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Report of Contributions

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Promises, traces, outlines, islets: Althusser's metaphors for communism emerging in the margins of capitalist society and their relevance for strategic debates today

In 1976 Louis Althusser delivered a lecture at the Catalan College of Building Engineers and Technical Architects. When Althusser incorporated parts of this text in *Les vaches noires* (one of his unpublished manuscripts from the 1970s) he referred to 'esquisses et promesses du communisme' (outlines and promises of communism). There is also in the archives another French version of the text that refers to 'esquisses et traces du communisme' (outlines and traces of communism). Also in *Les vaches noires* Althusser refers to the 'îlots de communisme' (islets of communism) emerging where there is free association and liberation from commodity relations. This point can be linked to Althusser's insistence that communism can emerge in the margins or interstices of capitalism in a manner similar to capitalism emerging at the interstices of feudalism. All these metaphors point towards some important open question for Althusser, but also for anticapitalist strategy in general: Is communism just a political project or a political design for a post-capitalist society or is the projection, elaboration and expansion of social forms already appearing within contemporary capitalist society as a result of collective struggles, resistances, experimentations that bring forward the collective ingenuity of the subaltern classes and groups? Can a political project for radical social transformation can simply be a generalization of dynamics emerging within contemporary social dynamics or it is also then attempt to organize, coordinate, think this process which combines both the accentuation of antagonism and the attempt towards the destruction of existing social forms and the attempt to put in place new social relations? If we take into consideration the radical contingency that is at the heart of the notion of the encounter that Althusser's aleatory materialism is based upon, how can we rethink the relation between the 'conscious' and the 'spontaneous' aspects of communist politics? The aim of this presentation is to attempt to revisit the tensions of Althusser's thinking of communism emerging at the margins or interstices of capitalist society and then try to think their relevance for contemporary strategic debates in an attempt to rethink the politics of emancipation as politics of organizing the social and political and intellectual conditions for the collective experimentation and ingenuity of the subaltern and to suggest that this is exactly the challenge of a 'new practice of politics'.

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