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Discontents with theoretical practice in contemporary political artworks: Theory as vanishing mediator in the art of Chto Delat

ABSTRACT

The starting point of this article is the necessity of theoretical practice in contemporary political artworks. The theoretical and cognitive aspects of artistic practice are assumed to be the position from where the real ambivalences and contradictions of political art engagement can be elaborated. Based on the writings of John Roberts on cognitive and political aspects of avant-garde artistic practice, I further discuss these relations with reference to Louis Althusser's debate on theoretical practice. From this conceptual frame, this article deals with the artistic practice of the Chto Delat group and especially with the importance of theory in their political artistic practices. By focusing on one particular element or a conceptual object of their practice that is a 'collective' I will try to demonstrate how the contradictions involved in this work determine the form of artistic practice itself.

KEYWORDS

political artistic practice
John Roberts
theoretical work
Chto Delat
Althusser
collective

INTRODUCTION

Chto Delat is an artist, activist and philosophers' group from Saint Petersburg and Moscow established in 2003. Considering the various artistic, activist and theoretical works – which they thoroughly catalogue in their occasionally published *Newspaper of the Platform 'Chto Delat?'* – we can see that the only successful activism of this group is about one intervention in theory. Their open letter to Alain Badiou, a communist theoretician, who, among many other thinkers, is one of the most cited in their newspaper, not to accept the invitation of Gleb Pavlovsky to give a lecture at the Russian Institute had a result. Badiou, following the suggestions of Chto Delat that participation in Pavlovsky's event would mean affiliation with Putin's cultural politics, rejected the invitation. This is, to my knowledge, the only case where an action of the Chto Delat group had a clear effect. According to the group's open letter, which they published in their Newspaper, Badiou did not repeat the mistake of Slavoj Žižek, who previously participated in a discussion with Pavlovsky on the 'limits of democracy' in the Institute supported by Putin's government (Chto Delat 2008a).

This is a clear case of demarcation and intervention within the field of theory, a case that is a theoretical struggle in every sense. The aim of this article is generally to answer certain questions on the relations between theory and practice within the contemporary art field, especially within the art field that openly emphasizes political and revolutionary emancipation in their work. With reference to the Chto Delat group my aim is to problematize certain issues related to the theoretical practice of political arts. The most important question of this article, which I will try to answer, is related to the necessity of theoretical practice in political artworks. The question of theory seems to have direct links with the political issues that are conceptually reflected in contemporary art; as Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung problematize, in their edited book on the role of theory in contemporary art, this interest has especially intensified during the mid-1980s. Issues such as gender, identity, social engagement and rising neo-liberalism, or altogether the issue of 'postmodernism', spurred theoretical interest in contemporary art (Kocur and Leung 2005: 2). In this article I will not attempt any periodization or genealogy of interest to theory in art, but as a leitmotif or red thread I will use the discussions related to Conceptual Art, especially a discourse related to the work of Art & Language. I will maintain the idea that from the beginning of the 1970s the collective work of Art & Language on issues of art community, activism, language, heurism, collaboration, mapping and ideology had a huge influence on the theorization of the art. Further I think that the legacy and especially the huge work on the relation between art, activism, politics and representation have not yet been properly elaborated. As Chris Gilbert wrote,

Art & Language's institutionalization of collective work did in fact made massive change in art production, after which it became impossible for even mainstream artists to unreflectively adopt the givens of studio practice, but they would henceforth have to locate their activities within self-instituted or at least self-theorized practices.

(2007: 89)

Actual interest in political issues in contemporary art also has to do with the rising influence of certain theoreticians in the field of aesthetics. Even if these

theoreticians, such as Alain Badiou, Jacques Ranciere, Toni Negri, Chantal Mouffe, Giorgio Agamben and Slavoj Žižek, to name just the most popular ones, represent oppositional directions their common interest is in some way or another traditionally linked with Marxism.

THE THEORY OF AVANT-GARDE

By discussing two recent texts, which deal with the issues of the relation between aesthetics and politics from the position of theory, I will try to contextualize the epistemological frame of this text. It is not a coincidence that two of these texts are partially related to the work of Chto Delat, whose main art practice is based on theory.

By taking one example, or a case study, of political art manifestation Gail Day, Steve Edwards and David Mabb, in their intervention-text published in journal *Historical Materialism*, proposed that Marxist analysis of contemporary political art practices has to include ambivalence in its theoretical elaborations. Their example of the Eleventh International Istanbul Biennial curated by group What, How and for Whom (WHW) is, due to its historical conjuncture, a typical example of ambivalence. Completely supported by private investment and conceived as a political justification of this investment (one type of capital against another kind of capital: in the case of Turkey, the capital of old-secular bourgeoisie against the new-religious 'green' bourgeoisie) Istanbul Biennial is a case of pure culturalization of capitalist administration. With a curatorial work of WHW Eleventh Istanbul Biennial, which was based on Brecht's sentence from *The Three-penny Opera* 'What Keeps Mankind Alive?', for a first time had the most overt MarxistMarxian political connotations in the history of this art manifestation. By problematizing contemporary art within the neo-liberal and aggressive capitalist context such as Istanbul and its Biennial with a clear agenda of Marxist concepts WHW positioned the art discourse within very contradictory terms. It was not surprising that as a reflex to this event there appeared the most striking critique of this curatorial work as further intensification of capitalist administration by culturalizing the politics. Common to all these critiques was that WHW used Communism and Brecht for justification of capitalist neo-liberal conditions (Zampa di Leone 2009).

According to Day, Edwards and Mabb what WHW intensified, or as they put 'dramatized', is the dilemma that haunts most of the Marxist analysis of artistic productions: how to handle the contradictions of political artwork contextualized within the policies of capitalist neo-liberal institutions. Their position is that revolutionary cultural politics should not be afraid of these contradictions and ambivalences (Day et al. 2010: 139). This dilemma, which could be reduced to antagonism between the 'art and commodity', is a general problem of the art, especially the art since conceptualism: what is the relation between the concept of art and the object of art and how does this schism determine the politization of art? From Situationist International's insistent critique of recuperation of art's commodification to the various International Art Strike episodes (from Goran Dorđević to Neoists) this dilemma is Marxist (as the dialectic between use-value and exchange-value) and global (again Marxist, since it is international). But according to writers this contradictory relation between aesthetics and politics, which is ultimately a Marxist problematic, should not be understood with references based on Bourdieu-inspired sociologist directions. This dilemma, which represents the overall tension in arts, is possible to trace in the contradiction of elements between

modernization and gentrification, between art's commodification and its emancipatory potential, between an individual art-practice and the institutions of art, through to questions of form and content (philosophical and aesthetic), or to those of 'art' and 'life' or the very relation of aesthetic and political praxis (Day et al. 2010: 139). Reference to Bourdieu's concepts such as 'distinction', consecration or other technical-economical analysis of art as commodification is, as Day, Edwards and Mabb very rightly point out, primarily evading the art's cognitive or truth-process character. This cognitive character of art, which is further related to its heuristic and critical dimensions, is, in Bourdieu-inspired directions, most of the time undermined within the overall determinants of the system (Day et al. 2010: 164–65). This evasion is due to the 'economism' of the Bourdieuan theory (they also mention David Harvey in a similar manner) that reduces the art to a kind of social struggle without epistemological foundation. Thus, accordingly, the real political art is not one that is above the economical constraints or art that is not spoiled by the capitalistic administration; this problem of 'art's insertion into the economic circuits of capital, which is yet to be understood comprehensively and theoretically' (Day et al. 2010: 162) should be used as the starting point of any artistic practice. Following Fredric Jameson's suggestion of maintaining the 'fundamental ambivalence' in the artistic practices Day, Edwards and Mabb propose to politicize this ambivalence even further through the prism of social contradictions. This would involve, as they wrote, drawing on some of Marx's most distinctive contributions: to be able to think historically *and* philosophically, socially *and* aesthetically (Day et al. 2010: 167–68, original emphasis). This is, according to writers, what the curatorial group WHW managed to do in their curatorial work in Eleventh Istanbul Biennial, by intensifying these contradictions and openly emphasizing the pedagogical and theoretical nature of political art productions.

If WHW as a curatorial group is most successful in emphasizing the fundamental ambivalence of political art, then the artistic group from Russia Chto Delat, with their practice of showing these ambivalences and contradictions in the most dramatic way, are 'the most significant cultural products of our time for Marxists to reflect upon' (Day et al. 2010: 144). The main feature of Chto Delat is their novelty in dealing with the political issues within the art world, or as Day et al. write, when referring to a series of works titled *Songspiels*: 'the articulation of the tensions created by capitalist class-restoration with a politics of form' (2010: 143). This is a clear demarcation from many other interpreters of Chto Delat who see the group's political intervention in their activist approach (Egot 2010: 110). The intervention that Day and colleagues implemented in a discussion on the relation between art and politics is important not only because of the focus on the ambivalence and social contradiction in art productions but also because of the re-emphasis on cognitive and theoretical dimensions in consideration of political art. My aim in this article is to discuss the tension of political art practices solely from this 'theoretical' dimension based on the work of Chto Delat.

John Roberts, who, as a Marxist writer on art, is one of the most concise supporters of cognitive and theoretical aspects in the aesthetical productions, is at the same time also the most loyal supporter of handling the political issues in contemporary art through formal novelties and avant-garde negations. His thesis, proposed in the analysis of postmodernism and work of Art & Language, is crucial in separating the political art from direct, activist, socially engineered activism (Roberts 1990). In his recent problematization of

avant-garde Roberts positioned the work of Chto Delat as a third or a suspensive avant-garde manifestation that could be characterized by its overt political but at the same time very cognitive and organizational elements (Roberts 2010b). Roberts does not propose the historicist scenario, where development of avant-garde reached its peak with the last, suspensive or the third avant-garde with the work of Chto Delat. In contrast, one of the three main principles of this avant-garde is that it has 'fidelity to the revolutionary impulse of the historical avant-garde as totalizing critique' (Roberts 2010b: 728),¹ where the fidelity is strictly defined as to the immediate social and political demands of the Russian (October) Revolution (Roberts 2010b: 718). Avant-garde art that is principally determined by the Revolution exceeded these demands because of its programme's inherent contradictions and experimental form. This 'form' that, according to Roberts, is 'unsurpassable central core' of avant-garde, is what makes avant-garde art ultimately political. Even after these conditions cease to exist (for example when the revolutionary conditions cease to exist), as in the case of the dark times of fascist victory, avant-garde will continue with its struggle in its own field. This is due to the heuristic and productivist nature of avant-garde that allows political work even in times of peaceful coexistence with antagonistic elements (i.e. with elements of non-revolutionary conditions). This clearly means that non-artistic elements should not govern the avant-garde's practice. For example, community participation, democratic techniques, social transformation and other utilitarian goals should not be the primary concerns of avant-garde art; these are instrumentalizations of art's principles by reducing its practice to a sole practicality. Roberts criticizes second or neo-avant-garde with these terms; it has tried to surpass the avant-garde's ultimate aims, which are a social negation, political organization and cognitive elements, by introducing the functionalist affirmation. Suspensive avant-garde, while sensitive to these problematics of the political effect of novel aesthetical forms, is at the same time not willing to give up the autonomy and cognitive dimensions of its practice. Referring to various texts written by members of the Chto Delat group Roberts demonstrates the policy of this suspensive avant-garde's theoretical practice as the necessity of negation for the production of new subjectivity and the legacy of avant-garde to make visible the new possibilities in both art and politics (Begg and Vilensky 2007).

It is important to understand the contradictory form of this third or suspensive avant-garde thoroughly in order to contextualize Chto Delat's practice within the global theoretical tendencies of contemporary political art. This tendency of political art, which maintains the principles of cognition, self-organization and negation, all together is shaped by the constant tension of reconciliation of these principles by the act of political engagement. This tension accordingly constitutes/determines the nature of this avant-garde as ephemeral and ad hoc. This means, to simplify, that the suspensive avant-garde that is political and revolutionary (through its fidelity to its *future past*: the October revolution) has a constant tendency towards social instrumentalization, but this tension of recuperation is precluded by cognitive and negationist aspects of avant-garde with continuous and permanent re-formulation of its forms. In the end, even if Roberts is not putting in these terms, it is possible to claim that the theoretical work keeps this avant-garde alive. But this double articulation of avant-garde, both as arts and as politics, or theory and practice is what constitutes generally the form of suspensive avant-garde. Apart from Chto Delat there are many other groups and individuals who can be labelled

1. Other two principles of suspensive avant-garde are: 'realism as the critical-modernist method in the spirit of Brecht and defense of artistic autonomy as a principle of self-organization' (Roberts 2010b: 728).

as being part of the suspensive avant-garde, with the clear characteristics of ephemeral and theoretical struggle, but Chto Delat represents one of the rare examples of artistic movements with the most clear fidelity towards the Soviet Revolution and towards the avant-garde that exceeded these demands. As Igor Chubarov in his text 'We can still march in a left fronts of the arts, Comrades!' described: 'faithfulness to the ideological project of the avant-garde has to be accompanied by a positive critique of its formal (academic) repetition together with a total boycott of the zones of contemporary art as the space where it has been captured by capitalism' (2008).

After all these tensions, contradictions and fine balances one cannot help but ask the question about the effects of the suspensive nature of third avant-garde on the theoretical work itself: if, in order to avoid the tension of double articulation of avant-garde not to be reduced to instrumentalization, the practice of social engagement has been suspended, then should it not also be symmetrical with the case of the theory that has a tendency to sublime towards the 'transcendence' that has to be suspended in the practice of political art? Or more precisely, what is the role of theory in balancing the political contemporary art's tensions?

THEORY OF THEORETICAL ART PRACTICE

This problematic of functionalizing the theory, or the use of theoretical practice as a normative aspect in arts, can be discussed from another angle: that of Badiou's position on the relation between art and politics. Just a glance at the concepts involved in the discussion on third avant-garde, such as suspension itself, and fidelity to revolution is enough to affiliate it with the field of Badiou's philosophy, where art is situated as a specific truth effect between negation and subtraction. John Roberts, who is aware of these similarities, in his article on Badiou's theory of art, finds that the irresolvable tension governs this theoretical position. The tension that is due to the antagonism between avant-garde's negationist and destructionist positions (violence, total destruction of previous order, etc.) is unreconcilable or disjunctive with the avant-garde's subtractive position (ultimately the abstract position arch-figured in Malevich, and in many cases, bordering with transcendence). What Roberts finds in Badiou as a latent Hegelian dialectic is a formula that resolves this disjunction by introducing the strange relation between art and politics: if subtraction is separated from destruction, 'we have as [a] result Hate and Despair', but if destruction is separated from subtraction, we have as a result a aestheticism and nihilism (art without collective agency) (Roberts 2008: 274). This strange formula, which is accordingly based on occasional suspension of one of the two tendencies in avant-garde, can also lead to the suspension of subtraction that is understood as abstract, cognitive and the true practice of art. In the universe of Badiou this elimination of the subtractive nature, which is the essence and the main constituent of art, is not easily done; instead according to Badiou's formula suspension in art/politics relation is always suspension of political, or more precisely, the destructionist dimension. Art, then, for Badiou is, in the last instance as Roberts discusses, mimicry of politics. To summarize, Badiou's theory of art places the political art as the effect of mimicry of politics; art's real political emancipation is not in its political effectiveness but in its subtraction, abstraction or autonomy of its truth/knowledge production. Roberts' critique of this theory of art departs exactly from this point: Badiou fails to render subtraction coherent as

a fully socialized concept internal to commodity relations and also to produce any adequate discussion and understanding of the social dynamics of new kinds of artistic forms that might correspond to the 'interplay' between subtraction and destruction (Roberts 2008: 277, 279). In this abstractness of art some important issues such as autonomy, institutional critique and artwork's nature of having both exchange and use value at once are not placed on the agenda, or as Roberts states, the problems in Badiou's theory of art are not theorized. His proposal, following Adorno's insistence on the determinate conceptualization of art, is second-order theorization of art's formal and expressive possibilities (Roberts 2008: 280). This proposal, which is intellectually and historically linked to the Conceptual Art's postulates, especially to the work of the Art & Language group, renders politics in artwork to a theoretical practice that is initially departed from the conceptualization of art's own conditions: in this conceptualization art's second-order theorization is not a simple self-reference, but a struggle that is political and theoretical at the same time because its demands of autonomy and abstractness will not exclude the ideological conditions and structures that govern this struggle.

Now it is time to ask what are the political or the social aspects of this theory of (art's) theoretical practice? Or more precisely what are the forms of this politics of second-order theorization in art? For a satisfactory answer we have to look to many historical examples, especially the theoretical formation of art group Art & Language, and especially their work with various Indexes, with *Blurting* in New York, and on their writings on social issues such as political activism. Elsewhere I tried to deal with this issue by analysing the concept of slogans in Art & Language and the way in which they attempted to formalize the political engagement with a careful theoretical work on the concepts involved in this action (Boynik 2011b, forthcoming). In order to determine the political aspects of theoretical practice we have to clarify the elements involved in this theoretical practice or the conceptual parameters involved in theoretical practice. This method is not to be mixed with the archaeology of knowledge or deconstruction of ideological elements residual in the conceptual discourse of any theoretical practice. Second-order theorization, or theory of theoretical practice, is not excavation, extraction or abstraction in the empiricist sense of some hidden elements that lead us to truth, as Louis Althusser would put it, but it is real theoretical work, a work of elaboration, transformation and production (1990: 59). The resources of this theoretical work Althusser finds in theoretical and practical work of revolutionary Communist movement; the former is present in the theoretical practice of 'Capital', or in Karl Marx's theoretical practice, and the latter or practical resource is to be found in the forms of political practice such as the history of struggles of Communist Parties, victories of communism in Russia, China, Cuba and in many other countries, decolonization of many Third World Countries, etc. (Althusser 1990: 63). From programmatic slogans to resolutions of party the practical outcomes of revolutionary political struggle are also resources for theoretical work. Most of the time, as Althusser discusses, these practical forms are not recognized as the theoretical events in the theory itself (1990: 65–66). It is easy to draw a parallel between these political formal resources of theoretical practice that Althusser mentions with the non-artistic elements of suspensive avant-garde formations. But here one very important problematic becomes apparent that I deliberately avoided until this moment: is the theoretical work of politics (say Lenin's slogans) similar to the theoretical work of art (say Art & Language's

2. Art & Language's reference to Althusser should be considered with caution. Even if there are few references on him in some annotations at *Blurring in New York* project, their text 'V.I. Lenin' ends with a reference to E. P. Thompson and his critique of overtheorization and the sophistication of Althusserian philosophy (Art & Language 1984: 169).

songs with Red Krayola, or Chto Delat's Songspiels), or, further, how we can see the work of art as a theoretical work?

Althusser, except for a couple of scattered texts – an open letter, an essay on the abstract painter Leonardo Cremonini, and two texts on Bertolt Brecht's theatre – did not write much about art. But his theoretical work was very influential in the field of political art discussions, and especially discussions related to spontaneous obviousness, ideological interpellation, subjectivization and state apparatuses had a crucial impact on cinema practice and theory throughout the 1960s and 1970s, both in France and in Britain. These are very delicate discussions that, in my opinion, still have theoretical and practical effects, considering the variety of works ranging from Peter Gidal to Jean-Luc Godard or from Black Audio Film Collective to Straub and Huillet, whose main intellectual problematic was Althusserian. Apart from certain writings of conceptualist artists and primarily the group of Art & Language there is not much reference to the Althusserian problematic in the field of visual art theory and practice.² But in his book on Louis Althusser Warren Montag argues that contemporary art and literature were cardinal influences to his writings; not only did Althusser's most productive period coincide with a new-found interest in contemporary painting and literature, and that he was very much influenced by those, but also the possibility which avant-garde offered for assault on the humanist foundation of bourgeoisie ideology was political position which constituted Althusser's relation to art (Montag 2003: 17–21). The main dictum for Althusser, which Montag argues should also be applied to art, is a break from the practice of reading that is dominated by a fundamentally 'religious model' of knowledge, a model according to which the world is a book whose essence or meaning can be 'read' in its appearance (Montag 2003: 55). We can further problematize this Althusserian position of art through reference of the artwork itself: after all the work of de-humanization, elaboration, transformation, de-spiritualization, and break, what is left from the artwork that is the object of this theoretical practice? Is the structure of ideology left bare (if that is possible anyhow) a last episode in engagement with artwork? Or are we talking about the suspense of art itself here? Even if Montag is not asking these questions directly, he is completely aware of these consequences and, after discarding the theory that art is reducible to the ideological super-structure, offers a study of art and literature that could reconcile singularity and unpredictability of art with the demand of science or history (2003: 133). This study or approach, or we can call it method, should start with the emphasis that the work of art is irreducible and that it must be explained as it is and also the knowledge of this artwork should not be limited to the historical conditions of its emergence (Montag 2003: 134–35). This method, which is partially based on the specific 'lure' of art, of its being the 'thing apart' as we found and insisted on throughout the text, will give a precondition of truly theoretical work in the field of art, or as Montag wrote: 'once we recognize the irreducible materiality of works, the conflicts and contradictions proper to them become visible and knowable' (2003: 134).

This materialism of theoretical work related to art practice and theory is important in order not to regress to some kind of hermeneutical abstractness where art discourse historically feels most comfortable. Materialism in the theoretical practice of art is also important once we decide to deal with the elements or resources that are constituents of this practice. More precisely, the materialistic analysis of theoretical elements that are constituents of the artwork will allow avoiding the spontaneities and immediacies involved in

that structure. To be even more precise we can give an example of our case of Chto Delat: in order to fully grasp the use of certain political and historical elements or resources in the theoretical practice of Chto Delat, such as collective, we have to apply the materialist method in order to determine whether any 'metaphysical' or ideological processes are at play in this practice.

To my knowledge Michael Sprinker's account on 'imaginary relations', which is directly related to Althusser's concept of ideology and materialist aesthetics, is most accurate for our theoretical departure. If artwork (and work on art) is about reconciliation with the unpredictability and science then how can we conceive the cognitive aspect of this practice? As we saw in John Roberts' writings art has a specific kind of knowledge (mostly related to the concepts that constitute its own field) and this specific relation to knowledge also governs art's specific relation to politics. Art should neither instrumentalize in social transformation nor does it have to disappear in subtraction. Sprinker, to whose work Roberts refers, goes further in order to make apparent the epistemological processes involved in this specific knowledge. He invokes Althusser in that the relation of art to science and ideology is a difficult one, as he proposed in his letter to Andre Daspre: 'the effect of art is not to give a knowledge of ideology (in the sense of description by concepts) but only to make ideology stand out, to render it visible' (Sprinker 1987: 271). But this role of art, again, must not to be confused with any kind of moment of epiphany or appearance; it is at once pointing at the 'conceptual armature' of the ideology of a capitalist mode of production and, second, it is performing this with a specific set of practices that are not so familiar to the science's critique of ideology: for example, this practice introduces an 'internal disassociation' in the work that consequently has further epistemological effects (as in play of Bertolazzi) and it also has a specific relation to subjectivization (as in the play of Brecht) (Sprinker 1987: 277, 282). More precisely, Sprinker defines the epistemological work involved in the theory of art of Althusser by referring to his thesis from *Reading Capital* on the epistemological novelty of Marx with a German word 'Darstellung': a concept whose object is precisely to designate the mode of *presence* of the structure in its effects and therefore to designate structural causality itself (Sprinker 1987: 289). This is exactly what we are aiming at: the specificity of the theoretical practice of art whose point of departure is theorization of its own structure; consequently, this knowledge will also designate the transformation of this structure. This is similar to the second-order theorization of Conceptualism from which Roberts draws very overt political conclusions.

Theoretical practice in its most general Althusserian sense is to differentiate the science from ideology by carefully distancing from all the obviousness, immediacies and as he calls the spontaneities of ideological cohesion (or 'cement') that is present with all parts of the edifice (1990: 25). This cement that unites ideology is rarely suspected and it is also almost a natural part of our everyday life, especially a constitutive part, of its humanism and all the other bourgeoisie concepts that are imposed upon us constantly. The aim of theoretical practice is to evade these traps. But, as Althusser shows, this obviousness of ideology is not present (or imposed) only in the field of life (i.e. our everyday relations, love, hate, religion and other non-cognitive practices), but it is also present in mediated forms, such as in theoretical work. But the work of theoretical practice is to penetrate these immediacies or spontaneities also in the theoretical work itself, to show the ideological constituents of theory. For the realization of this ideological struggle Althusser proposes

3. This sociologist or even anthropologist approach to Chto Delat's post-Soviet context can be read, and compared with our proposals, in the Introduction to a symposium organized by *Rethinking Marxism* on 'Russian aesthetics under capitalism' (Tikhonova 2008: 350–53).

a preliminary method (a dialectical materialism): to know is to produce the adequate concept of the object by means of theoretical production (theory and method), applied to a given raw material (1990: 15). It is the rules of this method, such as precisely establishing the object of theory and putting this object to work by means of production, that will necessitate the discovery that will divide science from ideology. The same can be claimed for the theoretical practice of art; it has to find and struggle against all ideological immediacies and spontaneities that constitute and designate its practice.

OBJECT OF THEORETICAL PRACTICE IN CHTO DELAT

What are, then, the objects of Chto Delat's theoretical (art) practice? In the following I propose to determine whether any residual ideological immediacies are involved in the theoretical practice of Chto Delat by looking at one conceptual object of the group, which is a *collective*. Following the discussions until now, it is possible to claim that this conceptual object is also at the same time one of the resources that they discovered. It is, as we have shown earlier with John Roberts' analysis of suspensive avant-garde, a *future past* discovery of revolutionary theory and practice. Collective is not something that Chto Delat arrived at after a difficult work on theory in their artistic production; it is also not some kind of idealist deduction of arriving at truth: they start with this conclusion, to emphasize Althusser, but without denegating the premises that produce the conclusions. We will look at these premises a bit more carefully to test whether any ideological operations are involved in the political art production that declares transparency and materialism as its principles.

In order to discuss the object of collective in Chto Delat we start by contextualizing the group's working conditions, which is Russia of post-socialism. Instead of offering some kind of sociologist reality check that the artwork is submitted or dependent on (as in many cases of vulgar Marxism interpretations), I will try to contextualize and historicize the conditions of Chto Delat with terms of theoretical practice, and the novelty that they introduced, within the theory.³ The best way to do this is to trace the moments and practices of break that Chto Delat introduced in the concept of the collective. For example, comparing the theoretical work of Chto Delat with Boris Groys and Victor Missiano, whose works deal with the same context of post-socialism and its ideological after-effects on current Russia, we can see that in Chto Delat the concepts of art collectives are not presented as an alternative policy of cultural workers or as opposition towards the officially supported and designated collective ideology. This is how Victor Missiano dealt with the post-socialist artistic collectives in his essay 'Institutionalization of friendship'. Written at the beginning of the 1990s this intervention became a core text for the problematization of collective cultural practices in contrast to official communist dogmatism. As I tried to show elsewhere the main role of this text is to situate the artistic collectives as normalization forces in transitional societies. As such it had easily captured the ideologies of transitional discourses (Boynik 2011a: 143). In Missiano's text even if collective has certain epistemological qualities they are finally practical proposals or policies for a new artistic way of living. In any case, it does not have that massive appeal to the exorcism of sedimented communist theory and practice as initiated by Boris Groys in his book *Total Art of Stalinism* written in the late 1980s. Groys, in his seminal book on avant-garde Soviet art, completely avoids the conceptions of art history based on antagonism between

avant-garde and socialist-realism. According to him the socialist-realism was based on the same principles as avant-garde based on Stalinist (and Leninist and Marxist) premises that 'subconscious dominates human consciousness and can be logically and technically manipulated to construct a new world and a new individual' (Groys 2011: 19). This synthetic construction, which, according to Groys, is the constitutive thesis of both avant-garde and socialist-realism, is directly linked to Stalinist totalizations. Essential to this synthetic construction is the collective nature that Groys names as 'collective surrealism', the policy that is genuinely Leninist but, under the guidance of Stalin, transformed into full-blown cultural politics. Because of the denial of any human participation, and the natural and traditional elements of this participation, this policy is based on appropriation of every means, of culture, or as Groys observes, even of state apparatuses, of land and the means of production (2011: 39). To summarize it is possible to say that Groys' analysis of Revolutionary break or moment is based on the assumption that communism is subconsciously a 'collective being' that is constructed synthetically, but as a subconscious its overdetermination of the cultural and artistic field is broader and deeper than is usually assumed. Hence, accordingly, the artistic practices that he proposes have to be based on deconstruction of this sedimented construction, or more precisely, on de-collectivization of this subconscious. In other words this is the post-utopian art that Groys tries to elaborate with the work of Erik Bulatov, Il'ia Kabakov and Komar and Melamid. In all cases this de-construction, or de-collectivization, is a very difficult task since the ghost of Stalin, which is in every pore of Russian man and woman, cannot easily be extracted from the subconscious. Especially in the analysis of Komar and Melamid's art Groys is most explicit in this policy: 'discovery within themselves of a universal element, a collective component that unites them with others, an amalgam of individual and world history' (Groys 2011: 93). Since this universal collective element is constructed with appropriation and the eclectic use of citations (synthesis of communism) it is not easy to deconstruct this subconscious with simple tactics of postmodern pastiche or irony; the post-utopian artists have to perform an analytical and philosophical exorcism. The main results of this philosophical practice in art are to return to the everyday or to a state of ambivalence (Groys 2011: 85–88). In the case of Groys, then, the theoretical practice is nothing but a re-emphasis of the immediate, of the obvious and of the spontaneous; here analytical (Groys does not mention theoretical) means an exorcism of the resources of Stalinism such as the collective.

Chto Delat, with their insistence on the future past of revolutionary legacy, represents a complete break from these two problematizations; their theoretical position is based on re-introduction of the concept of collective as the ultimate emancipatory practice in art. In contrast to Groys, the Chto Delat group maintains the theoretical position that the collective is not an obvious state of art and political practices, but that it has to be worked on, fought for and carefully constructed, or, as they announced in their declaration on politics, knowledge and art: 'Chto Delat is based on principles of self-organization and collective' (Chto Delat 2008b).

This tendency of collectivism in contemporary art has a certain global nature that is visible in various collaborative projects, networks, conversation pieces or simply in broad artistic positions of a 'collectivist turn'. In many cases these practices are directly involved in the practical issues of artist collaborations such as maintenance, evaluation and sustainability. In some cases even when these practices have some kind of theoretical problematic, the ontology

of phenomenological or experiential discussions determines these approaches: under what conditions is the collective emerging, what are alternatives to the collective, which modes of collaborations are not repressive, etc. (Kester 2005: 80–86). In some of these collective artistic tendencies certain political forms are present such as a break from artist-genius mythologies and an emphasis on the involvement of various non-artistic cognitive elements. It is possible to call these tendencies as artistic collectives with theoretical problematics; the common features to many of them are the insistence on radical democracy, direct participation, critique of various social extremisms, etc. The theoretical postulates of this collectivist political tendency are based on post-Marxist problematization of social contradiction's and antagonisms, primarily inspired by the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. As Peter Osborne has shown the socialist strategy of Laclau and Mouffe as 'politics of identity' was open to various interpretations, even reactionary ones such as the politics of 'collective self-assertion in antagonism' (1991: 215). Most importantly, this 'continuous process of making and re-making ourselves' (Osborne 1991: 215) has a certain performative dimension that easily allows this 'radical democracy' discourse to be adopted by most ideological and instrumentalized artistic practices (Mouffe 2007). Even if politically oriented, examples of this collectivist tendencies are not directly involved with the Marxist theories; for example, in Charles Esche's conceptualization this is related to Giorgio Agamben and Mouffe (Esche 2005: 17), in Maria Lind to Mouffe, Deleuze and Nancy (Lind 2007: 16–18), in Brian Holmes to Virno, Mouffe and Deleuze (Holmes 2007) or in the curatorial group WHW to Brian Holmes and Virno (WHW 2005). The radical democracy conceived by engineered pluralistic antagonisms in some cases even neutralizes the critiques of these artistic collectivist tendencies. For example, Claire Bishop's attempt at rebuttal of the non-epistemologically participatory art practices and co-operative relational art theories resulted in the formulation of the same theoretical postulates of 'radical agonistic democracy' of Laclau and Mouffe as her adversaries (Bishop 2004: 65–67). It seems that something of this theory of 'radical pluralistic democracy' has the possibility of uniting even the most theoretical oppositions within the same umbrella.

In contrast to a member of WHW, Nataša Ilić, who discusses Chto Delat's art practice as 'radical democratic' (Ilić 2011), I will claim that even if Chto Delat is involved in a direct struggle against the oppressive politics of Putin, as in the intervention to Badiou's planned visit to Moscow, it has never shown any interest in the agonistic elements of 'radical democratic' participation; in no way is their conception of collective related to Laclau's and Mouffe's 'logic of equivalences'. In order to make a break of Chto Delat from these collectivist tendencies more overt we can compare their work with WHW, with whom they collaborated on many projects and have many formal similarities. The most apparent similarity between these two is their reference to the future past of the revolutionary collectivist theories and practices; both WHW and Chto Delat are reintroducing communist collectivist practices in their work (through former's project on Communist Manifesto, Vojin Bakic's abstract monumental work, Partizan anti-fascist struggle, but also non-communist collectivist works during socialism such as Gorgona, Exat 51, etc., and the latter's main and continuous interest in the political and aesthetical transformations of the October Revolution). But the main difference between these two can be traced in their utilization of the concept of the collective. As I tried to show elsewhere, WHW and other so-called 'second collective' art

and cultural movements in post-Yugoslavian spaces are very much involved in the cultural policy of reconciliation and normalization within the discourse of an economical-political transition. In some aspects this approach, which can be compared with Victor Missiano's, in the work of WHW has a broader master plan of a reconciled cooperation of various alternative (and in many cases antagonistic) elements with more culturally and artistically developed progressive and pragmatic utility (Boynik 2012, forthcoming). In the last instance this interest in the collective is not theoretical, but it is either experiential or practical and it is never truly detached from national- and state-based politics. There is no such latent co-operative tendency in Chto Delat; this can be demonstrated most sharply with the formal difference in the manifestations of these two collectives: in WHW there is not a single case, to my knowledge, where members of group are in dispute, dilemma, confrontation or in antagonism with each other; they operate in a perfect harmony of successful group dynamics, never manifesting their own fissures. Chto Delat, in contrast, in most of their group discussions, texts and in the *Newspaper* that they publish, constantly manifest the schism, antagonism and disputes within their group.

From all these discussions it is clear that according to Chto Delat a 'collective' is not a sedimented subconscious of a communist totalitarian past to be exorcized, and they do not have any ambivalent ideas about the collective. Also, the collective is not related to practical issues of alternative artistic policy and it does not have any relations to national or state categories. The collective is not a cooperational or a utilitarian cohesion, but rather, it has a very inconsistent nature. This dissonance, which divides Chto Delat's idea of a collective from that of others, is similar to Art & Language's problematization of this issue through the treatment of collaboration as a conflict or as a state of pandemonium (Dreher 2005).

IDEOLOGIES OF THEORY: CHTO DELAT'S SPONTANEITIES

From this point, as a conclusion, we can ask as to what are the theoretical works involved in the problematization of this pandemonial or conflictual state in Chto Delat's practice and how does this practice effect their art form? If we again refer to Art & Language practice of collective theoretical work it is not superficial to ask whether there is any Indexing on the conceptual objects involved in the artistic practice of Chto Delat. To my knowledge, there is no systematic analysis of the conceptual objects involved in the theoretical work of Chto Delat, but there are many diverse theoretical elements in the work of the group that will allow us to realize this systematization, or Indexing of the objects, which, finally, will directly deconstruct the objects of this operation. Thus, my aim is, as an uninvited guest, to realize the second-order theorization of the theoretical work of Chto Delat by trying to specify the nature of conceptual object's involved in their practice. Again, I will perform this theoretical work for a 'collective'.

One of the most frequently repeated critiques of Chto Delat's theoretical work is the inconsistency of their theoretical references, which are as antagonistic and contradictory as the gap between Agamben and Althusser, Negri and Badiou, Brecht and Deleuze, etc. These antagonistic references in the theoretical practice of collective artwork are not particular to Chto Delat; in the same way Art & Language had similar irreconcilable theoretical references (Harrison 2001: 107). But it seems that in Chto Delat these contradictory

theoretical elements are not worked through, or transformed during the course of their own theoretical work. There is the impression that this theoretical elements are not in any kind of discussion and conflict, they are as 'floating signifiers' hanging in the practice of Chto Delat ready for utilization in any constellation in order to junction with anything at anyplace. These resources are generally neither worked through nor is their presence problematized. As Louis Althusser discussed about this immediacy of practice,

left to itself, a spontaneous (technical) practice produces only the 'theory' it needs as a means to produce the ends assigned to it: this theory is never more than the reflection of this end, uncriticized, unknown, in its means of realization, that is, it is a *by-product* of the reflection of the technical practices' end on its means.

(2005: 171)

It is important to show whether there is such a spontaneous-technical practice at play in the theoretical work of Chto Delat. Since I try to show that the novelty of Chto Delat is based on a break from practicality (social engineering) of a collectivist turn in contemporary art, here, the more acute problem is related to the existence of practicality or technicality and spontaneity in the theory itself or, more precisely, what if theory as an element of artistic practice suspends itself in order to open the ideological field for immediate practicality?

Following the discussions till now it can be claimed that if theory has this unworked and technical nature, then the objects involved in these processes would also have similar manifestations. The collective in Chto Delat as a political and revolutionary concept is the condition for theoretical work but in itself this object is non-understandable, non-criticized and non-problematized. Finally, it is always designating the political emancipation. But in no way is it discussed how this object determines/ designates political or aesthetical emancipation. It seems that the collective that is supposedly the main condition for the cognition or the guarantor for the political art practice is treated as the uncognitive object. More precisely, in the theoretical practice of Chto Delat, the object of collective is not theorized. Looking at the many examples of Chto Delat work we immediately see the following: a collective is applicable to many social, political, aesthetical and human conditions and automatically grants subversive elements to these conditions. For example, film-making, theatre, housing, thinking, drinking, motherhood, etc., whatever when collectively practiced is emancipatory and critical. To look at one application of this collectivist emancipation, motherhood, it is possible to show how the object of theoretical work when not critically examined would end up as non-critical and a-political practicality. Dimitry Vilensky and Tsaplya, members of the Chto Delat group in their text, wrote that motherhood in its role as a collective force can be emancipatory in contemporary capitalist conditions (2007). In the same article they locally contextualize this possibility with the political practice of the Committee of Soldier's Mothers, who are open opponents to Putin's politics. Precisely this motherhood was, for Irina Aristarkhova, a departure point for discussing the collective artistic and political movements in post-soviet Russia. Aristarkhova, discussing the art collectives in post-soviet Russia in 2007, fails to mention Chto Delat, but discusses the work of artist Anatoly Osmolovsky's actions and criticizes his position as being too

'meta-theoretical' without any social effectivity (Aristarkhova 2007: 259). This 'meta-theoretical' position is not capable of producing the social effect as the Union of the Committees of Soldier's Mother's of Russia does with an insistence on 'motherhood', which is unaccommodable in any theory, and is beyond the Program, Code or a Law (Aristarkhova 2007: 263). Through implementing Kristeva's and Levinas' views Aristarkhova introduces the category of motherhood not only as pre-theoretical but also as pre-social and pre-cultural, where politics does not come back (as in an orthodox church or soviet union) as an abstract philosophical category, but as a real, collective, lived, effective possibility to capitalize on and incorporate fragments of antagonistic elements (2007: 265). If 'mother' as a non-theoretical entity is enabling the conditions for collective aesthetical and political practices in the most conservative, experiential and non-cognitive ways, then it seems that Chto Delat, by collectivizing motherhood without problematization of this process, is also keeping the doors to non-theoretical practicality open. Motherhood, as an ultimate affirmative category, is too ideologically immediate and obvious for showing this non-cognitive nature of a 'collective'. We have to perform this demonstration through some aspect of negation. Considering that negation, as cognition, is a constitutive principle of avant-garde, it is necessary to look at this problem of negativity in order to determine whether non-theorization of conceptual objects will lead to certain practical affirmations *per se*.

As John Roberts wrote, negation in art is its starting position and 'for art to remain art (rather than transform itself into architectural design, fashion or social theory tout court) it must experience itself as being "out of joint" both with its official place in the world and within its own tradition' (2010a: 289–90). Negation offers a possibility for art to emancipate from spontaneity and ideological conditions and for re-structuralization of its own conditions and forms. This is why now we have to look at the cases of negation in Chto Delat and ask whether this position does have some kind of ideological unmediated relation to the object of a collective. If our assumption that theoretical practices that do not theorize their (own) conceptual objects will always affirm the object as self-understandable, or an obvious being, is right, then we should find the existence of 'collective' spontaneously also in negation. Chto Delat has many examples of negation and refusal, most of them in theory, and that is what interests us here. But I will choose one, which also has a practico-theoretical aspect: Chto Delat's rejection to not participate in a strike protesting the Subvision Festival organized by the artists and activists against the neo-liberal gentrification policies in the City of Hamburg in 2009. Chto Delat's decision not to join the strike against neo-liberal policies that made this Festival possible should be understood as avant-garde's principle of negation, which actually means to be 'out of joint'. Also negating the participation, or the refusal in some cases, as Peter Osborne showed in the case of Chris Gilbert, who resigned from his post of curating contemporary art in order to protest American imperialist policies, 'as such has little to tell us about the possibilities for politically critical practice in the art world' (2007: 109). In other words, the refusal might lack the theory, or the cognitive aspect, and just becomes the manifestation of mono-dimensional retreat. Participation, and especially participation in cultural and artistic manifestations that are antagonistic to political art practice, might have an even more productive effect on the politicization of that practice or as Day, Edwards and Mabb showed it might dramatize the contradictions of art production that

will further enrich the politicization of the art practice. Chto Delat, apart from taking part in contradictory manifestation, also published a small text in their *Newspaper* explaining why they are 'not off'. Reading this declaration carefully we realize that Chto Delat defends artistic and theoretical autonomy. They declare their aim as to publicize critical and anti-capitalist views in all possible spaces and institutions or to realize their contribution, which is the collective search for alternatives in a highly repressive situation (Chto Delat 2009). Being fully aware of the fact that any cultural product can be instrumentalized as a commodity against its producers, Chto Delat is urging the need to practice a fundamentally different politics that is 'based on egalitarianism and collective participation' (2009). Against recuperation what is proposed is not stalemate or pacification but participation with an emphasis on theoretical subversive elements, which is ultimately the 'collective'. Cognitive anti-capitalist emancipation as collective participation, as declared, is the central goal of their work. The object of a 'collective' again emerged in their theoretical work, and this time also as uncriticized and unreflected, as some kind of an unexplainable end for itself, or as they explain in the declaration, collective political articulation is understood as 'self-clarification'. This self-clarified, or obvious 'collective' as in the affirmative case of motherhood, also in a detached position of negation, consequently opens the door to, as Althusser would put it, ideological theoretical practices: declaration closes with a call for unity against the neo-liberals who, with dirty tricks, want to 'divide the artists' (Chto Delat 2009). It is very strange how the theory, which in the practice of Chto Delat is aiming at autonomy, negation and self-organization, recapitulates in general demand for unity as the means for collective articulation.

One of the reasons for this theoretical retreat is due to the asymmetrical structure of the double articulation of suspensive avant-garde or the relational mode between aesthetics and politics. This structural dilemma of double articulation most clearly became visible in a discussion between Gerald Raunig and Dimitry Vilensky on the issue of organization and spontaneity in the political art practices. Both Raunig and Vilensky, as representatives of seemingly different philosophical systems, argued on the necessity of new forms of organization in political art practices, and both were in agreement on the theoretical importance of this practice. Another common issue to both is the policy of in-betweenness that Raunig emphasizes as the 'need for new organization and a constant struggle against structuralisation' (Raunig and Vilensky 2008: 10) or Vilensky as 'a concatenation which is neither rigidly striating the singularities as in the state form nor totalizing them in a identitarian community' (Raunig and Vilensky 2008: 14). Through the discussion it seems that what brings them together are complex theoretical constellations of Deleuzian 'non-representative politics', 'exodus', 'flight lines' or as Raunig labels them 'instituent practices' and the Leninist critique of 'fetishization of politics' and reminiscences of model's of party, the trade union or the people's front. This diverse theoretical practice, apart from 'criticizing the old dialectical method', also, finally against the frigidity of thought, proposes spontaneity as 'incredible innovative potential which can only be actualized through interaction with an "external agent"' (Raunig and Vilensky 2008: 17). This concatenation that is established with external factors or non-artistic elements is a very tricky move; it is at the same time introducing an art practice that is functionalizing the theory and also proposing a new policy for organization of political culture that can be seen as social or architectural engineering. The policy of this new organization

that could be labelled as 'New Marseilles' is in the same interview described by Vilensky through installation of an *Activist Club* referring to Rodchenko as a 'new functionalism for alternative organizations that are neither as stiff and hedonist-like lounge areas championed by a "new creative class" nor shabby aesthetics of social centers, squats and protest camps' (Raunig and Vilensky 2008: 18). This new instrumentalized socially active political art policy is best described by Vilensky in his text 'Practicing dialectic: Chto Delat and method' published in *Newspaper*, as re-aesthetization of politics, something in contrast to Walter Benjamin's warning, something that will, as Vilensky describes, show that

it is not enough to make shit look shittier and smell smellier. It is vital to convince the viewer that there is also something that is different from shit. And we shouldn't count on the fact that viewers will figure this out for themselves. This 'something' would be comparable in power to the *Marseilles*.

(Vilensky 2009)

What is most important in this in-betweenness is not only the condition for a new policy but also functionalization of theory, or of self-evidence, as Vilensky says: their collective art practice is material proof of the 'instituent practices' theoretical validity' (Raunig and Vilensky 2008: 12). The problem in this retreat is not that theory becomes practical, but that this practicality is realized with the introduction of non-theoretical extrapolations such as a demand for populist policy. In these cases theory becomes a tool not for a critical reflection of existing conceptual objects, but as an 'object' for catalysing the unreflected transformation of art. In these cases, as Peter Osborne showed in the relation of philosophy to conceptual art, what happens is the disappearance of theory for affirmation of art (1999: 47–65). Similar theoretical-recuperation was found by John Roberts in his essay 'Avant-gardes after Avant-gardism' published in *Newspaper of the Platform 'Chto Delat?'* as denegation of avant-garde's political, violent, negationist and class character or simply denegation of its political revolutionary traits by introducing a future past avant-gardism without the past's revolution (2007). This suspension of political is what sets Andrew Benjamin and Hal Foster apart as future past avant-gardists from Adorno, who never elapsed to the coherent avant-garde of happy negativity. But as we remember, there is also another kind of suspension, one that the third avant-garde as opposed to the neo-avant-garde of Benjamin and Foster has introduced: the suspension of social engagement in favour of theoretical engagement (Roberts 2010b). But as I tried to problematize in these last pages, the question is what if in this theoretical practice, or engagement, some kind of non-theoretical and ideological elements are involved? Or more precisely, what if this theoretical work affirms some unreflected ideological features without even noticing them? My thesis is that by carefully looking at any object of Chto Delat's theoretical practice, in this case 'collective', it is possible to see how this unmediated theoretical engagement leads to closure in this revolutionary and politically engaged art practice. Of course this closure may be seen if applied in other conceptual objects of their theoretical work, for example, in handling the issue of 'pleasure', 'entertainment' and 'Brecht'.

In the appendix that follows I will try to discuss this theoretical closure with the schematization of the conceptual processes involved in this practice.

4. Jameson explains 'vanishing mediator' through protestanism as:

once Protestantism has accomplished the task of allowing a rationalization of innerworldly life to take place, it has no further reason for being and disappears from the historical scene. It is thus in the strict sense of the word a catalyst agent that permits an exchange of energies between two otherwise mutually exclusive terms; and may say with removal of the brackets, the whole institution of religion itself (in other words, what is here designated as 'Protestantism') serves in its turn as a kind of overall bracket of framework within which change takes place and which can be dismantled and removed when its usefulness is over.

(1988: 25)

APPENDIX

As we saw, the conceptual object 'collective' involved in the theoretical art practice of Chto Delat had two irresolvable elements: the organization and the spontaneity. This conflictual situation was because of the conflictual theoretical positions of this practice. This diversity of theoretical positions involved in the practice of Chto Delat is more than we mentioned in the article, from Lenin and Deleuze, to Badiou and Agamben, until Althusser and Foucault, to Roberts and Groys. Following the schematization of Fredric Jameson from his text 'The politics of theory: Ideological positions in the postmodernist debate' published in 1983, I will discuss these variations in four general theoretical tendencies as pro-modernist, anti-postmodernist, pro-postmodernist and anti-modernist. These four conflictual and binary tendencies are highly suitable for the schematization of conjunctions and disjunctions as necessary concepts for interpreting the structural relations as in the famous Greimasian rectangular model (Greimas and Rastier 1968: 88). For example, we can say that pro-modernist theoretical tendencies have a disjunctive relation with pro-postmodernist and anti-modernist tendencies, but a conjunctive relation with anti-postmodernist tendencies. Provocative as it can be the reference to Greimas' schematization of contradictory relations of elements results in an inherent limitation or 'deep structures' in the system of 'semiotic constraints'. These constraints are not necessarily introducing a step-back to the structural conjuncture of eternal relations, which has been seen as too un-human and apolitical. Especially in dealing with political art practice this schematization based on inherent limitations might seem as a nightmare, but I think that at the same time this schematization, which posits that 'all concepts are implicitly or explicitly defined in terms of conceptual oppositions' (Jameson 1988: 13), can reflect more precisely on contradictions of political art. My aesthetical reason, so to speak, for applying this structural schema to theoretical practice of Chto Delat is because it has many similarities to the analysis of Jameson on Protestantism's functionalist role as a 'vanishing mediator'.⁴

In the discussion between Alexey Penzin and Dimitry Vilensky 'What's the use? Art, philosophy and subjectivity formation', which is probably the most engaged discussion on Chto Delat's theoretical practice, the claim is that 'theory – the concept – is an organic element of art, and aesthetic experience is a necessary component of theoretical reflection' (Penzin and Vilensky 2010: 94). Apart from this constitutive relation the theory also has an aspect of transformation (via Karl Marx's Eleventh Theses on Feuerbach), which is its main practical and revolutionary dimension. This transformation, which is not only of an abstract and conceptual nature, has a clear relation to subjectivity formation or subjectivity transformation. They advance this transforming subjectivity position that can be described as Foucault's 'care of the self' or Pierre Hadot's 'philosophy as a way of life' through the



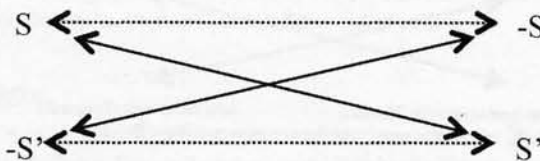
collectivization of these elements involved in transformation (Penzin and Vilensky 2010: 95–96). The general schema is as follows:

In this diagram S designates subjectivity and S' a new form of transformed subjectivity; for example, in the 'practices of the self' (S) the revolutionary transformation will pave the way to the 'radical transformation of subject', or to the *metanoia* (S'). In other words, the subject formation is approximated to the truth. Advancement of this process to the politics, which does not mean that the transformation of subject is not political in this system, is realized in Marx by 'collectivizing' these elements. Accordingly the element S that in Marx turned to the 'class subjectivity' or 'social practice' is transformed to, the 'communism'. Thus, the revolutionary transformation of class in this diagram results in communism. But since the direct application/translation of subjective formation to the social formation would mean the mechanistic collectivization of the elements, Penzin, in his diagrams, comes up with a third solution, which is one related to our current and actual political situation.

Subjective and social, or individual and collective is fused, intersected or commingled in the new (S) element of singularity, which is named, probably following Negri, as 'multitude' (Penzin and Vilensky 2010: 96, 99). Revolutionary transformation of element of 'multitude' in this last diagram paves the way to 'exodus' or to 'commons'. Probably this is how we should understand transformation of 'communism' to 'commonalism' in the policy of Chto Delat, which in another discussion between two members of group has been defined as 'actualizing political potentialities in different forms of action, just as there are still many zones still immanently non-colonisable by capital' or 'creating something new and sharing it with people without pursuing any utilitarian logic' (Riff and Vilensky 2009: 470).

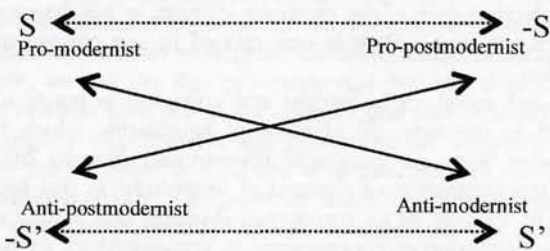
(Riff and Vilensky 2009: 470).

The main problem of this schematization is that the elements involved in this process of transformation are not handled in terms of their contradictory nature; for example, in conceptual-political aggrandizing of subjective and social formation to the formation of the 'multitude' no disjunctive, contradictory, cohesive elements are posed; in fact, this dialectic is described in most cohesive terms such as 'fusion', 'intersection' or 'commingling'. This is the first closure of this system that is based on unification and co-optive affirmation; the second closure is regarding the elements involved in the same system; they are also in an 'intersect' relation, or as Penzin describes referring to the first diagram that we reproduced below, as 'there is also a reverse that the truth has on the subject as it transfigures and "illuminates" it. This is the cycle of subjectivity formation' (Penzin and Vilensky 2010: 95). These two closures are another reason why I decided to use one overtly closed or constrained system in order to schematize the theoretical practice of Chto



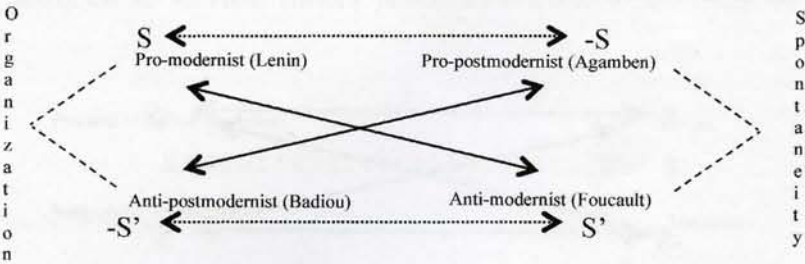
Delat. This Greimasian semiotic system, even if it is posed as a deep structure, has one very peculiar nature of not eliminating the contradictions as in the previous diagrams.

Here as I have mentioned earlier briefly the relation between elements S and -S and S with S' are of an antagonistic and contradictory nature. This system is in disjunctive relations as posed in the previous two relations and in conjunctive relations, which is in this case between S and -S' or -S and S'. Going back to other schematizations on postmodernist debate and its relation between ideology and theory, also proposed by Jameson, I would like to apply the same theoretical elements in dealing with the structure of the theoretical practice of Chto Delat.



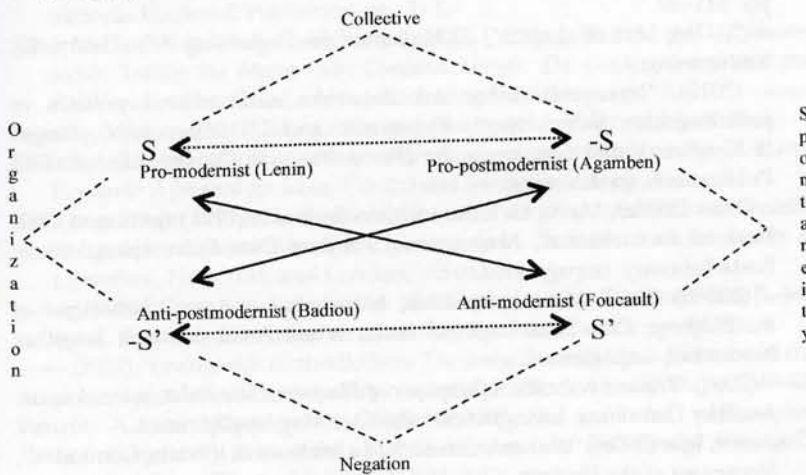
In totalizing or 'cognitive mapping' of these theoretical elements we can see that pro-modernist and anti-postmodernist theoretical tendencies are in conjunction, as opposed to pro-modernist tendencies that are in disjunction with both pro-postmodernist and anti-modernist theoretical tendencies. For example, we can claim that the element of 'Lenin' as pro-modernist is in conjunction with the element of 'Badiou' as anti-postmodernist in the structure of the theoretical practice of Chto Delat. Consequently we can claim that the element of 'Foucault' as anti-modern is in conjunction with the element of 'Agamben' as pro-post modernist. Following this structure it is clear that Lenin is disjunctive with both Foucault and Agamben.

Recalling the earlier account from this article that the initial problem of Chto Delat's theoretical practice is the irresolvable tension between the 'organization' and 'spontaneity' we can make explicit these tendencies by situating them in our schema. My thesis is that this tension led to both pacification of politics (instrumentalization, engineering and adaptation) as 'policy for New Marseilles' and of theory, as suspension of its autonomy by introducing non-theoretical elements. It is logical to situate these tendencies within the cohesive relation of conjunctions: the pro-modernist and anti-postmodernist as theoretical elements



of 'organization' and pro-postmodernist and anti-modernist as elements of 'spontaneity'. Then we will have the following structure:

Following Jameson's proposal in the schematization of analysis on post-
 estanism as a 'vanishing mediator' this Greimasian rectangle has the
 advantage of generating other supplementary relations, especially the
 relation between disjunct elements, in the case of the rectangle relation
 between contradictory elements of S and -S. In the case of our schema,
 this would be a supplementary relation between the 'organization' and
 'spontaneity' tendency in the theoretical artistic practice of Chto Delat.
 What is combining them and completing the system of conceptualiza-
 tion is the object of a 'collective' that by closing this system in an affir-
 mative disposition, as opposed to 'negation', which closes the system
 in a negative disposition, suspends the theory as ad hoc momentary
 functional parameters that allow the practice to work. The schema, in
 this case, be



From all these schemas it is clear that in Chto Delat's theoretical practice what causes the closure or ideological immediacy is evasion of disjunctive and contradictory elements from their work. As in the previous schema on 'subjectivity formation' these relations are posed as linear and monolithic without any fissures. These fissures, as I tried to show earlier, exist in Chto Delat's practice, even more than in many other mentioned political art tendencies, but they are not reflected upon. Contradictions exist as unmediated or almost as part of the necessities of their general 'world-view'. Since these contradictory theoretical elements or resources which are part of their theoretical and artistic work are not reflected upon tend to close the system with intrusion of factors which are completely unexplainable. In this case, the collective plays this role; it saves the system by mysteriously uniting all the conjunctive and disjunctive elements without questioning the context of these theoretical resources. The only possibility left for theory is, then, to vanish from the practice.

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