

# A Psychoanalytic Case for Anti-capitalism as an Organisational Form

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## Abstract

For many, anti-capitalism signifies too much and thus lacks the political conviction needed to inform left-wing strategy and tactics. What remains neglected, though, is how anti-capitalism can function as an organisational form, one that is constituted by the democratic requirements of struggle. At different moments and for different purposes, anti-capitalist organising may rely on vertical, horizontal, centralised, or decentralised formations. We cannot predetermine the organisational particularities of anti-capitalism because it is always a *form of forms* determined by the demands of struggle. However, we can explore the psycho-political valances of anti-capitalist organisation. The appeal of anti-capitalism, so conceived, lies in its ability to facilitate subjects' enjoyment and political commitment through formal and psychic lack, rather than through neoliberal excess or ideological surety. Psychoanalytic theory is useful for considering how the anti-capitalist form's signifiatory field can foster emancipatory knowledges, acts, and ways of being in politically fraught contexts of struggle.

## Keywords

act, anti-capitalism, epistemology, lack, psychoanalysis, subjectivity

## Introduction

Although it seems to be a simple – even self-evident – term, anti-capitalism presents several conceptual and political problems. If, for instance, we are anti-capitalist, it is not clear what we are *for* (Malherbe, 2022). Moreover, there are a host of left-wing political positions that are implied by anti-capitalism (e.g. anarchism, Marxism, radical feminism, decoloniality, communalism), not all of which are, in every instance, compatible with one another. History has also shown that liberal reformism (see Žižek, 2002) and fascist

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nationalism (see Sayre and Löwy, 1984) have employed anti-capitalist rhetoric, albeit in very different ways. Anti-capitalism, we might say, is politically insufficient because it signifies too much and thus falls short of the convictions, clarity, and commitments required to drive a progressive political agenda.

The arguments against anti-capitalism seem to engage it as a broad signifier that implies a variety of rhetorical stances, analytical positions, and political postures. What these arguments appear to neglect, though, are the organisational forms that anti-capitalism signifies, that is, what anti-capitalism means with respect to amassing, focusing, reproducing, sustaining, and deploying collective resistance against capital (see Nunes, 2021). As an organisational form, anti-capitalism relies on a principle whereby political collectives do not organise through unchanging or predetermined formations. Rather, anti-capitalist organisation avails to the collective a *form of forms*. At different moments and for different purposes, anti-capitalist organising may rely on vertical, horizontal, centralised, or decentralised formations. As such, anti-capitalism is constituted by the political will of the collective and the emancipatory requirements of the moment.

Nunes (2021) writes that ‘whereas the name of the replacement has varied over time (socialism, communism, communalism, anarchy. . .), the most common name for the system to be replaced has always been “capitalism”. To have systematic range was thus to be anticapitalist’ (p. 118). Anti-capitalism’s foundational negativity (i.e. its refusal of definitive content, or rather its embrace of lack) allows for the organisational range that collectives require if they are to organise the most transformative action possible within the material constraints of their situation. Moreover, its willingness to assume a range of forms means that anti-capitalist organising can attack capital at the different ‘moments’ of its realisation (e.g. the point of production, the market, and social reproduction; see Harvey, 2020). Even though anti-capitalism is plural, such plurality is always arranged and deployed in relation to a structural adversary (i.e. capitalism), meaning that the anti-capitalist form retains an adaptable mode of political commitment. Therefore, anti-capitalism does not function as a master signifier that announces a new foundation for social links (see Tomšič, 2015), nor does it denote liberal permissive pluralism. It is, instead, a loose signifier that implies a range of politically committed organisational forms, each of which moves with the demands of emancipation *in situ*.

The ever-changing forms of anti-capitalist organisation will cease only when capitalism itself ceases. It is in this way that anti-capitalism resembles the young Marx’s description of communism (which, of course, does not resemble what communism came to mean in the 20th century), that is, ‘the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence’ (Marx and Engels, 1978: 163). As an emancipatory organisational form, anti-capitalism is rooted in material struggle.

It is certainly possible for politically progressive collectives to employ a plurality of organisational forms without relying on the term ‘anti-capitalism’ to signify their willingness to assume these forms. For example, although they do not necessarily use ‘anti-capitalism’ to refer to all of their organisational activities, both the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Mexico and Abahlali baseMjondolo in South Africa deploy a range of organisational formations that are determined by the political task at hand. Yet, although we do not need to name a collective’s capacity for plural organisation

‘anti-capitalist’, our attempts to engage, analyse, theorise, critique, and argue for this organisational form, I posit, are aided significantly by the radical negativity implied by the signifier ‘anti-capitalism’. Psychoanalytic thought is especially useful for understanding the kinds of distortions, psychic structuring, limits, antagonisms, and displacements – as well as the arbitrary and unsatisfying nature of human relations – that constitute anti-capitalism as a radically negative organisational form (see Tomšič, 2015).

One might plausibly object to the use of psychoanalysis to better understand resistance to capitalism. Of what use is psychoanalysis for engaging resistance to climate catastrophe, land dispossession, neo-fascism, mass incarceration, and imperial warfare? Although psychoanalysis does not inhere in a political programme of any sort, rejection by psychoanalysis of a definitive conception of ‘the Good’ (see McGowan, 2013) can assist us in understanding the pitfalls of an anti-capitalist resistance politics that fetishises a singular organisational form, considering instead how different organisational formations might move in accordance with the material demands of liberation, and what psychic effects this movement has on the subjects involved in organising and advancing anti-capitalist political struggle (Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar, 2021). Anti-capitalist struggle, we might say, is an agonistic matter of differently wounded psychological subjects working together politically, which is to say that it is a matter of struggling psychologies (Malherbe, 2022). As such, psychoanalysis offers a useful means of understanding the very human nature of consolidating a necessarily dynamic mode of anti-capitalist resistance.

## **Anti-capitalism and its Co-optation**

Although I am making a case for anti-capitalism as an organisational form, it must be conceded that this is an unusual way of conceptualising anti-capitalism. Anti-capitalism is more often understood as a consciously assumed political posture, wherein individuals and/or collectives oppose the sorts of ownership, economic relations, psychological impacts, as well as modes of distribution and production that are made available under a capitalist political economy (Harvey, 2020). The anti-capitalist posture implies a range of accompanying analyses and rhetorical positions that inform the actions taken to disrupt the flow of capital (Malherbe, 2022). Although anti-capitalist action can be carried out spontaneously, if such action is to accrue power (i.e. the ‘ability to make things happen with access to the means of doing so’; Gordon, 2021: 21), it must be subsumed within an organised political formation (Wright, 2019).

While there has never been capitalism without anti-capitalism (Malherbe, 2022), as a distinctive term, anti-capitalism gained traction in 1999 when the protests that took place at the World Trade Organization’s Seattle conference were described by protesters and commentators as anti-capitalist (Chatterton, 2010). Because many of these protests were characterised by direct action, the rejection of ideological dogma, and non-hierarchical relations, anti-capitalism was initially associated with anarchism (Graeber, 2002). Today, however, the term anti-capitalism has been taken up by other political affiliations on the progressive left (see e.g. Harvey, 2020; Monteverde, 2014; Sears, 2005; Wright, 2019).

Although people who assume an anti-capitalist posture tend to commit to a particular organisational form, there is a range of forms that are available within anti-capitalism’s symbolic field. In his participatory action research project, Chatterton (2010) found that

anti-capitalist action was shaped by different places, identities, social relations, organisational practices, and political strategies, none of which were static or historically predetermined. In an attempt to systematise the plurality of the anti-capitalist posture, Wright (2019) provides a useful typology: smashing capitalism (i.e. revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist political economy), dismantling capitalism (i.e. electoral politics), taming capitalism (i.e. reformist measures), resisting capitalism (i.e. struggles that do not attempt to take state power), and escaping capitalism (i.e. micro-alternatives to capitalism). In opposition, then, to orthodox Marxian analyses which privilege the proletarian subject as the revolutionary actor, anti-capitalism locates resistance to capitalism across a range of subjects, actions, and locations.

The inherent plurality of anti-capitalism has, however, opened up its symbolic field to modes of co-optation that sublimate its political potency. This was apparent even at the time of the 1999 Seattle protests. As Žižek remarks:

Today, when everyone is ‘anti-capitalist’, right up to the Hollywood ‘socio-critical’ conspiracy movies . . . the signifier ‘anti-capitalism’ has lost its subversive sting. What we should be discussing, rather, is the self-evident opposite of this ‘anti-capitalism’: the trust that the democratic substance of honest Americans can break up the conspiracy. This is the hard kernel of today’s global capitalist universe, its true Master-Signifier: democracy. (Žižek, 2002: 273)

For Žižek, the anti-capitalist posture must be rejected by those of us committed to an emancipatory politics because the term has been taken up by our political adversaries to signify support for reformations within capitalist liberal democracy. As we are seeing today, it is possible for billionaires, blockbuster films, and status quo politicians to express anti-capitalist sentiment without reproach (Fisher, 2009). This situation, Žižek (2002) argues, is not possible when one commits to a specific anti-capitalist formation (here, he advocates for communism).

The liberal co-optation of anti-capitalism has several psycho-political implications. In understanding these implications, it is useful to consider what Lacanian psychoanalysts call enjoyment, which is an unconscious kind of satisfaction provoked through the dissatisfaction inherent to disrupting or transgressing a seemingly coherent symbolic order (Stavrakakis, 2007). When anti-capitalism is co-opted, it is drawn on to refer to a slightly reformed neoliberal status quo (i.e. capitalism by other means). As such, anti-capitalism is rendered psychically unappealing because it cannot offer enjoyment of any kind. Resultantly, enjoyment is ceded to the political right, which offers enjoyment through excessive racism, authoritarianism, nationalism, xenophobia, and sexism (Vighi and Feldner, 2009).

We need not accept the liberal co-optation of anti-capitalism. The struggle over signification has always been part of left-wing political struggle. We saw this in France in the 1960s when the Situationist International refused corporate monopoly over the signification of public space (e.g. billboard advertisements), just as today’s worker cooperatives are refusing capital’s right to signify entrepreneurship (Malherbe, 2022). Similarly, anti-capitalism’s signifiatory power need not become the property of capitalist reformism. Returning anti-capitalism to progressive politics, however, requires a refusal of the sureties and permissiveness of liberalism. The symbolic coordinates of anti-capitalism must,

in other words, find their foundation within a politically committed embrace of radical negativity that cannot be subsumed by liberal capitalist ideology's signifying field. Doing so, I argue, entails constituting anti-capitalism as an organisational form that embraces the contradictions and negativity (i.e. the lack) that underlies political activity, knowledges, and subjectivities.

The liberal co-optation of anti-capitalism obscures, makes absent, or renders superfluous class struggle. While an emancipatory anti-capitalism must centre class struggle and economic exploitation, it must do so in a manner that is attuned to the expansive nature of neoliberal capitalism. Broad anti-capitalist class struggle must derive appeal, ethical coordinates, and legitimacy from its rootedness in a range of feminist, decolonial, ecological, and anti-racist struggles. With that being said, there is little point in speculating on the specific forms anti-capitalism will assume and for what reasons. Anti-capitalism is always a contingent form of forms, and thus cannot be predetermined. Instead, we can probe into what anti-capitalism means for those who organise as comrades under its signifiatory field. Here, psychoanalytic thought is especially useful for examining the psychic and political potentialities of the radically negative identifications availed by anti-capitalism. Before fleshing out such psycho-political valances of anti-capitalism, it is contextually useful to consider some of the ways by which psychoanalysis (as a body of thought and as therapeutic practice) has been used to advance different anti-capitalist postures.

## Psychoanalysis, Anti-capitalisms

Psychoanalysis presents a history of uneven political commitment. From the bourgeois impulses that characterised much of Freud's thought (Frosh, 2018), psychoanalysis has operated as an apparatus of liberalism (i.e. adapting people to capitalist exploitation; McGowan, 2013), settler colonialism (e.g. in Palestine and Algeria; Fanon, 1967; Sheehi and Sheehi, 2022), neoconservatism (e.g. in much of contemporary Europe; Tomšič, 2015), and even fascism (e.g. throughout Latin America; Frosh, 2018). The racist and heteropatriarchal constitution of much mainstream psychoanalytic practice also cannot be denied (Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar, 2021). Yet, since its inception, psychoanalysis has also been made to work for specific anti-capitalist postures. Despite his personal prejudices, Freud insisted that psychoanalysis be used to understand the kinds of repression and alienation that were being ushered in by the developing capitalist political economy of his day (Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar, 2021). Moreover, the early 20th century saw several prominent psychoanalysts interpret Freudian ideas through a Marxist lens (e.g. Lev Vygotsky's cultural psychology; see Ratner, 2017) and combine psychoanalysis with artistic expressionism and radical politics (e.g. Otto Gross' anarchist countercultural activities; see Mitzman, 1977). It was also during this time that several radical psychoanalysts sought to align the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute with a Marxian politics (Frosh, 2018).

The twinning of psychoanalysis and various anti-capitalist postures continued after Freud's death in 1939. In the lead-up to the Second World War, the Institute for Social Research – the so-called Frankfurt School – drew on what became known as Freudo-Marxism to understand unconscious desire, economic change, and – most notably – culture

within Euro-American capitalist societies (Jeffries, 2017). Although most affiliates of the Frankfurt School were silent on matters of colonialism and had little-to-no connection with working-class social movements, the influence that the Frankfurt School has had on putting psychoanalysis to work for anti-capitalist analysis should not be understated (Robinson, 1969). In response to – and oftentimes moving away from – the Frankfurt School, psychoanalysis was embraced by several mid-20th-century anti-capitalists in the Francophone world, including Deleuze and Guattari (2009 [1972]), Sartre (1963), Lyotard (2015 [1974]), Fanon (1967), and Althusser (1971). In the 1970s, Mitchell (2000 [1974]) deployed Freudian concepts to understand psychic life under patriarchal capitalism, Lasch (1978) used psychoanalytic theory to analyse cultural narcissism in the United States, and the Ljubljana Lacanian School combined German idealism with Lacanian psychoanalysis to advocate for a (usually Marxian) socialism (Stavrakakis, 2007). In the subsequent years, Žižek (a co-founder of the Ljubljana School), along with several others (e.g. Badiou, 2005), have been pivotal in consolidating what Stavrakakis (2007) calls the Lacanian left. In the 1980s, the post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) influenced the so-called Essex School, which combined poststructuralism with psychoanalysis (Townshend, 2004). From the 1990s, Butler's (1990) bestselling work on gender performativity (in which she engages a range of psychoanalytic theorists, including Freud, Riviere, Lacan, and Kristeva) became tremendously influential among anti-capitalist feminists.

Many of today's most influential anti-capitalist thinkers have taken up psychoanalysis as a tool for sociological interpretation. Butler, for example, has produced work of enduring relevance, using Kleinian theory to implement feminist analyses of the precarity of certain lives under capitalism (Butler, 2004), and to argue for nonviolence as an anti-capitalist force (Butler, 2020). In a comparable – although more historicist – manner to Butler, Hook (2013) has used psychoanalytic concepts to explore desire and temporality under South Africa's racial capitalist order. McGowan (2016) has similarly drawn on Freudian and Lacanian theory to analyse unconscious attachment to capitalism. More generally, there have been attempts to use Jameson's (2002 [1981]) influential work in Marxist cultural criticism to advance anti-capitalist readings of the unconscious as it is constituted by a global neoliberal ordering (e.g. Long, 2021; Tomšič, 2015).

Although much of the above psychoanalytic work is quite removed from anti-capitalist action, this is not always the case. In the early 20th century, Reich's free Sexpol Clinics sought to understand people's sexual repression in relation to capitalist economic relations (Robinson, 1969). In colonized Algeria, Fanon's (1967) sociogenic work fused anti-imperialist action with psychoanalytic social theory and practice. Later, in 1970s France, Guattari (2015 [1972]) introduced psychoanalysis into dissident political collectives, and the series of groups known as *Psychanalyse et Politique* combined Marxism and psychoanalysis to advance a radical feminist agenda (Roudinesco, 1990). In more recent years, there have been several efforts to think psychoanalysis, anti-capitalist action, and queer theory together (see Popa, 2018), and to put psychoanalytic theory and practice into conversation with decolonial praxis (see Lau, 2021; Ratele et al., 2021; Sheehi and Sheehi, 2022). We are also seeing today several attempts to use psychoanalysis to inform the anti-capitalist action of Marxian social movements (e.g. Parker and Pavón-Cuellar, 2021) and anarchist collectives (e.g. Newman, 2004).



The snapshot of psychoanalysis and anti-capitalism presented here (limited as it is) is marked by fierce contestation (see, e.g., Butler et al., 2000; Copjec, 2015 [1994]; Jeffries, 2017). The point to be made, though, is that psychoanalysis has been used to support different anti-capitalist postures, rhetorical positions, analyses, and actions. When psychoanalytic theory has been drawn on to consider anti-capitalist organisation, it is typically in relation to specific organisational forms (e.g. socialism for the Frankfurt School; communism for Žižek and Badiou; radical democracy for the Essex School; and post-anarchism for Newman). As such, there is a dearth of psychoanalytic work that considers anti-capitalism as a radically negative organisational form in and of itself (for a notable exception here see Nunes, 2021).

## **Anti-capitalism: A Radically Negative Organisational Form**

As an organisational form, anti-capitalism is determined by a foundational negativity. This is to say that the symbolic field of anti-capitalist organisation attends to what is *excluded* by capitalism. We can, therefore, contrast the anti-capitalist form with those organisational forms premised on positively defined *inclusion* criteria. For example, in responding to lingering Cold War sentiments that associate socialism with authoritarianism, several contemporary anti-capitalist efforts in the US are organising under the signifier ‘democratic socialism’ (e.g. the Democratic Socialists of America). Effective as this has been (the resurgence of socialism in the US in recent years cannot be denied), the positive constitution of the signifier ‘democratic socialism’ forecloses the organisational forms available to this signifier which, in turn, has political implications. As several commentators have noted, although the 2016 Bernie Sanders campaign was able to successfully profess its democratic character by identifying itself with the democratic socialism signifier, it struggled to reflect a ‘deeper analysis of the racialized nature of U.S. capitalism’ (Ransby, 2015: 34). Even when the Sanders campaign did embrace an explicitly anti-racist political programme, signifying its allegiance to this programme remained challenging. This was evidenced in the many anti-racist activists who felt dissatisfied with the campaign (see Reed, 2020). Yet, even if the campaign took up a positively constituted signifier that successfully reflected its anti-racist commitments (e.g. anti-racist democratic socialism), this signifier could not attend to all capitalist exclusions that the campaign sought to address (e.g. gender oppression; see Albrecht, 2017). Such positively defined organisational forms thus present a problem of indefinite inclusiveness, that is, a fetishisation of presence whereby repeated attempts to reflect all struggles within an organisational form’s signifying field leads to an always-insufficient inclusivity (Nunes, 2021). The positive signifier will always fail because it cannot include everything. The base negativity of anti-capitalist organisation, on the other hand, represents an expressed inability to signify the whole; a self-conscious failure to include all positively defined struggles. Every struggle against capitalism is thus always already part of anti-capitalism’s signifying field, meaning that the anti-capitalist form is determined by the democratic will of all who are excluded by capitalism. Put differently, anti-capitalism as a form of forms does not seek to stabilise itself by accommodating various inclusion criteria. Instead, the anti-capitalist form is perpetually re-made by the exclusions of capitalism.

The refusal of anti-capitalism to retreat into unchanging or fixed organisational forms means that it is driven, rather than debilitated, by the internal tensions of the collective. When comrades articulate their political tactics, goals, and strategies together and in accordance with different emancipatory struggles, organisational forms are made through the most pressing political commitments of the moment, rather than self-contained and unchanging political programmes with which comrades are expected to identify, no matter what. Adapting to or moving with the most urgent emancipatory requirements in this way is essential for holding the collective accountable to its own political commitments. For instance, in 2013, when a senior party member of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) in the UK was accused of sexual assault, the party refused to work through the court system due to its opposition to the bourgeois state, opting to 'resolve' the case internally. The case was eventually dismissed by the party, leaving many party members feeling betrayed (Penny, 2013). By foreclosing its organisational form, the SWP could not adequately attend to its internal struggles (struggles which mirrored those of the very capitalist order the party opposes) and, as a result, the party form came to reflect the patriarchal interests of its male leaders. The SWP's strict adherence to entrenched organisational practices meant that it could not reckon with the symbolic limits of these practices. It is in this respect that anti-capitalism's ability to detotalise finality reflects a kind of ethics that is attentive to situations that cannot be effectively addressed – or predicted – by fixed organisational formations. Anti-capitalist organisation is constituted through intersubjective tension, which is to say, the anti-capitalist form is premised on the ebbs and flows of oppression under capitalism. This is especially pertinent in cases where a particular organisational form is defined by oppressive practices and must, in turn, be reformed and/or abandoned for a different organisational form.

Although anti-capitalism takes seriously tactics, strategies, and goals (all of which are shaped by democratic will and the emancipatory demands of the moment), it is also an organisational form that takes seriously the mobilisation of passions (Mouffe, 2005), that is, the affect produced between comrades organising against capitalism. Indeed, investing psychically in a political project is generally not undertaken or sustained at the intellectual level. It is more typically an emotional identification, one that has been thoroughly repressed by Enlightenment rationality (Glynos, 2001). To understand anti-capitalism's ability to marshal people's psychic investments, we must once again turn to Lacan's (2002) notion of enjoyment. As noted earlier, enjoyment – or what Lacan called *jouissance* – is an unconscious satisfaction obtained from symbolic rupture or incoherence. Under capitalism, subjects usually derive enjoyment from excessive accumulation (McGowan, 2016); an imagined coherence of the ego (Hook, 2013); and/or political fantasies that animate individualistic desires (Mouffe, 2005). Anti-capitalism, however, offers another kind of enjoyment, one that is premised on a foundational negativity, or what Lacanians prefer to call *lack*. We can enjoy lack because it returns us to an imagined moment when we sacrificed our apparent psychic wholeness for a symbolic order (i.e. the basis of our communication) that is riven by contradiction (McGowan, 2013). Anti-capitalism's refusal of definitive organisational forms means that subjects can enjoy the identifications, strategies, and tactics that are *not* provided (and are instead constantly being built, modified, abandoned, and transformed in accordance with democratic struggle). Even when anti-capitalism does assume a particular formation, it is a formation that



lacks because it is subject to change. Anti-capitalism's inherent lack introduces desire into political activity (i.e. our organising activity is driven by the organisational form's lack-in-being, rather than the attainment of a specific form) and, in this regard, anti-capitalist organisation is imbued with a psychic appeal that is more often mobilised by the excesses of the political right (McGowan, 2016). Therefore, to enjoy lack in this way counters our libidinal investment in capitalist excess (Glynos, 2001), while also relieving us of the ideological pressures to enjoy such excess (Žižek, 2006).

## **Knowing, Acting, and Being within the Anti-capitalist Organisational Form**

Anti-capitalism's embrace of different organisational forms intimates the contradictory psychic structure that marks political subjects. It is, therefore, with psychoanalysis that we can understand how anti-capitalist organisation propels political commitment, solidarity-making, and strategy among comrades who organise under anti-capitalism's ever-shifting, democratically constituted symbolic field. In this section, I draw on psychoanalytic thought to understand how the anti-capitalist organisational form can facilitate contradictory modes of knowing, acting, and being, and what these contradictions mean for advancing progressive politics.

### *Knowing*

Dominant regimes of truth tend to exclude the contradictory nature of knowing (i.e. how knowledge forms are not entirely at one with what they endeavour to signify; see McGowan, 2013). As such, knowledge always lacks. This is certainly true of political knowledge (Tomšič, 2015). When we disallow contradiction in how we know politics, political action can become associated with definitive knowing. Put differently, political action can be deployed to secure definitive knowledge. This can result in the subject deploying violence in an effort to stabilise the uncontested signification of specific political knowledges (Rogers, 2015). Attempting to enforce the surety of political knowledge in this way covers over epistemological lack within truth claims. We see this, for instance, in the way that far-right terrorist groups like the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging in South Africa, the Ku Klux Klan in the United States, or the True Blue Crew in Australia use violent action to advance a definitive, racist knowledge of the Other.

It is through violence that political knowledge is made excessive and thus enjoyable. Yet, the enjoyment of political knowledge need not be ceded to the political right because epistemic enjoyment is not the sole product of excessive or definitive knowing. We can also obtain enjoyment from institutionalising the limits of our political knowledge, resisting the mastery of knowledge and finding our epistemological bearings in the acceptance of the lack and contradictions that mark knowledge (Stavrakakis, 2007). The anti-capitalist form, as we have seen, constitutes political knowledge through the ever-shifting and democratically articulated demands of liberation. We cannot know, definitively, the organisational form that anti-capitalism will assume because this form is, by definition, unknowable, forged and remade in different struggle contexts. The Black Panther Party, for example, assumed a centralised formation when engaging in

militarised action, but it took on a lateralised form when undertaking community welfare activities (Bloom and Martin, 2016). The knowledge availed by such anti-capitalist forms is, therefore, expressively lacking and thus enjoyable.

Anti-capitalist organising's ability to institutionalise the limits of political knowing has implications for how we understand violence. In contrast to how right-wing terrorist action mobilises violence as a kind of truth-force, Fanon (1963) understood violence as a means of redirecting the violence that imperial capitalist domination has monopolised at the structural level. For Fanon, violence cannot define how we know politics or be used to enforce political truths. Instead, violence is resorted to and used in different ways (i.e. abandoned, taken up, and threatened at strategic moments and in accordance with specific political goals) to strike back at capital. We might say that for Fanon, although violence may be used to defend anti-capitalist organisational forms, it should not be definitively understood as anti-capitalism itself (Malherbe, 2022).

One way to acknowledge the limits of political knowing is to make room for the 'surprise knowings' revealed by unconscious (i.e. repressed) knowledges (Lau, 2021). The truth obtained from unconscious knowledges is not a relational, rational, or cognitive truth, but rather a conflictual truth that undergirds social relations, that is, an avowedly contradictory and political truth that can open up new and unforeseen possibilities for organising anti-capitalist politics (Tomšič, 2015). Engaging with unconscious political truth (which is always many truths precisely because everything is permissible in the unconscious; Freud, 2005) might entail working with psychoanalysts to create non-judgemental and reflective spaces wherein comrades openly discuss the affective dimensions of anti-capitalist organising. The various unconscious ideological mechanisms that operate between comrades (e.g. patriarchal, racist, and even classist currents) can inform anti-capitalist organisation, and how comrades work together to make visible and take responsibility for unconscious processes in the group (Malherbe, 2021). Such unconscious political truths will, for many, be difficult to accept. The feminist-identifying male is, for instance, unlikely to readily take responsibility for his patriarchal attitudes and actions within contexts of anti-capitalist organising. Lacan called this kind of resistance paranoid knowledge which, in mirroring the structure of narcissism, functions by declaring to the self and others the best course of action for both (Samuels, 2019). Anti-capitalist organisation need not shame or disallow space for paranoid knowledge. Rather, space should be made within the anti-capitalist organisational form to articulate paranoid knowledge and use this knowledge to make clear how a collective's political commitments can be honoured by individual comrades. In so doing, the internal bonds of the collective can be strengthened through the sorts of interpersonal tensions that tend to go unacknowledged and/or repressed by activist groups (Malherbe, 2022).

Embracing the lack and the contradictions inherent to political knowing does not mean that anti-capitalist organisational forms must dispel the kinds of knowledge made available by political fantasy (a mode of wishing that does away with tension and contradiction; Freud, 2005). At the same time, we cannot be uncritical of fantasy. It is through fantasy that *lack of knowledge* is made to appear as the more acceptable *loss of knowledge* (McGowan, 2013), the latter of which implies possession which can, in turn, be used to blame others for one's feelings of lack (i.e. the Other has stolen my psychic wholeness), or to advocate for a definitive knowledge that can retrieve what one has lost

(Hook, 2013; Rogers, 2015). Yet, because fantasy-laden knowledges organise our enjoyment, they should not be dismissed within anti-capitalist organisation forms, lest enjoyment in knowing is ceded to right-wing politics. Fantasy can take the subject beyond the limitations of a given symbolic structure, revealing points of rupture and inconsistency within this structure, thereby loosening the psychic grip of capitalism's signifying system over our political imagination (McGowan, 2013). Moreover, as Freud (1919) himself noted, fantasy is the screen upon which unconscious desires are staged or disavowed, meaning that, politically, fantasy can animate desire, foster solidarity, and bring about the kinds of collective identification upon which anti-capitalist organising depends (see Glynos, 2001). Organising our anti-capitalist politics around a demand for universal healthcare, for example, may entail relying on a fantasy that *knows* exactly how free healthcare will be distributed and received. Such a fantasmatic frame can bind comrades together, affectively, and make clear how capitalist ideology, despite claiming to centre the interests of the individual, cannot see to an individual's most basic survival needs (Malherbe, 2022). It is in this way that the anti-capitalist organisational form can mobilise political fantasy to momentarily escape the overwhelming, oftentimes traumatic, nature that accompanies accepting the limits of knowledge. It follows, then, that fantasy cannot be the final determinant of anti-capitalist organising because it cannot accommodate the kinds of contradictions that comrades will face in and among themselves as well as society (the capitalist society that they fight and the socialistic one they fight for). Yet, emancipatory fantasies can be deployed strategically to dislocate the imposition of capitalist fantasies of excess, individual competition, and accumulation (Žižek, 2006), thereby creating the affective conditions for organising lacking anti-capitalist knowledges that are rooted in the ever-shifting – but nonetheless material – demands of struggle.

Marx (1978 [1852]: 597) wrote that revolutionary activity can ensure that 'the content goes beyond the phrase', meaning that our political action can go beyond our capacity to signify the present conjuncture. Anti-capitalism need not have a psychotic destination which enlists a set of master knowledges and related master actions to possess answers without tension (see Rogers, 2015). It is possible to shape our organisational forms through contradictory ways of knowing that are premised on the inadequacies of knowledge itself. The ability of the anti-capitalist organisational form to embrace the foundational lack inherent to political knowledge does not channel political commitment into definitive epistemological positions but into a continual rearticulation of anti-capitalism's symbolic field. Yet, because anti-capitalist organising embraces epistemic lack in strategic ways that align with the liberatory demands of the moment, neither enjoyment nor fantasy is monopolised by our political adversaries.

## Acting

How subjects know – both consciously and unconsciously – determines how they act. Definitive political knowing implies definite political action. Although I have hitherto focused on how right-wing collectives have harnessed such definitive *knowledge-actions*, there are those on the political left who advocate for similarly definitive *action-knowledges* (i.e. actions which secure new ways of knowing). This is observed most

evidently among those on the psychoanalytic left (usually the Lacanian left) who take refuge in the transformative act. Contra continual processes of resistance, the transformative act is a political gesture that opens up – sometimes momentarily – new ways of acting and knowing that are outside the possibilities of capitalism’s prevailing symbolic order (see Badiou, 2005; Vighi and Feldner, 2009). The transformative act might entail a refusal to act within, or indeed a withdrawal from, the coordinates of a given situation, and in this sense, the act alleviates the oppressive burden to believe in capitalism’s ideological falsehoods (Žižek, 2006). Rosa Parks’ refusal to give up her seat on the bus to a white man in 1955 represents a well-known example of the act. The transformative act should not, however, be confused with the ‘false acts’ of the obsessional neurotic who acts only to prevent change (Žižek, 2006), such as diversifying the leadership of an otherwise oppressive organisation.

Although the possibility of the transformative act should not be discounted by those involved in anti-capitalist organising, we also should not be guided by the romantic idealism of such an act (Stavrakakis, 2007). A belief in the transformative act can denude politics of responsibility by papering over the bureaucratic, slow, contradictory, and even mundane processes that characterise political organising (Malherbe, 2022; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). We might then say that in contrast to the definitively transformative act, the anti-capitalist organisational form is more concerned with smaller transformative *acts* that continually adapt to the structural constitution of capital. For organisers, the change-making capacities of many transformative acts, unlike the singular act, must be understood cumulatively. It is together that these acts ‘make global capitalism small enough to be thinkable’ (Srnicek and Williams, 2015: 15). Examples here might include workplace refusals and union building, or instating worker cooperatives and community gardens. A concern with smaller acts is a concern with the specific political task at hand, and thus resists fetishising resistance, or resisting for its own sake (see Gordon, 2021).

To look to smaller transformative acts is not to abandon the singular transformative act. Small transformative acts can seize upon the political opportunities that the singular act makes possible. The 2015 student protests in South Africa were catalysed by one student’s singular act of pouring faeces onto a statue of Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town. This singular act catalysed a months-long series of protests (which experimented with many anti-capitalist organisational forms) against the cost of university tuition, colonial teaching curricula, and the exploitative outsourcing of labour (Nyamnjoh, 2016). Although it was the single act of throwing faeces onto the statue that transformed the taken-for-granted into the up-for-grabs (see Fisher, 2009), it was the numerous acts that followed in the wake of this singular act which instituted a series of transformations at the university. Similarly, we should not understand Rosa Parks’ act separately from the Montgomery bus boycott that followed it, nor from the years of activism with which Parks and her comrades were involved before and after her best-known act.

Smaller acts often produce the kinds of symbolic and material ruptures that tend to be associated with the singular transformative act. Organising smaller transformative acts need not, in every instance, rely on the symbolic power of the singular act. Certainly, transformative acts are carried out all the time in people’s day-to-day lives. Where the singular act is usually highly visible and often entails risk, everyday acts tend to go unnoticed by

elites and, in this regard, can be crucial for the survival of marginalised groups (see Scott, 1989). Although everyday acts can be constructive (e.g. workers' cooperatives) or destructive (e.g. pilfering), such acts always possess the potential to alter dominant power relations (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2020). Everyday acts are performed routinely and they are rarely organised formally. As such, they do not offer wholly 'knowable' visions of emancipation. Instead, they represent non-definitive, prefigurative experiments in quotidian emancipation. Everyday acts point to fragments of an unknowable future, one that evades the one designed and *known* by capitalism and that is being enacted in the present. As such, everyday acts are not premised on predetermined outcomes; they are always lacking. Anti-capitalist organising can be useful for connecting, supporting, and creating networks that strengthen such everyday acts (Malherbe, 2022). It is when everyday acts are organised that they become most transformative (e.g. an autonomous worker cooperative becomes exponentially more powerful when it is part of a federation of worker cooperatives, such as the Mondragon Corporation in Spain). The future-oriented logic of everyday acts (which is always a logic of desire because it is based on non-definitive lack) thus demonstrates a range of spheres into which the anti-capitalist organisational form can move (e.g. everyday life, industry, social reproduction, the market).

Anti-capitalism is concerned with multiple acts that are against capitalism, post-capitalism, and within capitalism, that is, a plethora of different acts that, together, strive to remake a world beyond capitalism while also, at times, operating inside the constraints of capitalism (Chatterton, 2010). In short, anti-capitalist organising relies upon small acts whose political significance cannot be predetermined and that need not be attributed to a singularly defined revolutionary subject. As Gordon (2021) writes, we must act 'on the basis of what one *cannot know* and despite what one thinks one *is*' (p. 55, emphasis in original).

## Being

Capitalism imposes onto the subject an always deferred promise of wholeness. This promise – which McGowan (2016) calls the capitalist promise (e.g. the promise of future returns, upward mobility, pleasure, and access to fulfilling commodities) – serves as the stabilising basis for capitalist ideology and thus for subjective identification under capitalism. The closer subjects come to fulfilling the capitalist promise (e.g. consuming, demolishing competition, working hard), the more incensed their feelings of estrangement become which, in turn, recommit subjects to the capitalist promise (Malherbe, 2021). In attempting to approximate the coherent ego ideal of the capitalist promise, the subject seeks to be recognised as 'good' by an imagined social authority (i.e. the Big Other; see Lacan, 2002) who might deliver this subjective wholeness. Yet, because such 'goodness' evades clearly demarcated symbolic coordinates, it can only be encircled (rather than fully attained) by projecting a similarly ill-conceived notion of 'badness' onto others who do not embody the capitalist promise according to one's imagined coordinates of 'goodness' (Samuels, 2019). Xenophobic discourse relies on such projection, scapegoating the responsibility for structural violence onto the figure of the foreign national. An imaginary conception of a 'good' coherent ego is, in this way, stabilised through projections of a similarly imagined 'bad' Other.

It is possible that progressive political organising mirrors the deferred subjective sureties and moralistic assessments of the capitalist promise. Certainly, left-wing groups might try to fix the coordinates of the comrade subjectivity or defer all decision-making to the authority of a charismatic leader. The anti-capitalist organisational form, however, accepts the subject's symbolic lack and its inability to cohere with available symbolic categories, thereby appealing itself to the what (e.g. collective values, politics, desires) and the who (i.e. workers, refugees, the lumpenproletariat) that have been excluded from capitalism's symbolic order. There was, for example, always an attempt to hold accountable Morales' government in Bolivia to the demands of different grassroots anti-capitalist social movements. The base negativity of anti-capitalist movements means that subjectivity is not made through a particular ego-ideal (and the associated commands from the Big Other). Rather, anti-capitalist organisation embraces the feelings of otherness that are denied by the capitalist promise (Malherbe 2021; Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar, 2021). It should be emphasised that anti-capitalism does not altogether deny the realisation of subjectivity, but because it does not defer to a single organisational form, the subject of anti-capitalist organisation is made through an assemblage of ever-shifting identifications that are hailed in the context of differing struggles. Making subjectivity within the space of negativity availed by anti-capitalism, therefore, need not be understood as the destruction of the self, but rather as an affirmative, collective, and creative act of subjective becoming (Glynos, 2001).

Anti-capitalism, as an organisational form, bases the solidarity relation on shared feelings of otherness, whereby one's subjective feelings of lack and contradiction are not papered over with ideological fantasy. Instead, the subject fills its sense of lack with the lack of the comrade Other with whom it shares a set of political commitments (Stavrakakis, 2007). This is not to say that all subjects lack in the same way. Under patriarchal capitalism, for instance, the feminised worker will experience lack differently from a male worker (Malherbe, 2021). Yet, a mutual experience of subjective lack can create avenues for solidarity across differently identifying subjects, using commonly experienced feelings of lack to consolidate different struggles against capitalism (see Malherbe, 2022). Anti-capitalist organisation, we might say, does not attempt to link struggles because they are the same, but because they are equivalent with respect to how they confront capitalism (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). These different struggles do not share a positive identification. What they have in common is their negative opposition to capitalism, and this is reflected in the negative foundation of the anti-capitalist form.

The anti-capitalist organisational form cannot, however, rely in every instance on comrades connecting and building collective power through an embrace of subjective lack. There are instances where subjectivities have been so maimed and brutalised by capitalism that organising around a coherent vision of the subject is crucial for creating conditions of healing within struggle (Malherbe, 2022). This is especially the case in contexts marked by colonality, wherein colonised peoples have repeatedly had their subjectivity reflected back to them as a dehumanised object-thing (Césaire, 1972; Fanon, 1963, 1967). Sheehi and Sheehi (2022), for instance, recount that Zionist occupational forces have torn apart Palestinian subjectivity (e.g. via land dispossession and daily bureaucratic humiliations), rendering psychoanalytic efforts to cherish and reconstruct this subjectivity imperative to organising decolonial anti-capitalist action. The Black



Panther Party in the US and the Black Consciousness Movement in apartheid South Africa similarly advanced their anti-capitalist political commitments via a coherent and insurgent construction of Black subjectivity. Anti-capitalist organisation, therefore, does not mean that we must rely upon subjective lack, in every instance, to advance and build solidarity across different struggles. There are moments that call for political subjects to organise around the kinds of subjective coherence that resist dehumanisation as well as fetishised attachments to victimhood, ever-defeated marginality, or political failure (Fisher, 2009). Although anti-capitalism's base negativity is useful for harnessing collective feelings of lack, it can also represent a space of freedom wherein subjects, in the context of struggle, reject capitalist identifications and recreate what it means to be a human subject.

Being is shaped by political commitment (Gordon, 2021). In this sense, subjectivity is both personal and intersubjective, or in Lacan's (2002) phraseology, it is *extimate* – simultaneously intimate and external. The negative constitution of the anti-capitalist organisational form is open to a plethora of politically strategic ways of being within the collective, whether this means embracing and connecting through the lack that marks both the self and society, or valuing and reassembling those subjectivities that have been maimed by the neocolonial apparatuses of capital.

## Conclusion

Marx wrote that subjects do not make history under circumstances of their choosing, 'but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past' (Marx, 1978 [1852]: 595). Organising against capitalism must respond to the dialectic of history, where the new is created in, with, and against a present that has been shaped in the image of the old. Perhaps we cannot overcome history, but we can remake society so that we stand beside history, rather than suffer beneath it (Long, 2021). Anti-capitalism, as an organisational form of forms, avails to subjects a radically negative space within which to build political commitment, solidarity, and collective power. It is in this space of negativity that subjects can organise in response to the shifting demands of emancipation. Using psychoanalytic thought, we can see how the anti-capitalist form draws on the contradictions of struggle and struggling subjects to drive progressive politics, rendering such politics psychically appealing and attuning it to how capital reproduces and defends itself.

Anti-capitalist organising is not devoid of political commitment. It is based on a situated commitment that manifests in accordance with the democratic dictates of material struggle. Whether anti-capitalism is centralised, dispersed, communal, legislative, grass-roots-based, localised, or internationalist, it is always determined by how those who organise under its negative signifying system understand the demands of struggle. In this, anti-capitalism is concerned with collective actions that are driven by conviction and desire rather than the knowledge of a secure or guaranteed outcome. Although anti-capitalist organisational forms are not necessarily named 'anti-capitalist', to signify them as such allows us to explore their psycho-political valances. Our organisational capacities can and must assume a range of formations if we are to confront capitalism's totality with the necessary commitment, scope, psychic appeal, and political ambition.

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