



Activism is the permanent “What is to be done?” of the epoch in which everything that constituted a worker identity has disappeared. A permanent “What is to be done?” which no longer disposes of that mediation towards generality which was represented by the worker identity and/ or the Party (existing or to be built), by the empowerment of the class, or more generally, by a proletarian being to be revealed, no matter if it was explicit in its mediations (political, trade-unionist, institutional) or thwarted by them.

[Sic 1.1]

Further Remarks

Further remarks and discussion on The Present Moment from Sic 1

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1. Additional remarks on the end of activism

In its first version, this text's chapter on the end of the old formalization of limits, which includes activism, led to the two critiques cited hereafter. The first one comes from an ex-participant of Meeting, the second one comes from the Greek comrades of the Blaumachen group/journal. These critiques led both to modifications of this chapter and to the following explanation.

First critique

Concerning "The Present Moment", and particularly the part on the "End of the old formalisation of limits", here are some very hasty, scattered and incomplete remarks.

RS can only be right on the disappearance of the Direct Action Movement (dam), provided however that one accepts his definition and periodisation. Personally, I don't find them pertinent. Dating the emergence of the dam from the mid-90s, as organically linked to the alter-globalisation rallies, is a fully arbitrary choice. Additionally, making of it an almost homogeneous whole is an aberration and defining it as "the activist milieus tempted by the alternative and posing questions relative to communism" is extremely simplistic.

The emergence – as a substantial phenomenon – of a whole constellation of autonomous collectives advocating and practising direct action rather dates back to the mid-70s. As this form (and content) of political organisation responds to necessities (no doubt this should be further explained) linked to a period (the 2nd phase of real subsumption) which is not over, one might think that this organisational form is here to stay. It is not being produced and reproduced in an identical manner through space and time but, if we intend to define a concept/category of this constellation (like the dam), it is rather in this way that we should analyse this phenomenon –

that is, perceiving the “Black Block” only as one of its avatars, delimited in space and time (and as such, completely justified to proclaim this avatar’s death). The spectacular circus of the alter-globalisation rallies has existed for only a particular period and was very far from involving the totality of what could be considered as the dam’s constituent parts.

Even when considering the “counter-summits”, if one searches persistently, we can of course find common points between the last episode of the Istanbul clashes, the Genoa riot and the militant intervention in Seattle. However we can also see that most components were dissimilar: relation, or absence of relation, to radical democracy, choice of objectives, organisational form, etc. These dissimilarities were due both to the history and political culture of the participating radical components (Turks of the ml, Italian anarcho-proletarians, American alter-militants), as well as to the social composition of the place concerned (e.g. the industrial port of Genoa is not the skiing resort of Davos).

The “alternative milieu” (understood as a constituent part of the dam from the 90s up to now) also has a history of its own. Very broadly speaking, it was similarly born in the 70s, but followed a course parallel to that of the autonomous collectives practising direct action. Additionally, where there has been interpenetration between the two, it has been extremely confrontational. It was only in the early 90s, on the occasion of the counter-summits, that some libertarian organisations (mostly Anglo-Saxon) organised common initiatives with certain components of both those currents. Although there were in the dam strong tendencies which would not have anything to do with this phenomenon (particularly the anarcho-insurrectionist tendency and the whole previous generation of the “autonomous” who had always fought bitterly against the alternative), this did not prevent the emergence of a theoretical horror (what in Paris is called “dijonisme”) which gained dominance in the dam’s public expression and representa-

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The present journal aims to be the locus for an unfolding of the problematic of communisation. It comes from the encounter of individuals involved in various projects in different countries: among these are the journals Endnotes, published in the UK and the US, Blaumachen in Greece, Théorie Communiste in France, Riff-Raff in Sweden, and certain more or less informal theoretical groups in the US (New York and San Francisco). Each of these projects will continue to exist on their own. Also participating are various individuals in France, Germany, and elsewhere, who are involved in other activities and who locate themselves broadly within the theoretical approach taken here.

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1. These phrases have been deleted in the final version of the present text.
2. As analysed by the English comrades of Endnotes.
3. “Concrete human activity”, because it is a social phenomenon, never identifying itself with an individual issue (relation between acts and thoughts of someone or something), nor with an addition of individual issues. When posed at the individual level, the question is blurred. Only when posed in its social and therefore collective form, our understanding of “concrete human activity” becomes clear.
4. The “1857 Introduction” (notebook “M”), in Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, London 1993, p. 105.
5. Hari Seldon is a fictional character of Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation Series*.
6. The identification of all the “radical milieu” with the standpoint of Call or *The Coming Insurrection* is unfounded, as F. points out in his comment.

tion, seducing and carrying away a fraction of the schooled middle-class youth. Having undoubtedly been myself a part of the dam, and having always fought vainly against the alternativist tendencies within it, I can only rejoice at the end of this period.

“The violence, which is about to increase, with which the crisis began to strike the ‘16–25’ year olds is going to ‘disalternativise’ the ‘alternative milieu’ for which the transition from posing questions relative to communism to the struggle against capitalism is going to be reversed”. Which means that, within the dam, the alternativist tendency is losing ground and will be wiped out by the proletarian component, which is set to regain the hegemony it once enjoyed.

F.

Second critique

In the last part of the above sentence a delimitation is attempted with which we do not agree, although using the word “internal” seems to mitigate this disagreement. Probably it is a case of the different historical backgrounds of the development of the radical milieus (whatever this means in every different country and historical framework), their different tendencies and their internal debates, confrontations, splits, etc., especially in France and Greece. As far as Greece is concerned however, we cannot make such a black-and-white declaration. Apart from very few exceptions, the various expressions/tendencies of the so-called anarchist/anti-authoritarian milieu are in one way or another tempted by activism and the alternative. However, this does not mean that “the debate over communisation” with some of them is of no longer any meaning. Moreover, this is an intention of the Greek publication of *sic*. Besides, we had the experience of a non-insignificant number of alternativists/activists becoming “disalternativised” during the 2006–07 student movement and even more during the December revolt. In addition, we agree with what is written in this text, that “the violence, which

is about to increase, with which the crisis began to strike the '16–25' year olds is going to 'disalternativise' the 'alternative milieu' for which the transition from posing questions relative to communism to the struggle against capitalism is going to be reversed". On the other hand, the above mentioned delimitation gives the impression of an effort for a strict "us" to be determined (who will this "us" be?), which is not what we have in mind in relation to our engagement in the class struggle and the theoretical elaboration produced by it. (This point is closely related to the comment on the "we/our" of the last section.) So, our proposal is that the last part of the sentence not be included.

Discussion

My answer will be essentially focused on the first critique; the answer to the second critique is contained therein.

Let us declare it unambiguously: the author of the first critique is totally right concerning both facts and my confusion of the various tendencies of the direct action movement. However, given the recognition of the facts and a rejection of the confusion, there still remain three questions to be answered.

First: What is the general definition of activism, taking into account that this critique recognises a certain coexistence between the "proletarian" and the "alternativist" tendencies?

Second: Where are we to trace the birth of this phenomenon?

Third: What is the future of activism in the present situation, defined by the "explosive combination" as exposed in the text?

Concerning the first point

Here I would tend to reproduce the critique of intervention made towards the end of "The Present Moment":

take place, but it predicts the general contours of the content of what is to come. Being predictive cannot be reduced to stating beforehand the date of the revolution. Posing time as a logical mediation is already sufficient in order to be predictive.

It is not however this "crystal ball" aspect which is the most annoying. The most irritating is rather the constant confusion between the real historical process and the theoretical apprehension of the social structure's functioning. This is all the more so as the notion of "temporal mediation" has a more opportunistic rationale, because its aim is to distance oneself from the supposed "immediatism" of the radical milieu.

If "immediatism" is to be criticized when it defines itself as the immediatism of communism (a stance shared by Call or The Coming Insurrection, but admittedly not by all the "radical milieu"⁶), it is however not to be criticized in each and every case, if we have a clear understanding of which "immediatism" we refer to. It is not about the immediacy of communism, but rather the immediacy of the communist question. Indeed, theory invites us to talk about the communist question in the present. It is not a "wager", but instead a necessity stemming from its very nature. Theory does not talk about the future, it only talks about the present. What is therefore immediate in the "radical milieu", or at least in a part of it, is nothing other than posing the communist question, or indeed acting in a direction which corresponds to the necessities of such a question. So, it is understandable why I think that it would not be meaningful to promote the concept of "temporal mediation", which is nothing other than a condensed expression of the theoretical confusion mentioned earlier, as a key which differentiates ourselves from a milieu that shares our same objectives.

Leon de Mattis

Even if they deny it, theorists always face the risk of yielding to what might be called, a bit ironically, the “Hari Seldon complex”.⁵ The theorist always affirms that he will never, ever risk a prediction of the future. But in reality, he cannot avoid evolving his past-oriented “it couldn’t but” into a future-oriented “it can’t but”.

This long digression was necessary in order to understand the scope of the critique we have to make of time as mediation. Let us be reminded of the terms of the problem. There is identity between the proletariat as a class of capital and as a revolutionary class. This identity does not stem as two separate results of two parallel processes, but as a unitary result of a unitary process. This identity is a contradiction.

If we are capable of adhering to a rigorous distinction between theory and history, we are able to accept that the proletariat is simultaneously one of the terms of the reproduction of the social relation, and the possible revolution of this relation in the sense that a dynamic, no doubt a contradictory one, pushes it to be both. Whether it is eventually the former and the latter, or the former, or the latter, is determined by threshold effects, secondary movements, and multiple and imponderable events. Theory itself, as an understanding of the central dynamic, plays by its very existence a role which is not indifferent to this dynamic. This responds then to the hitherto unknown requirement posed by the production of communism (a point to which I referred above).

If, on the contrary, we persist in confusing the levels of analysis, we subject ourselves to making a mediation out of time, and in this way, mix up the real process and its logical comprehension. Time is reduced to a mediation between terms of the structure, which, in the final analysis, produces history. Theory, as a simple description of the process, then becomes predictive. Of course, it does not predict when an event will

The question of intervention and the return from theory to practice, which is intrinsic to it, is only posed when the diversity of activity has been made an abstraction: practice as abstraction. The question of intervention transforms what we do in any given struggle (or what we cannot do), that is to say, practices that are always particular into an abstraction of practice, constructing the intervention/non-intervention dilemma. The process of abstraction is very tangible and built by empirically observed activities and attitudes. Such activities and attitudes can consist in a “practical readiness”, the capacity to “choose” between struggles, “the part of society above society”, the “everything concerns me”, the question of strategy and of the revolution as a goal to reach, as well as the individual’s decision as the methodological starting point rather than the existence of a contradictory process or of a gap expressed by activities. Additional conditions in which the process of abstraction can be observed concretely is the disappearance of capital reproduction within class struggle, a reproduction which is maintained as a framework, but not as a definition of the players, and finally, the leap beyond the reproduction of capital in the name of a situation considered fundamentally common, but beyond the objective diversities. Once more, we find here the real development of the contradiction, that is to say, the proletariat as a class of capital and its contradiction with capital as the normal functioning of the capitalist mode of production.

The core of the critique of intervention as a question resides in the abstraction of practice and the objectification of class struggle which respond to each other. “Practice” as such, as an entity, acquires meaning relative to its equally abstract complement, class struggle as a situation. Specific practices as such are now merely occasional manifestations of Practice as abstraction. This is the very foundation of the question of intervention, that is to say, of intervention as a question and its comprehension of theory as a “weapon” which then directs back to practice. Theory doesn’t need to prove its utility.

Theory is included in the self-critical character of struggles, the critical relationship of theory has changed. Theoretical production belongs to a practice which is not “ours” and to a theory which is likewise, not “ours”.

I will thus define activism generally as the construction of intervention as a question, in the way presented in the two preceding paragraphs. It follows that, in practice, activism is a definition of class belonging in which the generality of being proletarian has left aside any particular determination. If activism resides in practice as a question, the Practice constructed as a question implies the abstract generality of class belonging: today railwayman, yesterday jobless, tomorrow precarious worker, the day after tomorrow squatter or undocumented immigrant... Activism is the permanent “What is to be done?” of the epoch in which everything that constituted a worker identity has disappeared. A permanent “What is to be done?” which no longer disposes of that mediation towards generality which was represented by the worker identity and/or the Party (existing or to be built), by the empowerment of the class, or more generally, by a proletarian being to be revealed, no matter if it was explicit in its mediations (political, trade-unionist, institutional) or thwarted by them. If, as mentioned in the text, activism is an autonomisation of the dynamics of the current cycle of struggles, this autonomisation becomes for activism, in its working modalities, the generality of the proletariat in which every particularity is just a contingency, an accidental occurrence.

This is why activism can also be defined on the basis of a constitutive contradiction: Practice is necessary to it, whereas it sustains a random relationship to its object. This contradiction could equally be formulated in the following terms: activism falls within the province of a general class belonging; its application is, in fact, always particular. Hardly pressed, without any mediation, between the general and the particular, activism is tactics, and always dissatisfied with itself and with

Theory condenses in concepts the social reality as it is given by history. As a result, theory sees post festum in the old expression of the categories of today's social logic, the germ of what they have become. But just as for precursors, of whom we can know only afterwards that they had existed before, theory can only identify the germ because the plant has finally flourished. Or, to pick up the illustration used by Marx: “Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape.”⁴

As long as we are only talking about the past, the distinction between theory and history has little significance. In fact, the question whether the commodity should necessarily lead to the development of capitalism as a mode of production is not meaningful. It is only because capitalism as a mode of production has developed that we can fully seize what the commodity is. It is therefore only on the basis of the result that we can pose ourselves this question. But when we are talking about the future, the distinction regains all its importance. If the plant allows for the discovery of the germ, this does not mean that the germ allows for the deduction of the plant, nor does the anatomy of the australopithecus suffice to anticipate the anatomy of man.

What theory formalises is the expression, in the form of “thought-concrete” (to use Marx's expression), of the present dynamic of social relations. But theory does not predict the future. The theoretical operation which sticks to the abstract in order to rise up to the concrete needs the present as concrete in order to identify simple and abstract categories. It subsequently proceeds the other way around in order to, perhaps, understand history by means of these categories, and to establish the history of these categories. But this operation cannot be turned towards the future. Simple categories, whose logical determinations permit us to construct the thought-concrete, are the categories of the present. They can be seen in activity today. We know nothing about their evolution.

pressed in the form of the identity between proletariat as a revolutionary class and as a class of the capitalist mode of production) and its “course”. The contradiction is a logical structure but does of course have a history. Indeed, it is in the relation between this structure and its history that time as a logical operator (mediator) intervenes.

This is where the error lies.

To adequately understand what is at stake in this discussion, we should be reminded that Marx himself, when he presents the principal categories of capitalism, does not proceed in chronological order. The description of the social relation’s structure follows logic, not chronology. However, these categories did appear at some point in time in a certain order, but this is not the order of their theoretical exposition. This is not due to convenience of exposition but, more profoundly, to the fact that their reciprocal relations are not relations imposed by their order of appearance. Theory presents the structure of social relations as they are at the stage of capitalism as a mode of production, independently of the history of the structure’s emergence. This is a theoretical commitment.

Historical unfolding is thus not identical with logical unfolding. But, needless to say, the structure described by theory is not static but dynamic. Categories maintain among themselves relations that Marx does not hesitate to regularly describe as “contradictory”. Indeed, as it is claimed by some commentators, it is the very contradiction which is the structure. Thus, social categories described in their logical relations produce the effect of history. They produce the effect of history but are not identical with history.

This is, I think, what should be deduced from Marx’s theoretical method. Dissociation between logical order and chronological order, as undertaken by Marx, leads to pose in a rigorous manner the difference between history and theory.

others (until the next action). The next action is the rationale of the current action. Being fundamentally tactical, activism works like a toolbox: generalisation of the action, overcoming of sectional demands, self-organisation of the struggle, rejection of mediations, autonomy, etc. As a consequence, activism is normative. And while such a feature might not enter into its definition, it is nonetheless a preponderant trend.

For activism, any specific activity might have, in every case, been different. This appears to be self-evident as a critique of a tailor-made “enemy”: “determinism”. But the separation between an activity and the circumstances on which it is exerted constitutes a retrospective illusion which, constantly repeated, imposes itself a priori as a general comprehension of “practice”. “Practice” then becomes the question of practice, i.e. the question of intervention. The retrospective trap of the analysis of specific activities within a movement is defined by a separation, appearing a posteriori as self-evident (since it pertains to a cyclical movement) between the conditions of a movement and the activities or decisions of its actors (which are being retrospectively apprehended as particular objects). The starting point is the analysis of the limits of particular actions in relation with the movement, not of the limits of the movement of which these actions are constitutive elements, and which would admittedly have been different without them. One has separated what, in the best case, was in unison: conditions and activities, terms which not only were in unison, but rather absolutely identical – so much so, that no reality presents itself as the relation of these two terms. Their separation is the reconstruction of the world through the question of practice: an objective world faced by activity.

The error resides not only in the separation of the terms, but also in the comprehension of reality in these terms. Militants, always considering retrospectively their current action, have principles to apply, and dispose of a well-furnished toolbox; whereas the on-the-spot actors are content with the possibili-

ties (which are actions themselves), the thoughts produced, and the initiatives taken at the moment of the action. This is because they are defined by those actions while, like everybody else, they do not identify themselves with them. The retrospective trap transforms a movement of struggles, which is the sum or, even better, a constantly changing interaction between actions and decisions taken, into a scene that becomes the object of action, that is, one to which the action is applied. In this way, activism constructs and confirms the abstract generality of its class practice. This is then a militant reconstruction of reality in which action is “pure action” and its preexisting subject is a “pure subject that constitutes reality”. Neither the activity nor its subject are being produced themselves; they just face the world as “pure object”. The relationship to the world becomes that of success or failure. Needless to say, “failure” is always being interpreted as conjunctural and/or circumstantial.

However, the dialectics of the particular and the general does not spare activism. Nourishing the pretension to always be general, activism is directed towards an attack on the general conditions of capitalist reproduction as its particular and preferred field of action: commodity, exchange, State violence, ideological constraints, the educational system, gender roles, etc. Activism finds there a generality adapted to its own abstraction. But what makes it fail in its attack on the general conditions of reproduction is that the practices deployed in this attack render these conditions as abstract as activism itself. By its very nature, activism stops before the point of articulation between the general and the particular: being defined by a general and abstract construction of class belonging, activist practice jumps over the reality of the particularities inherent in the capitalist relation of exploitation. For activism, the generality of the proletariat is simply given, or at least an internal truth to be revealed, a generality mirrored so as to justify the generality of activism itself. To further the analysis, the definition of the proletariat here appears as

a “mediation that takes time”. And by emphasizing, from the very start the implications of the usage of the term “mediation”.

If the aim was simply to say that the creation of communism, like any other historical process, takes time, it would not be necessary to use the term “mediation”. This idea is already contained in the concept of communisation.

The idea of a “mediation” suggests something more, and supposes that the process passes through terms that differentiate themselves but are linked together by the mediation. So if we suppose that there is a “mediation” between the present period and communism, then this mediation would of necessity be “temporal”. Describing it as “temporal” would not change much. For example, the “transition period” is a form of “temporal” mediation between the present period and communism; one passes through a phase, socialism, which is neither capitalism nor yet communism, and differs in critical points from both capitalism and communism, but bridges the two and unfolds through time.

The idea of mediation, understood in this way, is incompatible with that of communisation. Communisation is precisely not a mediation between the present period and communism: it is not “something different” from communism, but rather communism as a process, communism in the making. If we perceive communisation as a mediation, the reason is that we comprehend it as a form of “transition period”, as a phase during which the question of communism is not yet topical, but is only destined to become so.

We see then why the term “temporal mediation” cannot indicate a mediation through time (we would not insult the text’s author by insinuating that he intends to restore any form of transition period), but instead makes of time as such a mediation. Time is the mediation between the contradiction (ex-

that abolishes its own rule”, yes, but then in all its dimensions, which means that it also abolishes the rule according to which human beings do not make their history. In communism, for the first time people will be making their history, and this has certainly something to do with the fact that we arrive at the point of having some vision of communism before it actually exists (even if we know that it is a present discourse on communism, destined to be overtaken by the process of which it constitutes an integral part). In present-day theory there is a part linked to a remarkable strength, the strength of “condensation”, or in other words the strength of thought, a part which will be necessary in a period of communisation, i.e. in a period when we will be producing new social relations and know that we are doing so. We do agree that, in a certain sense, we might say that the only role of theory today is to exist. This is a role nonetheless. By founding revolt on class struggle, and thus opening the perspective of its possible overcoming, theory is an arm against what is directly and daily produced by the dominant social relations, i.e. the vision of their perpetuation as an insurmountable horizon.

I think that, in “The Present Moment”, the error on the nature of theory and its role is also manifested in a second way. This concerns the relatively brief passage on so-called “temporal mediation”.

Let us eliminate from the very start an inaccurate interpretation of this concept, one which might arise as a consequence of the brevity, as well as the relative obscurity of that part of the text in which this concept emerges. “Temporal mediation” is not a “mediation that takes time”. “Temporal mediation” refers to time itself being a mediation. It is not a mediation unfolding through time, it is a mediation identical to time; it is time as mediation.

The difference is not blatant, but we will understand it better by reasoning ad absurdum and trying to grasp what might be

self-sufficient, independently of the relation between proletariat and capital, and thus of the specific, subsuming role of capital in this relation, and of its defining presence in the other pole of the relation.

It is in this sense that alternativism represents the natural inclination of activism, and the friction between “proletarian activism” and “alternativist activism” is a family affair (with its fair share of dirty linen to wash and the occasional murder between friends).

Let us now turn to the “real development of the contradiction”. Activism, with its abstract generality of class belonging, only exists through the practical and theoretical rejection of the real development of the contradiction as the course of the capitalist mode of production. On the one hand, we can have an identity between what makes of the proletariat a class of this mode of production and a revolutionary class, in which case we have a contradiction whose evolution, precisely because of this identity, is subjected to its own history as the course of the capitalist mode of production. Or, conversely, the proletariat is always that abstractly general class whose particularities are just accidental, which means that the reciprocal implication between proletariat and capital is not given in the very definition of the proletariat. As a consequence, this class finds its “revolutionary capability” internally, in what it is at present. So activism justifies itself, and thus the presence of communism as a potentiality can be considered, however only because one has separated the definition of the class and the process of capital.

In this sense, activism is not necessarily alternativist; the “alternative” is its horizon and its limit. Within activism, there is no such thing as a “proletarian activism”, independent from and contrary to the “alternative”. There is actually, within activism, an internal movement of rejection of its alternativist horizon which stems from activism itself. However this rejec-

tion can be completed only by formulating a thorough critique of activism, i.e. by ceasing to be activist. Nowadays, activism cannot but explode under the pressure of its internal tensions: faced with not only the alternative in which it knows the impasse perfectly well, but also with a militant practice whose critique it simultaneously formulates, activism is ultimately confronted by its own internal limit which it conceives of as a question of extension, whereas in reality, it is itself defined by its non-extension.

The alternative is theoretically possible (in the best of cases), but only operating within this abstract generalisation of the definition of the proletariat, a tendency which precisely defines activism. Without it, the production of communism can only be envisaged as the action of the proletariat that is merely a class of this society. This production would then be subjected to the development of class contradictions in present-day society and to their history. Particularities are not random occurrences to be obliterated. Such an a priori definition of the class is tantamount to comprehending the reciprocal implication as the mere reflexive play of two entities whose definition is, in reality, of their encounter, but which are instead understood as internally unaffected and not intrinsically related.

Concerning the second point

The definition of activism as a permanent “What is to be done?”, which no more contains any mediation between the general and the particular, but rather proclaims an abstract generality, or an empty void without any determination, already gives us the main part of the answer to the second question. On this point the critique is correct: activism should be traced back into the 1970s.

The question of intervention, or more precisely, of intervention as a question in itself, is an historical and ideological product. Up until the 1920s, all kinds of answers were being provided

tracing dividing lines, theory is treading on shaky grounds.

It might be thought that indulging in meta-theory, discussing theory in theoretical terms, is a pure exercise of style, presenting an interest only to those involved in this game. But there is a stake in such a self-comprehension of theory.

The question of communism, such as posed by theory, leads us to envision a historical period which, by definition, is going to unfold in a hitherto unseen manner. If this is to come about some day, it will be the first form of collective organisation about which it will have been possible to say something before it actually occurs. The first phrase of the text constitutes a perfect illustration of this: “Communisation and communism are things of the future, but it is in the present that we must speak about them...”. Yet, after beginning with such an extraordinary phrase, the text does not seem to take full measure of the absolute novelty, in historical terms, that would constitute the advent of communism.

Even the most visionary of the Venetian merchants of the late Middle Ages had never talked about capitalism as a mode of production and a dominant social relation, not even in the most abstract terms. Undoubtedly, medieval merchants were constructing, by their everyday activity, a new world of social relations. Undoubtedly, they might also have been conscious of this to a certain extent. However, the creation of a new world had never been a purpose they might have been able to make explicit in these terms. Such is not the case with communism.

This point cannot be held to be secondary, a sort of “that’s how it is”, as a kind of collateral effect. Theory is essential not by virtue of its direct influence, but because it is the mark of the specificity of the construction of communism: a process during which a constant reflexive return is possible, and which traces a horizon beyond the immediate one. “The game

as its first result that there is no general ideal representation which might be neutral. If theory could be no more than a condensate, it would simply be knowledge. The fact however is that theory gives us as its first solid conclusion (necessary to its very existence as theory) the notion that there is no knowledge in itself; no knowledge which would not be founded on concrete human activity. General representations (such as are to be found in philosophy, science, ideology, etc.) are a product and part of the conditions of real life. Saying that there is no objective discourse amounts to declaring that theory cannot be a neutral form of knowledge; that it cannot but remain marked by the stamp of its birth, that is, by revolt.

Theory of course integrates revolt into a rational perspective by establishing its genealogy. In this perspective, theory conceives of itself not as the result of an act of will but as the product of what founds it, that is, of class struggle. At the same time, however, it can only comprehend itself in this way because it has initially been an interrogation by the revolt that wants to comprehend the world in order to change it. Theory cannot abolish this starting point. In other words, theory's origin differs from its genealogy. The origin is revolt and the genealogy is class struggle. One might say that these two are identical, but, precisely in order to be able to say that they are identical, we need theory. Revolt must have provided itself with theory before being able to comprehend itself as a product of class struggle.

“The Present Moment”, making a confusion between the “role of theory” and the problematic of consciousness, contributes to the establishment of a false distinction, or, more precisely, to posing the conditions of a real distinction in false terms. Yes, the problematic of consciousness and of the enlightened vanguard are to be criticised, however considering theory as an arm does not necessarily amount to adhering to either of these two conceptions. In a text that sets itself the task of

to the question of intervention (neo-babouvism, marxism, blanquism, anarchism, bolshevism, reformism, etc.), but the question was not being posed as such. It did not exist as such and is meaningless in that what we consider to be its answers were not really answers, as the question itself was non-existent.

The “action of the revolutionaries” becomes formalised as such and becomes the question of intervention at the same time as intervention becomes a question. Practice becomes “intervention” from the moment when it becomes historically obvious, during the revolutionary wave of the years 1910–1920, that the proletariat makes the revolution and bears communism, specifically as it is in contradiction with and destructive of everything which constitutes its immediate existence in this society and all that is expressed by it. For various reasons however (e.g. the worker identity which is confirmed in the very reproduction of capital), the dominant revolutionary perspective was that of an affirmation of the class. It is in the theoretical formalisation of the German-Dutch Left that the question of intervention was produced. The Left shifted the question of reciprocal implication between proletariat and capital, towards a problem of the integration of the class and, more practically, a problem of organisation (of leaders, of organisations becoming an end in themselves, of bureaucracy, etc.): in the end, and on the whole, the problem of the critique of any “external intervention”. Its reflection on the “old working-class movement”, its analysis of the Russian revolution, and its criticism of working-class politics, led the German-Dutch Left to consider that the proletariat was in fact producing the revolution; that it bore communism by being in contradiction with and destroying everything that constituted its immediate existence in this society and all that is expressed by it. Revolution was retained as an affirmation of the proletariat's being at the same time as every form of existence of this being was subjected to critique.

The Left was simultaneously arriving, on the one hand, at a critique of every relation between the existence of the class in the capitalist mode of production and communism, and, on the other hand, at an affirmation of a conflated relation between communism and the class's being. This contradiction was temporarily overcome however by the limitation of integration and its comprehension, considered as embracing all mediations standing between the being of the class and communism. One had to fight and eliminate all these mediations, including, most importantly, intervention by the "revolutionaries". The proletariat had to negate itself as a class of capital (achieve its autonomy) in order to fulfill what it really was, i.e. something that went beyond capital: the class of labour and of its social organisation, the class of the development of productive forces. The autonomous organisation of the class, distinct from its organisation within capitalism, takes its starting point "in the deeper being of the class, quite naturally". It is always the class as it exists under capitalism whose being is affirmed as communism. However, nothing should obstruct this movement and no permanent organisation of revolutionaries should interfere, nor "program" be determined, as both "program" and organisation being considered harmful as well as ineffective. This position was based on the affirmation of a supra-historical revolutionary nature of the proletariat that can only express itself "in a natural way", that is, nothing should disrupt it or else its appearance might be thwarted. The overturning (i.e. revolution) is "possible" because being for capital is just an alienation, it is being estranged from itself. This exteriorisation consists in mediations: not only trade unions, politics, and democracy, but fundamentally also, any activity that is then being termed as "voluntary" and "external", thus becoming "intervention".

Today's theoretical difficulty resides in criticising the question as such: it is the difficulty of thinking outside of the alternative intervention/waitism. It is the difficulty of considering obsolete the precise contradictory relation between proletariat

nor from act to thought. It simply permits a passage from the level where representation and action cannot be dissociated to one where, temporarily, we can consider them separately.

Theoretical "condensation" is not however the only possible form of condensation. Philosophy, science, and ideology, also "condense" in their own manner. Where lies then the specificity of theoretical condensation? By condensing, it lies in that theory and does not content itself with expressing immediate experience: theory is a critical condensate. Indeed, theory is not self-born, entirely in itself: it is an offspring of revolt, which constitutes its precursory act. Without revolt, there is no revolutionary theory, because there is no need for one.

As condensate and critique, theory is an arm. These two determinations suffice to describe it in this way, independently of its direct or indirect "influence". So, for such a comprehension of theory, there is no need to claim that theory expresses the truth of what proletarians think (the problematic of consciousness), or that it conditions action (the problematic of the enlightened vanguard). Theory is an arm by its very object: because it is a critical condensate initiated by revolt, and because it is an understanding of the world in view of changing it.

No doubt, theory is not a condensate of just anything. But theory can only pose that of which it is, at the very end, the condensate after having run through the process of its condensation. In other words, it is first put into movement by revolt, and consequently it is first of all an arm and afterwards a knowledge; it is an armed manner of knowing.

Being critical, the condensate does not stay at the surface, but rather permeates semblances: from the commodity, it establishes its fetishist character, from the individual of capital, the fact that it is only "the surface of capitalist society", etc. Most importantly, because it is critical, theory establishes

The critique of this encounter of contradictions (the study of the possibility, conditions, limits, and process of this encounter) derives from that of the notion of conjuncture. In the footnote on the “durée”, I write: “The durée is a homogenisation in movement, fusion, dynamic interpenetration of phases of the contradiction”. Here we can see an important determination of the concept of conjuncture: the power to draw on more than that which it contains; to really create outside the chain of reactions of mechanistic causality and the teleology of final cause.

6. Critique of the conception of theory in the text

“The Present Moment” reduces the question of the recognition of a “role” of theory, or of the recognition of theory as a weapon, to the question of the return to practice, that is, on the one hand, conceiving of theory as pure understanding of the world, as consciousness, and, on the other hand, reducing practice to “intervention” or “action”.

It is however certain that in the social world, man’s only world, there is no human act that has not been thought, whatever the form of this thought and whatever the manner in which thought runs across acts – to the point where dissociating thought and act is impossible. Indeed, Marx’s “materialism” is not a simple adoption of the old materialism of the xviiiith century, which opposed thought to matter, and in which it would have been sufficient to substitute “action” for “matter”. “Reality” is “concrete human activity” according to Marx, and his “materialism” is the link between this activity and more general ideal representations. “Practice”, or “concrete human activity”³, thought and act, are intermingled, and theory is an abstract condensation of this practice. Thus, theoretical condensation does not signify a passage from the non-expressed to the expressed, from subconscious to conscious,

and capital of which this question was a formalisation that we can today describe as ideological.

Practice as a question has made its reappearance within the present cycle of struggles both on the basis of this heritage and in the framework of a new shape of class struggle. As the critique points out, activism appeared in the anarcho-autonomous milieu.

The proletariat’s class struggle whose content and objective was the reinforcement of the class within the capitalist mode of production has collapsed. The disappearance – in the course of the restructuring which, as class struggle, has accompanied this collapse – of any worker identity confirmed in the reproduction of capital (as was the case during the previous cycle of struggles) has produced not only the collapse of any organisational perspective (party or other) capable of mediating efficiently between the particular and the general, but also the very possibility to found on the being of the proletariat a reference point for action. This being used to be there, existing even if underground and masked. In their polemic on intervention and organisation, Pannekoek and Castoriadis could both invoke this being: for the former, one could only accompany didactically its revelation; for the latter, the point was to induce it or even anticipate it through organisation. To both of them, this being was there in a positive manner, as a guarantee for any comprehension of practice.

The revolutionary (communising) perspective produced in the proletariat/capital relation, which results from the restructuring, does not dispose of this guarantee any longer. There is still a general real definition and existence of the proletariat, but this generality is no longer the positive revolutionary element to be revealed. In the present-day situation, one can no more conceive of the revolutionary process as a passage from particular struggles to a general situation of the working class. Nothing lies in between communising measures and

particular struggles. We are condemned to the particular, and all mediations invoking the general from within particular struggles are nothing but the limits of these struggles.

So what is activism in the present situation? It is a proclamation of the general that does not go beyond the particular. Activism does not look for its validation in a general that subsumes every particular; this possibility is practically inaccessible to it in present-day class struggles. What it produces as its guarantee is a general invested in every particular struggle; activism's idealist illusion is the presence of the whole as such in each one of its parts. This generality is devoid of content and life. In fact, the only generality that can stem nowadays from particular struggles is not a positivity existing in these struggles, a general class condition, but precisely the abolition of this general class condition. Practices that, starting from particular struggles, might ensure the unity of these struggles and induce the practical existence of the general condition of proletarians can only be the dissolution, for proletarians, of their existence as a class. Activism experienced as the generality is condemned to float and surf on particular struggles, since the abstract generality it wants to imbue in these struggles leads it either to the myth of a general self-organisation connecting struggles, or to the more concrete development of these struggles within the more or less institutional mediations that are the only topical truth of the generality of the class's existence – a generality that activism cannot accept.

What is then the current rationale of this abstract generality of activism? Notwithstanding any particular situation, there does exist a common point in the proletarians' condition: the individual contingency of class belonging. In the past, this contingency could be integrated and overcome in the framework of the worker identity, the Party, or of the reinforcement of the class within the capitalist mode of production (a class which as a consequence – in the ever present process of

about the same goods) and a different mode of life imposed by capital. This is, for example, what the theorists of the Regulation School forget when they refer to fordism. We cannot make a comparison as if we were talking about two similar historical periods with merely a quantitative difference.

5. The conjuncture

The notion of conjuncture, scarcely outlined here, signals the significant missing element in this text: the problematic of the gender distinction, of the contradiction between men and women. For example, when, in relation to productive labour, we say that the contradiction, which is exploitation, “reflects back on itself” (*revient sur elle-même*), i.e. back on “that which makes the contradiction itself exist: labour as the substance of value which in capital is only value as value-in-process”, we are not going all the way to the end: the gender distinction. In all modes of production up to today, the augmentation of population and labour are the principal productive forces. The encounter of the class contradiction and the gender contradiction, on which the revolution as communisation depends, does not come down to a mere contingency, but neither is it necessary (i.e. the one being inferred from the other reciprocally); it is the result of the conflictual production between these two contradictions. Their connection, but only their connection, is located in the concept of surplus labour which opposes the worker to the non-worker (to use the most general formula) and which, by positing population and labour as productive forces, posits the gender distinction in the same stroke.

It can be maintained that the encounter of these two contradictions in the course of current struggles, when it occurs, always produces class belonging as a limit of struggles: women's strikes which put at stake the relation between the public and the private which is constitutive of wage-labour, or of a more generalised movement, like in the case of Argentina.

tariat. It produces the commodities of workers' consumption and determines the modes of life.

How could necessary labour time be shortened? By an increase in productivity (i.e. goods produced in 4 or 5 hours would be produced in only 3 or 4 hours), which means that fixed capital becomes the dominant element in the labour process; that capital has taken possession all the spheres of production in society. Hence every sort of institutional form and a complete transformation of the role of wage demands, which provides the basis for consultation between trade unions and capitalists. We can imagine how everybody can be content with a "sharing of productivity gains".

With the dominance of relative surplus value, which defines the passage of capital from the mode of formal subsumption to the mode of real subsumption, the reproduction of the class is integrated in the reproduction of capital. It is capital that determines the workers' mode of life and his consumer goods. The dominance of fixed capital in the labour process, and the transformation of labour's role within this process, puts an end to workers' know-how. Up until then, within manufacture, and even in what was called big industry, the worker had a certain mastery over his know-how (mastery over the pace of work and over the way the working day was going to unfold, which amounted to a means of pressure feared by the boss). This know-how is appropriated by capital in the framework of the organisation of work: at first taylorism, and then, when this know-how is incorporated within machinery, a passage to the fordist phase. At that moment, the active population comes to be largely composed of employees and workers. With the increase in production it becomes vital to avoid overproduction, hence this integration of the reproduction of the proletariat. This was going to lead to the "sharing of productivity gains" and, during the Trente Glorieuses, to the "rise in living standards" - a term to be handled with much reserve, as we witness a change of the mode of consumption (it is no more

its reinforcement – was being constituted as a whole). Now however it appears as a free starting point synthesizing the whole essence of the proletariat. Activism's abstract generality is not exploitation always performed in specific conditions, it is the individual contingency of class belonging. However, while the contingency of class belonging is true, it is also true that this contingency is not itself contingent, but necessary. In the capitalist mode of production, it is of no contingency that proletarians are contingent individuals. In a world where all mediations generalising the class as such have collapsed, individual contingency and its concomitant ideal of "freedom" appear as the most general synopsis of the proletarian condition. It is included in the very definition of the proletarian's condition in his relation to capital that he does not want to remain what he is ("a game that abolishes its rule"); that he is dissatisfied with himself. It is here one touches the very core of the new cycle of struggles, and of activism as well. In the course of the struggles of this cycle, activism is an inverted form of appearance of the contingency of class belonging. Inverted, because the very process of the reproduction of capitalist social relations makes of this contingency, instead of a result, but rather the primary condition of any exchange of labour power in one or another immediate form of exploitation.

It is the current perspective of revolution as communisation that legitimates the individual contingency of class belonging as a general characteristic of the proletariat. This contingency appears not only as a general characteristic of the proletariat but also as a generality capable of subverting that of which it is the generality. From the individual contingency of class belonging to the free and fluid association of individuals, the path seems to be marked out. The problem is that this contingency is completely abstract when it has erased the process of its own production, that is, its own determination, when it is presented as the overcoming of anything particular. If contingency is a synthesis of all things particular, it does

not possess in itself any capability of overcoming them. It is an illusion born from the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production in the present cycle of struggles.

For activism, contingency is this abstract generality, insofar as it is a generality that does not pose itself as necessary, that is, does not itself consider the particular situations as necessary. Thus the reality of capitalist reproduction becomes for it nothing more than a surface.

Concerning the third point

While we can accept the distinction made in the first critique between an “alternative activism” and a “proletarian activism”, I have tried to show in the preceding response that, if activism was not necessarily activist, the alternative was always its natural downward path and that these two tendencies shared a common foundation: abstract generality, or more precisely, that this foundation of activism makes of alternativism its natural drift. I admit that, after its brief hegemony over the activist milieu, the activist tendency has no future in a crisis which, as stated in the text, is going to “disalternativise” the alternative milieu. It would however be an illusion to expect a return of the “hegemony of the proletarian component”, as the author of the critique hopes. In the present moment it is the activist milieu as a whole that is set to collapse.

The proletariat always produces the totality of its class existence within capital. This existence is a relation to capital which no longer contains the confirmation of a relation of the proletariat to itself: a worker identity. At the same time, this means that the proletariat, in its contradiction with capital, enters in contradiction with its own existence, that is, with its own constitution as a class which it finds produced within capital as an external constraint. This is, expressed in the most general way, the situation of class struggles in the present cycle of struggles.

atic effort to make the text as easily readable as possible (for, say, a – highly hypothetical – interested Lithuanian reader).

On the other hand, this means that it would be better to have this text preceded by other much more accessible texts, able to serve more easily as texts of first acquaintance. The text “Communisation vs. socialisation” would be appropriate, but we can also think of other possibilities. For example, an immediate introduction to the very concept of communisation, either by a short text or by using excerpts of already existing texts, would be necessary.

4. Formal subsumption; real subsumption

The easiest way to specify the concepts of formal and real subsumption of labour under capital is to take as a starting point the modes of extraction of surplus value. In the Marxist vulgate there are two types of surplus value: absolute surplus value and relative surplus value. This always leads to a division of labour time between necessary and surplus labour.

Necessary labour time is the time the worker dedicates to produce a value which is equivalent to that of his own reproduction. But the worker always works more than that (or else there would be no surplus value, no profit, which is the very foundation of capital). This excess is surplus labour (or, in its form of value, surplus value). There are two ways to increase the duration of surplus labour: either by increasing total labour time (absolute surplus value), or by decreasing necessary labour time (relative surplus value). In the case of relative surplus value the total value produced does not change (insofar as total labour time remains identical), but, within this total labour time, the necessary part (dedicated to the reproduction of labour power) diminishes.

This presupposes that capital has integrated into its own reproduction, has taken on itself, the reproduction of the prole-

However, this unification is still, for most of us, an open question. One could mention a lack of clarity, in various authors' writings, on the status of overproduction, of excess productive capacity and of the problem of realisation in relation to various conceptions of the crisis: a certain confusion about exactly which "consumption" we refer to in each case (total consumption, including consumption of means of production, workers' consumption and capitalists' consumption, to say nothing of intermediate strata; productive consumption, covering means of production and workers' means of subsistence, strictly speaking, workers' consumption), and the necessary, but not really undertaken, clarification on unproductive consumption and its relation to productive consumption.

To return to our basic subject, this text is clearly more than what one would describe as a text of first acquaintance with the journal.

The text is at the same time too short for the issues it covers. It represents an opening on an international perspective. Once we address some problems, we should be detailed enough to permit communication with people who probably haven't had, until now, a contact with texts of the "communist current". We should moreover make a special effort to not introduce abruptly concepts with which not everybody is familiar. We think that this is included in the very definition of the project, and that it is necessary for the usefulness of a probable Greek edition. Hence, despite the previous observation, one cannot but consider desirable more explanation and detail on various points.

To conclude, it is realistic and desirable to consider this text as a (or more likely, "the") central text of the first issue. In this line of thought, it would be good to see more detail and explanation on certain points and, at the same time, a system-

In "The Present Moment", it is affirmed that: "Until the present explosive connection, this situation was making of the present cycle a constant tension between, on the one hand, the autonomisation of its dynamic, the calling into question by the proletariat of its own existence as a class, and, on the other hand, the recognition of its whole existence within the categories of capital. This tension was formalised by both activism and radical democratism – these two being rivals but also vitally linked to one another, insofar as each of them, being an autonomisation of the elements of one and the same totality, could exist only through a relation with its negative. No matter if in the first element we recognise the revolutionary dynamic of the this cycle, and in the second element the formalisation of the limits of struggles as impassable barriers for them."

In the same text, I suggest the following: "The disappearance of activism in its alternative flavour, and of activism in general, depends on the development of immediate struggles in which the construction of class belonging as external constraint is the very product of these struggles as struggles of the proletariat in its reciprocal implication with capital, not any more an autonomisation facing it." I had then added: "The milieus tempted by the alternative are no longer anything to speak of. There is no more room in the middle. The activities of these milieus can be matters of discussion and of manifestations of class struggle, but not in the terms in which they understand and interpret themselves, and the debate over communisation with this milieu is no longer for us an internal debate."

The critique of the Greek comrades, perfectly justified in relation with a certain actual experience, obliges us to provide some precisions. It is an exact and strict "us" which I refer to. In fact, I am referring to a theoretical debate, in the framework of what I define as theory in its narrow sense. It is only at this level that the above statement is "intransigent". In my

opinion, it is not possible to have a common journal with the activist tendency that is more or less tempted by the alternative. This is the sense given to "internal debate".¹

However, in the course of struggles such as those currently taking place in Greece, this milieu is the one with which we are most in contact, and even in which we find ourselves. In this framework, the "debate on communisation" does have a meaning. But it is going to be a debate over "disalternativation" in the ambit of the crisis and over the nature of immediate struggles. The alternative activist perspective makes no sense any more: the ground is being cut under its feet when class belonging as external constraint can become the product of the immediate struggles themselves. It follows that we are not having a debate over their discourse but over the decomposition of their discourse and practice. The debate will not concern the discourse itself, but the discourse as a symptom of the conditions of its articulation, as is the same as for every ideology. This is why I do not mean an anathema, and I cannot speak of an "internal debate".

The Greek comrades' critical remarks are very important, as it leads us to face the fact that some practices may superficially appear unchanged although in fact they are completely transformed in terms of both content and meaning. This is exactly what is happening to activism.

The "abstract generality" that I placed at the core of my definition of activism is nothing else than the autonomisation of the dynamic of this cycle considered in its result; a generality posing as a justification of this autonomisation. The contradiction in which activism was trapped, and which made of activism an incessant headlong rush, was the following. On the one hand, this practice, as autonomisation, would have as content and perspective the questioning, in every particular struggle, of its particular character and, more fundamentally or implicitly, the questioning by the proletariat of its own defini-

duce themselves within capital. It is there that this specific counter-revolution is to be found. It is there that the questioning of the proletariat by capital finds an answer in the proletariat's insistence to remain as such. This limit is the most difficult, since if the proletariat is not the proletariat, it is nothing anymore; a nothing whose content is the revolution. The only means for the proletariat to head towards revolution is that, within its action, the possibility for its reproduction within capital be historically superseded. Restructured capital has attained such a degree of abstraction that it becomes utopian, undermining, by the same token, proletarian mundaneness.

3. General remark by Blaumachen on the text

The text is too long as an introduction and at the same time too short for the questions that it is dealing with.

– It is too long and too detailed in its theoretical developments as an "editorial" for the first issue of sic, or, to be more precise, as a text that might be interpreted as a minimum platform. sic is supposed to represent an opening for a debate on communisation. If we give the impression that this text, in all its details, is the journal's credo, we would limit the debate before opening it.

A case at hand is the theory of crises. It is of course an important subject, but by detailing too much on the unification of the theory of crises, we come to an impasse: is this unification given (and clear) for most of sic's participants? If, as one can presume, this is not the case, how could we permit ourselves to give the impression that this is a fundamental point in our conception of communisation? Admittedly, we conceive of communisation in the present, as borne by today's struggles and crisis. If the unification of the theories of crises is "necessary" to understand the present crisis, then it is fundamental for our conception of communisation. Our thinking is not positioned at the other side of history.

facto from the first moment of exchange between capital and labour (purchase and sale of labour power) is not obvious. Everywhere the disciplinarisation of the labour power facing proletarians – made once again poor as proletarians – is inscribed in the agenda of the capitalist class. Reproduction of this faceoff between labour power and capital has become a matter of discipline.

Comment by Blaumachen: What is to be found on the agenda is not so much this purchase-sale as the eternal availability of the proletarian to be subjected to it (this is probably much clearer in Greece than in France; see what has been said in this text about the interest of “intermediate regions”). This makes a big difference as far as the repressive mechanism deployed for the internal enemy is concerned. It also permits the remembrance that capital has really been globalised, that it has made proletarians out of a vast mass of the world’s population, thus producing a proletariat for which being in excess is intrinsic to its definition, and that it seeks to find repressive modes of managing this situation (or even sometimes specifically capitalistic modes of extermination) – something that, viewed under another angle, undermines the equilibrium between the productive and unproductive spheres and only aggravates the difficulty of achieving a recovery of the rate of profit. Value’s utopia consists in emancipating itself from its dependence on living labour, in its uninterrupted parthenogenesis; it is a self-destructive utopia which (through a constant capital tending to engulf total capital and a surplus value suspended in the air, without living roots) defines socially a new slavery. But it also defines a situation where the questioning of the proletariat by capital becomes the other side of proletariat’s struggles, bearing revolution as well as the counter-revolution specific to it. Proletarians struggle for the wage (sometimes for the very existence of a wage), and they are regularly defeated. In their struggles for the wage, proletarians are ready for anything, even for becoming their own collective employer in order to find a possibility to repro-

tion as a class. On the other hand, the premise and possibility of such a practice was the generality of the proletarian condition, understood as inherent to every random particular situation. If we have there a contradiction that makes of activism not only a headlong rush but also a constant dissatisfaction with itself, it is because, as I already mentioned in the present notes that, “the only generality that can stem nowadays from particular struggles is not a positivity existing in these struggles, a general class condition, but precisely the abolition of this general class condition. Practices that, starting from particular struggles, might ensure the unity of these struggles and induce the practical existence of the general condition of proletarians can only be the dissolution, for proletarians, of their existence as a class”. The presupposition of a generality justifying activism could only be an abstraction, in this case something unreal, a being without determination. We should add that this abstract generality does have an existence, but this existence is not to be found where it would be expected. It is rather located in the dictatorship of abstractions, that is, in capital as value in process.²

If wisdom can only take root in the garden of accomplished fact, theoretical elaboration is sometimes obliged to risk anticipations. The explosive connection between a crisis defined in its specificity as a crisis of the wage relation and the illegitimacy of wage demands – something that forms the core of the text “The Present Moment” – permits us to think that particular struggles, within the most intimate relation that makes of the proletariat a class of this mode of production, can pass to a generality that would no longer be abstract, specifically to the extent that the content of this generality integrates particularities in the form of a questioning by the proletariat of its definition as a class, or in the form of the production of class belonging as external constraint. Particularity is no more this formal prerequisite to overcome. Overcoming, in its particularity, is its own movement, because the generality currently at stake is not a general class condition

but its abolition. I would already cite two examples taken from the activist milieu itself. Greek activists have taken as a starting point their own condition of unemployed, of a would-be labour force parked in universities, of temporary or precarious workers (I will not dwell again on how this gave simultaneously the force and the limits of the movement). A less massive and spectacular case is the debate that was recently waged in the French activist milieu concerning the “strike of the unemployed”, a debate which, though witnessing the confrontation between the “proletarian” and the “alternativist” tendencies, was nonetheless fundamentally marked by the fact that the activist milieu was talking about itself.

To put it in simple terms, my position was that we can only act in a practical manner where we are directly concerned. It is better not to dream about being nurses, railwaymen, undocumented immigrants or youth of the banlieues when we are not, that is, not dream about a prior abstract generality buried under the particular situations (it is still the myth of essence and of the nugget hidden in its gangue). But if our anticipation is right, interventionist practices that characterised activism may well superficially appear unchanged while in fact their content has totally changed (which will eventually, in one way or another, change their form too). I mean that they can be produced and invested by the generality which I was talking about and which is no more an abstract generality. We can go to see other people’s struggle, and “intervene” if we feel this way, to the extent that the generality produced in this struggle is the overcoming of this otherness. But the overcoming of otherness is not the updated realisation, of a preexistent commonness. Sectional struggles can only acquire a general dimension and significance on the basis, not of sectional demands, but of their negation. In other words, this significance and this dimension are not a unification of the proletariat. The generality produced in this case is the very contrary of the generality presupposed by activism. Only in its abolition can we find a general dimension. We could propose as “exam-

ples” the revindicative struggles in Bangladesh or Algeria, which turn against their own conditions of existence as revindicative struggles and become riots putting into question all the conditions of reproduction. The same might be true of more nearby, but less “spectacular”, events.

There is no generality as such of or for the proletariat, as some sort of given facts or preliminary conditions justifying intervention (the Party, the worker identity, etc. were still able to perform this function). Only particularities exist. But if we can envisage new practices (no matter if formally and momentarily they evoke activism), it is because, in the current explosive connection, particular struggles can produce a generality which is not a given fact, or the unity of what exists, but the abolition of what was a general condition only as an abstraction imposed within capital. In the passage I have used as a starting point, it is stated that, “Theory is included in the self-critical character of struggles; the critical relationship of theory has changed. Theoretical production belongs to a practice which is not ‘ours’ and to a theory which is likewise not ‘ours’”. It is the meaning of these inverted commas surrounding “ours” that I have tried to clarify in these last paragraphs.

R.S.

2. “The police is also, opposite to us, our own existence as a class as limit”

The expression of this limit will now be double: we are nothing outside the wage relation; this struggle as a class as limit is the police. [...] For the second: the police indicate that we are nothing outside the wage relation. Of course, the police is the force which, in the last instance, is our own existence as a class as limit. If the main result of the process of production is the reproduction between proletariat and capital standing face to face, then the fact that this face-off comes ipso