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Response: The Question of Organization

Since the Birkbeck conference reignited communism as a philosophical idea and 2011's demonstrations, movements, and revolts converged in global egalitarian struggle, the question of political organization has posed itself to the Left again. The essays collected in this issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* approach the question via three interlocking problematics: history, the subject, and the party.

These problematics have long been tied in one way or another to the Marxist project. In the simplest version, what Lars Lih (2008) calls the "merger narrative" of German Social Democracy, history provides a class with its revolutionary task. The specific mission of the working class is the abolition of capitalism and construction of communism. The party, as bearer of the news of this task, galvanizes and leads the working class in political struggle. In contrast, contemporary leftist preoccupations with speculative realisms, object-oriented ontologies, and self-organizing swarms, imply that the problematics of history, subject, and party so crucial to Marxist theory are obsolete. Like so many capitalist commodities, they need to be thrown out and replaced by the shiny and new. Whether they are eclipsed by temporalities

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geologic, synaptic, or futural; theories enamored with objects, animals, and the nonhuman; or assemblages fluid, spontaneous, and always already to-be-subverted, the problematics of history, subject, and party clash with assumptions of thought and action shared by many on the left. They do so by returning the question of political organization to the center of radical thought, and with it questions of means and ends, tactics and terrains: what do we want, how do we get it, and who are “we,” anyway? Connections between ideas and struggles—*actual politics*—are not subsumed under playful readings of cultural texts or the micropolitics of self-work. They are brought to the fore in the course of ongoing movements. Occupy Wall Street, for example, forced a new generation to take up questions of leadership, demands, organizational structure, collective solidarity, and the role of violence in struggle.

Given a particular conception of history, of where we are now in relation to where we have been, and a particular idea of the subject, whether as a supposition to be abandoned or refined, communist theorists find themselves taking a position on the party: is it a political form that has expired and will be replaced? Or might it provide, as Susana Draper puts it, “the space of a question that the current framework of the movements cannot pose”? A remarkable outcome of the opening to the idea of communism is this shift from philosophy to politics, an indication of the materiality of communism as an ideal that mobilizes its own realization.

A challenge addressed by participants of the Birkbeck conference was the disentangling of communism from the history constraining it within a dominant liberal binary of ethics and economics. Reintroducing communism seems to require shedding the legacy of its party-state enactments and starting afresh. Rendered as hypothesis, communism can point to a universal ideal irreducible to the tragedies and betrayals of the twentieth century. Against this attempt to theorize communism in its universality, the demand for history tends to be expressed as a demand to engage *only* these tragedies and betrayals, to situate communism securely within its failures while the sacrifices, hopes, and successes inseparable from emancipatory egalitarian struggles are subjugated and buried. A perhaps surprising effect of the demand for history is thus a persistent dehistoricization. History appears as a tribunal whose standards of judgment are given and uncontested, exterior to struggle rather than its outcome. The last five years of work associated with communism’s resurgence have started to dismantle this tribunal. In the new discussion, history is a field of possibility, of paths, opportunities, lessons, and sequences. Invocations of history can serve as calls to retrieve successes, to study more closely what worked.

The claim that the working class bears a universal interest was always a political claim. History does not deliver up its subjects clear and ready-made. Unlike the historical materialism that presented communism as the world-historical mission of the proletariat, *communist critical theory*, the term offered by Gavin Walker in this issue, treats the subject of communism as a problem rather than as a given. If communism can no longer know itself as solution to the riddle of history, then how and as what can it know itself? In the current discussion, the subject is tied to history as its product and producer. Rather than a tribunal, history is a field in which to locate the traces of communist subjectivity. As Marx (1994a: 188) writes in “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please.” This suggests that the subject of communism can, at best, know itself only retroactively and never fully, only in the course of its movement and not in advance. The subject of communism is collective, divided, resistant, and unknowing, a common response contingent upon the collective body in which it might realize itself, for a time, in a fragile combination of anxiety, courage, super ego, and justice (to use Badiou’s formulation from *Theory of the Subject*). Discerning this subject in the actuality of its movement thus emerges as an important theoretical task.

In its appeal to history, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson’s contribution to this issue emphasizes the material conditions for communism. What is clear to most in the current discussion is the gap, the nonidentity, within these conditions. Expressed in the form of a question: do the material conditions for communism necessarily give rise to the subject of communism or does the subject of communism retroactively produce the conditions of its own emergence? Likewise, given that capitalism’s globality is concomitant with its unevenness, a feature addressed historically in ideas such as Lenin’s notion of the “weakest link,” in what ways does any strictly economic description of capitalism, even one as resolutely tied to its late nineteenth-century industrial expression as that of Joshua Clover and Aaron Benanav’s contribution, require an analysis of politics as itself an attribute of material conditions? A number of the contributions here recognize that these are questions of political organization, of class, party, state, movement, and even commune.

## History

Several of the interlocutors in the present discussion find their relevant historical reference point in the 1960s and 1970s. They thereby link their theorization of communism to the radical politics of 1968 and subsequent

neoliberal economic reaction. Jason E. Smith draws on a text from Louis Althusser written in 1966. Draper, invoking Lenin's famous 1917 essay on the power of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies that rose up alongside the bourgeois Provisional Government, focuses on the problematic of dual power as it arose in the seventies in some Latin American countries. Taking up the question of transition, Alberto Toscano engages texts written by Étienne Balibar from the mid-1960s through the end of the 1970s. Alessandro Russo specifically emphasizes the "long sixties," the period stretching from the middle of the 1960s until the beginning of the 1980s.

From the standpoint of radical politics, what is noteworthy about the "long sixties" is the shift away from a party politics targeting the state toward social movements targeting society. This shift expressed itself in multiple ways, indeed, multiplicity can be said to be its dominant characteristic. Whether highlighting oppression based on sex and gender, exclusion anchored in race and ethnicity, the disciplinary mechanisms of institutions (university, church, family, union, party, clinic), patterns of hierarchy in organizations ostensibly committed to hierarchy's abolition, the stultifying effects of bureaucracy, the deadening normativity of consumerism, or the overarching machinic character of militarized industrial life, the critical project at the end of the sixties was marked by the rejection of the state and the constitution of a new terrain of struggle at the level of the social. How to live freely and authentically became a—if not *the*—primary political question, one that state politics could not answer. Remarkably, this rejection cut across state socialist and capitalist societies, across east/west and north/south divisions. Whether the critique was issued from a liberal, democratic, socialist, Maoist, or militant perspective, the underlying supposition was the same: politics exceeds the narrowness of class and party; it thus requires turning away from the state and toward everyday life in all its unique specificity. Forty years later, the suppositions of this critique continue to frame the politics of the Left, as we see in the contribution from Mezzadra and Neilson. Radical theorists beat the same antistate, antiparty drums. Democratic activists likewise emphasize NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), CSOs (civil society organizations), communities, and the local. Militants refuse and subtract, as if nothing had changed, as if politics were a matter of the micropure, as if the setting of politics remained that of a centralized state and dominant party instead of an uneven mix of centralizing and decentralizing forces in various distributed combinations of state use of market and market reliance on state.

The primary problem with the Left's entrapment in repetition is not just the repetition. It is that the repetition prevents us from acknowledging

how struggles at the level of the social come up against their limits in the state and market. David Ost's account of the Polish Solidarity movement (mentioned by Russo and Smith in this issue) provides the best example. Documenting the deep connections between the spirit of 1968 and the Polish movement in the seventies and eighties, Ost (1990: 14) describes its goal of a "permanently open democracy," a political field irreducible to the oppositions between state socialism and market liberalism. Solidarity emerged as a postmodern antipolitics that deliberately abjured state power, seeking instead the strengthening of citizens in civil society. Developed over the course of the seventies, the movement's ideology, Ost argues, "became irrelevant the moment it succeeded" (57). Legalization, official recognition of an organization by a monopolistic state, was unavoidably an encroachment on that state. There was no way that Solidarity could pursue its program of societal democratization without touching state power, as it realized shortly before the December 1981 crackdown. Slavoj Žižek makes an analogous argument with respect to capitalist societies. Antisexist, antiracist, antidiscrimination, and other such social politics founder against the hard rock of the market. Žižek (1999: 354–55) writes:

The domain of global capitalist market relations is the Other scene of the so-called repoliticization of civil society advocated by the partisans of "identity politics" and other postmodern forms of politicization: all the talk about new forms of politics bursting out all over . . . ultimately resembles the obsessional neurotic who talks all the time and is otherwise frantically active precisely in order to ensure that something—what *really matters*—will *not* be disturbed, that it will remain immobilized.

At some point, an encounter with the state and the market is unavoidable. The fantasy of a politics capable of remaining focused on authentic social relations, a revolution in personal life, and flourishing cultural experiments occludes the legal and economic conditions that either make it possible or prevent its realization.

In his contribution to the discussion here, Russo remains faithful to the spirit of the political experiments of the "long sixties," echoing their critique of party and state. His primary concern is with the failure of governmental communism. He emphasizes that the dictatorship of the proletariat was "the subject of a mass political experimentation prolonged and extended worldwide" and that "it has not passed those tests." His critique of my book runs in part on the mistaken assumption that I advocate for proletarian dictatorship when in fact I provide an extended argument for replacing it with

the sovereignty of the people (in the chapter of *The Communist Horizon* titled “Sovereignty of the People”). On the page Russo cites, I speculate on the bizarre evocation of communism on the US Right. Why, I ask, twenty-five years after the seeming demise of communism, are voices on the US Right so vociferous in the denunciation of it? What are they afraid of? They are afraid, I suggest, that people screwed over by bank bailouts, regressive taxation, and increasing inequality will recognize that the 1 percent uses the state to act in its own interests. They are afraid that the newly immiserated will not only recognize the government’s role in maintaining the wealth and privilege of the capitalist class, but might also start to think that the state could be used to benefit a different class or even eliminate the conditions that create classes. Such a use would necessarily transform the state.

Russo shies away from this possibility. For him, the idea of communism in politics can or should name only experimental invention and not a form of government. Russo equates governmental communism with twentieth-century party-states such as Poland and China, as well as with West European electoral parties, all tests that have not been passed. Rather than acknowledging the failure of these states and parties as communist, their abandonment of egalitarian ideals, betrayal of workers, and acquiescence to capitalism, he charges communism for their failure as states. Instead of addressing the ceding of a desire for communism on behalf of those parties that exploited workers when they should have been abolishing the conditions of exploitation and then ushered in extreme versions of capitalist competition and oligarchy, he confines such desires to fragile and momentary instances of political experimentation. In this regard, he rejects my account of the betrayal of communist desire even as his own discussion reminds us of the role of the European Communist and Socialist parties in affirming the policies associated with financial capitalism.

Russo takes the historical lesson of the “long sixties” to reside in the suppression of various egalitarian political experiments. The resulting political subjectivity he figures as “a young Chinese female worker at the Foxconn in Guangdong, or some other part of China.” He imagines the young worker asking herself about “the way out of her cage” and being only able to say that communism “is the name of what at present rules that dormitory-factory regime.” I do not find Russo’s singular answer to this thought experiment compelling. The fact of Mao, of the historical experience of revolutionary struggles for the emancipation of workers and peasants, is not fully absorbed in the capitalism of the CPC. Communism names more than a present form of exploitation. To assume that it does not is to render an ideal

as indistinguishable from its ideological deployment by a dominant power, an assumption which forecloses the possibility of critical thinking. Oppressive power always presents itself as something other than it is. This presentation opens up spaces for critique.

Unlike Russo, who remains attached to a rigid separation between experimental and governmental communism rooted in the sixties that renders political subjectivity into little more than a historical moment that is available now only as an object for theoretical contemplation, Draper moves back and forth between the seventies and the present, noting the complication of state and uprising. Engaging René Zavaleta Mercado's reflections on dual power, Draper observes that even as dual power figures empowerment and failure, it produced the opportunity for a new concept, the "motley." The standoff between state and proletariat is replaced by an uncoordinated multiplicity, "living residues from different historical modes of production that coexist without canceling each other out." Appearing as statal and as popular, the motley disrupts the unity of either side even as it maintains the division associated with dual power.

Particularly innovative are Draper's linking of the motley to the commons and her locating of the contemporary question of communism at the site of this linkage. How is a commons built from the motley? Draper explains, "the problem is how the communal forms of organization can relate to a state that moves within the horizon of capital accumulation, attempting to limit the modes in which it operates" (this issue). Draper's bold posing of the problem advances the discussion of communism beyond the romance of the local. Drawing on Raquel Gutiérrez, she emphasizes that even as the turn toward the commons decenters the state, it nonetheless provides a strategy for reorganizing state relations, for treating the state as an effect and figuring it as a practical problem. So conceived, the state sheds the unitary, cohesive, and centralized features for which it came under criticism in the sixties and seventies.

## Subject

The contributions from James Martel and Banu Bargu share with Draper an emphasis on division. Martel locates the divergent multiplicity Draper associates with the motley in capitalism itself. He finds within the pages of *Capital* a dynamic and contentious working class. Neither uniform nor unified, workers cooperate because capital forces them to: "the coming together of the working class is contingent, unwanted, and traumatic" (Martel, this

issue). The division of function in machines repeats as a division within and between workers. The capitalism that brings them together divides them; hence division is what they have in common. Division is the very basis of the subjectivity of the proletariat. Bargu brings out the same point as she emphasizes the political subjectification of antagonism. Rather than identifying or presuming class unity, the challenge is to recognize division “as the foundational tenet of a political grouping and to politicize it toward the constitution of a new collectivity” (Bargu, this issue). Martel and Bargu thus highlight what Clover and Benanav miss in their treatment of the proletariat as an organic unity. Class belonging is not the most significant feature of proletarians, nor is the unicity of their interests in an automatism of their politics. On the contrary, as Martel writes, “the labor process connects workers, but it does not override them with some organic wholeness” (this issue). Put in the terms of Martel’s (2011) theorization of the fetish, Clover and Benanav fetishize an illusory wholeness by failing to acknowledge the constitutive role of division.

As a consequence, Clover and Benanav’s critique of the party form misses its target. According to Marx, the capitalist cycle of creative destruction is brought to an end by the proletariat, not by the working class organized as *workers*—they are already organized as workers in the factory, which enables them to become conscious of their material conditions and the need to combine into unions. In Marx’s view, the abolition of capitalism depends on the organization of the class as a *party*, a solidary political association that cuts across workplace, sector, region, and nation. The working class, *as a class*, is implicated in the success or stability of capitalism; capitalism configures its struggles with the bourgeoisie. In contrast, the party takes as *its* horizon capitalism’s supersession in communism. The party is necessary because class struggle is not simply economic struggle; it is political struggle.<sup>1</sup> Bargu makes the point via a provocative enlisting of Carl Schmitt: “class positions do not seamlessly translate into political groupings.”

Consider the famous passage from “The German Ideology”: “We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of affairs” (120). How should we understand this? Not as immediate insurrection or as prefiguration but rather as *the expansion of voluntary cooperation*. Marx and Engels (1994b) explain that “the conditions of this movement [we call communism] result from premises now in existence.” The premises they are referring to involve the multiplication of productive force through the cooperation of different individuals as this cooperation is determined by the division of labor and not as an effect of people’s united power. Abolishing deter-

mination by the division of labor is a matter of *self-conscious collective action* wherein cooperation is not forced or out of our control but is instead willed commonly. Cooperation and concentration come to be self-conscious and willed rather than unconscious and determined. Instead of being brought together on the basis of immediate material needs that can only be met through the selling of their labor power, people join in solidary political struggles wherein common interest takes the place of self-interest. As the movement which abolishes the present state of affairs, communism expands *voluntary* cooperation.

In capitalist society, this expansion of *voluntary* as opposed to compulsory cooperation happens through the party. Multiplying fragmented local actions is not enough—they have to be legible as counterpower, felt as more than what any one of them can be in isolation. With a common name and as moments of a common struggle, they each become themselves plus all the others. As an organization premised on building solidarity among the divided, the party holds open a political space for the production of a common political will, a will irreducible to the capitalist conditions in which the majority of people find themselves forced to sell their labor power. Whereas work is obligatory, determined, membership in the party is voluntary, the willed formation of united power. Among its members, the party replaces competition with solidarity.

That class struggle is political means it exceeds the affirmation of people as workers with particular interests to include the critical assessment of this position as itself the result of inequality and exploitation. The universality associated with proletarianization indexes this dimension of critique, a dimension expanded over the course of the twentieth century as a critical gaze became a feature of different social positions. As Žižek unceasingly insists, the gaze is part of the field it sees. There is no point of pure description uninflected by the describing (especially when the describing picks its adornments here and there from an array of manufacturing statistics provided by the state and corporations, as occurs in the quarterly reports of investment advisers as well as the contribution from Clover and Benanav).

The party is more than an outgrowth or extension of labor unions. This should be uncontroversial given the importance of the peasantry in communist parties as well as the wide variety of groups founded and infiltrated by communist parties, for instance, newspapers, orchestras, women's clubs, and youth associations. The party's politics have never been reducible to a program for seizing and preserving production, notwithstanding Clover and Benanav's repetition of the critical gesture of the "long sixties."

The party is a political form for abolishing capitalism and ushering in communism. Toscano's exploration of the problem of transition makes clear that this is no simple task. The party occupies the place of division, holding it open for a new collective political subject. For classical Marxism this was the proletariat; in *The Communist Horizon*, I argue for the people as the rest of us—in each instance, though, subjectification is a possibility, not an empirical given. At different points over the past hundred years, the party has attempted to abolish capitalism and usher in communism in various ways: revolutionary seizure of the state, state management of production, participation in parliamentary processes, training of cadres and education of masses in order to be prepared when the time comes. The Communist Party has never been simply an organization aimed at achieving a set of economic reforms that would restrain capitalism's extremes and provide workers with welfare guarantees. It is no wonder that communists express a justified sense of betrayal when their parties compromise and retreat. They feel betrayed because the party gave way on communist desire, the very desire its wide array of organizations hold open, the desire underpinning solidarity and comradeship.

### Party

Thus far I have drawn out the problematics of history and subject as aspects of the unfolding discussion of communist organization. I have emphasized a view of the subject in terms of its division and its collectivity, a view that has itself arisen historically in contexts of critique, struggle, capitalist adaptation, and political experimentation. In so doing, moreover, I have crossed into the third problematic, the party, as the form historically available as a body for the communist subject under capitalist conditions. I conclude by drawing out a few of the key critical insights regarding the party form raised by symposium contributors.

Observing the “hybrid” constellation of the movements and protests of 2011 and beyond, Mezzadra and Neilson point out that the party was not a leading political form in these struggles. The form that struggles will come to take is an open question. Walker provides the best response to this assertion in his recounting of Badiou's rejoinder to Deleuze: an analysis insisting on hybridity imagines “that exposing this multiplicity allows one out of the practice of partisanship” (this issue). The point is not whether our situation is open or determined; it is about which tendencies we might support and push and why, knowing full well that there are no guarantees. With regard to

the movements of 2011, we must also take into account the points at which they foundered, that is to say, the movements' own self-critique with respect to the disjuncture between the rhetorics of horizontality and the fact of leadership. In Occupy, this has been expressed in the devolution of the movement back into the fragmented affinity groups characteristic of the alter-globalization movement. In Egypt, it has resulted in the seizure of the revolution by the most organized, namely, the Muslim Brotherhood. The problematic of the party, then, is not a matter of finding in new locations conditions resembling those out of which German Social Democracy arose (Clover and Benaviv), nor is it one of determining the political affiliation of influential movement actors in contemporary contexts (Mezzadra and Neilson). Rather, as Smith powerfully explains, it involves the anticipation of "a moment when this proliferation of struggles will begin to seek both an intensification in the content of their demands as well as an urgent need to find the key to their coordination and take on a *consistency*" (this issue).

Mezzadra and Neilson's reservations with respect to the party form nevertheless index the crucial matter of the state. For them, the issue is not the old problem of a party becoming authoritarian as it takes hold of the state apparatus. Rather, it is the opposite: "the state is *not powerful enough* to confront contemporary capitalism" (this issue; italics in the original). Although they do not link their discussion to the classic problem of "socialism in one country" and thereby acknowledge this historical continuity in the question of statal politics for communism, Mezzadra and Neilson's attunement to changing governmental forms and patterns of regional integration is significant (it is worth noting in this regard that the old Soviet bloc also involved regional integration and a rejection of state sovereignty). Together with Walker's emphasis on globality, it incites us to think and act in terms that treat the tight global interconnections of capitalist supply chains and interstate forms of cooperation as political opportunities. Perhaps the weakest links in contemporary capitalism should be approached not in terms of a nation-state's level of development (as if there were a uniform path of global development), but in terms of degrees of interconnection. Here, tactical goals might involve the disruption of hubs, central nodes, and exchanges.

Smith, in this issue, also emphasizes the party form's "vexed relation to the question of state power." He inserts a division between the party as an organization for insurrection and the party as an instrument for the transition to communism and dismantling of the state. This distinction is a useful one, helpful in its separating out of times and tasks. Nevertheless, in the setting of current political movement in the United States, United Kingdom,

and European Union, Smith's anxiety with respect to tendencies of the party to fuse with the state after a seizure of power appears to me to be misplaced, displaced from the more pressing problems of organizing a Left weakened by forty years of capitalist restoration of extreme inequality. The economy collapsed in 2008, and where was the communist, even the socialist, Left? Dispersed among the anarchists and worrying about having *too much* state power? To make party-state merging a problem facing a Left still incapable of coordination and consistency repeats the critique from the "long sixties" in a location where it no longer applies, buttressing ongoing Left incapacity. It is an anticipatory gesture rooted in a determinist account of history as if we, in new movement, had no choice but to reproduce the authoritarianism of the twentieth century.

With Badiou, Smith reads the present as a time of riots, linking it to the 1850s, a time anterior to the party. Putting aside the empirical and methodological questions of riots—Are there really *more* today? Are these riots globally everywhere the same? Are political demonstrations and revolts well described as riots? Would it not be more accurate to treat the *police* as the rioters in Tahrir Square, Zuccotti Park, and Gezi Park?—the problem with this equation is that it repeats the very gesture of neoliberalism as the political form of capitalist resurgence: the erasure of 150 years of struggle. Precisely because of these struggles there are ideals, practices, and even victories on which we can and should draw. Smith says that a politics of the street is "first and foremost defined by its distinction from and even antagonistic contempt for the juridical sphere." I disagree. Not only is engagement with police a key component of street politics, but it is inseparable from a wide array of legal rights and regulations. From rules of property and ownership, rights of access and assembly, and standards of reasonable force to the violation of these rules, rights, and standards by protesters and police and the resulting documenting, contesting, and adjudicating, the fact of 150 years of people's struggle is inscribed in legal codes. Fighting through and over these codes necessarily accompanies (in ways that often redirect and dilute) street-level struggle.

Smith also views the politics of the street as materially separated from the workplace. This, too, misdirects our attention into a time of separation between work and life ill-suited to our communicative capitalist present when boundaries between work and leisure have become diluted. Connected by networked devices, some are never not at work. Media traces of our political (not to mention creative, ordinary, and social) experiences are put to work for capital as so much free labor and free content for intermediaries like

Google, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. It is not even necessary to shift to the digital to recognize the street as a workplace—for cleaners, delivery services, taxi and bus drivers, construction workers, police officers, prostitutes, drug dealers, food vendors, purveyors of designer knockoffs, dog walkers, and others. My point, again, is not to lose the advances of the last 150 years in which we learned through struggle to recognize the imbrications of work and life. A politics of separation from the workplace is certainly *not* the innovation of the recent “politics of the street.” Rather, the innovation consists in the realization through direct action out-of-doors of the commonalities of political struggles that had appeared only as singular, fragmented, and local.

Walker, in this issue, brings in the work of Lucio Magri to call attention to the need for a new communist identity. At stake here is more than an imaginary identity, more than how we imagine ourselves. Centuries of communist struggle offer up multiple figures for such imagining: peasants, industrial workers, saboteurs, Bolsheviks, Red Guards, guerrillas, and Black Panthers as well as Spartacus, Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Mao, and Che. Rather than an imaginary identity, organizational forms such as the party provide the locus for symbolic identity, a structure or platform that functions as a frame for disagreement as it supplies that place from which we judge ourselves. Instead of associating this symbolic location with an identity, I suggest we think of it as a name in common, a name we struggle over as well as share (see *Not An Alternative* 2012). An advantage to thinking in terms of a common name rather than an identity is that it maintains the space between what we are called and what we are such that no one voice or tendency can present itself as the total embodiment of communism. Bargu, in this issue, observes that a partisan form of sovereignty (a sovereignty of the people understood as divided and non-all) “requires positive generators of identity” to guard against becoming stuck in the exceptional politics of violence. A name in common is not a failsafe measure for preventing such exceptional violence. Yet as the platform for a site of collective struggle for communism rather than a signifier with claims of mastery, it could provide a container for multiple such “generators of identity.”

Bargu’s contribution also suggests the relevance of the idea of sovereignty for a communist critical theory. Her close reading of Schmitt makes her well attuned to the risks both of sovereignty and of attempts to deny or avoid it. One of the provocative questions she poses concerns the potential for a cycle of enmity. If, as I argue, division is constitutive for communist subjectivity, are we not left with a politics that requires the constant generation of enemies? A possible solution might be found in the recognition of

communism as a substantive notion of justice (rather than a procedural one). The very principle of from each according to ability, to each according to need points to a material arrangement of production, consumption, and distribution that itself becomes a site of struggle. In a way, the enemy is us, our own systems and structures, legacies of oppression and exploitation, tendencies to self-focus and preferential attachment.

To summarize: the idea of communism pushes toward the organization of communism. This push manifests itself in three problematics that have arisen as key sites of contestation and inquiry. The problematic of history has advanced from its prior tribunal phase. It now involves not just sequence and periodization—where are we with respect to a given cycle of struggles?—but attunement to the settings that turn some questions into the ones worth asking. Noting the continued resonance of the “long sixties” in communist critical theory, I have sought to historicize present critiques of state and party by situating them in the broader turn to the social that characterizes the political assumptions of the radical Left. This historicization helps illustrate the gap between then and now. Our problems are not those of centralized welfare states and a Left dominated by hierarchical party organizations; they are of fragmented and dispersed oppositional elements and a global capitalism reliant on state and interstate support. The problematic of the subject takes up questions of the material conditions of communism, the possibilities for revolt, and organized abolition and replacement of capitalism. Here the recognition of division becomes crucial as a reminder that the subject of politics is never fully given, fully unified, or fully knowing. The problematic of the party persists in the overlap of history and subject. Because history does not give over its subjects clear and ready-made, they have to be produced—in settings they neither predict nor choose. The primary organizational question, then, is what might a party look like for us? What features might install in it the necessary discipline, flexibility, and consistency necessary for building communist power?

### Notes

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- 1 See the discussions of the party form in Dean 2013; Peter D. Thomas, “The Communist Hypothesis and the Question of Organization”; Gavin Walker, “The Body of Politics: On the Concept of the Party”; Jason E. Smith, “Contemporary Struggles and the Question of the Party: A Reply to Gavin Walker”; and Gavin Walker, “Limits and Openings of the Party: A Reply to Jason E. Smith.”

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