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Between Extraction and Exploitation: On Mutations in the Organization of Social Cooperation

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Whatever happened to the concept of exploitation? There was a time in the not too distant past when labor politics drew its strength and energy from the reality of exploitation in the workplace. It was the age of the industrial worker in which the search for the "hidden abode of production" veiled by markets and contracts promised to unleash a revolutionary class struggle. The transformations of the composition of living labor and dramatic shifts in the workings of capital in the last decades seem to have displaced exploitation from the center of politics and theory. On the one hand, to recall the terms of a famous discussion between Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser (2003), the politics of "recognition" has given priority to matters of identity and culture in the development of social movements, while on the other hand the question of "redistribution" has become increasingly framed in terms of social policies and welfare state crisis. The current discussion within the left in many parts of the world reproduces the opposition between "identity" and "interest" in forms that include multiple variants of a "left populism" that often takes "class" as a kind of objective and trans-historical notion (see Mezzadra and Neumann 2017). Beyond occasional rhetorical invocations, exploitation does not really play an important role here, either from the angle of identity or from that of interest. We are convinced that this is a severe limitation of this debate and that a rethinking of the concept of exploitation is a crucial theoretical and political task for the left today. In this article we work from within Marxist theory on exploitation in order to go beyond Marx in fashioning a concept of exploitation adequate to contemporary operations of capital and forms of labor organization.

We undertake this task against the background of a larger research project, which aims to shed light on the workings of contemporary capitalism from the viewpoint of three strategically important domains of economic activity: logistics, finance, and extraction (see Mezzadra and Neilson 2013b, 2015 and 2017). What interests us beyond the analysis of concrete developments within these "sectors" is to produce resonances among them in order to discern an operative logic that cuts

across logistics, finance, and extraction. We forge the concept of "operations of capital" to establish a vantage point from which to analyze such a logic. At the same time, we attempt to reframe the Marxian notion of *Gesamtkapital* ("aggregate capital") to understand the ways in which specific operations come to occupy a position of command in its composition. Through this notion, we also seek to trace the articulation of capital within wider and variegated formations of capitalism. What we emphasize in our analysis is that it is not only in extraction but also in logistics and finance that capital's operations are increasingly characterized by an *extractive* logic. This is a point that has recently been made both with respect to logistics (Tsing 2012) and with respect to finance (Sassen 2014; Hardt and Negri 2017). Working through the Latin American debates on "neo-extractivism," but also keeping in mind the relevance of "data mining," for instance in the development of "platform capitalism" (Srnicek 2016), we forge an expanded notion of extraction that allows us to demonstrate how an extractive logic permeates contemporary capitalism writ large, placing the state under duress and raising the question of the articulation and orchestration of heterogeneous operations of capital under the command of extractive operations (see also Gago and Mezzadra 2015).

The latter point is particularly important to us. While we emphasize the relevance of capital's extractive operations and their prominent position in contemporary capitalism, our reading of the notion of *Gesamtkapital* cautions us toward reducing them to contemporary capital as a whole. We rather show how the prominence of extraction is structurally linked to a further increase and intensification of what we called in a previous work "multiplication of labor" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013a, chapter 3). This is a concept that we use to make sense of the processes of heterogenization of the composition of living labor that must build the backdrop of any investigation of and reflection of class nowadays. Our focus on operations of capital is therefore at the same time a focus on the changing composition of living labor. And it leads us to stress the increasingly complex nature of that exploitation that continues to be the "secret" of the valorization and accumulation of capital even in its most ethereal forms and which must therefore be given center stage in any political project of liberation. Just think of the mundane experience of taking out a mortgage. What does the specific capitalist actor that deploys such an operation exploit? Simply put, the labor of the mortgagee, to be performed in the future to repay the debt. But this labor can take place in whatever form, more often than not involving other capitalist actors and operations (ranging from industrial to illegal) that exploit the mortgagee according to a logic that can be very different than the extractive one of the financial operation.

It is important to note that while literally extractive operations of capital (for example in mining, or in extensive agriculture) target goods that can be defined as "common," the operations of logistics and finance ultimately draw value from the exploitation of social cooperation. One of the main points at stake in our investigation, which is driven by an analysis of contemporary social struggles, is precisely to understand the gaps, the tensions, and the frictions between social cooperation and the embodied and grounded experience of living labor. These gaps, tensions, and frictions must be reflected in any attempt to rethink the concept of exploitation and are at the same time crucial to grasping the potentialities and difficulties of a political subjectivation of labor – of a class politics adequate to the challenges of the present. In this article we begin by revisiting the Marxian notion of exploitation. First we analyze the relations between exploitation on the one hand, dispossession, power, and domination on the other. A focus on gender and race is particularly important in this regard. We turn in a second section to analyze the Marxian notion of "co-operation" from the point of view of the intertwining of the individual and collective dimensions of labor and exploitation. We conclude with a more political section, focused upon the possibility and limits of a ("reformist") project of "normalization" of exploitation and of a class politics today.

1. In the semantic field of exploitation

In the opening sentence of his entry on *Ausbeutung* ("exploitation") for the *Historisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus* Johannes Berger (1994, 736) stresses the semantic and etymological connection between exploitation and extraction. "Originally," he writes, the word *Ausbeutung* "was meant to designate the extraction of mineral resources in ore, coal mines etc." It is important to keep in mind this link between the concept of exploitation and the world of extraction. One can find several traces of this link in Marx's *Capital*, particularly where the "production of surplus value" is equated with the "extraction of surplus labor" (Marx 1977, 411). This semantic proximity to extraction points to a crucial aspect of Marx's understanding of exploitation—that is, the constitutive role of the violence that operates in silent but nevertheless compelling ways at the juncture between the labor and valorization processes whose unity makes up the process of production in a capitalist society. We know that for Marx exploitation is not a violation of formal rules of justice or some kind of trick used by capitalists to take advantage of workers. It is rather predicated on a "fair" labor contract, taking place according to a logic different from, although articulated to, the logic and rationality of law. Without dismissing the relevance of the legal concept of exploitation that has become entrenched in several national legislations and in international human rights law with regard to such topics as human trafficking, sex work, or child labor, our use of the notion is close to Marx's original intentions.

We are aware of the multiple problems that haunt Marx's theory of exploitation, ranging from its constitutive connection with his labor theory of value to the rigid distinction it presupposes between productive and unproductive labor—as well as between production and reproduction (see, for instance, Berger 1994 and Balibar 2012). These limits were tested in a specific and interesting—although for us problematic—way from the early 1980s within so-called analytic Marxism and most notably by the work of John Roemer (1982; 1984; for a critique see Dymski and Elliott 1988). We are not interested here in providing a full-fledged defense of Marx's position, since we have already taken a critical distance from some of its aspects. What we want rather to emphasize is the specificity of a notion of exploitation predicated upon an analysis of the dramatic gap between the capacity of subjects to produce, the use (or non-use) of this capacity, and the accumulation of wealth outside these subjects' control. The concept of exploitation is rooted in the materiality of the production of subjectivity, it works the boundary between the two meanings of the genitive in this phrase, which means between the exploitation of the subjective productive power and the forging of figures of subjectivity that facilitate exploitation (see Read 2003, 102).

There is no need here to reconstruct the contours of Marx's theory of exploitation – from the stipulation of a contract between the "bearer" of money and the "bearer" of labor power to the shift from the sphere of circulation to the "hidden abode of production," where these two *dramatis personae* shed the mask of the juridical person to confront themselves as capitalist and worker. "The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business," Marx famously writes; "the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but – a tanning" (Marx 1977, 280). The result is the institution of the working day or a limited and repeated stretch of time in which the appropriation by the capitalist of an amount of value produced by the worker without paying any "equivalent" (the appropriation of *surplus value*) defines exploitation.

Starting with this basic definition we can easily see that exploitation is connected to a whole set of other concepts that occupy its semantic field and are part and parcel of its workings. This is particularly the case with the notion of *dispossession*, which in the wake of David Harvey's influential formulation often tends to be opposed, even beyond Harvey's original intentions, to the concept of exploitation (see Harvey 2003). Once we disentangle the latter from the narrow paradigm of the exploitation of "free" wage labor in the factory system described by Marx in *Capital*, it becomes clear that a moment of dispossession, or expropriation, is inherent to the very nature of exploitation. Marx himself stresses the relevance of this moment among the historical processes that led to the appearance of labor power as a commodity on the market as a basic

condition for the existence of capitalism. “And this one historical pre-condition,” he adds, “comprises a world’s history” (Marx 1977, 274). This is the world’s history that Marx investigates in his analysis of the “so-called primitive accumulation” at the end of *Capital*, volume 1. But it is important to stress that his theory of exploitation takes labor power as *given*. Going beyond Marx here, we think that it is important to include the production and reproduction of labor power, with the effects of dispossession that are often connected with these processes, in the very concept of exploitation, while recognizing them as crucial fields of social struggle. Stressing the relevance of the production and reproduction of labor power further compels us to take into account, following a long tradition of feminist critique, the crucial role of the sexual division of labor in shaping the conditions of exploitation (see Weeks 2011).

As far as *power* and *domination* are concerned, they come into play with the multifarious coercive techniques and the panoply of normative arrangements that rule and direct the capacity of subjects to produce—putting it at the disposal of others. The very existence of the labor market, of this absolutely peculiar market is predicated upon specific technologies of power that articulate the moment of compulsion brilliantly epitomized by Marx in his analysis of the double sense in which the proletarian is “free” – free to sell labor power and “completely denudated,” “stripped of any objectivity” as he writes in the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973, 295-296). The operations of gender and race as crucial and contested domains for the production of subjectivity are crucially important in this regard since they intervene in the fabrication of the bodies that are constructed as exploitable bearers of labor power. This is another important point in which we need to go beyond Marx. In fact he effectively emphasizes that the peculiarity of labor power lies in the fact that it is inseparable from the body, from the “living personality, of a human being” (Marx 1977, 270), but he tends to posit the body as a *neutral* container of labor power. While a long history of social struggles (particularly anti-racist and feminist struggles) have challenged this assumption and politicized the body, we have become aware of the fact that the ways in which the body is fabricated plays a crucial role in the relation of the individual “human being” to his or her labor power. From this angle, race and gender cannot be considered as “secondary” factors with respect to class and rather need to be recognized as constitutive of any theory of exploitation (see for instance Federici 2012 and Roediger 2017).

Moreover, there is a clear link between exploitation and *alienation*, which goes well beyond the instance of the reification and literal alienation of labor power by means of the legal device of the contract understood by Marx as basis of “free” wage labor. This link rather refers more generally to the missing control by producing subjects of the objective conditions of their lives and labor, of the

combination of their forces and capacities to produce within larger assemblages, where social cooperation meshes with machines, control devices, algorithmic protocols, and logistical coordination systems (see Carver 2008). It is within these larger assemblages that exploitation ultimately operates and enables the accumulation of wealth and capital. As we will show in the next section Marx is well aware of this problem, which he analyzes from the angle of the organization of the combination of individual workers' forces, of cooperation in the factory. But the question of alienation in this specific sense is even more pronounced today in a situation in which social cooperation that has long smashed the walls of the factory and is often organized, coordinated, and exploited through algorithmic operations.

Matters of measure and calculation figure prominently in Marx's theory of exploitation and in successive Marxist debates on the topic. Although he recognizes the relevance and productive force of cooperation in the factory, it is important to emphasize that the blueprint for Marx's understanding of exploitation is the relationship between an individual bearer of labor power and an individual owner of money, which means an individual capitalist. It is with respect to this relationship between individuals, mediated by a "free" contract that is also an act of mutual, dialectical recognition, that exploitation emerges as an appropriation (without corresponding any equivalent) of the value produced during a period of labor time that exceeds the "socially necessary labor time" required to reproduce the value of (the individual's) labor power.

Nevertheless, as we already pointed out, this theory of exploitation is predicated upon a set of conditions that by far exceed the individual dimensions of the relationship. But also independently of the historical processes that lead to the production of labor power as a commodity, the value of this commodity, which regulates the extension of "socially necessary labor time," is far from being an objective parameter, existing outside of the development of the drama of exploitation. It is rather crucially determined by what Marx calls "a historical and moral element," which means by the "level of civilization attained by a country" and more specifically by "the habits and expectations with which the class of free workers has been formed" (275). These elusive aspects become politicized by workers' struggles for wages. We are convinced that it is important to emphasize even more than Marx does the instability of measure in the domain of the theory of exploitation, both in order to acknowledge the power of workers in challenging any "measure" of exploitation (as well as its necessary parameter, which means "abstract labor") and in order to take into account the element of excess with respect to any measure that distinguishes contemporary forms of social cooperation as eminent targets of capitalist exploitation.

2. Co-operation

As we have already noted, Marx's critique of capitalist exploitation takes primary aim not at extraordinary conditions of violence or injustice in the workplace but rather at the normal and efficient functioning of capitalism. The moment of violence, so to speak, comes after the moment of "free" exchange between capitalist and worker, even if we should heed the lessons of "global labor history" in challenging the presentation of "free" wage labor as a capitalist norm (Van der Linden 2008). In controlling and using the worker's labor power, the capitalist inserts the worker into a labor process that is by its nature cooperative. Let us first highlight the salient features of Marx's analysis of cooperation before exploring some of the limits confronted by this analysis in the face of the operations of contemporary capital.

In the framework of a grounded analysis of the combined organization of labor in the large-scale industry of his time, Marx reframes philosophical and political problems that continue to haunt discussions of the concept of cooperation—ranging from the empowering effect of "mere social contact" to the very conditions for the emergence of a collective subject (see Mezzadra 2014, chapter 7). Crucial to his investigation of the "special productive power of the combined working day" (of the "social productive power of labor, or the productive power of social labor") is precisely this latter question of the production of a collective subject. "When the worker cooperates in a planned way with others," Marx writes, "he strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of his species" (Marx 1977, 447).

This potentially enhancing and liberating experience develops in Marx's analysis under the exclusive and "despotic" command of capital. In the *Grundrisse*, we read: "All social powers of production are productive powers of capital, and it appears as itself their subject. The association of the workers, as it appears in the factory, is therefore not posited by them but by capital. Their combination is not *their* being, but the *being* (*Dasein*) of capital. *Vis-à-vis* the individual worker, the combination appears accidental. He relates to his own combination and cooperation with other workers as *alien*, as modes of capital's effectiveness" (Marx 1973, 585). A radical split traverses the subjectivity of workers, who are at once incorporated into a collective body and separated from its social productive power, which is crystallized in and represented by "the powerful will of a being outside them, who subjects their activity to his purpose" (Marx 1977, 450). This is because the industrial capitalist entirely performs the organization of cooperation, which means the establishment of the objective conditions of the process that enables the emergence of the new, collective subjectivity of labor.

Marx sets out firstly to show that the accidental differences among individual labor powers are equalized into an "average social quality" (440) that can be taken as a kind of individual statistical

measure. But then he is confronted with the emergence of a social productive power or a "social force" that cannot be considered as "the sum total of the mechanical forces exerted by isolated workers" (443). There is a split between the individual dimension of labor power and the collective use of it in the labor process (see Virno 2008) that produces a differential of force. And since it targets this differential of force, exploitation in capitalism is always "exploitation of a social labor process." The "unavoidable antagonism between the exploiter and the raw material of his exploitation" crisscrosses the fabric of cooperation in the industrial setting analyzed by Marx. While "the number of cooperating workers increases," he writes, "so too does their resistance to the domination of capital, and, necessarily, the pressure put on by capital to overcome this resistance" (449). An unstable system of reciprocal limits emerges out of this parallelogram of forces, which lays the basis both for the further development of antagonism and for what can be called the "normalization" of exploitation (and the ruling out of "over-exploitation") through a dialectical process of recognition between capital and labor (see Balibar 2012). Marx's analysis of the "struggle for the normal working day" in *Capital* (389-416) can be read as a kind of blueprint for such a limitation and normalization of exploitation. To this one may add that the history of recent decades has shown the instability and historical contingency of this process.

While Marx's conceptual and empirical description of cooperation remains challenging and in many ways inspiring, we need at this stage of our analysis to underscore once more its historical conditions and limitations. When we talk of social cooperation as the main productive force in the present we have in mind something different from Marx's factory system. The split between the individual and social aspects of labor power is exploited in the factory system by the same capitalist through the whole set of operations at his/her disposal. Such an exploitation of productive cooperation continues to be performed and to shape laboring lives in a wide array of worksites in many parts of the world. Nevertheless, what marks the distinctiveness of the current situation is the fact that even these laboring lives, which means even the conditions and exploitation of traditional industrial workers, are influenced and altered by the vertical intervention of other operations of capital—by *extractive* operations of capital. This means that the notion of extraction that we are using in this article cannot be equated with the meaning given to the word by Marx when he speaks of "extraction of surplus value." By analyzing the ways in which financial operations synchronize and command the accumulation of capital and investigating the logistical coordination of social and productive environments and processes, we can single out logics of "drawing" and capture of value that need to be grasped in their specificity.

It is true that Marx himself points to forms of secondary exploitation that take place independently of the extraction of surplus-value in the production process. In the *Grundrisse*, he writes not only of "backward branches of industry" where workers' access to the means of production is conditional on loans extended by interest-bearing capital but also of cases in which interest is generated by loans financing consumption. In both instances, he observes "exploitation by capital without the mode of production of capital" (1973, 853). The latter case of loans contributing to household indebtedness has emerged as the paradigmatic example of financial extraction in current times when such levels of indebtedness have increased significantly, particularly in the Anglosphere countries (see Bryan, Martin and Rafferty 2009). Today such loans are used to finance a variety of forms of consumption—from housing, study, purchasing of goods, and even in the case of a recently reported expansion in credit card debt, health and medical expenses (Silver-Greenberg and Cowley 2017). Finance spreads patterns of volatility and risk across the fabric of economy and society. But any critique of financialization must take account of how it corresponds to a situation in which the heterogeneous composition of labor and social cooperation emerges as the main productive force. From this point of view, the question of the "source" of financial value becomes important. In very general terms, we can define finance, quoting from a recent book by Cédric Durand (2015, 187), as "an accumulation of drawing rights on wealth that is yet to be produced, which takes the form of private and public indebtedness, stock-market capitalization and various financial products." This is not an entirely new story. In his important discussion of finance capital in *Capital*, volume 3, Marx actually provides the basic terms of this definition, stressing the accumulation of "claims or titles" to "future production" as a distinctive feature of the specificity of the financial moment in the series of transformations effected by capital (Marx 1981, 599, 641).

This emphasis on the relevance of the wealth *to be produced in the future* seems crucial to us because it challenges any interpretation of finance as self-referential, of financial capital as merely fictitious and opposed to productive capital. Highlighting the crucial role played by financial operations in contemporary capitalism means also stressing the fact that they cannot be abstracted from the promise of future production, which also means from other operations of capital that shape and organize social cooperation according to heterogeneous logics. A compulsion to work (in order to enable future production and to repay the debt) is therefore strictly connected with the spread of debt and indebtedness. And an abstract figure of future cooperation traversed and constricted by this compulsion looms as the main "source" of financial value, regardless of the forms and arrangements that this future cooperation may assume. What is produced and crystallized in financial operations is the measure and the norm of this future cooperation in a situation in which, differently from that pertaining in industrial capitalism, there is no longer a single branch of the

economy or a single standard employment relation that can be taken as a reference for the calculation of the average rate of profit and as a standard for the mediation of the relation between capital and labor.

Similarly, but in a different way, logistical operations of capital point to secondary or indirect processes of exploitation that penetrate the fabric of social cooperation without directly organizing it. In the case of the supply chain operations of a firm like Walmart, processes of logistical coordination correlate the supply of goods from a country like China with modes of transport, branding, procurement, distribution, and consumer demand in outlets spread across the world but primarily quartered in the United States. The spatial stretching of global production systems means that logistical processes definitely have a capacity to shape and guide productive activities. The role of logistics in synchronizing diverse forms of production along supply chains, often only commanding that producers keep their prices as low as possible, means that wealth can be generated through forms of coordination that connect and valorize the relative spatial positioning of different points of production above the methods of production deployed at any one of these points. The logistical moment in the operations of capital assumes an external position with respect to the multiplicity of productive environments and differences that it exploits (although it is important to note that many of these environments are in turn reshaped by logistical arrangements in the organization of labor). It thus becomes possible to speak of a properly extractive dynamics of logistics, since logistical operations exercise a kind of drawing power over diverse labor regimes and meshes of social cooperation that they do not directly organize or mandate. Like the operations of finance, which draw upon a future wealth whose production is forever deferred, logistical operations thus display an extractive dynamic.

Exploitation takes on very specific characteristics once it is considered from the angle provided by these extractive operations of contemporary capital. The gap between the capacity of subjects to produce and the appropriation and distribution of wealth looms large—and beyond any measure—once the huge accumulation of capital (and power) enabled by such operations is considered. While it is becoming more and more difficult to reconstruct exploitation in terms that lead from the daily experience of subordinated individuals or collective groups to the identification of the specific operations of capital (and related capitalist actors) that are concretely responsible for it, the ghost of dispossession increasingly haunts experiences of exploitation. Processes of individualization, competition, and the production of subjectivity under the signs of self-entrepreneurship, human capital, and debt proliferate within these gaps and experiences.

3. The politics of exploitation

Contemporary social struggles attempt to come to grips with this situation, both in cases where the confrontation with a specific figure of capital (or with specific capitalist actors) leads to an encounter with the wider assemblages of capitalism within which its operations are enmeshed and in cases where the metropolitan scale of an uprising is traversed and constituted by extractive operations characterized by a certain degree of elusiveness. In the first instance, we can think of the many recent actions that have confronted the financial or logistical operations of capitalism from the Strike Debt movement in New York to migrant strikes in the Po River Valley. In the second case, we can think of the so-called movements of the squares that swept the world in 2011 and its wake as well as urban conflagrations such as the riots and actions stemming from events in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014.

How is it possible to define the subject of these struggles, their social and political composition? Is the concept of class a working tool that allows us to grasp the heterogeneity and shifting nature of the convergences of forces that are manifest in today's most significant struggles at the global level? We tend to agree with Göran Therborn that this is definitely not the case if we work with a traditional understanding of class as a "structural category to be filled with 'consciousness.'" In the present, class rather becomes "a compass of orientation—towards the classes of the people, the exploited, oppressed and disadvantaged in all their variety" (Therborn 2012, 26). The compass of class not only allows recognition of "the inhuman, abstract and unearthly reductions forced onto people and planet" by capitalism (Dyer-Witheford 2015, 8). It also cuts through the composition of social cooperation and directs our attention towards the crucial junctions of its articulation where exploitation becomes visible and embodied in the lives, joys, and pains of specific subjects. The struggles that erupt at these junctions are potential moments of politicization of social cooperation since they point at radical fractures that the operations of capital inscribe into its fabric. It is precisely where the singular, grounded, and lived experience of living labor, which means the subjective use of the capacity to produce, becomes concatenated and networked with other subjective uses of that capacity, that exploitation operates in its most violent although often elusive forms nowadays. Contrary to the argument of Karl Polanyi, exploitation is far from being reducible to an "economistic prejudice" or to the "inadequacy of ratios of exchange" (Polanyi 2001, 166). It rather splits the field of subjectivity, articulating its diverse forms in ways that correspond to the heterogeneity of the operations of contemporary capital and give rise to struggles that penetrate the very composition of living labor in its social and cooperative dimensions.

Against the background of the contemporary landscape of social struggles, we ask whether it is possible to imagine and politically organize a social counter-movement to the debordering of

market relations in a way consistent with Polanyi's theory. Because Polanyi's approach assumes an organic notion of society beyond class division, interrogating the possibility of such a counter-movement means asking important questions about the chances and limits of a reformist project in the present situation. The normalization of exploitation as an outcome of the dialectic between capital and labor can be considered a pretty accurate definition of historical reformism. From the angle of our discussion of the extractive characteristics of contemporary capitalism, we contend that such normalization is highly problematic today. This is because crucial dimensions of exploitation operate precisely in an extractive mode, beyond any measure and dialectic. The huge degree of power that is connected to the accumulation of capital enabled by such operations requires the formation of a counter-power adequate to confront capital in directly antagonistic terms. The boundary between reform and revolution seems to be blurred today, and one could even say that radical political action is the condition for the very possibility to test the effectiveness of a reformist project. This is a problem that has been recently tested in many parts of the world with reference to Polanyi. Writing of workers' insurgency and wildcat strikes in the Pearl River Delta, Eli Friedman raises the question regarding the possibility of such a counter-movement in contemporary China. He identifies the main obstacle in the absence or weakness of "independent workers' organizations," as well as in the peculiar history and structure of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (Friedman 2014, 162). "Whether or not dispersed worker insurgency will create enough political pressure to force changes in the union" is for Friedman a crucial variable for the future of labor (166). But the prospects for a reformist path in China also depend on the state's response to workers' mobilizations and on the position of labor within the state itself. These are questions that, alongside the issue of the capacity of unions to provide a general representation of labor, do not regard only China.

The most relevant social struggles of recent years, starting with the global cycle of occupations in 2011 and including such an important instance as the extraordinary movement against the *loi travail* in the long spring of 2016 in France, seem to be characterized by a radical quest for a direct political articulation, through the invention of new institutions and forms of organization precisely capable of stabilizing and expressing a counter-power. This is apparent also in the most original and challenging manifestations of social unionism, in the reinvention of the tradition of mutualism that goes hand in hand with the development of struggles for housing or in more and less traditional labor struggles in many parts of the world, notably when casual and precarious workers are involved (De Nicola and Quattrocchi 2016). Even the effectiveness and the conditions of the strike have been tested by social struggles, including by the women's strike that was particularly important in Argentina, Italy, and the U.S. on March 8, 2017. These struggles and mobilizations on

the one hand raise the question of the ways in which the abstention from work can actually lead to the interruption of the valorization of capital and on the other hand point to the need for a sophisticated fabric of infrastructures and even institutional devices that enable the participation in strikes (see Negri 2016). Crucial from both points of view is once again the connection between living labor and social cooperation, and the articulation between the singular experience of exploitation and its commonality (which is also the articulation of the singular use of the capacity to produce and its enmeshment in wider and shifting collective and cooperative arrangements).

Different forms of community building and popular economy, ranging from the establishment of cooperatives to the organization of subsistence networks, tackle the problem of politicizing social cooperation and instituting forms of defense and self-tutelage for the exploited and oppressed. We perfectly know that these forms are not at all free from the predations of capital, and particularly of financial capital. The same is true of experiences of co-working, platform cooperativism, and the sharing economy that attempt to contest, or at least to limit the logic of private appropriation within the field of knowledge-based capitalism or the gig economy. This is because the common emerges here as the main productive force that is exploited by capital. Our own discussion of the gaps and articulation between living labor and social cooperation is to be understood in this sense as a contribution to the ongoing discussion on the common. A theory of exploitation makes sense today only if it can grasp the new dimensions of extraction introduced by the eminent role of the common as a productive force. But the common is not at all a homogeneous or organic subject. It is rather fractured by a multiplicity of fault and boundary lines. It exists in the abstract and mystified figure produced by capitalist exploitation (and is in a way represented on the global financial markets). But, in political terms, it has to be produced and articulated through the hazardous action and struggle of the exploited in order to become the basis of a new democracy that develops in a tense relation with the extractive dimensions of contemporary capitalism. It is from within such a development that struggles against exploitation can open up the space for imagining once again the actuality of communism.

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