

THEMATIC ARTICLE

Thinking about organization and organization studies based on the philosophy of praxis

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Abstract

This essay proposes a reflection on the themes of organization and organizational studies, taking the propositions of Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez's philosophy of praxis as the foundation. The author's propositions are systematized in the first part of the text, what refers to the definitions of praxis and teleology – what defines the proper human activity – to the inseparable relationship between theory and practice in praxis; to the levels and forms of praxis – repetitive and creative, spontaneous and reflexive; to the philosophy of praxis. Based on these foundations, a reflection is made on Administrative Theories, Organizational Theories, Management as the hegemonic version in Administration and Organizational Studies (OS), Organizational Analysis understood as a predominantly interpretive and constructionist theoretical activity, and Critical Management Studies. It ends with a discussion about OS as a space with the potential for a creative praxis in relation to the organization of liberating social struggles. The challenge is to think about organization as a category with possibilities of content developed based on creative dialogues and learning processes with the knowledge produced in the praxis of organizing liberating concrete struggles embedded in material socio-historical relations.

Keywords: Philosophy of praxis. Organization. Organization studies. Social struggles. Social movements.

Pensar la organización y los estudios organizacionales desde la filosofía de la praxis

Resumen

Este ensayo propone una reflexión sobre los temas de la organización y los estudios organizacionales tomando las proposiciones de Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez sobre la filosofía de la praxis como fundamento. Las proposiciones del autor se encuentran sistematizadas en la primera parte del texto en lo que se refiere a las definiciones de praxis y teleología – lo que define la actividad propiamente humana –; a la relación inseparable entre teoría y práctica en la praxis; a los niveles y formas de la praxis – reiterativa y creadora, espontánea y reflexiva –; a la filosofía de la praxis. Posteriormente, con base en estos fundamentos, se realiza una reflexión sobre las teorías administrativas, las teorías organizacionales, el *management* como versión hegemónica en la Administración y en los Estudios Organizacionales (EO), el Análisis Organizacional entendido como actividad teórica marcadamente interpretativa y construcciónista, y los *Critical Management Studies*. Se finaliza con una discusión sobre los EO como espacio con potencial para una praxis creadora en relación con la organización de luchas sociales liberadoras. El reto es concebir la organización como una categoría con posibilidades de contenido desarrolladas a partir de diálogos creativos y procesos de aprendizaje con el conocimiento que es producido en la praxis de organizar luchas liberadoras concretas, insertas en la materialidad de relaciones sociohistóricas.

Palabras clave: Filosofía de la praxis. Organización. Estudios organizacionales. Luchas sociales. Movimientos sociales.

Pensar a organização e os estudos organizacionais desde a filosofia da práxis

Resumo

Este ensaio propõe uma reflexão sobre os temas da organização e dos estudos organizacionais tomando as proposições de Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez sobre filosofia da práxis como fundamento. As proposições do autor se encontram sistematizadas na primeira parte do texto no que se refere às definições de práxis e teleologia – o que define a atividade propiamente humana –; à relação inseparável entre teoria e prática na práxis; aos níveis e forma da práxis – reiterativa e criadora, espontânea e reflexiva; à filosofia da práxis. Na sequência, com base nesses fundamentos, se realiza uma reflexão sobre as Teorias Administrativas, as Teorias Organizacionais, o *Management* como versão hegemônica na Administração e nos Estudos Organizacionais (EO), a Análise Organizacional entendida como atividade teórica marcadamente interpretativa e construçãoista, e os *Critical Management Studies*. Se finaliza com uma discussão sobre os EO como um espaço com potencial para uma práxis criadora em relação com a organização de lutas sociais libertadoras. O desafio é conceber organização como uma categoria com possibilidades de conteúdo desenvolvidas a partir de diálogos criativos e processos de aprendizagem com o conhecimento que é produzido na práxis de organizar lutas libertadoras concretas, inseridas na materialidade de relações sociohistóricas.

Palavras-chave: Filosofia da práxis. Organização. Estudos organizacionais. Lutas sociais. Movimentos sociais.

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INTRODUCTION

The proposal for this text is to stimulate a reflection on our work as academics and practitioners of and in organisations and organisational processes, and to do so based on the contribution of one of the most important philosophers of Our America: Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez. As this is an invitation to reflection, it is not intended to provide conclusions or results. Instead, it is hoped that it will produce creative and fruitful interlocutions for the continuity of the dialogue.

Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (1915-2011) arrived in México in 1939. A Young writer and member of the Republican army against Franco's forces that ended the Second Spanish Republic established in 1931, he arrived for exile at the age of 24. He soon joined the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) as a student at the Faculty of Philosophy, where he obtained his bachelor's, master's and doctorate in philosophy. Shortly afterwards, he joined the teaching staff, working for more than fifty years and becoming one of the most prominent philosophers of Latin America (Robles, 2009). In 1967 he published a fundamental book, as it was his doctoral thesis – *"Filosofía de la Praxis"* (Philosophy of Praxis) – which opened a new perspective for the development of Marxism in Latin America (Lozano, n.d.).

The following content is a synthetic exposition of Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez propositions concerning the definitions of praxis and teleology – what defines the properly human activity; the inseparable relationship between theory and practice in praxis; the levels and forms of praxis – reiterative and creative, spontaneous and reflexive; the philosophy of praxis. In the sequence, based on these foundations, a reflection is proposed on Administrative Theories, Organizational Theories, Management as the hegemonic version in Administration and Organization Studies (OS), Organisational Analysis understood as a markedly interpretive and constructionist theoretical activity, and Critical Management Studies (CMS). This is followed by a discussion of OS as a space with potential for creative praxis in relation to the organisation of liberating social struggles.

THE FOUNDATION OF PRAXIS ACCORDING TO ADOLFO SÁNCHEZ VÁZQUEZ

The reference to address the theme of praxis is mainly the book by Sánchez Vázquez (2003): *"La filosofía de la praxis"*. A few complementary insertions of his own authorship are made to contribute to the understanding, and also insertions of other authors coherent with his propositions and with the same objective.

According to Sánchez Vázquez (2003, p. 51), "all praxis is activity, but not all activity is praxis". Activity, in a broad sense, refers to the act or set of acts by means of which the agent modifies something.

Such a general definition begs consideration of what defines the properly human activity: that which involves the intervention of consciousness with two results at different times – the prefiguration in the idea and the actual result. As Marx (2013, p. 115) explains: "what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality." Lozano (2009, p. 218) complements that "Marx's discovery is that man builds, unlike bees, a social framework from the relationship between material activity and intellectual activity that implies intentionality". In other words, human beings are, by definition, ontopraxiological beings who create an objective and subjective framework which are social relations. Lukács (1978, p. 43) also highlights Marx's merit in revealing the priority of practice, its directive and controlling function of knowledge, demonstrating that all praxis, even the most immediate and every day, has a relation to consciousness, "since it is always a teleological act in which the finality of realisation precedes both objectively and temporarily".

In order to speak of human activity, therefore, it is essential to speak of teleology – of activity in accordance with ends, regardless of how the originally formulated idea ultimately takes shape. With regard to this ontological aspect, Sánchez Vázquez (200) incorporates Marx's (2013) conception: the human/social being exists by producing the new and always producing itself because it is the only being capable of prefiguring its *telos*, the result it aims to produce.

This is the ontological basis for understanding that praxis refers "to the practical transforming social activity that responds to practical needs and involves a certain degree of knowledge of the reality it transforms and of the needs it satisfies" (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 310). If the ends that consciousness elaborates carry within them a demand for realisation, this realisation

presupposes, among other conditions, a cognitive activity so that the ends are fulfilled; there is an intimate relationship between the elaboration of ends and the production of knowledge about the world and about oneself.

Praxis, therefore, “has a material, objective aspect, so it cannot be reduced to its subjective, conscious side; at the same time, this conscious side cannot be reduced to its material side.” Therefore, “theory is not practical in itself, nor as a model to be applied, but it is so because it is part of the practical process” in which it finds its foundation, its ends and its criterion of truth (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 51).

In other words, “simple, objective, psychic or merely spiritual activity that is not materially objectified cannot be considered praxis” (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 271). Although “theoretical practice transforms perceptions, representations or concepts, and creates a peculiar type of products which are hypotheses, theories, laws, etc., in none of these cases is reality transformed.” In this sense, theoretical activity is distinguished from practical activity because its object or raw material is objects that have only a subjective existence, or concepts, theories, representations or hypotheses that have an ideal existence. The immediate aim of theoretical activity “is to elaborate or transform ideally, not really, that raw material in order to obtain, as products, theories that explain a present reality, or models that ideally prefigure a future reality” (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, pp. 279-280).

If, on the one hand, theoretical activity is not practical per se and, for this reason, one cannot speak of theoretical praxis; on the other hand, there is an indissoluble unity of theory and practice because the knowledge elaborated in theoretical activity is indispensable for transforming reality, or for outlining ends that ideally anticipate its transformation. However, it must be made clear that, despite this indissoluble unity, theoretical activity is still the product of subjective operations, even though they may have objective manifestations.

In the framework of this indissoluble unity there are relations of autonomy and dependence of one and the other, that is, practice is the foundation and the end of theory, understanding that “it is not a direct and immediate relation, since a theory can arise [...] to satisfy directly and immediately theoretical demands” and that, only in the last instance and as part of a historical-social process, “theory responds to practical needs and has its source in practice (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 309). If so, affirming the unity between theory and practice does not deny the relative autonomy of theory. In the same way, it is not possible to think that practice becomes theoretical in itself, as if practice alone would make its rationality transparent. Practice is foundation, end and criterion of true knowledge, but practice does not speak for itself and therefore requires a theoretical relationship with it in order to understand praxis (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003).

Even if practice retains its primacy over theory, this primacy does not dissolve theory into practice, or practice into theory. By maintaining the two in relations of unity, and not identity, theory can enjoy a certain autonomy with respect to practical needs. This relative autonomy is an indispensable condition for theory to serve practice and even to be able to anticipate it. Without this autonomous development, theory would be “a mere expression of an existing practice and would not be able to fulfil, as theoretical instrument, a practical function” (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, 313).

To sum up: praxis is a theoretical-practical activity, “that is to say, it has an ideal, theoretical side and a material, properly practical side, with the particularity that only artificially, by a process of abstraction, we can separate the one from the other.” Now, “in the same way that theoretical, subjective activity, in itself, is not praxis, neither is a material activity of the individual [...] when it lacks the subjective, theoretical moment, represented by the conscious side of that activity” (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 315).

It can now be addressed the theme of “different levels of praxis according to the degree of penetration of the active subject consciousness in the practical process and the degree of creation or humanisation of the transformed matter highlighted in the product of his practical activity”: creative praxis and reiterative or imitative praxis; and reflexive and spontaneous praxis (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 318).

Praxis is essentially creative. In creative praxis, consciousness draws “an open end, or a dynamic project, and precisely because of this openness or dynamism it must remain open and active throughout the whole practical process.” The distinctive features of creative praxis are the indissoluble unity of the subjective and the objective: “the unpredictability of the process and of the result; and the “uniqueness and unrepeatability of the product.” However, between one creation and another, human beings reiterate an already established praxis (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, pp. 321-322),

In reiterative or imitative praxis, the three aforementioned traits are absent, or there is only a weak manifestation of them. In it, the subjective is expressed in a kind of ideal model: “the project, goal or plan pre-exist to its realisation;” “the field of the unpredictable is narrowed;” “it is a second-hand praxis” that does not produce a qualitative change in the present reality and “does not transform creatively, although it contributes to extend the area of what has already been created and, therefore, to multiply quantitatively a qualitative change that has already been produced” (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 330).

Two obvious expressions of reiterative or imitative praxis are bureaucratised praxis and the praxis that exploits labour in the productive process.

In bureaucratised praxis there is a rupture between form and content, with the formalisation of bureaucracy: “bureaucratised activity can be repeated ad infinitum as long as it fills the form that pre-exists the content and remains outside the practical process” (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 332). The reference is not the activity of a group of people exercising a specific and legitimate practice, but the degraded, inauthentic forms that are incompatible with creative praxis.

In the labour process that transforms the worker into a commodity, predetermined patterns characteristic of reiterative or imitative praxis are followed, and the unity of consciousness and body as an activity directed by the former disappears. Thus, two of the distinctive features of creative praxis disappear: “the product is not a mere duplication or reproduction of an ideal object, nor is it the reproduction of the latter as an element of a series that can be repeated ad infinitum” (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 336).

To move forward it is necessary to define practical consciousness and praxis consciousness. Practical consciousness is that which acts by intervening in the course of the practical process to turn an ideal result into a real one, even modifying the process itself in its realisation in order to face unforeseeable demands. Praxis consciousness rises in creative praxis and is not only projected, embodied, but turns on itself and on the material activity in which it is embodied; it contributes to enrich the real activity, it is the “practical self-consciousness” (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 353).

The degree of consciousness of praxis makes it possible to distinguish two new levels: spontaneous praxis and reflexive praxis.

The practical problem of the kind of relationship that praxis has with consciousness has implications for liberation praxis, for praxis that is oriented towards the transformation of society. The relationship between the spontaneous and the reflexive is critical in organising and in studying social movements, popular and workers’ struggles. Sánchez Vázquez (2003) warns of the need to confront two extremes that are equally pernicious because of their practical consequences: the overestimation of the spontaneous element, which has the counterpart of lowering the role of theory; and the overestimation of the reflexive element, which has the counterpart of ignoring the spontaneous elements that emerge at the beginning or during the practical processes of struggle¹.

A conscious praxis is oriented by a just relationship between the spontaneous and the reflexive. Liberation from exploitation can only be achieved if there is consciousness of exploitation and of the necessity of the corresponding praxis to cancel it, of “a praxis that unfolds within the framework of a given set of objective conditions and with a high consciousness of it, both of its limits and of its ends and possibilities”. A praxis that “has an objective aspect (insofar of its necessity, limitations and possibilities are objectively determined, as a praxis founded and demanded by history and society), and a subjective aspect” in the consciousness of this historical-social necessity, of its limits and possibilities, from which it draws ends to transform society (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 355).

¹ Sánchez Vázquez (2003) refers to revolutionary theory and to the practical process of revolution in a direct debate with Lenin (2015) thesis on the indispensability of revolutionary theory for a revolutionary movement to exist. It is understood that it is possible to maintain the idea that Sánchez Vázquez defends, adapting it for social and popular struggles, that aim to transform the exploitative social relations of labour and nature imposed by the system of capital, adopting the notion of the actuality of the revolution that Lukács develops in dialogue with Lenin. Lukács (2012, p. 32) writes: “[...] neither Marx nor Lenin ever developed the actuality of the proletarian revolution and its final goals as if its realisation were possible in any form and at any time. [...] The actuality of the revolution determines the fundamental tone of a whole epoch. Only the relation of isolated actions to this central point, which can only be found through the exact analysis of the social-historical whole, makes these isolated actions revolutionary or counter-revolutionary. The actuality of the revolution must therefore be understood as: the study of each and every one of the particular problems of the moment in their concrete relation to the social-historical totality; their consideration as moments of the liberation of the proletariat.”

To make the importance of reflexive praxis even more explicit and, moreover, to make an explicit connection with the issue of organisation, I draw on Sánchez Vázquez's (2010, p. 58) critique of spontaneism as a form of organisational utopianism. To make this aspect more comprehensible, it is interesting to introduce the propositions of Lukács (1970) with whom (Sánchez Vázquez, 2010) dialogues.

For Lukács (1970, p. 295), it is necessary to remove the questions of organisation from a "kind of utopian gloom" in which they are immersed, confronting "the dialectical relation between 'final goal' and 'movement', between theory and praxis" (Lukács, 1970, p. 294), since "organisation is the form of mediation between theory and practice" (Lukács, 1970, p. 297). Of course, the author, as well as Sánchez Vázquez (2010), refers to the organisation to transform reality from the perspective of eliminating relations of exploitation and oppression, as already mentioned.

Sánchez Vázquez (2010) criticises the organisational utopianism that, in a way, is still found in Lukács (1970, p. 59), explaining that "the organisation is not, in itself, a guarantee of truth," since, as a means or instrument, "it must adapt itself to demands of the conditions of each historical situation" (Lukács, 1970, p. 62). Moreover, according to Sánchez Vázquez (2017), there is a moral dimension inherent to any political organisation that pursues goals and values such as freedom, social justice, and human dignity: the goals cannot be considered apart from their possibilities of realisation (utopianism), leading to failure and defeat; the goals cannot be absolutised (dogmatism and fanaticism); the means cannot be defined only by their effectiveness (pragmatism and efficiency realism). In other words, "there is no room for a spontaneism that underestimates the conscious factor, but neither is there room for the exaltation of this factor to the exclusion of the role of practice, of the real struggle" (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 373). What is taken up again, therefore, is the inseparable unity between theory and practice, as well as the indispensable consciousness of praxis.

The meaning of the philosophy of praxis is precisely to take praxis itself as an object in the process of struggle for liberation from exploitation and oppression, and for the transformation of society. A philosophy that sees "itself not only as a reflection on praxis, but as a moment of praxis, and therefore with the awareness that being theory only exists by and for praxis." Its specificity is "the insertion of theory itself in the transformation of the world" (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 65) from an ideological option that recognises the existence of class struggle and adopts the perspective of the working class.

Consistent with the meaning given by Max (1999) in the 'Theses of Feuerbach', it is indispensable that philosophy be integrated into praxis itself, that it fulfil the practical function that corresponds to it "as a critique of existing realities and ideologies; as a commitment to the social forces that exercise real critique; as a laboratory of the concepts and categories indispensable for drawing up and applying a line of action; as self-consciousness to raise the rationality of praxis and, finally, as self-criticism that prevents it from distancing itself from action, paralysing itself or throwing itself into utopia and adventure" (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 68).

IMPLICATIONS OF SÁNCHEZ VÁZQUEZ'S PROPOSITIONS FOR THINKING ABOUT ORGANISATION STUDIES

It is useful to start by asking about the object of study of Organization Studies (OE). In other words, what is understood by 'organisation' from this foundation of praxis? In order to do so, it is important to remember that human beings are, by definition, ontopraxiological beings who create an objective and subjective intertwined of social relations, as mentioned above.

If human beings have the capacity to prefigure in their consciousness the result they want to obtain and different acts necessary (network of causalities) to concretise the originally formulated idea, organisation is in itself a praxis of creating means or instruments that aim to concretise necessary ends based on a certain degree of knowledge of the reality they want to transform they want. In other words, organisation is part of networks of causalities put in place to concretise the prefigured end, it is a mode of mediation between theory and practice in objective socio-historical situations.

In this sense, abstract theoretical-conceptual definitions with pretensions of universality cannot be accepted. As Faria (2022) argues, such an attitude would imply assuming the existence of the organisation as an entity disconnected from the spatial and temporal dimensions, as well as the result of an ahistorical and inhuman construction. If organisation is a mode of mediation between theory and practice, if it is a means in and for praxis, it can only be investigated by taking into account the concrete and specific relations between theories (ideas, prefiguration, intentionality) and practices of concrete and specific social subjects immersed in socio-historical realities defined by the materiality of the relations of production and, in our historical time, by the conflict inherent to the system of capital.

However, as we know, a conception predominates in OE that takes the organisation as an abstraction “emptied of materiality” that puts the researcher in confrontation with ideas, believing that “by confronting ideas he/she will confront the reality that they mask” (Faria, 2022, p. 96). In this process, reality is created from references to the organisation in its conceptual form.

In a reflection that also problematises the production of knowledge disconnected from reality, Zemelmann (2005, p. 64) warns that “if we do not know how to construct a thought about the reality before us, and we define that reality in terms of conceptual demands that may not be relevant to the historical moment,” we organise thought and knowledge within frameworks that are not those of the reality we want to know and, therefore, “we are thinking about invented realities”. This has obvious adverse practical consequences. To address this problem, the author specifies the difference between theoretical thinking, which is always a predicative discourse, attributive of property, which cannot fail to make statements about reality, which already has an organised content, which is structured in terms of constructing propositions in a very specific manner; and epistemic thinking, which is centred on the question, not on predicates, and which places the object of research and the researcher before the circumstances without anticipating properties about them.

I can now propose some reflections on what we do in OS on the basis of the above. It is already known that theoretical activity is not per se praxis, that there is an indissoluble unity between theory and practice and of autonomy and dependence of one and the other, that practice is the foundation and the end of theory, that theoretical activity based on the imposition of concepts with the pretension of universality invents realities and has adverse implications for practice.

It is easy to affirm that Administrative Theories are part of reiterative and imitative praxis. To clarify, ‘Administrative Theories’ refers to the knowledge produced in the moments proposed by Ibarra-Colado (1999): (a) pre-organizational (1870-1926) – a first stage of rationalisation of work demanded by the transition from the craft workshop to the factory; and (b) pre-institutional organisational (1927-1939) – the first developments of the human relations movement and systemic modernism that establish the organisation as a system of balance between the formal and the informal. This knowledge is characterised by a set of prescriptions that pre-exist the mode of its realisation and inhibit creation, subsisting with some internal adjustments that, even under slogans such as the humanisation of labour relations, exacerbate exploitation – with the rupture between consciousness and body, and bureaucracy – with the rupture between form and content. The relationship with the socio-historical context is evident. In moment (a), knowledge is an instrument at the service of capital which is forced to overcome its limits and increase the extraction of value from labour as the only way to continue to exist in the process of competition. In moment (b), in addition to a new technological revolution (with new sources of energy, mainly electricity and oil), the concentration of capital resulting from the competitive moment and the development of the financial system accelerate monopolistic tendencies (Nunes, 2007) with new demands to control labour in large corporations.

What can be said about Organisation Theories (OT)? According to Prestes Motta² (2001, p. v).

Developed since the end of Second World War, organisation theory is the fruit of a mutation of management theory, from the evolution of North American sociology, political science and social psychology. As a field of instrumental knowledge, no less than as a worldview, organisation theory reflects the growing power of the techno-bureaucratic elite in the countries of state monopoly capitalism.

Prestes Motta (2001) explains that the transition to OT is systematised in the work of March and Simon (1958) – ‘Organizations’. In it, the organisation is studied as a social system in which management is exercised to obtain the possible efficiency in the face of structural and behavioural determinations. One can also mention the contribution of Selznick (1948), for whom the organisation is an adaptive system, affected by the social characteristics of the participants, as well as by a variety

² There is a slight discrepancy in the dates, as well as the name, between Prestes Motta (2001) and Ibarra-Colado (1999), but the narrative is of the same trajectory. Moreover, both authors share, albeit in different terms, a concern with the consequences of OT for the exploitation of workers.

of pressures originating from the environment. Undoubtedly, the framework for the term 'Organisation Theories' was the publication of 'Comments on the Theory of Organizations' (Simon, 1952), which expresses the attempt to define a field of study and to justify its status as a distinct theoretical area, related but not identical to small group or social institutions theory.

To understand this definition of organization, it is important to return to that historical moment. According to Panitch and Gindin (2012), the globalising tendencies of capitalism were revived after 1945 when, in the central countries, profits were realised through increasing working class consumption. The high rates of economic growth and the apparent stability of capitalism expressed an important change in the organisation of the economy – from competition to monopoly – with the continued and steady increase in the profits of monopoly firms (Baran & Sweezy, 1966).

If this socio-historical context is taken as a reference, the impact of systems theory and functionalism is understandable. In addition to the confusion between reality and function, highlighted by Lefebvre (2014, p. 492), the assumption that society has self-regulating mechanisms that guarantee stability and order becomes "a representation and an ideology that seeks to exercise control and integration under conditions that are *ipso facto* given, accepted and recognised" (Lefebvre, (2014, p. 499). In other words, a period of accelerated expansion of capital on a global scale, a static and fragmentary vision of reality had great repercussion in the social sciences in general and, in particular, in the field of management, providing the foundation for the development of OT.

Returning to the question of OT, there is no doubt that the theories about organisation that are located within systemism – from the Parsonian framework to internal revisions such as complexity theory (Misoczky, 2013) – are part of and support a reiterative and imitative praxis. No matter whether the discourse of contingency contains an apparent critique of the prescription of optimal solutions, the rationale remains to ensure the reproduction of the social order and to expand the accumulation processes of transnationalised monopolistic corporations. In this context, 'organisation' gains centrality. A term that due to its abstractive disconnection from reality is presented, according to Ibarra-Colado (2006, p. 90), as "ambiguous and unproblematic" and, thus, can play a fundamental role: "to substitute other terms, such as corporation or monopoly or bureaucracy, that were strongly questioned by important sectors of society."

Misoczky (2017a) identifies a second mutation of OT, which begins in the 1970s, extends and deepens until today: the hegemony of managerialism in the context of neoliberalism, understood as the contemporary mode of existence of capitalism (Saad & Moraes, 2018). According to Harvey (2007, p. 22), "neoliberalism is, more than anything else, a project to restore class domination to sectors whose fortunes were threatened by the rise of social democratic efforts since the end of World War II" and by the "collapse of growth in the 1970s" (p.28). Therefore, "neoliberalism must be considered as a 'reaction' (also: 'way out' and 'solution' for global economic and political elites) in order to confront the structural and global crisis of capitalism" (Puello-Socarrás, 2015, p. 22).

In OT, neoliberalism is naturalised, and a renewal takes place in the service of the processes of accumulation and class domination. The renewal constitutes a second mutation that is expressed in the centrality of managerialism – a specific form of rationality that reproduces the specific logic of market relations in all dimensions of associated life, and constitutes an ideology because, in addition to mystifying specific contradictions of capitalism operating at the level of ideas, it also expresses itself concretely at the practical level of everyday life³. As it could not be otherwise, managerialism also colonises OT and, as a consequence, OS, which are often referred to, respectively, as Organisation and Management Theory and Organisation and Management Studies (Misoczky, 2017a).

If OT are the main theoretical foundation of OS, what can be said about the meaning of the theoretical production we do in OS and its contribution to praxis? To answer, Ibarra-Colado's (2006, p. 95) warning about OS as "a set of knowledge produced for the practices of management, organisation and work in large corporations throughout the 20th century" is mentioned. They are, therefore, "knowledge of practical consequences that order/standardise/prescribe particular modes of existence." It is evident that, for the purposes of this reflection, the reference is to the mainstream of OT and OS, and that the characteristic of reiterative praxis is found in both.

³ The most obvious visible parts are expressed in the mantras of entrepreneurship and innovation, with their evident practical-operational functions in the reproduction and expansion of the accumulation in the contemporary mode of existence of capitalism.

Moreover, in parallel with the growing hegemony of managerialism, two trends have emerged that have spread more and more since the 1980s, and on which it is also necessary to reflect: (1) Organisational Analysis (OA), defined in this text as a markedly interpretive and constructionist theoretical activity, as found in the Mexican and Colombian academic context in which it has an important presence, even forming part of the very definition of what OS are; and (2) Critical Management Studies (CMS).

About OA, the declared intention is to disconnect itself from the determinations of functionalist positivism, linking itself to interpretivism and constructivist perspectives⁴, often exploring affinities between them⁵. Constructivism expresses agnosticism as a starting point and has a vocation to “reveal how the taken as given becomes taken as given.” In OS, the specificity is to ask about “what happens before organisations appear as obvious, solid and equipped with boundaries”; what is “the content of black boxes” that are only opened in crisis; what is “sold in addition to the main commodity” (Czarniawska, 2003, p. 137).

In *Nuestra America*, OA exerts great influence, for example, in the OS postgraduate programmes articulated by the Mexican Network of Organisation Studies (*Red Mexicana de Estudios Organizacionales – Remineo*). Martinez et al. (2011, p. 16) explain the identity of the programmes since the moment of their creation: “the aim was to contemplate organisations with the objective of understanding them and not transforming them.” Thus, OS “focus from an analytical point of view on the study of a set of elements, circumstances and/or processes that make it possible to understand organisational reality in its broad diversity”, analysing specific organisational problems “not in order to provide immediate answers, but simply to recognise their complex nature.” Furthermore, the authors mention that OS offer “plausibility, judgements, interpretation from diverse points of view and multiple coexisting rationalities” (Martinez et al., 2011, p. 17).

As Lozano (2009) highlights, to remain at the level of interpretation is to remain at the level of theory in the sense of contemplation. The implication of this are not being aware of the conditions of theory genesis, not being responsible for the practical consequences, not understanding its permeability to the multiple conditioning factors of society and history and, in a way, assuming that one cannot influence change in one’s own circumstances.

It follows that OA presents itself with a critical intentionality, specifically in relation to the administration’s practice and instrumental knowledge, but with the desire of “staying away from the arrogance of both critical thinking and positivist ambition” (Czarniawska, 2003, p. 137). In other words, the attitude is not only agnostic, but also relativistic. Regarding the question of whether OA can be considered praxis or is constituted as a theoretical activity, the answer from the statements from adherents to this perspective is that much of what is produced is restricted to a theoretical activity that tends to remain within the confines of the academy. Its quality or recognition tends to be legitimised by the academic community itself.

On CMS, Klikauer (2013, p. 1115) states that it “offers an interpretive key to OS while remaining closed within the hegemonic paradigm of management studies,” providing “systemic correctives in support of management”, never seeking to end domination and never advancing the cause of emancipation. Misoczky and Andrade (2005) made a similar argument, identifying the existence, in CMS, of a domesticated critique. The author’s central object of analysis was the founding text of Alvesson and Willmott (1992, p. 434) and their proposal of micro-emancipations, which would require stripping critical theory of its utopian project (emancipation) and “making it more relevant and accessible to the more mundane world of management and organisation.” The argument of domesticated critique is also supported by the words of Alvesson and Willmott (1996, p. 18): “the aspiration is to support the development of organisations in which communication (and the productive potential) is progressively less distorted by asymmetrical and oppressive power relations.” Misoczky and Andrade (2005) conclude that, just as conventional OT are characterised by a focus on micro-processes separated from the social relations that occur beyond the organisational space, CMS is proposed “as a social engineering task” (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992, p. 461) expressed in remedial and never transformative attitudes towards the existing social order.

⁴ The publication of ‘The theory of organization: a sociological framework’ (Silverman, 1970), with its emphasis on the Weberian comprehensive approach, phenomenology and social constructivism (Berger & Luckman, 1966), is a framework for a perspective that became established in OS under the name of interpretivism.

⁵ This influence is also found in part of the CMS, although the main influences are post-modernism and, more markedly, post-structuralism.

In this context of not pretending to break with the current order and contributing to management, the intention is to be part of a creative praxis that produces effects, albeit limited from an emancipatory perspective, in society and organisations. For this reason, there are a number of reflections on the difficulty of achieving dialogues and influencing practitioners (Fleming & Banerjee, 2015; Fournier, 2000; Parker, 2002). Parker's (2020, p. 9) self-criticism on the 20th anniversary of his book 'Against Management', is representative of the tendency to remain a theoretical activity: "We are now 20 years closer to climate collapse, and global inequalities continue to grow [...]. Academics continue to produce words that most people don't read, and 'critical' academics spend their time imagining that writing a 'critical' piece and tweeting about it is the same as engaging in politics."

This is understandable because the project is, from its origins, one of "critical thinking" which "represents a methodology (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996, p. 14). If "critique is merely a methodology, is not a philosophical attitude, is not a position in the concrete world of material social relations, does not express values and principles, does not express the indispensable negativity towards the facts it takes into consideration, does not propose to contribute to transform the existing structural relations (Misoczky, 2017b, p. 143), it cannot be concretised as praxis and remains in a kind of vacuum despite good intentions.

THE PRAXIS OF ORGANISING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS POPULAR AND WORKER'S STRUGGLES

Finally, it is necessary to return to the object of study of OS, articulating the propositions of the philosophy of praxis and the philosophy of liberation.

"Consciousness, organisation and action are inextricably linked" (Sánchez Vázquez, 2003, p. 381). Therefore, a liberating praxis denies the validity of the current order based on knowledge about the structures and praxis of exploitation and oppression. In our time, negative critique implies "denying the present reality, with its entourage of social groups, inequalities, mass unemployment, destruction of nature, marginalisation of social groups and entire peoples, reification of existence, etc." (Sánchez Vázquez, 2000, p. 74). In addition to the negative moment liberating praxis has positive moment of construction of the new. The positive moment contains the political-critical principle of feasibility for a possible that opens up in the face of apparent practical impossibilities that have to be subverted (Dussel, 1998), a proposition consistent with Sánchez Vázquez's (2010) critique of organisational utopianism.

OS can be a space for creative praxis in relation to liberating social struggles for those who are interested in "theorising in terms of praxis and trying to contribute to the transformation of the world" (Sánchez Vázquez, 1977, p. 67). Of course, in this process there is a confluence between investigating reality and acting to transform it, under "the dialectical unity formed by theory and practice, in which practice is cyclically determinant (Fals Borda, 2012, p. 225). This confluence is conditioned by an analectical attitude⁶, which requires containing the denied moment in a positive dialectic in which the Other is affirmed as a denied exteriority that disavows the system that exploits and makes impossible the production and reproduction of life in community and in relation to nature (Dussel, 1998).

To move in this direction, it is necessary to overcome the predominance of theoretical approaches to the study of social movements (SM) and popular struggles developed in central countries in periods of affluence and characterised, besides the disappearance of capitalism and its inherent contradictions, by the incorporation of structuralist strands of political science and conventional OT (Misoczky et al., 2008). An obvious example is the still very present approach of *Social Movements Organisation*, defined as a formal organisation that shares preferences and supports the implementation of the objectives of a SM (Zald & McCarthy, 1987). In the more recent period, there are attempts at more processual approaches. This is the case of Laamanen et al.'s (2020) adaptation of Ahrne and Brunsson's (2020) propositions on partial organisations, defined as orders resulting from decisions and the verification whether the decided order is more or less organised.

⁶ Analectics is, for Dussel (1998), an attitude that requires the openness to think, to listen, to see, to feel, to taste the world from the perspective of the Other; it is conditioned by humbleness and solidarity; it allows one to recognize the existence of a politics of Totality and the Other; it proclaims the non validity and contest a system that constantly negates the concrete possibilities of producing and reproducing life in community.

Another attempt is Faria's (2022, p.94) definition, for propaedeutic purposes, of organisation in two senses: formal structures and modes of belonging. In the second sense, organisation "corresponds to its political and practical purposes, which may be those of struggle, social movements, resistance, whether they are planned or, in another example, temporary/transitory." In this case, organisations are "predominantly structured by codes, symbols, values, subjective dispositions of judgements (also called beliefs), bonds and common projects, which are circumscribed as a guarantee of unity of belonging." The author explains that formal organisations are political spaces in which regulated and standardised social practices are developed; and that organisations of belonging are based on interactive relations for consciously or unconsciously shared objectives. While recognising their limits as a propaedeutic resource, it has to be said that Faria's (2022) definitions do not overcome the difficulties mentioned above and tend to reinforce arbitrary separations between organisation and movement, as if movement and the ephemeral were not also organised or part of interlinked organisational praxis. In this respect, considering organisation as a mode of mediation between theory and practice opens up possibilities for recognising the praxis of organising the means and instruments of action in social and workers' movements and struggles as a concrete object of OS, overcoming the tendency to subordinate to the established and/or to the hegemonic.

In this sense, it is important to recover the need to engage with the often tacit knowledge that is produced in concrete processes of organising social and workers struggles and movements. Following Zemelman's (2005) indications: if we allow ourselves to be dominated by theoretical, predicative thinking, and by contents that do not correspond to the logic and purposes of the organisational praxis with which we engage, as researchers and activists, we end up inventing realities and betraying subjects and collectives. Moreover, there is always the risk of falling into utopian or Manichean visions of organisational forms. If organisation is a means or instrument for action, it must be adapted to the demands and conditions of each concrete situation and, therefore, there can be no universal theory or fetishised organisational models⁷, just as organisation should not be transformed into an end and praxis should not be bureaucratised when it is a means for liberation.

There is an enormous field of research and action to explore the problematic of the organisation of social movements, popular and workers struggles, as long as we abandon predicative discourses, adopt an analectical attitude and develop a conscious thematic critique (Dussel, 1998). Conceiving organisation as a category that has possibilities of content which, of course, will be interpretive mediations of concrete organisational praxis of liberating struggles embedded in the materiality of socio-historical relations, opens OS for creative dialogues and learning processes with the knowledge that is produced in these spaces.

The challenge remains to break with the hegemony of 'the organisation', as well as to break with the reproduction of conceptualisations that are disconnected from concrete praxis. Beyond the interdisciplinary dialogues that are a defining feature of OS, the political question of what we do is raised in the sense that we not only contribute to the production and dissemination of the knowledge produced in liberating praxis, but also that we are part of collectives in struggle and participate in the reflection of our own praxis.

The question of the political problematic of the academic activity of those of us who identify in one way or another with critical attitudes in OS remains open. Thinking about it from the perspective of the philosophy of praxis questions us directly.

⁷ The obvious example is the fetish of horizontality in the recent period.

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