social organization based on affinity; the insurrectionary strand, which combines political efforts that have state domination as their main stage of struggle and transformation; and the communizing strand, where we find forms of struggle that seek support in the internal tensions within the logic of value itself. Of course, in reality, struggles tend to mix these different general strategies, combining them

in different ways. Insurrectionary struggles may require phases of dual strategy, organizations based on the communization of the economic power of capital may seek assistance from legal or parliamentary mechanisms that serve as protection, and so on.

As we mentioned earlier, the way in which different forms of struggle intertwine with specific social forms of organization is a determining factor in their ability to articulate with other political processes. And many of the difficulties that peripheralization poses for contemporary struggles, analyzed in the third chapter, stem from these variations. Struggles centered on the production of autonomous communities may view forms of political organization that seek to challenge the state in some way with great suspicion—just as political processes that are directly articulated by the logic of value may distrust the capacity for transformation and expansion of organizations concerned with the sovereignty of particular territories. However, the set of forms of political organization that emerged from the material reality of capitalist society, giving shape and direction to these different movements and strategies, constitutes the only possible source of the “common interests” of the proletarian movement as a whole. They constitute the living matter of communist practice.

Communist construction

The first part of the book was devoted to presenting a general overview of our historical situation, focusing on what we call "peripheralization." Among the multiple consequences of this moment in capitalism—when the organization of value and labor power no longer leads to the corresponding organization of workers—we focused on the specific implications for politics and, in particular, on an important consequence for communists: the peripheralization of capitalism means the end of any structural tendency promoting the convergence of proletarian struggles. This does not imply, however, that peripheralization puts an end to communist ambitions, but it certainly transforms the scope of our tasks, both in practice and in theory.

Next, in the second part, consisting of five chapters, we focus on what could be a theory for communist practice under peripheral conditions, that is, what would be a theory capable of assisting in the articulation of interests common to revolutionary struggles without relying on the assumption that there is an underlying political unity on which we could count. It was with this motivation that we introduced some of the main theoretical ideas of this book: the organizational point of view, different social logics, the theory of social domination, and the difference between aligned and misaligned social forms. All of this served to characterize, in an abstract and open-ended way, what is happening in peripheral capitalism. However, our purpose was never to produce a theory of how capitalism works, nor a political program to guide a concrete struggle. As we have reiterated several times throughout the text, what we lack is not an understanding of the machinery of capital domination, nor new specific political ideas, but the means to closely follow the struggles that are already being waged in this new social terrain and to continue to investigate the possible points of articulation and connection between these different political processes. That is why this is a theory of communist practice, and not of political practice in general. The ideas introduced in the second section aim to ensure the degree of "plasticity" necessary for us to take seriously the different characterizations of peripheral capitalism that we find in contemporary

struggles without thereby abandoning the task of building, where possible, a common revolutionary horizon.

We then arrive at the third part of the book, dedicated to political organization, struggle, thinking, and transformation. Throughout these four chapters, we mobilize all the ideas introduced in the previous sections to better characterize the variety of forms of struggle that the terrain of peripheral capitalism allows. The aim of these chapters was not to say what revolutionary politics “should be” today—no one needs us for that—but to try to propose sufficiently general definitions of what different political processes can be so that it is possible to navigate the diversity of contemporary struggles. The final outcome of this conceptual reconstruction was a schematic but also quite plastic view of some crucial categories of revolutionary politics, elaborated in such a way as to enable concrete investigations of struggles to take seriously the political ideas at stake in different political organizations, their challenges, and their strategic horizons.

Although the previous section of the book is absolutely crucial and already anticipates the type of approach we are trying to promote, it is only now, in light of everything we have already discussed, that we can really focus on what we previously called communist practice and give this practice some concrete contours. After all, it is only by considering all the theoretical construction done so far that we can truly understand how a fragmented social space, where the logics of value, property, and affinity do not always align in the same way, even if the dominance of capital remains unchanged, could produce forms of political struggle that are heterogeneous among themselves. The space composed of these forms of organization—with their own inventions, impasses, and strategic horizons—is the raw material of a practice that aims to investigate, construct, and articulate the common interests of the revolutionary movement.

As we will attempt to clarify in the final chapters of the book, we believe that the only thing that can effectively replace the belief in a convergent tendency of anti-systemic struggles – which would spare us the work of articulating and composing different organizational forms – is a set of concrete practices that combine the investigation of what is actually happening in the struggles with the construction of bridges and points of real interdependence between them. This does not mean,

however, that there is only one way to carry out these tasks. Historically, communist parties have often acted as a point of articulation for the different fronts of the working-class struggle, but there are many other ways in which these practices of investigation and articulation can be intertwined in concrete struggles, both explicitly – such as forums and spaces for exchange – and implicitly – as another axis of militant concern, internal and organic to the different movements, parties, and political collectives that already exist.

Whatever form communist practice takes in a given context, it will need to navigate a tortuous path between the whole and the parts of the revolutionary movement. This is because communists, as we shall see, are people who act on the basis of the contradiction between a particular struggle and the larger political ecosystem in which that struggle is embedded, even if they are there reluctantly. Thus, communist practice inevitably zigzags between capitalist totality—whose fragmentation underpins the heterogeneity of struggles—, the specificity of political processes—which draw their forms, conflicts, and horizons from the specific social reality in which they operate—, and the totality of the movement formed by the common interests of these different struggles. In a supposed context of historical convergence, extrapolated from European modernity, this whole process would be much simpler: capitalist totality would already signal the centrality of the worker as a political subject, which would offer us a metric for evaluating proletarian struggles in general and pave the way for us to envision the international revolutionary movement as a whole. In the absence of this structural shortcut, it is necessary to investigate and build.

Revolutionary movement and peripheralization

When we presented our typology for the advances and retreats of political struggle, we mentioned three "side effects" that plague social achievements, political victories, and revolutionary triumphs because of their specific limitations. Social achievements can be confused with mere conservative capitulation, political victories give rise to fantasies about the unlimited power of capital to absorb struggles, and revolutionary triumphs, because they do not lead to the transformation of the entire global capitalist system at once, can fuel the idea that the most we can achieve are isolated moments of freedom, small miracles that soon disappear. All these side effects stem from the same problem:

political advances, when considered separately, will always be small in contrast to the capitalist totality. This is not an internal insufficiency of these advances themselves—it is always better to have social achievements than not to have them, just as it is better to have more political victories and more revolutionary triumphs everywhere—but a specifically communist problem, that is, a problem linked to the difficulty of situating all these transformations within a larger articulated movement.

We can quickly recall here an important consequence of the distinction we made between modern and peripheral social formations in chapter nine. To recap, we differentiated the modern “society of work” from peripheral capitalist formations based on the way the three social logics relate to each other in each of these cases. In the first case, that of modernity, the three logics would be aligned: value, property, and affinity reinforce each other, organizing the same way of life where being a worker and consumer also means being a property owner and citizen, as well as an autonomous individual and family member. The same is not true in peripheral formations, where these three logics are not so tightly aligned: the forces of value, property, and affinity often point in contrasting directions, and it is necessary to constantly negotiate with different forms of power that intersect and mix.

We mentioned in that chapter that the so-called “spontaneous convergence”—the promise that industrial progress would progressively equalize the conditions of political organization of the working class—could be considered an effect of the momentary alignment of social logics in modern capitalism. Social alignment also implies political alignment, that is, it facilitates a political transformation that affects the entire capitalist edifice at the same time. It is a context where the difference between social conquest, political victory, and revolutionary triumph becomes more diffuse, because when we transform the logic of the family, we also affect rights, citizenship, and the productive sphere, all at once. So, on the one hand, social alignment allows political struggles to more easily enter into total conflict with social reality. But if the struggle is capable, in its organization, of confronting value, property, and affinity all at once, on the other hand, it also suffers resistance from all components of the social world simultaneously. The revolutionary struggle in modernity is therefore integral, but slow. It is often more localized and restricted, but

with great transformative promise. It cuts deep, but faces enormous inertia to move. Peripheral misalignment has other characteristics. On the one hand, it is more difficult to affect all dimensions of social life at once—because of the varied ways in which the power of the market, the state, and communities operate in a fractured terrain. Because of this, it is also easier to differentiate advances that amount to small social gains and partial political victories. And even the most radical triumphs manage to gain some continuity when they occur in the shadow of the military power of a state incapable of integrating the entire national territory—with the equally grim consequence that this power manifests itself with far fewer scruples when it comes to decimating these political experiments. The “misaligned” revolutionary movement is, in this sense, more dispersed and volatile in terms of its advances: it may even exist with great intensity, albeit in a more fragmented form, as it manages to operate in the many gaps of peripheral capitalism, but it has difficulty consolidating any sense of unity or totalization, due to the variety of its forms of organization and the unevenness of its achievements, victories, and triumphs.

Today, communist practice, in this process of moving between the local and the global, between particular struggles and the revolutionary movement as a whole, must learn to navigate this second form of historical inertia as well.

Positions in the revolutionary movement

And how are we all affected by this challenge? Here, we can make a small typology of the positions we can find ourselves in relation to different political processes—this will ultimately lead us to define the position of communists. As always, our interest is to adopt an organizational point of view, so that these distinctions do not imply recognizable functions, identities, or catchphrases, but only describe the places we can occupy within more complex organizations, struggles, and political ecologies.

Without going back into detail on our typology of forms of political transformation—persistence, social conquest, political victory, and revolutionary triumph—it is important to remember that all these ways for a struggle to advance politically depend on the capacity of political thought to

negate, in different ways, the social world and conservative and reactionary forces. We analyze these forms of negation and their relationship to the different dimensions of political thought in the twelfth chapter. What matters to us now is to consider that, this being the case, where there is political transformation there is not only conflict between different organizational forms, but a series of real contradictions at play. *Contradictions*, because if political transformation implies the denial of something, and if that something still exists, then those who participate in a struggle will inevitably become involved with forms of organization that cannot be simultaneously maintained. And it is these contradictions that have helped us to situate the different positions we can take in relation to the revolutionary movement.

For example, one contradiction we may experience is that between the life we lead, inserted in the current social world, and the existence of a given political struggle in which we do not participate directly. A person who picks up a meal every week at a community kitchen may not participate in the maintenance and defense of the social movement that created the kitchen, but still recognizes that this struggle makes a difference in their life—and proves this regularly by standing in line, respecting other people, talking to others about the kitchen and the quality of the food, and possibly rebelling if reactionary forces try to prevent the organization from functioning. Even if they are not actively building the political transformation at stake in the fight against hunger, they are involved in it by interacting with the kitchen and its militants as a relevant part of their social reality.

Now, this position—external to the political process, but linked to it—is precisely the position of the *social base*, which we discussed briefly in the eleventh chapter when we talked about the "struggle for perception." Remember that we pointed out, at that point, that it is possible to distinguish between people who are only in the social environment of a political organization—in its surroundings—and those who actually form its base by asking the following question: among the people who interact with the political organization in some way, for which of them does it make a difference that this organization is political? That is, in the exchanges and other interactions between those who do not participate and those who participate in a given political process, does

the political dimension of this organization of life make a difference? Does it create another type of interdependence or does it operate exactly as if the political organization were just any social group?

We call the social base of a movement or organization those people for whom the political dimension of that group makes a practical difference in their lives. Even if they do not actively participate in a given struggle, if this political reorganization of the world ceased to exist, something would really change for that person. In contrast, another person who also eats at the solidarity kitchen, but for whom healthy food or the dignified treatment they receive there is not important enough to distinguish that kitchen from a welfare-oriented “NGO” kitchen, would not be part of the social base of that organization. Not surprisingly, the social base—whether it be a social movement, an election campaign, a revolutionary party, or a spontaneous protest – does not actively and constructively participate in any political dimension of the struggle, even though it is linked to that struggle: it interacts externally, voting for a candidate on election day, buying products that finance a social movement, discussing opinions with family and friends, accepting food baskets or other material support, passing through the turnstile of a subway station taken over by militants for free. They remain essentially in the “environment” of this political reorganization, relating to its effects.

Things are different for *militants*, that is, for people who participate directly in the composition of a political organization. It is worth remembering, once again, that “organization,” for us, does not mean exclusively a stable, formal group with its own name and ideology—from an organizational point of view, there is no one who is not a participant in multiple organizations: what makes a difference in the above definition is participation in a political process, whatever collective activity that may be. By participating in a collective activity that is not organized solely by the logic of value, property, and affinity, the militant embodies a second contradiction, a tension between an orientation toward transforming the world and another determined by social reality. Whether participating in a spontaneous protest that has formed, distributing a party newspaper, coordinating meetings, or engaging intensely in a strike, those who act politically find themselves caught up in another contradiction, which creates tension between two conflicting ways of living

the same life: the one that inserts us into the social world—at work, in the law, in the family, etc.—and the one on which the advancement of a political struggle depends.

In this sense, a militant is someone who constantly needs to find ways to carry out tasks, participate in collective actions, and take risks that can undermine their own social security or social stability. They are part of a process of political transformation that, in turn, transforms and negates their own relationship with the social world—with family, friends, bosses, norms, and laws.

It is possible to occupy this position without occupying the position of social base—that is, without establishing useful relationships with the struggle. Many middle-class militants experience this tension between the struggle and their social lives without the benefits of the struggle being immediately useful to them—they do not need food from the soup kitchen, they will not be included in the new forms of community and cooperation that they help to produce, nor are they residents of the region that will benefit from the public policy they are trying to implement. When someone is positioned both as a social base and as a militant for political transformation, we call this position a *political base*. Even though this overlap of contradictions is more difficult to achieve, the position of the political base is more solid than that of the militant, because the “external” relationship with the benefits of politics somewhat eases the “internal” tension between social organization and collective political reorganization. If we eat better by fighting together, there is more reason—and sustenance—to continue fighting.

We can also define a third position based on the contradictions that political transformation produces in people's lives. As we have seen, the political reorganization of reality is composed of a series of inventions, reevaluations, and strategic redirections of this process. This means that political transformation, in its course, also needs to abandon certain ways of doing things and adopt new tactics and even rethink its more general horizon. Of course, this need to rethink and reinvent our own forms of struggle is also part of the struggle with the conservative and reactionary forces of the social world, but it is expressed as a contradiction between a given political form and its own transformation—whether through course corrections, reassessments, or political retreats.

The person who is caught up in this contradiction between different moments or forms of a given struggle takes on the role of *organizer* of that struggle.

Of course, the image that immediately comes to mind is that organizers are therefore people who have the formal responsibility of evaluating actions and commanding new directions—coordinators, important political figures, "heads of state," or leaders—and it is true that the form that organizers often adopt emulates those that value, property, and affinity constitute socially, with hierarchies, managerial roles, or charismatic influences. But according to our definition, anyone who has an active relationship with the current state of a political process and participates in its reorganization, even if only momentarily—even if only solving a specific problem to better adapt collective action to the situation it faces—is adopting this position.

Again, it is possible for someone to be simultaneously affected by the contradictions of the social base, militancy, and the position of organizer—in a way, it is this complex position that defines, in many struggles, the place of what we traditionally call the *revolutionary subject*, that part of the proletariat that is politically active and organizes and reorganizes its own struggle. And, once again, it happens that this overlap allows for a better handling of the organizer's contradiction, since that person has immediate access to the successes and failures of each tactical move, as a militant and political base. However, in struggles where hierarchy and division of labor are very marked, the position of organizer can become almost completely separated from the others—giving rise to a variety of bureaucratic types.

This brings us, finally, to the position of *communists*. As we have already anticipated, the contradiction that defines this position is that between the particularity of a specific struggle and the field of emancipatory struggles as a whole. In a way, despite normally being part of a specific movement, in which they are active and possibly help to organize, communists are those who have "one foot outside" their own organization: they consider what actions to take, what organizational revisions to propose to the collective, or even how to participate in a specific collective action, based on the fact that their organization exists within a larger political space and that we need to take this into account. This is a contradiction, not mere duality, because the communist's "foot outside"

does not stem from a lack of engagement or adherence, but from its deepening: it is in order to win that we need to consider our interdependence with other struggles and political processes.

It is crucial for us to define the position of communists based on a contradiction, as there are ways to occupy "diplomatic" positions between different struggles without this effectively implying any conflict or effective communist construction. This is the case, for example, with formal agreements between parties and movements to form broad fronts that serve the interests of the organizations in question. There is no need for any conflict or contradiction here—and therefore no communists need to be present—since the connection created is based on political forms as they already exist. Nothing needs to be transformed or reoriented for a "petition for democracy" to circulate among many different organizations.

Like all the positions we have described so far, the position of communists may appear separate or superimposed on the others, but here the situation is slightly different. The more rooted in the experiences of the social base, militancy, and collective organization, the more chance the communist position has of finding a way forward for its contradiction—because it has greater access to the material reality from which struggles draw their different forms. Our habit of thinking of communists as a superior caste could give us the impression that it is easier to find communists among the organizers of a struggle, then among militants, and finally among the political base of that struggle, respectively—as if there were a pyramid going from the base to the great communist leadership at the top. In practice, however, this is not the case: it is much more common to find political bases capable of circulating between different struggles than militants or organizers, who are usually extremely attached to their own political insertions, theories, and worldviews.

What is unique about the position of communists is that this position cannot stand alone: it is impossible to be a communist who is neither a base, nor a militant, nor an organizer of a struggle. In this extreme case, it would be possible to recognize the "foot out" of particular struggles, but what about the "foot in," which characterizes the contradiction of the communist? It is possible that there are people who move between different struggles, active in different spaces for a period of time, always concerned with the role of that organization in its larger political ecology, but this

would be a case of a kind of militant nomadism, which is different from simply occupying the position of communist.

One possible hypothesis—and one that will certainly occur to some—is that a person who wants to think about the contradiction between different political struggles in order to bring out their common interests, but who does not act as a base, militant, or organizer of any of them, is a "communist intellectual." It is tempting to accept this answer: after all, it is in the intellectual field that the connection between real struggles and the revolutionary movement can be most easily described and idealized. However, it is almost impossible for the fundamental contradiction of the communist not to dissolve, in this situation, into a kind of eclecticism or political fantasy—after all, where would the basis for contradiction come from for a person who only accesses struggles from the theoretical problem of identifying their common substrate and general directions? It is important to recognize, even so, that the intellectual who confronts the ghosts of idealism experiences, in a way, a real conflict. In writing this book, we have been repeatedly confronted with this very problem: sometimes it is necessary to take such long abstract flights, removing ourselves equally from all the struggles with which we are in contact, in order to better think about what may exist in common between them, that the rarefied airs make us question the usefulness of this intellectual adventure.

What allows us to address this particular conflict, however, is not some new concept or philosophical justification, but a return to militant practices: never losing our footing within concrete political organization. It is from political experience that the contradiction that defines the communist position presents itself most clearly. After all, the constitutive difficulty of the revolutionary movement is neither to make political agreements between struggles, nor to philosophize about a substance from which all struggles would arise, but to radicalize the political transformations that different processes are capable of producing from their concrete composition. It is the effort to build a concrete interdependence, made up of articulations that pass through the bases, militants, and political organizers, that constitutes the horizon of communists.

It is also worth noting that the contradiction that underpins the position of communists is also what justifies all the theoretical construction we have done so far. It is only from the point of view of those who are faced with the need to simultaneously consider different processes of political transformation that the question of political thought arises concretely. What does a given political struggle think? How does it differ from that other one? At what point, objective, or task could they meet? These are questions that the base, the militants, and even the organizers of a political process do not need to ask themselves in a practical and recurring manner.

It is also only in light of this contradiction that we can situate the practical challenge of communists—and do so without imagining an intellectual vanguard capable of assessing and deliberating the revolutionary path through some crystal ball—and finally return to the *Communist Manifesto*.

The practice of building without convergence

In the first chapter, we argued that, in the *Manifesto*, communists are not defined by their particular form of organization, by having more knowledge, more commitment to the revolution, or a more consolidated vision of the forms that a post-capitalist society will take. Communists are those who, within any political struggle, “highlight and make prevail the common interests of the proletariat” and who “represent, always and everywhere, the interests of the movement as a whole.” What we argue is that, when there is no spontaneous tendency toward convergence between the fronts of proletarian struggle, actions such as “highlighting,” “making prevail,” and “representing” become much more complex and consequential practical activities, as they participate in the effective construction—and not just the direction—of these “common interests” and the “movement as a whole.”

Linked to each of the positions we listed above is also a different type of political construction. The base builds the political environment of the struggle, transforming the organization's surroundings so that it is less costly to defend and engage with this emancipatory process. Militancy builds the advancement of forms of political organization, fighting for transformation in all dimensions of the

political conflict we analyzed earlier: struggles in the domains of composition, interaction, and perception. Organizers help transform the gains of the base and the militancy into inventive revisions of these political forms that we want to disseminate—remembering, of course, that they do not need to be leaders to do so, it is enough that any militant also dedicates themselves to building and rebuilding the form of their own organization. Communists, in turn, build means so that the articulation between different political struggles can drive the base, the militancy, and the organizers.

Where this complex construction moves in a revolutionary direction, the contradictions we mentioned become less intense due to the growing prevalence of the political pole: the environment becomes more conducive to struggles, organizations are better equipped to confront challenges and more flexible in the face of new ones, and the more a struggle advances, the more the environment, power, and flexibility of other struggles also advance. Where no construction is possible, either the struggles disappear or they experience an often unsustainable intensification of their contradictions: bases become distrustful and resentful, militants face mental health problems and often dedicate themselves to criticizing one another, organizations face the saturation of their forms and the possibility of self-destruction, and the communist horizon is either lost or returns to the fantasies of an enlightened vanguard, supposedly prevented from operating by the lack of political consciousness of others. As we can see, the idea of construction is what replaces, in our theory of communist practice, the role of spontaneous historical convergence.

And in light of the idea of communist construction, we can now reiterate the following:

Communists do not organize themselves into separate parties. They are people who form the base, the militancy, the organizational core of different collectives and movements—but who take on an additional contradiction for themselves, one that is impossible to experience without prior involvement in some specific struggle. Communists, therefore, have no interests that separate them from the proletariat in general. Nor could they have any, since recognizing and cultivating their common interests from the scattered fragments of the proletariat is the only way to address the contradictions of communist practice. Communists do not proclaim particular principles. The

material reality of society is the only possible source of new political principles and objectives, and in seeking to build links between movements, communists can only be guided by the advancement of struggles created and conceived on the basis of these diverse principles.

Communists differ from other workers' parties in only two respects. First, by investigating the different forms of political organization in which they are involved, transforming the experience and impasses of different political movements into elements that concern organizers, militants, and the rank and file of other organizations. Second, by representing these cross-cutting elements, whether they be problems or solutions that cut across different parts of the same ecology, as concrete signs of the existence of an interconnected revolutionary movement—a common political matter that different organizations can draw on and which, in this way, illuminates the “movement as a whole.” In practice, communists therefore constitute the most resolute fraction of workers' parties—because assuming the contradiction between the strategic orientation of their own movement and the existence of other struggles depends, by definition, on having more conviction in the role and power of other political processes than we would need to simply participate in a particular struggle. In theory, communists have an advantage over the rest of the proletariat in that they have a clear understanding of the conditions, progress, and general aims of the proletarian movement – but where could this clarity come from if not from refusing to be satisfied with the way other struggles appear from the point of view of our own militant insertion, preferring instead to rely on concrete investigation of different social and political fragments of the peripheral space? By bringing into their organizations a concern for the movement as a whole, communists also import theoretical tools that help us to increasingly contemplate our common interests, whether in grassroots work, militant tasks, or strategic reorganization.

It becomes easier to understand, we hope, why a book on the theory of communist practice has so intensely mobilized the idea of peripheralization. At the level of internal contradictions within a particular struggle, it is quite plausible that this idea has no immediate usefulness. It is from the specific point of view of the communist contradiction that the problem of political fragmentation and historical inertia characteristic of peripheral capitalism becomes a real issue. And it is only from this same point of view that another, equally fundamental point becomes clear. Finding the means

to produce a growing effective interdependence between organizations, struggles, and emancipatory strategies is not only preparing the revolutionary movement to inhabit the eroded terrain of peripheral capitalism, but also reorganizing this terrain based on other collective principles—after all, capitalism increasingly dispenses with this material articulation of collective life, crossing political and social fragments. In this sense, advancing in the mission of materially articulating struggles is also—by a paradoxical coincidence—the beginning of what could be another mode of production of social life.

The dimensions of communist practice

In the previous chapter, we began to discuss the effective position of communists amid political struggles in peripheral capitalism. “Amid” because our way of situating the construction of the revolutionary movement avoids positioning communists either before or above the reality of political organizations. They are not before, because, as we emphasized, the “raw material” of communist work is the concrete diversity of emancipatory politics—so that there is nothing communists can do in a political “vacuum,” no plan or strategy to be elaborated. Nor are they above, because struggles do not need external direction, authorized by a general theory of capitalism, to create and reinvent their paths and means of radical transformation of society. On the contrary, if our theory of political transformation is correct, the more rooted in the fragmented material reality of peripheral capitalism, the greater the chance that political processes will achieve revolutionary triumphs, even if localized. The fact that every victory is situated—even when it is grand and lasting—and therefore demands an additional step, an effort of communist construction, cannot serve as authorization to replace the autonomy and political experimentation of struggles with a prior and generalized direction. Both the substance and the means of building the revolutionary movement are created by the struggles themselves, so that the contradiction that situates the position of communists does not exist independently of the practical reality of the social base, the militants, and political organizers.

As we have seen, the contradiction at the heart of the communists’ existence is defined by the absence of immediate convergence or identity between the different forms of radical political processes – after all, communists would not be necessary if the development of struggles spontaneously brought them closer together. Being caught up in this contradiction means constantly confronting a given form of political transformation with the existence of others, which may either have points of contact or be distinct or even in conflict with each other. And what differentiates this from mere political eclecticism is that this confrontation cannot be external—for it is not simply a matter of being aware of the existence of other struggles, but also to consider how,

from their point of view, the struggle we are waging is perceived—nor can it be superficial, for it is not a matter of seeking individual links with other struggles, but of building networks of effective interdependence between them, when possible. It is in the form of a contradiction that this position can be experienced within the field of struggles, and it is its concrete implementation that gives content and form to communist practice: that is, it determines what it can effectively mean to "highlight," "make prevail," and "represent" the common interests of the revolutionary movement.

At the same time, also because of this same contradiction, the position of communists helps to construct a point of view that is not entirely contained within any particular struggle, as it is traversed by this more general political sphere. The existence of a "communist point of view" can, in fact, be derived directly from our theory of organization: an organization composed of the partial articulation of various concrete political organizations will interact with its environment in a different way and will also distinguish what counts and what does not count in these political processes in a unique way. This helps us avoid, once again, the interpretation that this position of the communists is derived from a more comprehensive theory or vision: if there is no practical articulation between struggles, there will be no organization based on their common interests, and if this does not exist, there can be no concrete communist point of view for communists guided by this perspective. As always, this is an organizational, practical, and concrete question: there is more concreteness in the communism of those who deal with the real articulation between two or three localized struggles than in the political practice of those who constantly mobilize the image of a new society to come to guide the strategic path of an isolated political group.

The existence of a perspective derived from the reality of the articulations that communists are capable of building allows us to advance in our understanding of their practice, even if it is impossible to anticipate their specific determinations, since these arise from the concrete reality of the struggles. Considering this point of view, we can understand, for example, why even without separate parties, principles, or objectives, communist practices still have a specific form: it is because communists perform the same tasks as every base, militant, and organizer, but from a different angle, that is, considering each struggle as part of a heterogeneous ecosystem. As we will now see, this change in perspective is not abstract, as it corresponds to a practical reorganization of all the

components of a given emancipatory struggle—its conflicts in the fields of composition, interaction, and perception.

Composition and political experiments

A first clue to help us think about political organization from the perspective of communist practice is that, from this point of view, even when engaged in a particular struggle, we situate ourselves based on the contradiction between this political process and others. That is, we think about collective activity in light of a larger political ecology, even when acting in a single space. It is worth remembering that, in our theory, the only way to perceive other things in a given context is if we interact and structure this activity in a new way—and therefore it is because we are involved with the question of communist articulation and construction that it is possible for other aspects of a given practice to come to the fore. What, then, does it mean to participate in the composition of a political organization based on communist practice? The field of composition, as we saw earlier, concerns the way in which a social activity is structured—how it is divided, its internal dynamics, etc. In general, this concerns the way in which different social logics mix to form any collective process: the role of money and work, rules, bureaucracy and laws, affinity, friendship, etc.

In the field of politics, however, organizational composition is the site of a conflict between the pressures of the social world—in its conservative and reactionary forms—and the political form that aims to restructure coexistence, organizational structure, and collective action. Most of the time, the persistence of a political process is disputed in the field of composition: staying together, meeting, preserving critical capacity and collective vision, etc. And it is also in the field of composition that the basis of militancy and organizers is distinguished—since militants and organizers do not interact with the organized process “from the outside,” but participate and act within it. In all these aspects related to political composition, the tactical and strategic revision of the political form is always at stake, born of material reality and its power to refuse to integrate socially. How can we describe what we are? How can we relate to each other? How can we structure the organization of a political process so that it can not only persist in the face of conservative and reactionary forces, but effectively transform reality?

To formulate and address these questions from a communist point of view is to include in our considerations not only how a struggle thinks—as we have seen: its tactical, strategic, logistical, and mobilizing dimensions—but also how it appears from the point of view of other organizations. Of course, it is probably useless for an anarchist collective that maintains an urban occupation to try to see itself from the point of view of a rural union with which it has no relationship—that would be an abstract exercise—but perhaps it is not so useless to think about the housing struggle in which they are engaged from the point of view of the agricultural workers' struggle if there is a possible interaction between the two. This does not necessarily mean establishing a planned and firm relationship; it may simply mean that, in a way, both the occupation and the union share the same social environment—whether because they face the same enemy, because some residents of the occupation migrated from that city in search of another life, or because the organic produce sold on the corner is purchased from producers in that region. In all these cases, the rural union's perspective on urban occupations can shed light on aspects of the material reality of these struggles that are not directly visible from within them, allowing for the reformulation of issues that might otherwise seem intractable or invisible.

This other light, however, is very weak when the reformulation effort is purely intellectual—when militants try to see themselves through the eyes of other people. What strengthens this other perspective is the creation of connections and shared activities, such as meetings, community fairs, demonstrations, etc. The effort to compose something together confronts both organizations with their social and political differences, and through the resistance to this process, this other perspective begins to take shape. In this sense, communist practice in the field of composition—which thinks of opportunities for articulation between organizations as opportunities to learn new aspects of their own structures—is very similar to an experiment.

In a very simplified way, an experiment can be thought of as the creation of an artificial space, where we can control the influence of different factors, where we then cause some disturbances and observe their effects. As it is a controlled space, we can better understand the laws and principles that are operating there, separating these determinations from other possible causes, and thus

giving shape to something that previously remained invisible. However, in addition to the aspect of "controlled disturbance," the experiment has a second characteristic: it must be comparable to other experiments, that is, we need to be able to articulate and construct a coherent vision composed of the results of several of these artificial arrangements, whether they are able to confirm our hypotheses or not. This second characteristic is not minor or secondary: the experiment must be carried out with a view to the possibility of it being shared—that is, carried out by other people.

Now, from the point of view of communist articulation, there is something of this artificiality of the experiment in the way a political organization aims to prevent the regular functioning of society and extract new collective forms from social material reality, in order to then creatively test the consequences of this reorganization of life. What the communist perspective adds to this compositional dimension of struggles is precisely this second clause we mentioned, the condition that this compositional struggle against the world be shareable to some extent. It is the concern with a transition between the composition of different organizations that ultimately qualifies the possibility for communists to understand the experimental dimension of the efforts of the grassroots, militants, and organizers of a given political process—without the construction of means for sharing the successes, mistakes, and limits of each struggle, this dimension would be nothing more than an empty metaphor.

We have seen previously that, in the field of composition, conservatism and reactionism appear as two types of pressure on the participants in a political process. In the first case, conservative pressure leads militants to decide, increasingly, based on the needs of their survival and current social reproduction. In the second, reactionism aims to replace the unjustifiable and fragile character of new political ideas with ideal models extracted from social reality which, while giving more stability to the organization, also indicate the people and ideas that need to be eliminated from the struggle. In both cases, the social world advances on the political ideas extracted from material reality by the struggle, reducing its space. But communist practice can offer new tools to deal with these two conflicts, either because political recomposition can effectively alleviate the pressures of social life on militants—especially if it allows for a reduction in the workload in both organizations—or because it helps to bring to light even more elements of the material reality that

motivates the political character of the struggle in question. Discovering that fighting for the right to housing in the center of a city can also mean fighting for the right to return to the countryside is a way to revitalize a political idea threatened by the horizon of urban violence, for example.

In a sense, political struggle is always experimental; what communist practice does is create the means to accumulate a practical balance of these experiments. And these means do not involve communists treating the struggle with indifference or taking an external and scientific position—not least because, as we have just suggested, political organizations appear as experiments to each other, and not to impartial sociologists or historians observing everything from the outside. What communist practice adds to struggles, and what initially emerges as a contradiction in its militant practices, is precisely this science of the potential contained in the articulations between different forms of political composition. In fact, there is nothing very new about this intuition: are political organizers not interested in accounts of past struggles and their ability to shed new light on our own practices? The question is rather why we can only recognize the power of other struggles to illuminate our own organizations if we can keep our distance from them. There is, perhaps, a bit of communist vanguardism here that attempts to empower certain militants in particular to have a better overview than others—something that the concrete articulation between struggles helps to undo.

Interaction and political technologies

The field of interaction, as we know, is the main stage of political struggle. It is where political processes clash with capitalist structures and the most visceral reactionary forces, and also the trench that best allows us to assess the advances and retreats of struggles, as well as their tactical and strategic successes and mistakes. Consequently, it is also where communist practice needs to demonstrate its greatest political usefulness.

The main difference between communist practice in the field of composition and in the field of interaction is that, in the former case, the articulations in question concern the interior of political processes—allowing for encounters, exchanges, and even internal reorganizations of struggles,

whether provisional or more lasting – while in the latter, what is at stake is the articulation between actions aimed at transforming the world, whose effects are measured not by the internal reorganization of the political process, but by the reorganization of social relations around us. The most traditional cases of articulation in the field of actions are certainly those of demonstrations and campaigns led by many organizations together, but the circulation of political force that emerges in moments of widespread revolt – amplifying the power of very different collectives and struggles at the same time – is also an effect of the same transfer or interactive sharing. Even if they remain separate from a compositional point of view, they come together to enhance the effect of a given intervention – which may even have a very different strategic meaning for each one. In their minimal form, these articulations reduce the cost of action for each organization and increase their aggregate effect.

Of course, these same examples also demonstrate one of the great difficulties of communist practice in the field of intervention. Given a certain set of struggles, each organized differently—revolutionary parties, center-left parliamentarians, social movements, territorial movements, autonomist collectives, etc.—and each perceiving social reality from its own composition, it is almost impossible to find coordinated actions that are not extremely simple, sporadic, and indirect in effect. Acts, revolts, and campaigns—especially if they are called not to advance the struggle but to prevent the “advance of the right”—help solve this problem by presenting themselves as means to be disputed, rather than as actions whose ends really matter to these different struggles. Any more complex, deep-rooted, and lasting joint action, given the fractured ecosystem of the left, would break with the basic logic of coordination—that is, allowing for a greater aggregate political effect than any struggle could produce on its own—because it is generally extremely costly for political organizations that are very different from each other to give in enough to sustain a shared tactical path for a long time.

Of course, there is no general recipe or model for addressing this tension from the point of view of communist practice, but it is crucial to note that this impasse we mention—the lack of guarantee that the most appropriate forms of intervention for each political process will reinforce and multiply their effects—is the most direct expression of the contradiction that situates the position

of communists. In a way, the tactical and strategic reconsideration based on this tension, which leads us to confront the question of how to formulate interventions that are more likely to produce political advances due to the field of action of other struggles, and which do the same for them, is at the very heart of this practice. But, as we saw earlier, it is impossible to completely separate the field of interaction from the fields of composition and perception—or, in the terms we presented earlier, to separate tactics and strategy from the fields of logistics and mobilization—and therefore communist practice focused on aggregate action is also a practice necessarily concerned with the internal structure of different political processes and the way they conceive of social reality.

We say that communist articulation centered on composition treats the structure of different organizations as experiments—insofar as these concrete articulations reveal potentially invisible aspects of these diverse struggles. Communist articulation in the field of intervention takes another form—it resembles the domain of technology more than that of experimental science.

Technology is, in general, the field of study and development of tools and instruments. Just as experimentation differs from mere experience in that it is transferable or shareable, technology differs from practical know-how in that it makes these processes explicit and allows them to be reproduced by others. A carpenter who knows how to make a special joint between parts of a piece of furniture depends on his accumulated experience and technical talent to perform this operation – he may even invent new uses and forms for his work tools. We say that this technique has become a technology for carpentry when this know-how becomes easily reproducible without requiring other users to occupy the same position as the original carpenter. Of course, educational workshops can teach this technique, but it is when this practice informs new tools, instruction manuals, and preparations for the means of production that it really becomes transmissible even to those who are not so technically talented. On the other hand, technology not only makes what was born from the technical experience of a few reproducible at a lower labor cost, but it can also make actions feasible on scales that are inaccessible to us individually. The separation between technique and technology is not only the difference between a talented worker and one who merely uses tools that facilitate work, but also between actions we can accomplish through our own efforts and actions that are

only possible because they involve special tools that allow us to act on the very small and the very large.

Similarly, the field of political technology brings these two dimensions together. On the one hand, it is the field of communist practice concerned with the transfer of forms of action across different struggles, allowing different strategic visions to benefit from forms of intervention that did not emerge from within their own processes of struggle. On the other hand, it is also the field where we seek to find forms of action whose aggregate effect is irreducible to the sum of the interventions of particular struggles. At the simplest level, we can think here both of the reproduction of instruments of struggle through different political processes—the adoption of European workers' inquiries in contexts of extremely precarious informal work in southeastern Brazil, for example—and of the concrete articulation of different struggles in joint actions—such as campaigns to change legislation, to block a right-wing candidate, or to organize mass protests, etc. But the more we know about the terrain of each struggle, and the more each struggle knows about the terrain of the others, the more distinct forms of articulation can become viable – ways of stitching together diverse actions into true chains of continuous political activity, combining solidarity kitchens, category strikes, occupations, networks of small producers, etc. Such constructions require complex articulations between movements, parties, and their different bases, but they also reinforce the possibility of political advances that would be impossible for any of these actors to produce in isolation.

Thinking about forms of political intervention in our organizations and others as technologies—that is, as ways of acting and transforming reality that can be improved and shared—is a bit like worrying about the “means of production” of the struggle. It means observing how we act, at what cost, and whether there are “more economical” ways to campaign and act, depending on whether we cooperate or not. And if we consider compositional articulation, which we described earlier, as an experimental look at militant “work,” we could even talk, perhaps, about the problem of the “organic composition” of struggles and how different ways of acting can reduce the militant work necessary to perform different tasks, increasing the effectiveness of our interventions. Once again, none of this implies the existence of a committee external to the

struggles trying to direct and unify different forms of action—great managers or generals of the struggles. Just as only concrete compositional articulations really make new aspects of an organization appear to its militants and to militants from other organizations, so too is the process of articulating forms of intervention constructed in the midst of action and its evaluation—and, not surprisingly, it often poses the challenge for rank-and-file members, militants, and organizers to choose between producing real political effects and ensuring the ideological distinction of their own organizations. It is in this tactical and strategic pass that the communist contradiction and its constructive task are most clearly expressed.

Perception and political inquiries

Let us quickly recall our definition of the struggle for perception. What is at stake here, for a given political process, is the way in which people outside that organization conceive of what is happening there. While emancipatory forces aim to transform the social environment enough so that even those who do not actively participate in the struggle recognize the existence and legitimacy of their political principles, conservative and reactionary forces act on these social environments in order to make them indifferent or even harmful to the advancement of the struggles. The main example we gave of the type of struggle that takes place in this sphere is grassroots work, often evaluated in terms of the class consciousness it stimulates in people. On the other hand, we emphasize that, from our organizational point of view, the type of transformation we are interested in evaluating occurs in the field of social practices and relations, even if its individual outcome is the possibility for people to express and intellectually understand the world in a different way.

How is this type of action integrated into communist practice? There is a specificity here that is worth mentioning. Looking back, it is interesting that articulation in the field of composition is the most counterintuitive—the idea that interaction with other organizations can reveal unthought-of dimensions of a struggle is perhaps the most difficult to conceive—and articulation in the field of intervention is more pragmatically understandable—as it directly involves the attempt to create more strength for our different political interventions. This differentiation certainly stems from the

fact that there are many ideological and organizational justifications for political processes to express themselves in such distinct ways, but there is a certain set of common political enemies against which all these struggles rise up—this would make tactical and strategic articulation a little more intuitive.

When we consider the social environments of struggles, this intertwining becomes even stronger: even though each struggle “slices” reality differently, people generally live in the world of peripheral capitalism. We know that peripheralization produces organizational fragmentation in social life, producing a series of different arrangements between value, property, and affinity. It turns out that, while political organizations normally express the tension between a particular arrangement of these logics and their specific emancipatory principles, people need to navigate and circulate between these different fractures, crossing divided cities, social environments that are very different from each other, often desperately clinging to the logic of commodities for guidance, since this is, today, the only way capable of integrating the entire social fabric. This difference between a necessary circulation between social fractures, on the side of the people, and a truncated circulation between political organizations, allows us to recognize the popular content of communist practice. Perhaps paradoxically, considering the complexity of everything we have analyzed so far, we must conclude that the point of view of the contradiction between particular struggles and the totality of the revolutionary movement is, within the sphere of emancipatory politics, the position that best reflects the more general contradictions of social life in peripheral conditions. The communist horizon is, after all, that of the “world in which many worlds fit” – a reunion between political form and the variety of forms of life.

It is by considering this transit of people through different social environments that we can understand why, in the field of perception, communist practice tends to produce a reversal in the logic of base work. If base work aims to produce recognition, on the part of the people, of the legitimacy of a given political struggle, from the communist point of view it is the bases of the different struggles that have the power to shed new light on the political consciousness of the militants and organizers of different political processes. That is why the practice of articulations in the field of social environments takes the form of inquiries.

Even though it has taken many different forms throughout the history of Marxism, the practice of "workers' inquiries" generally has the characteristic of shifting the core of political thought from militants to workers. Even though they often involve political activities indistinguishable from grassroots work—meetings, conversations, neighborhood and workplace inquiries, newspaper distribution, public events, etc.—inquiries end up taking on a different form by more directly confronting the essential communist contradiction. Carried out by militants with particular political orientations, the inquiries offer themselves as a mediation between workers isolated from each other, a mirror for them to build new horizons of articulation among themselves – from sharing forms of resistance to creating a more comprehensive collective consciousness. In other words, the form of the inquiries, as a communist practice, exposes the struggles to the possibility that the political point of view of the workers does not coincide with the restricted vision of the organizations that carry out the inquiries. It is possible—and very common—that, from the point of view of a given social environment, the differences we make between our organizations and ideological conceptions do not make that much difference, and we all appear to the people as part of the same political camp—something we are often unable to conceive for ourselves.

This makes the inquiry, for communists, a crucial tool both in understanding how the different social fragments that make up peripheral capitalism are connected and in identifying the gaps that can allow, based on concrete practices, the construction of a perception of the totality of struggles—a point of view that is largely indifferent to our ideological categories and is generally guided by the aggregate difference we can make in people's real lives. In this sense, the inquiry is neither an experiment—it does not act through recompositions and articulations between organizations—nor a technology—since it does not concern the articulation between forms of action. What inquiries construct, in short, is a perception of the common interests of different struggles, that is, a rearticulation between parts of the social fabric capable of illuminating and evaluating the relevance of the distinctions we draw for our bases, militants, and organizers. By submitting all emancipatory political construction to the court of popular perception, the inquiries root communists in the only trustworthy substrate – closing the circuit that goes from the base to the communists, and back to them.

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.

Common Space of Organizations

The fourth part of our book was devoted to presenting some theoretical and practical tools that can assist communists in investigating and composing contemporary political struggles—which culminated, in the last chapter, in a discussion of communist investigations. Investigation, in all its different forms, serves to ensure that the content of revolutionary theory, practice, and strategy is not derived from an abstract analysis of the trends of capitalism, but is elaborated from what different concrete fronts of struggle think about contemporary capitalist organization, based on their challenges and political objectives, without losing sight of the horizon of structural transformation of capitalist society. Our entire theory has been constructed so that it can be molded and accommodated to very different ways of doing politics, of organizing conflicts and struggles, of evaluating our enemies and imagining the future. That is why, as we have seen, investigation cannot be a process of sociological observation: investigation involves engagement with practices and organizations, the construction of concrete alliances and articulations, because it is impossible to adopt a communist point of view if there is nothing concrete in common between struggles—and communist investigations serve to highlight, bring to the fore, and represent what is common in revolutionary politics. But the description of the different types of investigation—punctual, procedural, compositional, and formative—remains a theoretical contribution. It is the abstract theory of some of the means by which we can give concreteness to our analyses and to the practical challenges that arise from them. And what we will do in this chapter is take a final step toward the concrete, sharing the story of a particular political organization called Common Space of Organizations, or “CSO.” In doing so, we adopt a much more situated perspective—and invite readers to exercise the contradictory point of view that connects this small experiment to the larger movement to which we belong.

Background

We will present, in some detail, the trajectory of CSO throughout its short existence, spanning a little over two years of activities. Our expectation is that the description of how this collective was created and transformed over time—which profoundly influenced the way we conceived the ideas in this book—will serve as an example for other militants interested in continuing this type of action, whether in their political insertions, by creating similar devices, or even by articulating directly with us. But in order to more easily separate what is contingent and particular to our experience from what could effectively constitute a communist experiment of more general value, it is worth briefly dwelling on the history that preceded the formation of the collective. The Common Space of Organizations is actually the result of more than a decade of political mobilization and intellectual reflection by more than a hundred militants around the world. Its history is directly linked to a collective founded in Rio de Janeiro in 2011, called the Circle of Studies of Idea and Ideology (CSII), and to an international network of communist researchers that has been meeting since 2016 under the name Subset of Theoretical Practice (STP).

In the nearly ten years it was in operation, CSII brought together militants from various cities in Brazil—as well as an international group—with the aim of investigating, based on the experience of different organizations and political orientations, whether there were common problems that crossed the ideological boundaries of the left. Using a methodology inspired by psychoanalysis, the collective met to discuss different political experiences and attempted to recognize patterns and impasses that were repeated in different situations. Based on this analysis, groups were formed – “subgroups” – to think about new collective solutions to these difficulties, which the CSII then shared with other interested political organizations. As the collective grew, some members of the Circle felt the need to create a space for the theoretical systematization of the practice of articulation and analysis that the organization had been developing. This is how the Subset of Theoretical Practice emerged – which was originally a “subset” of this larger organization. In 2021, after several years of difficulty in continuing its proposal, CSII assessed that its way of operating no longer found traction in the social and political environment to which it had access and decided to cease its activities. STP, a research group founded within the Circle, decided to continue operating nonetheless and opened its doors to militants and intellectuals from other political processes and places around the world.

CSII already brought together militants working on very diverse fronts—unions, anarchist collectives, communist and socialist parties, social movements, etc.—but when STP became autonomous, this scope expanded even further. militants involved in many struggles, many of them informal, without fixed organizational nuclei, both in Brazil and in other countries, approached STP in search of ways to elaborate their political experiences and try to extract lessons for future struggles. This long collective work—which involved revisiting political processes, comparing different contexts and their particular challenges, and a highly complex interdisciplinary synthesis—consolidated the foundations of the theory we present throughout this book.

However, as STP developed and formalized this new approach, it began to be sought out not only by militants from past or declining struggles, but also by active political organizations interested in the possibility that the tools developed by STP could help with ongoing impasses and challenges. Faced with this demand, some members of the Subset concluded that it would be impossible for us to contribute effectively to these struggles with the structure we had at that time, since we operated basically as an international investigation group that met virtually. This conclusion is supported by our theory: an online investigation group is organized in a certain way—and therefore can only interact effectively with a very limited type of social environment, in addition to being unable to perceive much of what is around it. Online meetings force us to reduce what is happening in the struggles to distant reports, and the people in STP, scattered around the world, often did not share even the minimal experience of those specific social contexts, which further reduced our ability to perceive what was politically relevant to these organizations. Finally, virtual meetings tend to be very low-cost gatherings for those who participate—all you need to do is turn on your computer and coordinate a time—and this prevents concrete social and political structures from being more present in these meetings, whether in the form of obstacles or opportunities for joint action. In other words, the basic conditions for carrying out even the simplest ad hoc investigation are not so accessible in this format.

This was the main motivation for us to create a new collective, the Common Space of Organizations, in the second half of 2023. Our goal, at that initial moment, was to put to the test

the theoretical work we had been developing at STP, both through the didactic presentation of concepts and through frequent meetings with militants from different political organizations.

November 2023

The Common Space of Organizations began to meet weekly in downtown Rio de Janeiro in November 2023. Its meetings were open to the public and were divided into three types, forming a more or less regular cycle: theoretical seminars, where we intended to debate the accumulated theoretical balance of SPT; "militant inquiries," which is what we initially called specific interviews with militants from different political organizations; and collective elaborations, meetings dedicated to debating with the public how the political experiences we heard related to the concepts of the seminar. At the same time, we made an effort to ensure that the organizations participating in the inquiries returned to subsequent meetings to help us with interviews with other movements. Our intention, still very rudimentary, was that this process could, on the one hand, influence the training of these militants—since they would have access to discussions about the concrete problems of other organizations—and, on the other hand, influence the form of the inquiries themselves—since it changed the political composition of the interviews and therefore the type of interaction possible. We also believed that this connection between militants could lead to new links between the invited organizations themselves.

From the organizational perspective we have developed throughout this book, we can say that the political idea that gave rise to CSO did not emerge from the material reality of the collective itself, but from traits that STP gathered over the years from the "black box" of many scattered struggles in Brazil and elsewhere, through the reports and analyses of the militants and intellectuals who gathered there. Perhaps we could condense the political principle formulated from this material reality as follows: the particular failures of struggles can become common material for those same struggles. Like any political idea, there is a component of refusal here—what we call "anti-social negation"—that is, a rejection of treating the histories and experiences of different political processes as mere cases of capitulation or lack of revolutionary vision. Instead of simply using the social form of this fragmentation, as it presents itself, to confirm the need for each fraction of the

struggles to remain isolated, STP began to argue that something is expressed in this fragmentation that can be the basis for a new communist perspective. But not only that: beyond refusal, the collective developed a political way to begin to move through these fragments—to carry out "social negations"—through the creation of a collective investigation method that would transform the diversity of struggles into motivation for theoretical reinvention and, conversely, a research methodology that would facilitate the coexistence of militants and intellectuals traversed by this social heterogeneity.

If, on the one hand, CSO was able to begin its activities based on this accumulation and the direction it suggested, on the other hand, it took time, for this very reason, to confront the challenges arising from its own material reality. In fact, much of what materially conditioned this cycle of meetings and activities that we mentioned earlier was not clear to us at the beginning. We had a tactic—to hold regular meetings, whatever the cost—an experimental bet—the possibility that, by promoting STP theory, we could produce new combinations of militants and political organizations, just as the Subset itself had begun to do—and what made a difference for us was, essentially, the concatenation between the different meetings we held—seminars, inquiries, elaborations. This simple arrangement allowed for a first attempt to advance and promote political articulations, but the original form of CSO was not very receptive to what was happening with our composition – who built the space and in what concrete way – with our capacity for interaction – because we were concerned with restricting our actions to this previously formulated model – and perception – since very little of the social environment of downtown Rio or the political environment of Rio de Janeiro made a difference to our work at that time.

December to February, 2024

Organized in this way, we were able to conduct three initial inquiries in quick succession. We talked to an autonomist collective that had suspended its activities some time ago, a Marxist group that was competing with a more conservative labor party, and militants from different factions of the ruling center-left party. The choice of the initial groups we invited was largely determined by the access we had to militants from these organizations, which guaranteed a certain degree of trust and

tolerance from the guests towards the type of activity we were proposing. At the same time, our assessment of the tensions that could arise due to their different political orientations was, at the time, that this expressed CSO's effort to deal with the internal contradictions within the left in Brazil. We did not consider at that time that, by connecting these organizations, even if only occasionally, through our inquiries, we were also weaving CSO itself into this fabric of relationships—an effect that we later discovered was important to take into account, as other groups began to question whether, by listening to militants with political orientations with which they radically disagreed, we were not taking the side and positions of these organizations.

The first three inquiries followed the format of the specific investigations we described in the previous chapter. We scheduled meetings with militants from these different organizations and devised a procedure to help us guide the conversations so that they would not be restricted only to the representations that individuals make of the struggles in which they are involved. Our method consisted of a few simple guidelines:(1) Never invite just one person to talk, as the presence of multiple accounts from the same organization already helps to separate what is in the realm of personal impressions.(2) Avoid inviting leaders, public figures, or militants who are accustomed to presenting their organizations, as this increases the chance that guests will think along with us about their struggles.(3) Invite militants who participate in an inquiry to participate in an interview with another organization, as this helps to prevent the interviews from merely reproducing the perspectives of the groups involved.(4) Invite an organization that participated in an inquiry to a second follow-up inquiry, as this also contributes to understanding the organization's journey beyond the individual experiences of its militants.

It is worth noting that only one of the invited organizations—the autonomist collective involved in the struggle of outsourced workers—had militants who participated in other organizations' inquiries, and this was also the only organization at that time that returned for a second inquiry. This was, at least in part, because one of CSO's coordinators is part of this collective – and because, we believe, this was the only one of the three inquiries where the investigation took the form of an effective political exchange.

In retrospect, the initial interview method we used was too schematic and too concerned with ensuring the production of investigation that was of exclusive interest to CSO itself, since it allowed us to connect the interviews to the themes of the seminars and the discussions of the collective elaboration meetings. Virtually nothing in this process was thought out based on the interests and needs of the invited organizations – that is, we did not yet understand that investigations are essentially a form of connection and that their ability to produce new knowledge and insights is actually a consequence of this. The only exception was really the inquiry with the autonomist collective: at the time we made the invitation, the group was no longer active, and the opportunity to organize a reunion and elaborate a little of its history together with other interested people ended up being useful for the organization itself, which decided to resume its activities a few months later.

Even so, the inquiries contributed greatly to CSO's progress. First, because they served as fodder for the collective discussions we had, demonstrating that the theory developed by STP really allowed us to approach the reality of these struggles in a different way, recognizing their differences and limitations without having to choose one organization as the representative of the "real" political point of view and the others as processes guided by false premises. That is, it was becoming possible to navigate between these different militant perspectives, understanding how they were affected by different social and political compositions.

Secondly, we also realized that the construction of a collective space where it was possible to share different political experiences was in itself of great value to those who were there. Both the seminars and the collective elaboration meetings began to revolve not only around the inquiries, but also around the militant experience of the people who regularly participated in the CSO meetings. This space for exchange served both to identify other invisible aspects of the material reality of the struggles—recurring problems, forms of suffering in activism, failures that required new ideas to be worked out, etc.—and also became an important source of questions about CSO's own actions.

March to August, 2024

What was happening, without CSO organizers realizing it, was that the material reality of the organization itself—with its conflicts and also unexplored possibilities—was beginning to affect the space, demanding a profound reformulation. In the first months of activity, the collective organized itself with the aim of ensuring that its regular meetings took place, holding additional coordination meetings to agree on the division of labor necessary to make this happen. This form of organization conditioned the type of interaction that CSO was capable of producing, both with the struggles and with the people who frequented the space, and the way the collective perceived its environment. For example, we were concerned with inviting militants, but we did not consider how organizations understood this invitation—since there was no concrete plan for working with them—and we did not consider the participants in the regular meetings as members of the collective—since they did not have access to any forum for deliberation or strategic evaluation of CSO: for us, they were the “audience” of the meetings.

But the material reality of our organization quickly began to make itself felt. The first conflict that began to arise from the materiality of this process concerned the difficulties that maintaining the collective's practice posed for the organizers. Ensuring that weekly meetings were held in an easily accessible location became extremely laborious, creating increasing tension for the coordinators of the space, who were responsible for the various tasks necessary to continue the activities. The tension between survival and political life had already manifested itself, in fact, since the beginning of ECO's activities—which is why the collective had been sensitive, from the outset, to the need to collaborate with the transportation costs of invited militants, for example. But it was around March 2024 that CSO decided to respond to this problem in a more structural way, creating a partnership with an investigation institute: in exchange for some financial resources – which would help us with the rent for the space, transportation and food costs for the meetings, and a small allowance for the coordinators – the collective began to hold monthly meetings, separate from its regular activities, such as book launches and presentations of the work of the institute's researchers. This agreement was certainly only possible, under the terms in which it was made, because a member of the coordination team worked at this institution, so that this partnership did not bring additional constraints to our organization. The agreement, in this sense, established a “fence” – it placed a monthly CSO activity under the control of another organization – so that it was possible

to avoid intensifying the coordinators' work regime – that is, a fence that allowed us, at the same time, to avoid expanding the “margins” of money and work on the time of activism, determining what we could and could not do collectively.

If the material tension between the world of work and activism brought up a new problem for the organization—which responded to it, at first, without much inventiveness, and in a provisional manner—another tension that arose at the same time received a more striking treatment. As we have already mentioned, the importance of exchanges between regular participants in the space, which became increasingly central to the evaluation of what we were doing there, called into question this initial perception that there would be a small group of coordinators concerned with disseminating a political idea developed by STP and, apart from that, an audience interested in debating theory in light of the inquiries. In contrast to this conception, a small autonomous political community began to form within CSO, based on the confidence that it was possible to share militant experiences and learn from them. And it was up to the organization, at that moment, to figure out how to make room for this new development, even if it meant rethinking the political content and strategy that had guided us until then. In organizational terms, it was becoming increasingly clear that we could use a “frontier”—a common boundary, shared by both sides of the divide—to overcome the asymmetrical and unnecessary fence that separated the group's active militants from a supposedly passive public. Based on this, we added a new regular meeting to the organization's calendar, dedicated to evaluating our activities and planning next steps together with all group participants—these were the first seeds of CSO as a true collective.

These two transformations need to be considered together. The institutional partnership had alleviated the tension between work and activism for the coordinators, who were thus able to devote more time to the tasks necessary for maintaining the meetings, ensuring the existence of this collective space, which was increasingly appropriated and built by its participants. Not only that, but since CSO's political composition included these interventions in economic life, the group was also aware of the need to include this dimension in its collective deliberations—which, in turn, conditioned the type of discussions the collective was able to have and the ideas it was able to formulate. In this way, the community that was forming there shared not only reports on the

difficulties of interaction between organizations and their enemies, but also experiences about the obstacles that the reproduction of life poses for those who engage politically—a rare type of collective elaboration, but one that is crucial for us to effectively understand how our struggles are concretely rooted in the social world. If, from this angle, the two changes reinforced each other positively, on the other hand, they also created a new contrast. After all, while CSO began to recognize itself as a larger collective, composed not only of the initial coordination, but also of other people interested in building that organization, it also produced a new internal difference within the group—between those who received financial assistance in exchange for taking care of the collective's more "invisible" tasks, and the larger group that jointly thought about the political dimension of CSO. This division in the organizational composition was discussed and recognized, but it also produced new effects on the group's ability to intervene and perceive the social and political world around it.

In political terms, however, none of these transformations was as striking and consequential as the one that began with the two subsequent inquiries conducted by the collective. In early 2024, CSO coordinators began meeting with a militant linked to a soup kitchen located near our collective's headquarters. This solidarity kitchen, which is part of a large social movement, is one of dozens of similar initiatives scattered throughout the country. Unlike what happened with the first three specific investigations—when we started from personal contacts we had with militants—here there was no prior link between us, and the original justification for the contact was the possibility of helping the militant publicly expose a situation of exploitation involving app delivery workers, a sector where he had also worked for a time. For the first time, the need to think of the investigation as a political exchange became explicit – but what was initially designed as an exchange between support for the complaint and an interview with the militant for CSO soon changed in character. And here, the functioning of the solidarity kitchen had a crucial influence. For different reasons, solidarity kitchens are staffed by both cooks and other militants in the movement, as well as volunteers, which means that there is already a common practice of receiving visitors and involving third parties in the daily work of organizing and producing meals. Thus, instead of the exchange we had proposed, our contact suggested that we visit the kitchen and help with daily tasks before conducting the inquiry.

At that point, we had begun to review the role of inquiries in our meetings, and the invitation to visit the kitchen was therefore very welcome, serving as a basis for this reformulation process. We formed a rotating group that once a week took part in the kitchen renovation effort and also helped with the preparation of the meals—and we continued this practice for a few months, even after conducting the interview with the movement's militants. It was not only our first “procedural investigation” – as we now call this type of more lasting articulation, subject to the mode of struggle of another organization – but also an example that allowed us to begin to better understand the limitations of the interviews we had conducted up to that point.

In addition to our work with the solidarity kitchen, we organized a second inquiry during this same period with the autonomist collective with which we began our activities. Over the past few months, relations between CSO and this collective had grown closer—in fact, other members of our group had joined this organization on a permanent basis. The collective had resumed its activities since the beginning of the year, working with outsourced workers from different public universities and collecting their complaints on a website and in a newspaper distributed in these same workplaces.

After a few months of working together, we invited some militants from the collective for a conversation, which also played a crucial role in this process of reformulating our investigations. If our engagement with the kitchen and with the autonomist militants taught us the value of procedural investigation—its ability to bring to light other aspects of organizations, while allowing for concrete articulations based on the sharing of work and common challenges—the contrast between these two experiences was also very useful in indicating a possible limit to this type of investigation.

The process of struggling alongside the autonomists resulted in an extremely productive conversation, where ideas developed in STP and CSO were able to help in the analysis of organizational dilemmas and strategic challenges of the collective without implying the group's submission to ideas external to its practice. The conditions for this to be possible were quite

specific: after all, there were CSO militants in the collective and there was also an affinity between the groups due to their shared interest in using the workers' inquiry as a political tool. Continued coexistence, coordination in the field of composition, and the sharing of political technologies all contributed to making possible a detailed discussion of the paths and missteps of the struggle with outsourced workers. The procedural investigation with the cooks and militants, however, culminated in a very different interview: we realized that much of what we were learning in our weekly work with them did not appear in what they told us during the interview, and the way we formulated the lessons and ideas that emerged from that practice was also not recognizable to the movement's own militants. The feeling that we were "seeing from the outside" what was happening in the kitchen had not only persisted but deepened.

The contrast between the two investigations made us realize that there was a difference between simply taking on tasks from another organization and effectively learning to see social reality from their political perspective. The productive side of both inquiries led us to differentiate between "punctual" investigations—the interviews—and "procedural" ones—where there was coexistence and collective work – while the contrast between them helped us distinguish what would be the scope of "compositional" investigation – where collective work creates common situations and objectives that serve as the basis for a common perspective among the organizations that are involved. This component was present in the case of the collective, but not with the cooks and militants of the social movement. Even with this qualitative difference between the forms of articulation we were building, it was very significant for CSO to have been able to facilitate, for the first time, an exchange between other organizations. During a protest against a businessman who threatened to fire workers from the university cafeteria, the kitchen offered to send meals to the workers, students, and militants gathered by the autonomist collective. It was a one-off exchange, without the need for any greater ideological alignment, which allowed the action to take place strategically at lunchtime – and also a political exchange that would never have occurred spontaneously, given the differences in orientation and composition of the two organizations.

September to December, 2024

Although we learned a lot from the process with the solidarity kitchen—which continued after the unsuccessful interview—and from the feedback inquiry with the autonomist collective, the articulation that really consolidated the idea of a third type of investigation was the one we undertook with another political organization. Since June, CSO had been approaching a very old political movement with a national reach, which is mainly organized in the outskirts of large cities and in small towns, seeking to build networks of cooperation and self-organization that they call “popular communities.” We had some prior contact with a few militants from the movement, but we knew that, due to the radical and silent orientation of the organization, a one-off investigation would not be possible or even interesting. However, the movement had recently begun to build a community in the city center, and this made a more continuous approach feasible, along the lines of the procedural investigations we were already conducting. We began to attend the movement’s activities—both in the downtown community and at state and national meetings—always following the principle of submitting ourselves to the mode of organization of the struggle with which we were involved. But here the process took a different turn, as the new group that the movement was forming in the city center was experiencing particular difficulties. It was a new experiment for this organization: most of its communities had a very strong foundation in their places of residence, which facilitates the creation of bonds of trust and collective work—something that does not happen in the same way in a chaotic area in the urban center of a metropolis. Because of this, our work with the movement and this new community took on a different aspect: we were not only offering militant labor for a struggle, but helping it to think about itself under new conditions.

It is very important to mention that a fundamental principle of this organization is popular protagonism – its social composition is almost exclusively made up of precarious workers, and its principle of self-organization places the movement’s base at the center of all decision-making and collective construction processes. Here, CSO’s political composition may have helped us find a way of working that respected the form and strategy of this political organization. As we have seen, CSO was at that time undergoing an internal division between a coordination team that carried out the tasks necessary for the continuation of the space – agenda, publicity, dealing with the owner of our headquarters, practical contact with other organizations, etc. – and the newly formed

collective, which was engaged in inquiries, strategic deliberations, and joint evaluation of our actions. This meant that we already understood the political value of the work necessary to reproduce a collective space—and it was through this same path that we consolidated our articulation with the downtown community, taking on tasks of organizing meetings and facilitating the participants of this group to gain time to increasingly appropriate the movement, its method, and the collective that was forming there.

Working with this movement consolidated a series of practical and theoretical novelties for CSO. Above all, it helped us understand the difference between procedural and compositional investigation, as it was not just a matter of collaborating on specific tasks, but of jointly facing challenges that had yet to be solved – common impasses that could creatively guide our political exchange. The investigation process with this movement was also the first that did not include a specific inquiry at any point—no interviews or formal conversations with militants convened by ECO—but was carried out through a series of different types of articulations: joint experiments, shared political technologies, popular inquiries of interest to both organizations, etc.

In parallel with the process with this movement, CSO was also beginning to build another relationship, with a network of political articulations centered on the territorial struggle. Unlike the movement mentioned above, this network of articulation already conceived its political task in terms of a seam between extremely diverse struggles – encompassing peripheral organizations in the urban context, quilombos, settlements, and indigenous territories. This type of action, involving groups and struggles so different from each other, was also accompanied by a unique vision of how to combine different political traditions in a process of revolutionary composition. Interested in learning a little from their experience, we initially invited some militants working in Bahia to a conversation in Rio de Janeiro about their political perspectives, and from these conversations and interactions, a different type of interaction between the organizations began to emerge. A crucial novelty here was the role of CSO in bringing this network closer to the popular movement with which we were already involved.

In conversations with the militants from Bahia, we gained some understanding of the challenges of the process in which they were involved, and from the perspective of these impasses, an exchange with the popular movement began to become an interesting possibility. In strategic terms, both organizations considered it crucial to establish new links between the peripheries of large cities and autonomous territories in the countryside, and both thought of these links in terms of material exchanges, collective work, and the distribution of production. There had even been rapprochements between these organizations in the past, but without continuity. We then took it upon ourselves to bring this proposal to the movement and help organize an activity that would enable a new strengthening of ties—which took place a few months later in Bahia. From December until today, we have continued to support this articulation, which has unfolded into other activities since then.

At the same time, we began to visit the territory of one of the militants who visited us in Rio de Janeiro, a settlement in southern Bahia, as well as some national activities of the network of territories. This effort at interstate coexistence also led us to reorganize CSO internally, as it required a new approach to the financial resources we had—now mobilized for conducting investigations—and an even greater degree of involvement from the members of the collective. It was the first time that the process of compositional investigation—that is, focused on common problems—led our group to undergo important internal transformations.

Both the process we initiated with the popular movement and with the territorial articulation network had yet another crucial impact on CSO, as both organizations were already thinking very deeply – guided by a wealth of accumulated experience – about elements that we were only beginning to explore in relation to contemporary communist tasks. With a history of more than fifty years of commitment to the role of militant investigation and the Maoist “mass line” as ways of keeping the struggle aligned with the rhythm and interests of the people, the popular movement helped us to review and clarify what is really at stake in investigations and their role in rooting politics in material reality. In turn, the challenges faced by the coordination network have not only transformed our understanding of the role of territorial struggle today, but have also greatly

enriched our vision of how political construction based on material interdependence can help connect struggles that are thought of in extremely different ways.

These two experiences thus became the first cases of "formative" investigations at CSO, where our joint action was not only focused on specific common interests, but also helped to form a shared communist perspective, since the dimensions of investigation, articulation, and revolutionary construction were already part of the political thinking of all the organizations involved.

January to June, 2025

After a little over a year, CSO no longer resembled the original organization. We began our activities in November 2023, using a cyclical model of three types of meetings, coordinated by a group of three or four people, with the primary objective of disseminating the theoretical framework developed by STP to a diverse audience and, secondarily, of promoting indirect contacts between other political organizations. However, as the investigations took shape and developed into effectively constructive articulations, it no longer made sense to define our work agenda in this way. A first important change was the proposal to create a new cell of the collective in São Paulo, as well as to encourage the creation of others. Since the middle of the previous year, when we began to coordinate with national movements and struggles, our field of action had already begun to expand beyond Rio de Janeiro, which justified a constant presence in other cities—also motivated by the interest that other people began to show in the collective. To accompany this process—and also to facilitate coordination with new organizations—we decided to write a text that would condense the history of CSO and explain the working method that guides our organization. This text—initially a 30-page document!—became the first version of this book.

Throughout the first half of 2025, the São Paulo CSO group also began to meet regularly, seeking new militant connections and advancing the more established contacts we already had. In Rio de Janeiro, we replaced the “seminar” format meetings with readings and discussions of the book

manuscript, discussing each chapter collectively, while also deepening the bonds we had built up to that point.

The need to reorganize ourselves to better follow the investigations in which we were involved—a process that began in the second half of 2024—led to a series of changes in CSO's internal structure. We created a national forum for strategic decisions involving the collective's interstate activities, and we reworked our relationship with the investigation institute that supported the Rio group, both to ensure the autonomy of our organization and to facilitate the involvement of all CSO members in this partnership, since it involved the transfer of resources and therefore the material reproduction of the collective and its participants. The division that had been established between the Rio coordination and the other members of the group—due to financial support and the existence of a space separate from the coordination—began to be rethought, leading to new internal structures as well.

Finally, CSO's relationship with SPT—which remained active throughout this time—also underwent an important change. Throughout our activity, there was a growing demand – both from members of the collective and other interested parties – for a space more dedicated to investigation, which could also help clarify details of the theory we developed in the Subset and later in CSO itself. A proposal then emerged that this demand be addressed to STP itself, which already functioned as a space for theoretical investigation and could take on the additional task of mediating the approach of people interested in our theoretical vision, or even interested in creating new cells of the collective – in Brazil or elsewhere – and who could begin this journey in dialogue with the investigation group. The Common Space of Organizations, which had emerged as a small experiment of the STP, now became the general organization, of which STP was an important “subset.” The unanimous approval of this transformation led STP to change its name to “Common Space of Theoretical Practice” to better integrate CSO.

In this brief summary of our activities, we emphasize some key moments that profoundly influenced the changes and developments that the collective underwent. But it is important to note that virtually none of the investigations we conducted—with the exception, perhaps, of two of the

first three “specific investigations”—were actually completed. Many of them had long-term developments and today comprise an ecology of articulations of varying degrees of involvement that we continue to build. We have also left out of this summary other political exchanges and processes that are still ongoing, due to the need to be concise in this report.

Investigating the Common Space of Organizations

But what is the Common Space of Organizations when viewed from the point of view of other struggles? This is not a rhetorical or innocent question. If our organizational theory is correct, then we have much to learn when we consider the interaction between CSO and other political groups from their different perspectives.

Many of the people who have passed through our collective, either individually or collectively, participating in one or another isolated meeting or reading some written material, have concluded that CSO was a space for investigation or theoretical debate. In fact, our open meetings rarely result in political action, as we mainly act on the activities of other organizations, and often include rather abstract discussions—as during the collective review process of this book. This view is similar, in part, to the initial impression we made on the social movement responsible for the solidarity kitchen. In our early exchanges, we were repeatedly treated as social science academics, interested in learning about that struggle for the purposes of investigation and theorization. Our detached interest, without any openness to recruitment by the organization, our willingness to talk and learn about the experiences of the militants—all of this certainly contributed to this impression. It is true that the consistency of our joint work in the kitchen, as well as some subsequent coordination processes that we helped to build, eventually changed this perception, but it remains relevant because it is a common and understandable way in which CSO is perceived by some struggles—especially those that have become accustomed to being the subject of master’s and doctoral theses in the humanities.

From the perspective of the popular movement we worked with, this perception that we were academic observers did not take hold, and our political objectives were taken much more

seriously—certainly because of this movement's previous experiences with other communist groups. On the other hand, the social composition of ECO—mostly teachers, students, health professionals, and liberal professionals—placed us in the camp of "supporters" of the revolutionary struggle, that is, a collective whose influence must be carefully controlled so as not to interfere with processes of popular self-determination. Here, even more than in dealing with the solidarity kitchen, the decisive factor was concrete work—and more than that, the ability to demonstrate in practice our collective's willingness to respect and follow what the movement's base decided as its orientation.

It is interesting to contrast this perspective with that of a forum of autonomist struggles with which we had some exchanges. Here, the perception we conveyed—perhaps in contrast to the "diffuse" way in which this forum is organized—was that we were a small dogmatic political party, interested in reconciling and managing all struggles through a far-fetched theory. It is useful to compare these two views of CSO, as the popular movement was also concerned about the possibility that a collective, external to its bases, would disrespect and distort its forms of struggle. However, from their point of view, the concern stemmed from the socioeconomic composition of our group—which could lead to a silent power imbalance—and not from bad faith or political duplicity, while the forum of struggles—whose social composition was much more similar to ours—perceived our interest in a common construction as veiled political "entryism."

Even more interesting, perhaps, is the way we appear to the network of territorial struggles. CSO meets in large cities and is composed almost exclusively of salaried workers. It is also a predominantly white group. The contrast with the reality of the struggles of indigenous peoples, quilombolas, and peasants could not be greater, which makes CSO almost indistinguishable, at first glance, from a group of foreign tourists whose presence is costly for their hosts. We mention this contrast not because of its supposedly derogatory nature, but because it is impossible to discover the place of one organization alongside another without considering what does or does not make a difference in this interaction. And if, on the one hand, this indistinguishability between CSO and other white groups in the city may close some doors, or at least make common

construction very delicate, on the other hand, it is a trait that can serve as "camouflage" when articulations need to sound more harmless and superficial than they appear.

It is clear that this quick kaleidoscope is composed only of clues that we have collected along the way—and we can learn very little about these different perceptions of CSO without considering the forms of interaction and composition of each of the struggles in which we are involved. But even as a caricature, it is important to consider our history from these other perspectives, as they are not—with few exceptions—distortions or interpretations in bad faith. It follows directly from communist theory that a political organization reveals different aspects of its structure when in contact with other political forms—just as it also follows from this theory that this contrast can be the source of experiments, technologies, and inquiries capable of transforming our forms of struggle. It is impossible to tell the story of CSO without considering how our organization responded to these different perceptions of ourselves, which often helped us to review and broaden our horizon of action, while also pointing out blind spots and “black boxes” that we need to learn to deal with.

In our brief history, CSO has linked up with organizations and struggles that are much longer-lasting, deeper, and more intense than the conflicts we face directly in our collective. It often happens that our organization perceives itself, in the mirror promoted by this contrast, as a small part—tiny and incidental—of a huge field of battles and historical challenges in the struggle for collective emancipation. But if this sudden reflection, which gives us a measure of our size, may perhaps even hurt our vanity, on the other hand it situates our smallness in the infinite sky of the communist adventure.

Continue

This book has no conclusion, nor could it. As we mentioned in the introduction – and presented in more detail in the last chapter – the purpose of this work is to situate itself within the political struggles currently underway. It is true that the intuitions, ideas, and practices systematized here were elaborated out of militant experiences and intellectual exchanges among hundreds of people across the world over the past decade, but this does not mean that this collective elaboration has come to an end or that this theoretical effort is complete. Both the format of this book and our strategy for its dissemination, as well as the restructuring processes we have begun in our collectives, aim to enable other experiences and exchanges between organizations to emerge and connect with that prior process. For us, the success or failure of this writing is better measured by the articulations between emancipatory political organizations it helps to promote than by the intellectual agreement or approval of its readers.

As could not be otherwise, much of what has been presented here is indebted to the social and political context in which it was elaborated – beginning with the choice to explicitly cite only one book, the Manifesto of the Communist Party, and to center the theoretical dialogue on Marxism. Even the choice to preserve the name “communists” is partial, and may unnecessarily clash with the thinking of other political processes that, feeling the need to abandon this particular language, have elaborated other tools and ideas to guide their own practice of articulation and composition. We hope that the effort we have made to keep our theory abstract enough to encompass very diverse contexts while, where it was relevant, centering it on structures and practices rather than on names or banners, helps to mitigate these disagreements and to throw light on possible articulations between struggles that understand themselves through political traditions that are effectively in conflict with one another.

Thus, instead of proposing a theoretical conclusion or a final wrap-up to this work, we would like to address the main “loose end” we have left. Both the diagnosis we presented in the first part of the book and the tools we built in the second and third parts served to delimit what we have called investigation and composition. To investigate is to act within our struggles from the communist

standpoint, transforming questions of organization, of intervention, and of how struggles are perceived by others into an expanded field of action that takes into account the political space in which they are embedded. To compose is to transform these practical processes of investigation – whether in the form of experiments, exchanges of “technology,” or surveys – into ever more consistent and larger networks of concrete articulation between struggles. But the title of this book includes a third term: continue. What does it mean to continue, and how does this relate to investigation and composition?

As we have seen, the communist standpoint, for us, is not the one that takes the lead and directs a political process. In some struggles, there are well-defined vanguards, and this can be important; in others, this is secondary, or even a symptom that something is not going well. Furthermore, depending on the context, the most advanced sectors of each struggle or movement may shift drastically. It is possible that parties, movements, and communities that today manage to formulate a way forward will tomorrow run into adverse conditions they have never faced before, and come to depend on other political forces, more capable of setting the example. Communists, then, must not only know the reality of struggles – investigate – and seek points of articulation and construction – compose – but they must do so aware that this does not necessarily mean carrying out the program of any one organization in particular. It is as if we were in a labyrinth: the question is not “this way or that way,” the question is how to reach the end – and that may involve going in one direction, then in another, stopping and rethinking what has already been done. In practice, this points to a general orientation: to take every decision, every victory or defeat, as material for a next step. Continuing is the only thing we can do that transcends victory and defeat, since both winning and losing can help us rethink which path to take.

But to continue is not only an injunction in the sense of a direction: it is also what guarantees concern with the material reality of struggles. It is not just a matter of continuing the investigations and processes of composition, but also of thinking about these practices with a view to the fact that we need to continue. It is in this sense that the third “watchword” of our book becomes more tangible: it is what situates both the problem of investigation and that of composition in the field of political economy – that is, in the field of the costs of energy and time we can spend on each

thing when we are aware that the journey will be long. As we have seen, the action of communists takes place largely through their own organizations, insofar as the concern with the “movement as a whole” creates a new contradiction, lived by every militant and organizer who engages with this standpoint. But if there is a new contradiction, there is also more effort, more concerns, more tensions. Before reducing everyone’s work, cooperation always demands a bit more work: it is as if, in order to undo the bad habits that isolate us – precisely so that we can support one another and grow stronger – we needed to work even harder, until the collective effort begins to bear fruit. Communist practices face this challenge. And it is therefore crucial that communists be able not only to look around them, but also to recognize the magnitude of their historical task, the better to prepare themselves, choose their battles, and also value the capacity of articulations to give an afterlife to struggles and political histories. Through articulations, the legacy of a struggle, or of an important political experience, can continue to influence and transform reality even when we ourselves are no longer able to carry on.

But how can communists know whether we are advancing? Whether it is right to continue?

In a certain sense, the Western communist tradition imagined two ways of thinking about how continuity could lead us to a radical rupture. The first – which in the Manifesto is represented by the “utopian socialists” – thinks of this rupture as a question of space. At that time, capitalism appeared to be a phenomenon circumscribed to certain countries and regions, and so it was possible to imagine that a new society would begin elsewhere, in a commune or community far from the dictatorship of the commodity and of capital. Flight, the outside, the expansion of a territory or of a guerrilla – these are all images we find here, and which remain crucial to the revolutionary imagination.

But as it became clear that capitalism was spreading to every part of the world, and that it was increasingly difficult to imagine a safe space outside its grasp, another way of thinking about transformation began to emerge, this one centered on the dimension of time – the science of history, “scientific socialism,” was largely responsible for creating and nourishing this other form of imagining. Rupture, here, became a question of the transition between global social systems –

between a “now” and a “later,” rather than between a “here” and a “there.” The revolutionary imagination that takes time as its central category thinks largely in terms of accumulation, of stages, of crucial moments where everything will be at stake. And it makes sense that this way of imagining the revolution emerged: once capitalism had colonized all of space, it seemed that the only point of escape was awaiting us in the future.

Today it is possible that both the spatial imagination of refuge and expansion and the temporal imagination of free time and an open future are somewhat saturated, in the sense we gave to that idea at the beginning of the book: they are still important, but they no longer have as much political traction in a peripheral social terrain like ours. To keep going forward, to survive, seems not to lead to any great confrontation, any moment of true rupture. What we have called the peripherization of capitalism is also, as we have seen, a crisis of modern temporality, which had anchored that expectation in a common future supposedly hidden within capitalism itself. And who today believes that the world is moving, by its own inertia and internal contradictions, toward the conditions adequate for a great planetary insurrection?

It happens that there is a third dimension, as fundamental as time and space, and equally capable of accommodating our revolutionary imagination and desire for transformation: the scale of things. And this is a dimension where, by continuing, even with all the multiplicity of struggles, even without guaranteed convergence, we can still glimpse a form of radical rupture.

It may seem counterintuitive, but when I tell someone an object’s position in space and time, that does not yet tell me what its size is. To define that, I need another criterion of comparison, not a map or a clock. A football is large compared to an ant, and tiny compared to a city – and practically nothing if we think of the enormous solar system. Scale, however connected it may be with space and time, can change without them changing, and is therefore independent of them to some degree.

This way of thinking about parts and wholes, the small and the large, can also inspire our revolutionary imagination, situating what we are capable of doing collectively in a space of much

greater reach than what we have immediate access to. It is clear that we must act politically with a view to how a strike at a single institution can be made to expand until it becomes a strike of the whole sector, or a general strike, just as we must think about how to make a strike last until it secures its demands – space and time – but we must also be able to think the larger space of institutional strikes and breques (small revolt-stoppages in supermarkets), of party pressure for the advancement of labor legislation. It is not that each of these things automatically moves in the same direction – but if we want them to come together and relate to one another in some way, then we must also exercise this capacity to keep thinking politics beyond our own action and form of organization. Sometimes struggles have short extensions and durations, but in their totality, in the way they influence one another, they in fact think and act with magnitude and horizon.

Struggles spread across the world, yet interdependent, can cover the globe, and can therefore constitute a larger point of view, even if these connections do not yet guarantee the spatial or temporal continuity of these processes. To sense the existence of a political force of this magnitude does not mean trying to lift ourselves out of our immediate reality in order to decide and intervene directly “in the whole,” but rather to be attentive to those moments when the point of view of this totality offers us means of reorienting our forms of organizing and acting that are truly consequential and powerful. When this point of view – grounded in the existence of a network of articulations and real interdependencies – becomes consequential, that is, when what we build is better organized once we take the communist perspective into account, we have here an important indicator that there is a revolutionary struggle underway, however silent it may be.