

Subjectivity, militancy and ideology from STP's *framework*

a report

Rafael Saldanha

But the cure in that sense is a myth, as is the equivalent mirage within a Marxian ideological analysis: namely, the vision of a moment in which the individual subject would somehow be fully conscious of his or her determination by class and would be able to square the circle, of ideological conditioning by sheer lucidity and the taking of thought. But in the Marxian system, only a collective unity - whether that of a particular class, the proletariat, or of its "organ of consciousness," the revolutionary party - can achieve this transparency; the individual subject is always positioned within the social totality (and this is the sense of Althusser's insistence on the permanence of ideology).

Fredric Jameson, *The political unconscious*

Comrades here are the zero point of possibility, what is left after everything else is gone, remainders existing in ruins, at the negative place of beginning. Instead of treating comradeship as the relation between the Bolsheviks, in his novel *Platonov* treats the term comrade like he does communism—both as words existing in an inchoate post-revolutionary vocabulary of rupture, longing, possibility, and loss. The new world has not arrived, but there are new words, words which don't quite make sense of the present, especially for those living on the steppes in the last years of the Russian civil war. Isabelle Garo writes: "In Chevergur, communism is the name of a world that does not exist, which could be constructed and that is already in ruins. It is also a more subjective than objective reality, or rather a principle of subjectivation." Comrade is the relation necessary for constructing the new world, a relation present in and as the absence of property, nationality, and recognizable identity.

Jodi Dean, *Comrades – an essay on political belonging*

The aim of this text is to explore some elements not yet derived from STP's *framework*. To some extent, this dialogues with and extends some of the group's internal investigations. To another extent, these questions seek to make room for traditional themes of the communist left.

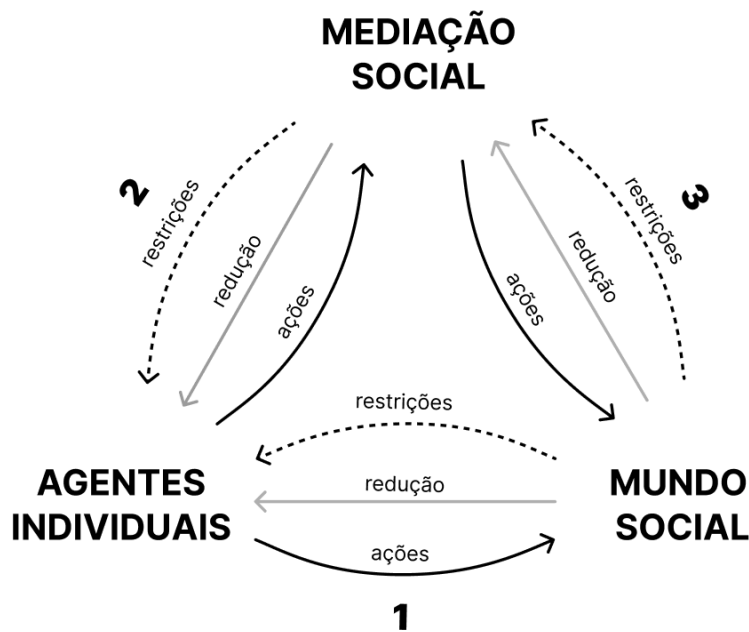


diagram 1

The first diagram we'll rely on is the social mediation diagram presented in the text *Working Through Political Organizations*. This diagram seeks to present the difference between purely social mediations (in which the *status quo* of a world is reproduced - whether voluntarily/consciously or not) and those that are seen as political. A social mediation is one in which certain actions are carried out — regardless of whether they are done consciously/voluntarily or unconsciously/involuntarily — based on mediations that are completely compatible with the world in which they exist. In this way, we can say that social actions are those that find their justification in a current social world¹. This social mediation acts on the world, composes with it (the full arrow) to the same extent that it is constrained and restricted by it (dotted arrow). This being the case, we can say that we are facing a social mediation if $1 = 3 \circ 2$ (the action belongs to a social mediation that is contained in the world).

¹ For a broader discussion, albeit in development, of the concept of "social world" and its consequent closure, see *Theory of social worlds*.

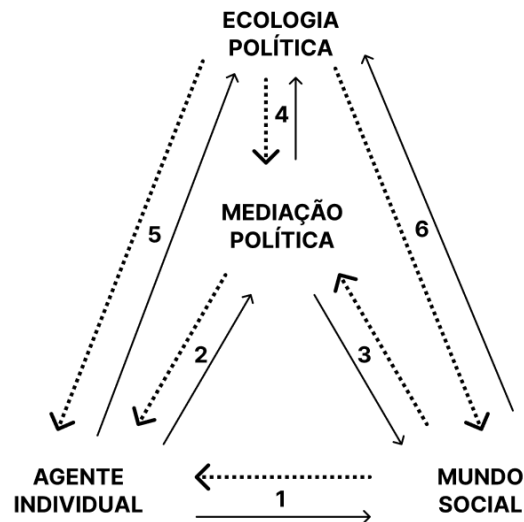


diagram 2

A mediation can be considered political when an action that is carried out through it is not completely compatible with the currently dominant social world (as in the diagram above). In other words, considering the dotted arrow, the restriction, we can say that this social mediation will not be totally constrained or determined by the social world. In other words, it won't be possible to find justifications for certain actions from the world. Not being compatible with or justified by the actual world can mean a few things: Firstly, if we understand that the social world is a set of practices, habits, exchanges that are organized in a certain way, we can say that a political action is not able to be fully realized because in some way and at some level it goes against the dominant form of organization of the world. This is therefore a negative definition of political mediation. If we talk about a particular “action”, we can consider it political insofar as it belongs to a mediation that is not contained in the world. Therefore $1 \neq 3 \circ 2$.

We can also give a definition that is not merely negative. Our wager in *The Organizational Point of View* is that an action is political to the extent that, in addition to the social world in which it takes place, it is composed with something other than the world. In this case, it is a situation in which a (political) mediation is itself part of what we call political ecology. This, in turn, would end up restricting the mediation itself, so that its divergence from the world becomes explainable. If the mediation from which political action takes place cannot be completely compatible with the current social world, it is because it is also being restricted by a political ecology. Political ecologies must be understood as the ecosystem of different political organizations involved in political processes (and not merely social ones, which preserve the world as it is). Thus, to understand a political mediation as part of an ecosystem is to find the point of view from which certain actions make sense even if they seem unjustifiable from within the world. Incompatibility with the world points to compatibility with an ecology.

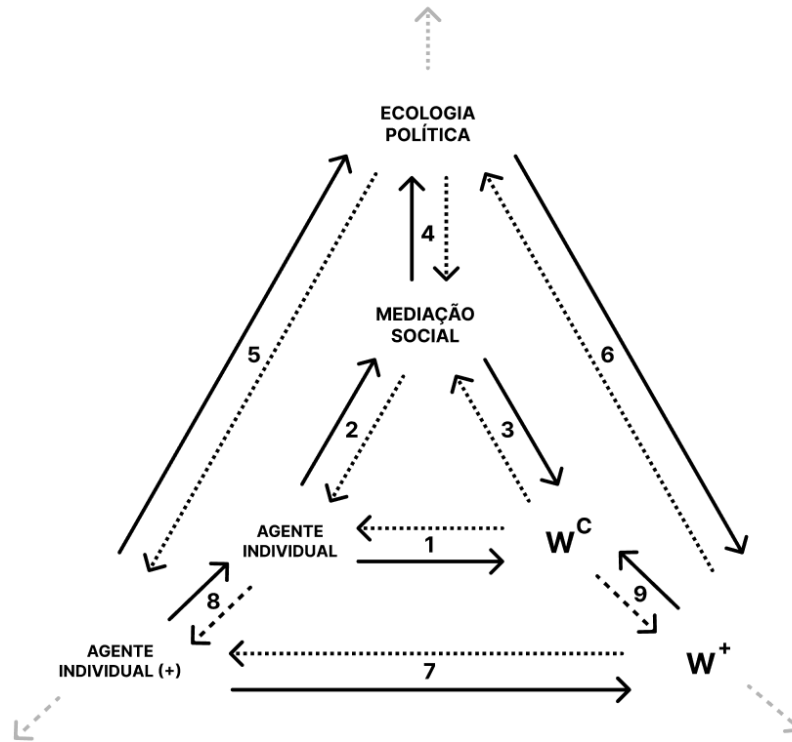


diagram 3

At this point we find a point that has not yet been sufficiently explored by the STP, despite being presented in the aforementioned text. What we see in the diagram above is not simply that political ecology acts on the world. It is of fundamental importance to preserve the fact that every type of mediation (even political) is to *some extent* constrained by the world and also acts on it. On the other hand, the specificity of political action is that it is not entirely determined by the world, but also by the political ecology in which it participates. Thus, we see that it is restricted by both the political ecology (4) and the world (3). In the same way, it acts on the political ecology (being part of it, composing it) as well as on the social world. In this sense, we can say that a political mediation at the same time acts on the world, but also builds a broader political process. This can help us understand the expansion of the diagram. If it is social mediation that affects the world, it cannot be said that political ecology *directly* acts on the world (as in diagram 2). So, expanding the diagram, we opted for a change in which political ecology itself acts (and is restricted) by an expanded world

(W+), which in turn *acts on the* current world². In this case, it can be said that talking about a political action carried out by a political mediation is the same thing as an action that makes up a movement of political processes that seeks to make up a wider world that in turn seeks to act on the current world. Thus, it can be said that in the case of political mediation, $3 = 9 \circ 6 \circ 4$. This process points, as mentioned in the WTPO text, to the issue of transition. It can therefore be seen that two elements have been added to this expanded diagram: the expanded world (W+) and the enriched individuals (I+). With regard to the expanded world, we can say in principle that it is a broader social world, with determinations that are not completely subsumed in the current social world. Enriched individual agents, on the other hand, can be understood in principle as organizational compositions that are not totally determined by a current social world. In this way, it is an individual form of being (organization) that differs from the way individuals are organized in a concrete social world. Here we can contrast, for example, an individual in a capitalist world, which interacts with the world according to the determinations of this world, with a (more) free individual who is able to act on the basis of other determinations. In this sense, it should also be emphasized here that the individual agent himself is not an individual in all its breadth (considering all the aspects that make up a human life beyond its sociality). From the perspective of the organizational point of view adopted here, it can be said that he is the smallest social mediation in a social structure. So, although it is customary to say that an individual is more than the world allows them to be, in the context of this text, the individual agent is from the beginning understood as the individual socially determined by the social world of which they are a part of³. The counterpart to this, which allows us to reinforce the understanding of what the “enriched individual agent” would be, is therefore that this is not simply the “more complex” version of an individual, beyond sociality. It’s also minimal social mediation, but connected to a different social world with other means of navigating it that would be unavailable in the current social world and that would end up configuring a different social individuality. As we shall see, we could also say that, inspired by Jodi Dean's work, that this “enriched individual” can be seen from an organizational point of view as a “comrade” — in the sense that this is an individual that *belongs* to a political ecology.

² A question arises here: could it be said that what the world can be is restricted by what the world is? This in turn relates to one of STP's mottos present in an earlier text: communism becomes the theory of how to solve communist problems, and not capitalist ones. In its original context: “Against what remains the main theoretical strategy of the Left — that is, proposing better descriptions of our current social reality in such a way that our theory is capable of locating and expressing the inconsistencies and weaknesses of our social system in ways that conservative depictions cannot — we want our theoretical space to be infinitely richer than our social world, so that capitalist social formations might appear within it as particular solutions within the broader space of other possible solutions to general problems of social coordination, allocation of resources and free association. The strategy of regionalizing or situating the parameters of our social formation has profound effects both to theoretical construction as well as to the practice of politics, since the first sign of a broader theoretic framework is its capacity to reformulate problems in its own terms, meaning that, within this framework, communism becomes the theory of how to solve communist problems, and not capitalist ones.” (STP, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Organization: Outline of An Ongoing Research Project*, p. 401)

³ As examples, we can think of cases in which individuals as “individual agents”, i.e. “lesser social mediations”, will be approached as “workers”, “legal entities”, “family members” and so on.

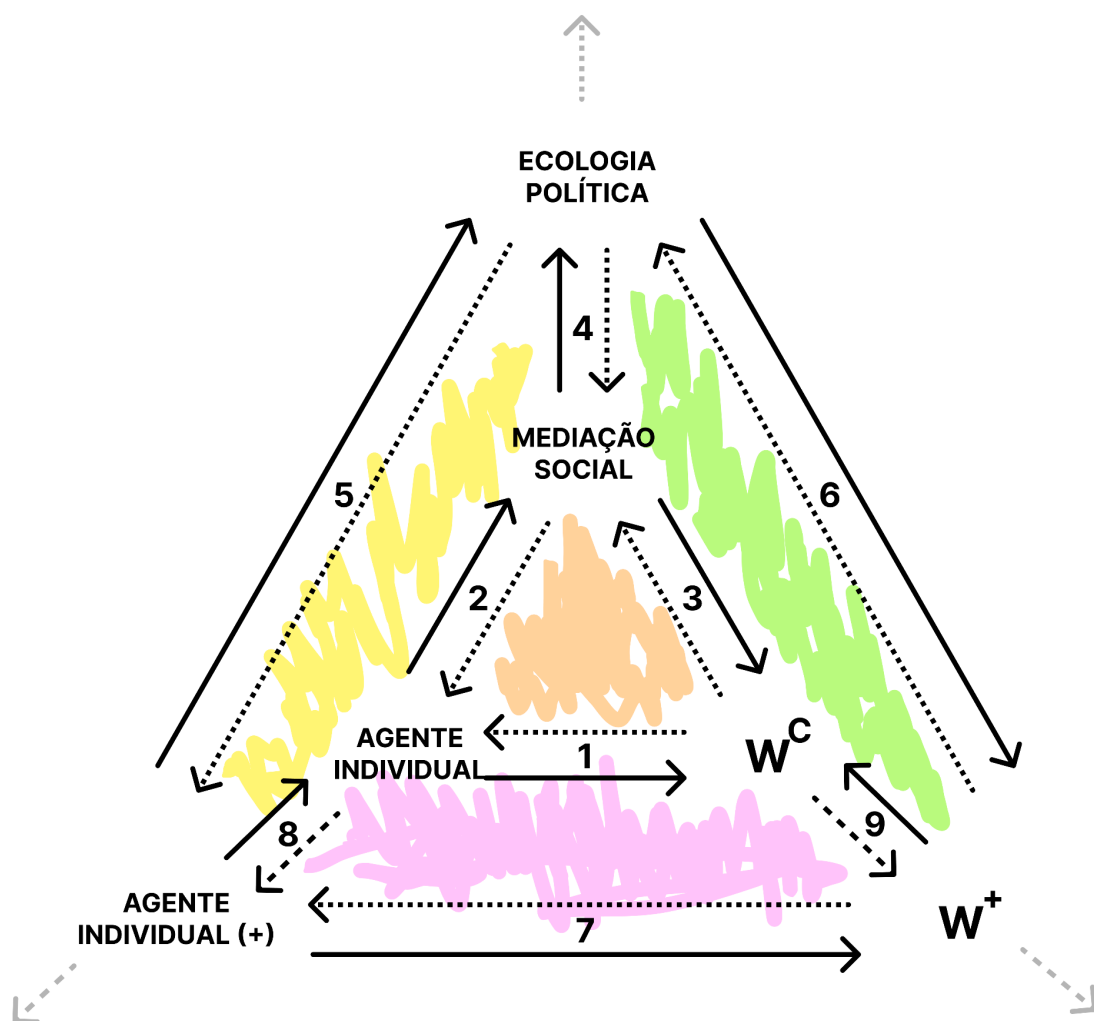


diagram 4

There are also two aspects worth mentioning, when we consider other areas of this diagram. As you can see above, there are 4 different areas that make up this diagram of social mediations. We're talking here about the central area (1-2-3) and the area to the right (3-4-6-9). In the case of the central area, this is the area of social reproduction of a certain dominant social world. In the area to the right, we find the collective dimension of the communist transition process. It remains to comment on the areas below (1-9-7-8) and to the left (2-4-5-8). In the case of the lower area, we see that this is a relationship between individual agents, enriched individual agents, the social world and the expanded social world. Thus, we can say that what an individual can be is restricted by what the individual is in the dominant social world ($8 \circ 1$). In turn, only an enriched individual agent can be part of an expanded social world (7). So, in this case, if there are individual agents who are not completely determined by the social world, one could speak of politics insofar as they are able to act on what individuals are in a current social world. In this way, what appears here is that the construction of an emancipated world by enriched individuals who end up acting on the actual world is the same as the process in which enriched individual agents manage to act on individual agents so that they act on the world. This process, however, seems incomplete precisely because the challenge is that the enriched individual agents manage to not be constrained by the agent (only

situating this smaller diagram within the larger diagram, with political mediations and political ecology, would allow this).⁴

Finally, we can talk about the area to the left. The impression I have is that this is the space of *subjectivation*, insofar as it deals with the dynamics of how individuals participate in political processes. In this case, we can see that the process by which an enriched individual participates in a political ecology is the same as the process by which this enriched individual acts on a current individual, who in turn participates in a social mediation that makes up a political ecology. Thus, $5 = 4 \circ 2 \circ 8$. You can also see in this partial diagram that what an individual is (in a social world) in some way restricts and constrains what he can be (an enriched individual [I+] who would not be constrained by the world as it is [W], as is the case with I, but as it can be [W+]). I believe that this point to be further explored involves both the dynamics of the transformation of an individual into a comrade or a militant (through participation in a political process) and also some of the challenges when it comes to thinking about the process of composing political groups (how certain structures end up being more conducive to certain types of individuals making up that group).

⁴ This smaller diagram is the only one of the four that doesn't go through any kind of mediation, in which we only find direct relationships between individual agents (enriched or not) and social worlds (expanded or not). This redoubling without mediation seems significant to me, although at the moment I'm not yet able to understand how. One thing that does appear, is that this part of the diagram seems to recall some of the difficulties and aporias faced by Plato in his Republic. In this work, it can be said that one of the great dilemmas concerns the difficulty of building a just society out of non-fully just citizens. The absence of social mediations between the individual and the polis (especially those connected to a political ecology) in this Platonic work makes it seem as if there is no path from an individual agent to an emancipated world. This world, in turn, could only be constituted by just citizens (and these, on the other hand, would be constituted by a just social world). The appeal to education (and the critique of the arts and myths) seems like a way of trying to think of a mediation that would overcome this limitation. Even so, however, it doesn't seem to be able to be fully sustained, since in the Platonic hypothesis, the just representations mobilized for pedagogical functions (which would serve as mediating structures that would help build just citizens of a just world), are in no way anchored in a series of political processes that are a part of a political ecology — they are sustained by an intellectual mediation, a kind of dialectical process inherent to philosophy that would allow the individual to approach the idea of the good.

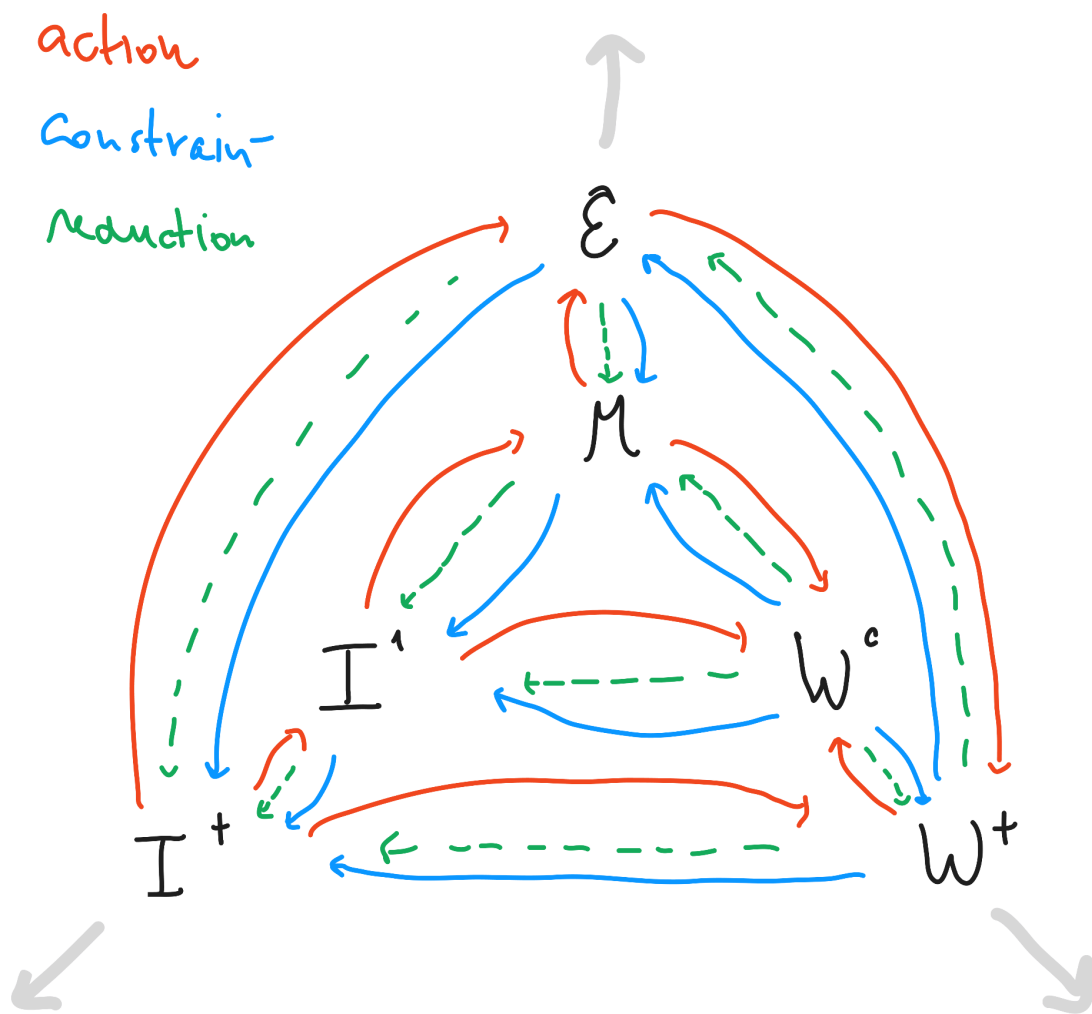


diagram 5

Although what we have here is nothing more than the construction of the problem, I believe that we can also present another aspect of the problem if we remember that in addition to the relations of action and constraint, there are also reductions (the way in which organizational structures appear to individuals). The diagram above (diagram 5) helps us remember this structure. As you can see, it is possible to think about the compositional processes. The way a political ecology appears to an enriched individual is equivalent to the way a political ecology appears to an individual enriched through social mediation and an actual individual. In this sense, the impression is that in the intelligible field, an actual individual will find it very difficult to situate themselves in a political movement due to the very fact that this type of ecology seems to be the place of a militant with an individuality that is not totally determined by what the world is. The fact that the point of view of militancy only seems to be fully visible from the point of view of the enriched individual makes it seem as if this challenge of concrete individual agents participating in politics is not merely a contingent issue, but a structural one. As if to some extent this structural configuration could be pointed to as the source of the countless sufferings present in militant life. It could therefore be said that there is a *deficit* of intelligibility from the individual's point of view due to the very place in

which they are inserted in this series. What we would have here would therefore be a *deficit of intelligibility* connected to the very horizon of emancipation.

But we must also point out a second *deficit*. It is important to point out that just as the enriched individual (I+) is not determined by the world as it is (W), the current individual (I) is determined by that world. In other words, as well as the current individual composing political mediations, composing political ecologies, these individuals (and the mediations they are part of) are also simultaneously determined by the world as it is and which they also compose. In this sense, as well as being at an incomplete point of view with regard to the ability to commensurate the political action in which he is involved, he is also subject to a double-determination (of the world and of the political ecology) of his point of view/his intelligibility. It is worth asking here whether this double-reduction (this cleaved point of view) doesn't end up producing the kind of epistemic distortion traditionally described as ideological in the Marxist tradition.⁵

Without going into the merits of the countless discussions surrounding this concept, I would like to rely here simply on the Althusserian notion of ideology as a “representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence”. If we understand “reduction” as “the relevant information about the world needed to adjust our future actions and evaluate previous ones, a useful picture of the world.”⁶, we can assume that it is a kind of “balance” between action and restriction in the relationship between two poles of an interaction (one that acts and the other that resists). In other words, the “reduction” is what appears relevant to the extent that there is this interaction⁷. So, if this is the case, insofar as an individual agent (I) relates to the actual world (W), there will be some reduction at play. What appears to this organizational point that is the individual is what in the world resists him.⁸

When we think of today's world, a world governed by the logic of value, we can get a clear picture of the case. As Marx says in *Capital*, “the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things.”⁹ In a simplified way¹⁰, we can therefore speak here of reduction in the sense that we are using insofar as the social environment itself leads the individual to *abstract into* the “language of commodities”¹¹. This implies that circulation in the social fabric (interaction) ends up having as its epistemic counterpart the ability to see the world according to the demands it makes in order to compose oneself with it. In this sense, we can return to the Althusserian notion: seeing oneself as a worker, being taken by the needs that the world of work imposes on individuals (developing their workforce, refining their

⁵ Another possible point of inquiry might be into W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of “double-consciousness”,

⁶ STP, WTPO, 344

⁷ This reinforces organizational trinitarianism, insofar as organizational composition is equivalent to interaction capacities, which is equivalent to what an organization appears to be.

⁸ Can we say that these are the points at which his relations with the world are not trivial?

⁹ Marx, *Capital*. “The equality of all sorts of human labour is expressed objectively by their products all being equally values; the measure of the expenditure of labour power by the duration of that expenditure, takes the form of the quantity of value of the products of labour; and finally the mutual relations of the producers, within which the social character of their labour affirms itself, take the form of a social relation between the products.”

¹⁰ That is, considering only the dominant social logic of value and disregarding the mixed character of social logic for the purposes of understanding.

¹¹ “The second consequence is that it exemplifies what ‘abstraction’ means in our theory (XII): to abstract is not to move outside or beyond the concrete towards some new separate realm, but rather to restrict the concrete, to construct material structures that become indifferent to certain differences, thus ‘forgetting’ them—we abstract into the world, not out of it.” (STP, *Atlas of Experimental Politics*, XI)

skills, being able to recharge that workforce, situating themselves on the market, etc.) would be an *imaginary representation* of the real conditions of existence (of the need for individuals to be reduced to their workforce for the purposes of extracting value).

We can therefore say that, in a certain sense, the individual is determined by this structure of constraints of the social world which aims to reproduce itself. On the other hand, and this is partly the point of the STP, this circuit described in the smaller triangle of diagram 5, which describes the relations of reproduction of a social world, can be rethought on the basis of real and experimental efforts (i.e. they are not fantasies or idealizations) which demonstrate in their constructions the limited nature of the dominant social world. Returning to the double-determination of the individual agent's point of view, subject to two determinations, it can be said that to the same extent that their point of view is *ideologically* determined, it can be said that there is a *utopian* counterpart¹² to the extent that when they engage in political mediation, there is also another world that appears to them — or more properly, the emancipatory horizon of the communist hypothesis.¹³ As Jameson suggests in the epigraph to this text, however, this tension cannot be resolved from the point of view of the individual (I).

We can even ask ourselves if this lack of resolution from the point of view of the individual agent doesn't help us to think about a pair of affections that are central to the political experience and that have been elaborated by some of the comrades of STP: the pair of failure and defeat. As our comrades say:

Whereas defeat comes from the world's external victory over the movement and places us before our enemies, failure is the movement's internal undermining of itself, and places us before ourselves. The mourning that follows defeat, because we have lost, is the collective reinscription in something that did not happen but was glimpsed, the invention of an emblem for that which was missing at the border of the movement — between it and the world that was glimpsed; in the abrupt passage from potency to impotence, there was a desire that did not find its measure and awaits to be symbolized. Failure, in turn, is the unwanted result of the internal constraints that the movement chose to impose on itself, of a discipline, therefore: principles, organizational means, tactical and strategic choices.

(STP, *The hustle of struggle: notes on organizing and militancy in the app couriers strikes*)

¹² "There can, I think, be only one consequent "solution" to the problem thus posed: it is the proposition that all class consciousness - or in other words, all ideology in the strongest sense, including the most exclusive forms of ruling-class consciousness just as much as that of oppositional or oppressed classes - is in its very nature Utopian. (...) The preceding analysis entitles us to conclude that all class consciousness of whatever type is Utopian insofar as it expresses the unity of a collectivity; yet it must be added that this proposition is an allegorical one. The achieved collectivity or organic group of whatever kind - oppressors fully as much as oppressed - is Utopian not in itself, but only insofar as all such collectivities are themselves figures for the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved Utopian or classless society. Now we are in a better position to understand how even hegemonic or ruling-class culture and ideology are Utopian, not in spite of their instrumental function to secure and perpetuate class privilege and power, but rather precisely because that function is also in and of itself the affirmation of collective solidarity. (Jameson, F. *The Political Unconscious*, 279-281) Much of this inflection was influenced by Jameson's proposals in this book (especially the conclusion "The dialectic of utopia and ideology").

¹³ "Now, we call the communist hypothesis the claim - which is ultimately only provable through concrete political practice - that Org is larger than W, in other words, that the world seen from the standpoint of the composition of political processes - that is, from the standpoint of a concrete political ecology - can appear larger than the world seen from its dominant logic. The communist hypothesis is precisely the proposition that the concrete social object made up of the composite of as many political organizations as possible "sees" more of a given social world than that world itself." (STP, WTPO, 364)

Returning to diagram 4, we could then assume that when we talk about defeat, we are thinking of the tensions that are imposed in political mediations based on the difference between the course of political action $9 \circ 6 \circ 4 \circ 2$ and the usual social circuit $3 \circ 2$. In these, we see precisely that something hasn't happened insofar as what is at stake is the "the world's external victory over the movement". On the other hand, in the case of failure, we can see limits based on the movement's own decisions. In other words, it's a limit that seems to occur at another point in the diagram. If, as we've said, the point of view of the individual agent (I) is limited with regard to the emancipatory horizon in comparison with the point of view of the enriched individual agent (I+), the tension would perhaps appear precisely in the play of actions, restrictions and reductions between an actual individual and an enriched individual: in other words, in the space of the arrows 8. The dilemma that arises is that, to some extent, if the enriched individual seems to be the one who composes the political movement in this circuit, on the other hand, the current individual (determined by the current world) can only take part in this process through their ability to navigate the mediations (also determined by the current world) that are, in turn, part of a political processes. Moreover, another noteworthy fact is precisely the inability of a current individual to simply become an enriched individual through his own action. Since it is he, according to the diagram, who constrains the enriched individual (who in turn acts on the current individual), then he can only become this type of individual to the extent that he effectively engages in political mediations. It is as if it is only through participation in these political mediations, through their political organization's ability to inscribe themselves in the history of a political ecology, that the militant's space can also be constructed. Since, however, those who are part of organizations are necessarily determined by the world (including, of course, determined in their reductions, in what appears to them), it seems to me that the fact that the organizations we need will always be built by individuals who to some extent fall short of the demands of their horizons is structural. The hypothesis raised here, therefore, is that perhaps it is in this space that failure occurs. As we have said, however, this utopian horizon is not merely a fantasy, but something that emerges from real constructions, which will always come from individuals — supposedly — falling short¹⁴.

And it is this lack of resolution that helps us move on to future questions. If the point of view of the individual agent is unable to resolve the tension between ideological and utopian determinations, this is not only due to the double-determination of this point of view, but also to the fact that it is not from the point of view of the individual agent that the emancipatory horizon seems to make sense. This would be precisely the point of view of the enriched individual agent (I+, as shown in diagram 5). In this case, then, it could be said that any lack of resolution connected to the emancipatory point of view would force us to further explore the area of the diagram made up of arrows 2-4-5-8 (the yellow trapezoid in diagram 4) — which in our view seems to force us to think about a kind of theory of the subjectivation of the individual insofar as they participate in political processes: in other words, a kind of theory of militancy - but which, as we have seen, is not without its ideological counterpart.

¹⁴ "Comrade is a generic figure operating as an ego ideal. It provides the perspective comrades take when they see themselves acting politically, a perspective generated by their relation to others on the same side of a political struggle. This equality is the utopian element of comradeship. The determinations of a sexist, racist, capitalist society unavoidably intrude, but comrade names a relation no longer determined by these factors, providing a site from which they can be judged and addressed." (Dean, J. *Comrade*)