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**Key words:** Argentina 2001, austerity, Bloch, Hope, excess, negativity, non-factual reality, prefigurative epistemologies, abstract labour, value.

**Abstract:** This essay discusses negativity as the force underpinning social antagonism, with particular reference to the fleeting moment of hope experienced in Argentina in December 2001. It proposes that *Que se vayan todos* (QSVT) was an act of negation that ventured beyond the capitalist reality of crisis, and opened another dimension that does not correspond to the facts of the recuperation of QSVT by the state in 2003. By engaging with Bloch's notion of 'real as process' the paper problematises 'factual reality' and argues that the 'real as process' informs both the process of valorization of capital and the process of prefiguring a reality that is not-yet. In moments of negation/creation like QSVT, value is confronted by hope. Negation creates an excess that occupies a wide space in the reality of struggle that cannot be appropriated by the state.

## **Too bad for the facts: Confronting Value with Hope**

We must believe in a sense of life ... in which man fearlessly makes himself master of what does not yet exist, and brings it into being...when we speak the word "life", it must be understood we are not referring to life, as we know it from its surface of fact, but to the fragile, fluctuating center, which forms never reach (Artaud 1958/1994: 13)

The Not in origin, the Not-Yet in history,  
The Nothing or conversely the All at the end (Bloch 1959/86: 306)

In this essay, I attempt to open up, circle and problematise negativity as the force underpinning social antagonism, with particular reference to the fleeting moment of

hope experienced in Argentina in December 2001. The Argentine uprising disrupted existing forms of enquiry. For over ten years now, many of us have been thinking about the best ways to understand and appreciate this event. (Colectivo Situaciones 2002, 2012; Dinerstein 2002a; 2005; Sitrin 2006; Zibechi 2003, among others). Here, I interrogate this moment again. What can we discover in the reexamination of this ‘past’ ephemeral moment of *negation* embodied in *¡Que se vayan todos, que no quede ni uno solo!* (QSVT)? Many became disappointed with the fact that, after all, QSVT proved not to be a revolutionary movement in traditional terms. Others enthusiastically embraced the integration of QSVT into the language of the national and popular project led by the Kirchners. In both cases, the negativity of QSVT has got lost in the intricacies of debates about the problems of the political left, the tribulations of autonomous movements vis-à-vis the state, and the development of their struggles. In the Latin America of the pink tide, questions about whether autonomous movements are ‘locked into the position of either supporting or opposing state policy enacted by functionaries who are thought to speak in their names’ (Reyes 2012: 13) are leading the debate. These discussions are apposite in that they engage with the predicaments of contemporary resistance up to certain point. However, they are deceiving for they are rooted in a false dichotomy of seeing social struggles as ineffectual or - alternatively - immanently capable of creating alternative socio-economic paradigms. I propose to move beyond such a dichotomy.

Any form of insubordination is embedded in existing economic and institutional frameworks and contradictions. It emerges and develops within, despite, against and beyond institutions, cultures, politics and systems of meaning, which are always incomplete. The state is a significant mediator in this process, and there is always a risk that radical resistances are reabsorbed into the capitalist synthesis (Holloway 2010). Autonomous movements are compelled to ‘navigate the tensions’ between being integrated into the logics of capitalism and the possibility to move beyond it (Böhm, Dinerstein and Spicer 2010). My question is rather different: Has QSVT opened new horizons and practices, i.e. opened spaces for prefiguring other realities not yet materialized that contest the capitalist reality? I am inspired by Bloch who, in an interview by Michel Löwy, highlighted:

‘the world as it exists is not true. There exists a second concept of truth, which is not positivistic, which is not founded on a declaration of facticity, on

“verification” through the “facts” but which is instead loaded with value (*wertgeladen*)- as, for example, in the concept of “true friend”, ...the kind of storm one finds in a book, a poetic storm, the kind that reality has never witnessed, a storm carried to the extreme, a radical storm and therefore a *true* storm ... And if that doesn't correspond to the facts- and for us Marxists, facts are only reified moments of a process—in that case, *too bad for the facts (um so schlimmer für die Tatsachen)*, as Hegel said in his late period.’ (Bloch, Löwy and Hill, 1976: 37-38, italics in the original)

Has QSVT opened a dimension of the real that does not ‘correspond to the facts’? If so, how can we *grasp* it and engage with it? Critical analyses show that present-day resistances are not merely opposing austerity measures or corporate power, but that antagonism is a node within a complex process of negation and creation of alternative relations and arrangements that assert a dignified life *beyond* capitalism. This means that they are not only challenging the existing matrices of power and socio-political horizons by opposing austerity measures, corrupted politicians, international financial institutions, unemployment, and/or corporate power, but that they are filling voids or rendering exiting alternative ideas, relations, organizations and political alternatives visible: e.g. new forms of production, self-management and cooperative work, non-representational politics, anti-oppressive education, ‘living well’ (*buen vivir*), communal property, economic possibilities. They elicit expansive waves of ideas, feeling, actions that open the horizons of the mind widely. Presently, the ‘not yet’ is prevailing over ‘what it is’ and ‘how can it be improved’. The *idea* that *another world is possible* has become a practical quotidian reality of millions of people. ‘Hope movements’ i.e. movements ‘devoted to contesting development and creating alternative economic arrangements conducive to the pursuit of a dignified life’ (Dinerstein and Deneulin 2012: 585). Not only they find the possibility of another world imaginable but, following Bloch, ‘*simply necessary*, far removed from any formal or real examples, proofs, concessions, premises of its existence, postulated *a priori* in the nature of the thing’ (Bloch 1923/2000: 276). Aníbal Quijano (2009) describes the present condition as ‘probably the first time in the history of the colonial matrix of power that we are not only hopeful toward the future, we are also working toward that future, and we are beginning to build that future, we are at this very moment building it.’ These developments open another dimension of enquiry that has

been only marginally explored, but that is mainly neglected or made invisible not only in much academic knowledge but also in critical analysis of resistance.

### **Factual reality, real possibility, prefigurative epistemologies**

Fisher argues that capitalist realism is constructed as the only possible by suppressing alternative realities. He proposes that ‘one strategy against capitalist realism could involve invoking the Real(s) underlying the reality that capitalism presents to us’ (Fisher, 2009: 18). In an effort to bring about submerged realities, Santos (2006: 23) advises that we should develop both a ‘Sociology of Absences’ and a ‘Sociology of Emergences’. The former can reveal how ‘much of what does not exist in our society... has been actively produced as non-existent’ and, as a result, ‘reality is reduced to what exists’. The latter consists of ‘the symbolic amplification of signs, clues, and latent tendencies that however inchoate and fragmented point to a new constellation of meaning as regard both the understanding and the transformation of the world’ (Santos, 2007: 8). Like this, radical mobilizations like QSVT could be appreciated in terms of the practices and horizons that they bring about beyond both the complexities of debt, bankruptcy, poverty, and financial chaos, repression on the one hand, and existing forms of institutionalisation of class conflict and representational politics.

QSVT ventured beyond the horizons of what exists. But its horizons are not graspable through conventional methods of enquiring and conceptualising reality. Following Bonefeld, conceptualisation that hypothesises about the objective world ‘is able to name and order things but cannot recognise them. In its vulgar version it operates an ethics akin to a cash register –indifferent to its own substance eager to calculate.’ (2009: 128) We need epistemologies that transform immanent critique of capital into a ‘prefigurative moment of social transformation’ (Motta 2011: 181). We must ‘think out of things’ in order to ‘discover their social constitution’ (Bonefeld 2009: 128). This means to problematize ‘factual reality’ and engage with the non-empirical dimension of an open-ended real. This Real would not constitute an ‘objective’ possibility, which according to Bloch is defined ‘on the basis of a mere partial-cognition of its existing conditions, is scientifically to be expected, or at least cannot be discounted’, but represents a *real possibility*, i.e. ‘everything whose conditions in the sphere of the object itself are not yet fully assembled; whether

because they are still maturing, or above all because new conditions –though mediated by existing ones – arise for the entry of the Real’ (Bloch, 1959/86: 196-197). Prefigurative critique requires intuition, emotional intelligence and courage on our side. We are required to adopt ‘as a practice of theorising ... one that tolerates “not knowing” and allows for contingent connections and the hiddenness of unfolding; one that at the same time foregrounds specificity, divergence, incoherence, surplus possibility’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxi). This is a scientific approach that does not searches for ‘true and verifiable facts’ but seeks to reveal and uncover the processes of struggle that underpin facts and the ossified concepts of the social sciences.

### **Non-empirical reality, the abstraction of experience, value and hope**

With a simple statement - ‘no thing could be altered in accordance with wishes if the world were closed, full of fixed, even perfected facts’, Bloch (1959/86: 196) inspires a discussion about the factuality of reality and the objectivity of capitalism. He suggests that ‘facts’ are ‘simply processes, i.e. dynamic relationships in which the Become has not completely triumphed. *The Real is process*; the latter is the widely ramified mediation between present, unfinished past and above all: possible future’ (Bloch, 1959/86: 196-197, my italics). But what provides the *material* foundations for this statement? This question is not addressed directly by Bloch. I contend that the understanding of the *Real as process* (as defined by Bloch) is rooted in the openness and uncertainty of the *process* of valorization of capital. But, as it occurs to scientists who are determined to prove the significance of dark matter for our ungraspable universe, those who intend to prove the existence of a non-factual, non-empirical reality will have to resist disbelief and sometimes discredit. Sohn Rethel explains how his determination to examine the ‘secret identity of the commodity form’:

[it] was so hidden within the bourgeois world that my first naïve attempts to make others see it only had the result that I was given up as a hopeless case. “Sohn Rethel is crazy!” was the regretful and final verdict of my tutor Alfred Weber (brother of Max), who had had a high opinion of me.’ (1977: xiii)

Rethel was pointing at the imperceptible process of valorization of capital that characterise capitalist social relations of exploitation. Weber could not understand his doctoral student's discovery because he had no method to realize and critique the 'inverted world of capital' (Reichelt 2005). In capitalism concrete labour is mediated by and becomes socially realised through its opposite: abstract labour, regardless the concrete form of exploitation of labour (De Angelis 1995). Abstract labour is the specific social form of existence of human practice in capitalist society. The transformation of concrete labour into abstract labour means the expansion of indifference: 'In the relation of labour to capital . . . labour is not this or another labour, but labour pure and simple, abstract labour; absolutely indifferent to its particular specificity, but capable of all specificities' (Marx 1973: 296). De Angelis emphasises the political significance of Marx's abovementioned definition of abstract labour 'as "human labour power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure"' (De Angelis 1995:100). In this definition, human labour power is conceptualized not only in abstraction from 'the concrete determinations of useful labour which constitutes its useful properties' but, more importantly 'abstracting from those concrete determinations of labour which constitute the realm of workers' sensuousness firstly in relation to, and secondly, in the context of that work activity. It means, in other words, to abstract from the lived experience of the workers' (De Angelis 1995: 110).

This process of 'abstraction of experience', i.e. 'capital as such is indifferent to every particularity of its substance, and exists not only as the totality of the same but also as the abstraction from all its particularities, the labour which confronts it likewise subjectively has the same totality and abstraction in itself' (Marx 1993: 296), not only gives consistency to the factuality of capitalism but, more importantly, constitutes a site of struggle. The objectivity of capitalism does not reflect the factual reality of the world: 'what it is' is achieved by reifying 'capital as the subject' (Bonefeld 1995). The process of construction of objectivity is the same process of struggle that take place *as* the abstraction of doing into abstract labour occurs. '*Objectivity is class struggle*' (Tischler 2009: 116). In *Crack Capitalism*, Holloway (2010: 52) exposes the significance of this ongoing and never-ending process of abstraction that underpins the 'close-knit character of social cohesion in capitalist society... a *social synthesis*'. He argues that the struggle against capitalism is a

struggle against this process of abstraction of our human activity (doing) into abstract labour. (Dinerstein 2012)

The abstraction of human activity into a homogeneous and imperceptible substance constitutes the form through which capitalism weaves its *imperceptible* web of social cohesion. This constitutes a non-empirical reality of class struggle that is due to the dual nature of labour in capitalism, i.e. ‘labour is *at once* concrete and abstract...The dual nature of labour in capitalism results in the simultaneous existence of two realities empirical and non empirical reality.’ (Taylor 2002: 104) To account for this duality (concrete and abstract) is fundamental to our understanding of the non-factual aspects of insubordination. Non-factual does not mean spiritual cultural, or immaterial, aspects of life as opposed to the materialistic dimensions of class struggle. It does not mean unfeasible fantasies either (c.f. Wright 2010).<sup>1</sup> It means the *real* possibility of prefiguring a reality that is not yet that, by operating within its non-empirical reality contests the process of valorisation of capital. Bloch’s abovementioned description of facts as ‘simply processes, i.e. dynamic relationships in which the Become has not completely triumphed’ applies to the uncertain process of valorisation of capital, which is not a ‘given’ but depends on the possibility of exploitation of humans and the abstraction of their activity into an homogeneous alien, on daily basis. In short, the real possibility of the not-yet-become inhabits the non-empirical reality of the value form, where the former constitutes a threat to the possibility for the latter to realize. Likewise, the process of valorisation of capital constitutes the reality within which the not yet become is activated and flourishes. At negation, *value is confronted by hope*, for the non-empirical reality of the value creating process *instantly becomes* the *real* possibility of the not-yet-become.

### **QSVT: Negation, the experience of abstraction and excess**

QSVT rejected *stability*. Like austerity, the term ‘stability’ was used to label the neoliberal transformation that took place in Argentina during the 1990s. Stability is a misnomer for a form of the violence of money that was legitimised by a consensus created in the centers of global power after the defeat of both socialist and social democratic projects of the 1970s and 1980s. In Argentina, *stability* was imposed by a series of destabilizing means that ranged from anti-strike decrees, to the de(re)regulation of the labour market, to the commodification of health, the



criminalization of poverty, the creation of the unemployed. The latter were the indispensable conditions for the neoliberal reforms to be implemented and preserved, assured by the pegging of the peso to the dollar. Stability, a form of the violence of money, became a powerful social imaginary constructed on the basis of austerity and repression that drew, among other things, on the previous experience of another form of the violence of money, i.e. hyperinflation, and the anxiety and uncertainty that it creates with its threat of social disintegration (Dinerstein 1999; 2002). Ironically, President Menem's success in the second round for elections, which ratified his destabilising policies, was possible due to the fear for an uncertain future, embodied in the slogan 'me or chaos'. Yet, austerity policies intensify the necessity to subordinate life to the whims of money, to the point of devastation.<sup>2</sup>

Capitalist crises are crises of the 'objectivity' of capital. They make difficult to continue masking the violent processes that underpin what it is usually presented as 'what it is' in the period pre-crisis. Austerity and crises trigger a multiplicity of invisible resistances that might be enacted together in a process of mobilization such as QSVT (or not). As a moment of negation, QSVT *destabilized* stability. It irrupted from within the crisis of stability and promptly portrayed it as its opposite, i.e. as one of the possible forms adopted by the violence of money, as a policy based on the impoverishment of people's lives. As Coole (2000: 231) put it, negativity points to

'the instability of every form and of the contingency of all boundaries. It delivers a radical message that things could be different and that the way they are bounded or limited, divided up and identified, is not ontologically, naturally or normatively given.'

QSVT made apparent how the ongoing process of *abstraction of experience* (as previously defined) that underpins the valorization of capital can be transformed into a fleeting moment of the *experience of abstraction*, that is into a collective realization of being subordinated to the whims of an abstraction, the experience of living in denial, of non-realisation, of frustration. The experience of abstraction produces excess: 'the excess of reality which overflows the unity achieved at the expense of the mutilation that homogeneity implies' (Tischler 2009: 109). QSVT was described *post factum* by those involved in it as a moment of being in possession of ourselves, as making history, as a moment of relief and liberation, a moment of

dignity. We were tempted to feel disappointed with the fact that QSVT did not ‘last’. But can a ‘crack’ be judged for its durability, its impact or what future gains it can promise? As Holloway suggest ‘cracks’ offer a ‘new temporality of rebellion’ that alters our perception of revolution: they are ‘here and now insubordination’ (Holloway 2010: 26) which breaks the form of experience of time imposed by capitalism, homogeneous time, time as ‘duration’ (Holloway 2010: 135). Hope alters the given past–present–future temporalities by articulating the possibility of anticipating the future within the present (Dinerstein and Deneulin 2012: 594-595). Unlike ‘clock time’ (Holloway 2010), QSVT transpired the ‘time of insubordination’ (Tischler 2005). At the time of insubordination, the process of abstraction is interrupted by the utopian function of hope.

In the negation of what exists, QSVT encountered that ‘impetus and a sense of being broken off, a brooding quality and an anticipation of Not-Yet-Become’ (Bloch, 1959/1986: 11-12). Expressed in the subjunctive -the tense of desire, of longing, craving, searching, hoping, QSVT embraced hope, thus evolving into ‘a *yes* that is anchored in *the no* of the *gestus* of the action of dignity as a *mode* of life against death’ (Matamoros 2009: 201, his italics). QSVT was a moment of de mediation, were collective ecstasy rejected capitalist mediations which perform as the ‘guardians of the distance’ between labour and its abstraction, and which shape the forms of social antagonism (e.g. the state, the law, representational politic, policy, money) (Dinerstein 2005) Bloch (1959/86: 315-316, his italics) highlights that

there is definitely utopian present in this, precisely in the sense of begun *abolition of the distance between subject and object*, therefore also of self-abolishing utopian distance itself. *The magnetic needle of intention then begins to sink, because the pole is near*; the distance between subject and object diminishes, as the point of unity dawns pre-consciously, where the two poles of utopian consciousness: dark moment, open adequacy...reach the point, coincide. Accordingly, utopia cannot go any further here, it goes instead into the content of its presence...

And yet, moments of ‘Becomeness’ are unreachable. Bloch argues that ‘[a]s is unfortunately only too evident, what is intendable as such presence, as such

manifested identity does not yet lie anywhere in a Becomeness, but it lies irrefutably in the intention towards it, in the intention which is never demolished...’

### **QSVT beyond translation**

In this essay I did not wish to enquire here whether or why there is an ‘impasse’ of the autonomous organising that emerged against neoliberalism in Argentina 2001 (c.f. Colectivo Situaciones 2012) for was not unforeseen that the two forces that antagonised in the aftermath of December 2001, i.e. the rejection of power, on the one hand, and the elite’s struggle to re-establish order, on the other hand, were ‘resolved’ in the election of Kirchner in April 2003. As the playwright Alfred Jarry once underscored, ‘in a world obsessed with violence, a world in which obscenity flourishes, Ubu is still king’ (cited by Cooper 1974: 72). To be sure, the autonomy that emerged with QSVT constitute an (im)possible endeavour (Böhm, Dinerstein and Spicer 2010) for each process bears the tension between being recuperated by power or rebel against and beyond it. During and after QSVT, neighbours gathered in popular assemblies, Piquetero workers, human rights activists from H.I.J.O.S., workers who had occupied their factories, among others, had to necessarily faced the capitalist reality. They engaged in multiple struggles in, against and beyond the state, corporate power, the law, policy, and development discourses for state policy, money, legislation and policy. These resulted in repressions, expulsions, resistances as well as co-optations, appropriations and translations of QSVT that recuperated it into the national and popular project led by the Kirchners.

Appropriation repositioned QSVT as a rejection of wrong (neoliberal) policies and as a set of demands for democracy, human rights, welfare and income distribution. Hence, the negativity/hope that inhabited QSVT were erased from the official account of the event. The ‘translation by erasure’ (Vázquez, 2010) of QSVT was the outcome of intense process of struggle that culminated with the arrival of Kirchner in power, which had at its apex the massacre of the Piquetero activists Maximiliano Kosteki and Darío Santillán, from the Unemployed Workers Coordinadora Aníbal Verón (CTDAV) in June 2002 in Greater Buenos Aires. While this paved the way for the rephrasing of QSVT, it rendered visible the struggle for and against *translation* and demonstrated that collective actions directed to ‘shape absences’ have no representation in the grammar of the state institutions and power.

The impossibility to decode the Piqueteros' struggle for *dignified* work into a demand for *decent* work as in the programme led by the International Labour Organization (see Dinerstein 2013) is a good example of this. So while objectively Ubu Roi is still king, QSVT unlocked a Pandora box of *real* possibilities which are not entirely perceptible, and which remain concealed within the process of economic and political recovery post-crisis. Yet, the new practical horizons that were prefigured in Argentina 2001 occupy a wide space in the social reality of worldwide struggle, 'which forms never reach', like dark matter.

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<sup>1</sup> Wright is concerned with the ‘feasibility’ of utopias. In Bloch’s terms, this is a contradiction in terms. Wright calls ‘real utopias’ the projects that intend to realize peoples’ anti-capitalist dreams. But he disregards the fact that real utopias are not ‘feasible’ for *real* possibility is not settled, prefigured or predicted. He confuses concrete with real. He should have called them ‘concrete’ utopias, instead.

<sup>2</sup> I have discussed elsewhere (Dinerstein 2002b) how the mobility and non – materiality entailed in the volatilisation of capital during structural adjustments and particularly during financial crisis deepens the struggle in and against the subordination of life to the imperative of an abstraction, by exploring the case of unemployment and the emergence of the Piquetero movement in Argentina. Rather than ‘excluding’ the subjects, capitalist crises intensify the real subsumption of those expelled, excluded, impoverished and unemployed by capital.