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Performing Thought: The Intellectual and the Collective. A Dialogue Between Anthropology and (Non)Philosophy

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Introduction

What does it mean, today, for thought to bind itself to the world? Across philosophy, anthropology, and the social sciences, the figure of the "committed intellectual" continues to oscillate between critique and participation, universalism and locality, authority and care. This article begins from the tension that traverses this figure: the suspicion that intellectual work, even when devoted to emancipation, may reproduce the very structures it seeks to resist. Through a dialogue between anthropology and (non)philosophy, and through an engagement with authors such as Bourdieu, Foucault, Latour, Viveiros de Castro, Trouillot, and Laruelle, we explore how concepts like reflexivity, power, mediation, and plurality reshape the ethical horizon of thought.

Our aim is twofold. First, we outline a theoretical landscape in which philosophy and the social sciences confront their own conditions of possibility—how they legislate, represent, or participate in the Real they attempt to describe. Second, we bring this framework into contact with lived perspectives: a small ethnography of researchers reflecting on how their intellectual practices intersect with questions of belonging, responsibility, institutional life, and social transformation. Throughout, we ask whether commitment today requires less a position of mastery and more an openness to being affected, displaced, or reconfigured by the very worlds thought encounters.

In this sense, the article proposes that social commitment cannot be reduced to activism, nor to academic reflexivity alone. It is a practice of mediation—sometimes critical, sometimes experimental—in which thinking becomes a form of responsibility: not the authority to define or guide, but the capacity to coexist, translate, and perform knowledge without legislating over others. What emerges is not a program, but an invitation to rethink the intellectual's role in a plural, uneven, and entangled world.

I. Philosophy and Social Commitment: Theoretical Framework

1. Pierre Bourdieu: Between reflexivity and moral responsibility of thought

The question of social commitment has been developed by Bourdieu through his attempt to overcome the opposition between theory and practice. In *The Logic of Practice* (1990), he introduces the concept of *habitus*, the system of durable and transposable dispositions that generate practices without presupposing to follow rules consciously. The *habitus* is structured

by social conditions and structuring of social life, it is both a product and producer; it consists in a balance between objective structures and subjective experience. Within this framework, philosophical or intellectual work cannot be detached from the field in which it operates. The *field of cultural production* defines the positions available to thinkers and the strategies by which symbolic capital circulates (Bourdieu, 1990).

In *Pascalian Meditations* (2000), Bourdieu develops a radical call for reflexivity. Reflexivity is not introspection in the psychological sense, but a methodological and ethical demand: the thinker must analyse their own position within the social space of knowledge production. This form of reflexivity sets the base for an ethics of responsibility. In fact, if intellectuals possess the tools to understand the social mechanisms that sustain domination, they also carry the responsibility to reveal them. (Bourdieu, 2000).

Social commitment, in this sense, is rooted within epistemic practice itself. The act of theorising is already a social act, shaped by the logic of the field and by relations of power. For Bourdieu, the ethical task of the philosopher or social scientist is to engage critically with these mechanisms, in order to transform the instruments of knowledge into tools of emancipation rather than domination. In this sense, reflexivity represents the bridge between epistemology and ethics: knowing becomes a mode of acting.

For Bourdieu, reflexivity, which is not to be understood in this context as psychological self-awareness, is epistemological and sociological demand. It can be formulated in the following definition: reflexivity is *to turn the instruments of knowledge back upon the knowing subject, exposing the* [*social conditions*][1] *of possibility of its own discourse*. In other words, the task is to objectify the objectifier: the scientific habitus and the field, along with their categories, must be brought into analysis themselves. Reflexivity here is critical auto-objectification.

This reflexivity, however, still belongs to what François Laruelle would call a *philosophical decision*. It presupposes that the subject can, from a meta-position, totalize its own condition, so that it would end up *legislating* the structure of the relation between knower and known. One of the most crucial examples of the deployment of reflexivity in the field of social sciences is the Ontological Turn in anthropology. It, in fact, radicalizes Bourdieu's gesture. Instead of simply reflecting on epistemic conditions, the OT (in the figures of Eduardo

[1] In square brackets the element, in this case "social conditions", which varies in the definition depending on the paradigm. Pierre Bourdieu's work was influenced by marxist theory (see Paolucci 2022 – Bourdieu and Marx: Practices of Critique (Marx, Engels, and Marxisms, Palgrave McMillan), but this provisional definition may work for other vantage points too. As an example, from a psychoanalytical paradigm, the question would not be of social conditions, but of "libidinal and unconscious conditions".

Viveiros de Castro, Marylin Strathern, Martin Holbraad) asked: what if the "conditions of possibility" are *themselves multiple*? Hence reflexivity becomes cosmopolitical: anthropology must reflect on how its own ontology differs from those of the people it studies.

This, here, being one of the most radical formulations of the question of reflexivity on the field formulated through the engagement with the work of Gilles Deleuze, emerges as also one of the most paradoxical attempts to decolonize-while-legislating. The danger here is to construct meta-ontological sovereignty—that is, an ability to stand above all ontologies and map their differences. Possibly, this development, while being ethically richer than the standard, modern approach, ends up becoming much more authoritarian: knowledge is *still* the capital that differentiates between those who *"reflect and see*" and those who, maybe even because of colonial repression in the past, have and had no possibility to access reflexivity. The reflective subject, in objectifying itself, creates a new wholeness (the *subject relating to itself as object and subject*), a new standard for thinking, that then self-legislates over what is to think *properly*.

From Laruelle's point of view, from the point of view of his critique of what he calls philosophical (but that extends to other sciences too) decision, preserving the critical core of Bourdieu, a provisional definition can be remade in the wake of this problem of authority:

> Reflexivity is not the epistemic mirroring of the knowing subject upon itself, but *the suspension of the subject's right to legislate over the Real*. An operation, this, that turns critique into immanent *participation*. Reflexivity thus designates the movement by which thought recognizes its own inscription within the world it seeks to know, without presuming to adjudicate that world's modes of being.

An additional distinction can be made in the context of epistemic legislation:

> A *good legislation* names the reflexive recognition that every discourse operates under certain determinations: it formalizes its own limits.
> A *bad legislation* universalizes those determinations, mistaking its own conditions for the structure of the Real.[2]

[2] Non-Philosophy, in this sense, radicalizes reflexivity by universalizing the suspension itself: the recognition that all thought, including this one, is in-the-Real, not over it. See Laruelle, 2010, 2012.

2. Michel Foucault: the subjective ethic of freedom

If Bourdieu grounds social commitment in reflexive analysis of structures, Foucault approaches it through the practices of freedom that shape the subject. In his essay *The Subject and Power* (1983), Foucault describes power not as a substance or possession but as a set of relations that "act upon actions". Power is omnipresent because it operates in every relationship where the individual acts over another one's possible actions. Nevertheless, this omnipresence does not eliminate freedom, on the contrary it presupposes it, since relations of powers can only exist in a field of possible resistances.

This notion of resistance introduces a new sense of philosophical responsibility. Foucault's later works shift from the analysis of disciplinary power to an ethics of self-formation (*technologies of the self*). Here, philosophy's social role is not to prescribe universal norms but to cultivate forms of subjectivity capable of critical engagement. The philosopher is not a lawgiver but a "*diagnostician of the present*", someone who questions how we have been made into what we are, and how we might be otherwise. Following this reflection, social commitment becomes a matter of *problematization*: bringing into question the taken-for-granted assumptions that govern behavior and thought. Critique allows the subject to question, interrogate, doubt truth and its effects of power, and power's effect on truth (1983). This double movement, questioning power through truth and truth through power, defines the ethical horizon of philosophical practice. Commitment is not imposed from outside but generated within the dynamics of critical self-relation and collective transformation.

If, for instance, Bourdieu's reflexive sociology becomes institutionalized as *the* method of critical social science, connecting to Laruelle, its call to examine the researcher's position can harden into an epistemic ritual. The sociologist, in proving awareness of his or her habitus, paradoxically reinstates the hierarchy between the knowing observer and the observed world. Reflexivity becomes a certification of mastery rather than an exposure of limits. In other words, a "good" legislation turned "bad", to borrow Laruelle's distinction. Foucault's late notion of *technologies of the self* already gestures toward another path. Rather than dictating norms of liberation, it multiplies practices of self-relation without prescribing their truths. The philosopher becomes not a judge of forms of life but a participant in their experimentation. In this sense, problematization becomes an investigation into *operations* rather than *being*. In simple terms, to problematize for Foucault is to ask: *under what conditions does what we take as self-evident come to appear as true, necessary, or natural*? Which can be smoothed, in non-

philosophical terms, as: *can thought interrogate its own operation without reinstating itself as the measure of the Real*?

3. Bruno Latour: Beyond Modernity, Toward a Politics of Association

Bourdieu and Foucault focus on social and disciplinary structures, while Bruno Latour redefines the very field through which commitment can be understood. In *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), Latour argues that the so-called modern constitution rests on a false division between Nature and Society, facts and values, science and politics. Modernity, he suggests, never truly purified these realms; instead, it continuously generated *hybrids*—networks of humans and nonhumans, discourses and technologies.

In this sense, Latour's contribution to the idea of social commitment is twofold. On one hand, he dissolves the privilege of the human as the sole agent of action, replacing it with the concept of *actants*—entities that participate in networks of causation. This redistribution of agency calls for a new ethical and political orientation: commitment can no longer mean acting *on* the world from an external standpoint, but participating *with* the world in processes of collective composition. On the other hand, Latour's "politics of association" reframes engagement as composition rather than critique. Instead of denouncing the falsehoods of the world from a position of transcendence, the philosopher is invited to build fragile but inclusive assemblages of humans and nonhumans that allow coexistence.

In this view, philosophy's social task is not to unveil an hidden truth, but to facilitate co-contributions among multiple realities. Latour's approach resonates with the demand for a planetary or global philosophy that does not eliminate difference but connects heterogeneous actors, where social commitment becomes the art of mediation: composing common worlds out of partial perspectives.

Yet even Latour's generous cosmopolitics risks reintroducing the very gesture it seeks to overcome. In redefining commitment as the composition of common worlds, the philosopher remains the one who gathers and translates, the one who *mediates* between heterogeneous actors. It is a subtle danger: the work of connection can turn into a new form of arbitration, where theory still decides what counts as a relation, an actor, a world, a commitment. The Real becomes the field to be networked rather than what precedes every act of networking.

A further displacement is needed. To think *with* the world, as Latour demands, is not yet to think *from within* the operations of the Real in which we — subjects and objects of study — are immersed. A non-legislative commitment begins when philosophy relinquishes its

authority to determine the structure of coexistence. It is no longer a question of representing or assembling reality, but to participate in it without assuming a privileged position. Concretely: this would mean engaging phenomena (technological, ecological, social, political) not as materials for conceptual synthesis, but as autonomous operations that already think in their own way. They are *already operative before thought approaches them*; a good way to understand this is through Marshall McLuhan's famous motto "the medium is the message". In the way the medium operates on the content that is transmitted, it is always already operative even if the subject does not acknowledge its operativity. The task of thought is not to immediately organize multiplicities. That can still be done, as Laruelle argues, but it cannot be deployed as *the only modality for thinking*.

4. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro: The Relative Native and the Plurality of Worlds

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's *The Relative Native* (2015) helps extend the critique of modern universality through the lens of Amerindian perspectivism. His anthropological philosophy challenges the assumption that there is one world described in many ways; instead, there are many worlds, that are each constituted by distinct relations of perspective. For Amerindian cosmologies, humans, animals, and spirits share the same cultural form but inhabit different bodies and viewpoints. The modern distinction between nature and culture collapses; what appears as "nature" to one being is "culture" to another one. By calling his essays *The Relative Native*, Viveiros de Castro reverses the ethnographic gaze. The "native" is no longer an object of study but the producer of theory.

This shift has deep implications for social commitment: it decenters Western philosophy as the main site of reflection and opens a space for epistemic multiplicity. Therefore, commitment is no longer about extending philosophical universality to others, but about learning to translate and connect across different ways of seeing the world.

The ethical dimension of this approach lies in the reciprocal transformation. To engage with another ontology means to be changed by it; thinking becomes a form of relational responsibility. The philosopher's task is not to speak *for* others but to think *with* them, recognizing that conceptual tools are themselves local and situated. This idea anticipates a genuinely pluralist vision of social commitment, one that values multiplicity as the very condition of shared life.

5. Michel-Rolph Trouillot: The Otherwise Modern and the Limits of Universality

Similarly with Bruno Latour, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, in *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (2003), introduces the concept of the otherwise modern to capture the uneven and plural nature of global modernities. For Trouillot, the modern world is not a homogeneous condition but a historical assemblage that emerged through colonial entanglements. The "West" does not own modernity, it only narrates it from a privileged position.

Trouillot's critical anthropology exposes how universalist discourses, whether philosophical, political, or scientific, often conceal asymmetries of power. The very claim to universality becomes a form of epistemic domination. In this context, social commitment requires more than critique; it demands epistemological humility. To think otherwise means acknowledging that our categories of analysis (reason, progress, freedom,…) are themselves historical artifacts, not truths that transcend history. By advocating for an *otherwise modern*, Trouillot invites philosophers and social theorists to imagine modes of engagement that are not predicated on assimilation but on coexistence. From this perspective, social commitment means stepping aside, letting ideas from the margins have a voice, and not assuming that the center has all the answers.

6. Toward a Plural Ethics of Commitment

All of these authors share the same concern: how to connect the thought with responsibility. The answers are all divergent. For Bourdieu, the intellectual must turn critique upon the conditions of their own production; for Foucault, freedom emerges through the ethical work of self-formation; for Latour, commitment means assembling heterogeneous networks rather than preserving the illusion of purity; for Viveiros de Castro and Trouillot, it entails acknowledging the multiplicity of worlds and the meaning of modernities.

Nevertheless, they are all united in the rejection of the image of the philosopher as a detached observer. In each case, knowledge is a social and ethical practice. Thinking is not the opposite of acting but a specific mode of intervention. The philosopher is an actor within the very system he studies.

The concept of philosophy and social commitment therefore cannot be reduced to the question of engagement in a political cause. It encompasses a broader ethical horizon in which thought itself becomes an act of care, whether we care for truth, for others, for the plurality of worlds we inhabit together. The philosopher's responsibility is not only to produce concepts but also to reflect on the conditions, effects, and possible alternatives of their own practice.

Yet, as François Laruelle reminds us, even this care can become legislative if it presumes to determine the "form of the Real". His proposal of a non-decisional stance invites a plural ethics of commitment grounded not in the authority to define, or code, or organize, but in the humility to coexist. To think non-decisionally is to acknowledge that every philosophy, anthropology, ethics is already in the world it seeks to transform. In this light, commitment no longer signifies representing or assembling the Real. Rather, it means participating in it without producing encapsulations. It amounts to a solidarity and democracy of thought with what exceeds it.

The theoretical perspectives outlined here provide an initial foundation to examine how contemporary thinkers and researchers navigate the tensions between philosophy and social engagement. From Bourdieu's reflexivity to Foucault's ethics of freedom, from Latour's politics of association to Viveiros de Castro's and Trouillot's decentering of modernity, a common thread emerges: philosophy must become aware of its mediating role between reflection and the action.

This brief theoretical framework is followed by an empirical exploration of how individuals situated in academic and cultural institutions articulate their own forms of commitment. The following section of this study presents and analyses a series of interviews with researchers who, in their lived experience, embody and contest these theoretical tensions. Their reflections will allow us to observe how these philosophical models translate, or not, into contemporary practices of reflection and engagement.

II. Philosophy and Social Commitment: An ethnography of philosophical perspectives

1. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative and interpretive approach to explore how researchers understand the relationship between philosophy, psychology, psychoanalysis, and social commitment. Since these ideas are deeply tied to personal experience and cultural context, the project focuses on narrative and reflection rather than statistics or measurement.

The six participants of this brief investigation are all researchers and doctoral students at the Global Center for Advanced Studies (GCAS). They were invited to reflect on their backgrounds, the cultural meaning of their disciplines, and their understanding of social commitment both inside and outside academia. Each participant received a set of open-ended

questions designed to encourage personal reflection and conceptual exploration. The questions focused on their academic and cultural trajectories, the perception of philosophy and psychoanalysis in their societies, and the role of research in fostering social engagement.

List of questions:

1. Could you share your academic background, personal journey, and cultural heritage with us? How have these shaped your current interests or perspectives?
2. How are philosophy, psychology, and psychoanalysis perceived within your culture? Do your own views align with or differ from these cultural perceptions?
3. What led you to engage with these disciplines? Has your personal journey shaped your approach to them, or have these disciplines influenced your personal trajectory?
4. How would you compare your culture's understanding of philosophy and social commitment outside academia? Is it acknowledged? Do you consider it useful? You can make a comparison with western philosophies/societies if that speaks to you.
5. In your view, what role do philosophy, psychology, and psychoanalysis play in fostering social commitment? How do these roles manifest in everyday life?
6. In your opinion, should we, as a research community, explore new strategies to reinforce the social commitment of our work? If yes, how? If not, develop your thoughts.
7. We invite you to elaborate further—what ideas or reflections do you believe are important for us to consider together? Whether it's a personal insight, a provocative question, or an unconventional perspective, we welcome your thoughts.

The interviews were conducted in written form, in order to allow participants to answer carefully and at their own pace, producing rich and thoughtful reflections that resembled short essays rather than brief responses. It also allowed the participation of researchers living in different countries with different time zones, ensuring each volunteer was given the possibility to provide their insight.

Since the interviewees are also contributors to the same issue of this journal, the study

is not anonymous. Instead, it emphasized ethical transparency and mutual respect. Participants were informed that their words would be interpreted in a collaborative and reflective way, and that the analysis would be shared with them before publication to ensure accuracy and consent. This approach values the interviewees not as "subjects" but as co-researchers, which aligns with qualitative principles of reflexivity and reciprocity (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Nevertheless, in this study the names of the researchers do not appear in the text. The purpose of this choice is to maintain the focus on the content rather than the subject who exposes it.

The analysis focuses on understanding meanings, the answers were read several times to identify recurring ideas, images, and tensions. These were treated as interpretive threads rather than rigid categories. The main themes that emerged, such as hybrid identity, personal transformation, institutional critique, and different meanings of social commitment, were discussed as interrelated ways of expressing how philosophy can be lived and practiced today.

This approach assumes that understanding is never neutral. As Gadamer (2004) and others have argued, interpretation always involves the interpreter's own horizon of experience. In this sense, the process of analysis became a continuation of the philosophical dialogue itself. The aim was not to extract information, but to listen to thinking as it unfolds — to see how personal experience, theoretical reflection, and ethical concern come together in the lives of researchers who seek to practice social commitment in and through thought.

III. Ethnography of Perspectives: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and the Practice of Commitment

The interviews reveal the common desire to make philosophical, psychological, and psychoanalytic reflection matter, to connect thinking with living, ethics with social responsibility, and ideas with care. Although the interviewees come from different parts of the world and intellectual traditions, their reflections often touch similar concepts: belonging and displacement, knowledge and experience, theory and action.

1. Living Between Worlds

Many participants describe themselves as living "between" cultures, languages, or intellectual worlds. This in-betweenness — sometimes chosen, sometimes inherited — shapes how they think and why they are drawn to disciplines that embrace complexity and contradiction. One

participant, reflecting on growing up "on the cusp of Muslim and Hindu worlds, never enough of either," explained that *"psychoanalysis, with its refusal to settle contradictions, felt like home."*

Others shared similar experiences. One in particular described her Greek-Australian background as a constant crossing between traditions — between "the everyday pragmatism of Australia" and "the reflective spirit" she associates with Greek heritage. For her, philosophy became a "companion" rather than a career, a way to think deeply about meaning amid illness and change.

This sense of hybridity gives their philosophical practice a particular openness. It becomes not just a search for truth but a way to question boundaries — in identity, in thought, and in method. As one interviewee put it, "Ambiguity became a part of my life very early, and it became a terrain I knew best." For these thinkers, to live "between" is not a problem to be solved but a method for staying alive to complexity.

2. When Thought Begins in Experience

Across the interviews, philosophy and psychoanalysis emerge not as abstract interests but as responses to lived experience. Several described their paths as beginning in crisis or illness. "Thinking," said one, "is not decorative; it is survival." For one researcher, philosophy was a way to find "a language of repair" while living with chronic illness.

Another participant spoke of moving between neuroscience, psychology, and psychoanalysis — not out of indecision but from the need to reconcile conflicting ways of understanding reality. His intellectual journey, he said, was a series of contradictions that "showed themselves especially on the people's side."

For others, thinking began as resistance. A researcher who grew up within Indigenous, Jewish, and working-class American contexts, described philosophy as "what was left when psychiatry failed me" — a way to continue the work of care when existing systems caused harm. For them, "thinking is an act of worlding," a process of "living the world you want to create in real time."

These stories remind us that thought does not begin in abstraction but in the need to make sense — to live meaningfully with what hurts or confuses.

3. Rethinking What Commitment Means

Every participant affirmed the importance of social commitment, though what it *means* varied widely. Some framed it as a matter of public engagement. Someone else argued that academia must "step outside its comfort zone," calling for "public philosophy initiatives" that reach people who rarely encounter philosophical discourse. Livingston took a more radical position: "Get out of the ivory tower and into the streets," insisting that philosophy must align itself with global liberation struggles and "a free Palestine."

Others viewed commitment as a subtler transformation of consciousness. One participant proposed that "theoretical work accomplishes more in the world than practical work," since it changes the conditions under which we think and act. Rozek connected this to psychoanalysis, suggesting that philosophy's role is "to reshape morals, reshape ways to approach crisis."

Despite these differences, all participants shared the sense that social commitment is both inner and outer — a form of thinking that leads to doing, and a form of doing that deepens thinking.

4. Psychoanalysis: Between Healing and Unseflling

Psychoanalysis appeared throughout the interviews as a language for both healing and disruption. For some, it offered tools for care and understanding; for others, it served to unsettle comfort and open wounds that demand reflection. One participant described it as "a language of support, recognition, and repair" — a way to orient oneself "when other grounds feel unstable."

One researcher in particular described psychoanalysis as a means to transform social trauma, particularly in the unresolved legacies of German history. He argued that "philosophy's social commitment should offer new ways to work through trauma," connecting psychoanalysis to a broader ethics of collective responsibility.

In this researcher's view, psychoanalysis is most powerful when it reveals its complicity with systems of domination. "In the extractive system of colonial capitalism," they wrote, "therapy is, at best, damage control." True healing, they suggested, begins when we recognize how the psyche is shaped by power and history.

What unites these views is the conviction that psychoanalysis, like philosophy, is not meant to soothe or stabilize but to awaken — to help us see more clearly and live more consciously with what we uncover.

5. Academic Life and Its Contradictions

All participants expressed ambivalence toward academic life. They valued it as a space for study and exchange but criticized its elitism, bureaucracy, and detachment from the world. One noted that "academic research often remains trapped in specialized circles," while another argued that academia must become "more transparent and inclusive," especially in its methods.

A third interview described the university as "a site to camp out in the undercommons," borrowing from Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's notion of intellectual resistance. For them, the task is to "develop new practices of study" that refuse the hierarchies of traditional scholarship.

In these accounts, the university becomes both an obstacle and a resource — a structure that must be used strategically but never fully trusted. Social commitment, in this sense, means working within and against the institution at once.

6. Bricolage as a Way of Thinking

A recurring image across the conversations is that of *bricolage* — making thought by assembling fragments, drawing from multiple disciplines, traditions, and experiences. One interviewee's movement between neuroscience, theology, and philosophy exemplifies this. He described his intellectual life as "living in tension between empirical, theoretical, and applied approaches to reality."

Similarly, others spoke of drawing on mythology, poetry, and art to make sense of human experience. One said that philosophy, psychology, and psychoanalysis are "complementary tools to better understand and live human life." This bricolage mindset resists the purity of disciplinary boundaries. It reflects a desire to think in ways that are adequate to the messiness of life itself.

7. The PhD Journey as Transformation

Several participants, especially those still in doctoral programs, described their research journey as a personal transformation — not simply intellectual but existential. Someone called

it "a path of undisciplined detours," while another participant described the process as learning to "live with uncertainty" and to "endure not knowing."

In their words, the PhD is less a professional milestone than a form of self-formation: a slow education in attention, patience, and humility. It is not about mastering a field but about being changed by the process of inquiry.

8. Rethinking the Meaning of Commitment

Across all these perspectives, a shared insight emerges: social commitment is not only about activism or knowledge production. It is a way of being in the world — attentive, critical, and caring. Philosophy, psychology, and psychoanalysis are not abstract systems but living practices that help individuals and communities navigate complexity.

For these researchers, commitment is not a single act but an ongoing stance — a way of thinking *with* others rather than *about* them. It is the courage to stay with contradiction and to see thought itself as a form of action.

Their words offer a portrait of a generation of thinkers who refuse to separate theory from existence. They show that intellectual work can still be an act of commitment — not by simplifying the world, but by remaining faithful to its contradictions. In this sense, philosophy and psychoanalysis remain vital today not as systems of knowledge but as practices of engagement — ways of thinking and living with integrity in uncertain times.

IV. Dialogue on Commitment

FS: The responses are varied and revealing in the different ways they attempt to resolve the very problems they identify. They span a spectrum: some adopt more idealist views of the relation between thought and social reality; others take a Marxist approach grounded in material conditions and the possibility of change; and still others rely on a modern-bourgeois conception of the intellectual's relation to everyday life.

Given the issue's secondary focus on the possibility and form of a "planetary philosophy"—a question repeatedly raised over the past fifty years—I sought to delimit a space where one response to planetarity could be found in the examination of mixtures between Western theoretical formalism and intellectual contexts not necessarily rooted in the West. This is especially relevant in the current moment of re-bordering and the resurgence of identitarian

political narratives after globalization. Encouragingly, many of the contributors neither originate from nor live within the Western world—or inhabit it only partially. My initial intention in proposing the call was to read the essays *against themselves*: as evidence of theoretical dependency even when written from cultural settings where psychoanalysis, classical philosophy, or critical theory are not native idioms.

Yet despite their geographical and cultural diversity, the contributions converge on a familiar model of theoretical production. They engage the global or planetary dimension of contemporary problems as a given fact rather than as an object to be interrogated. This unexamined acceptance produces a certain conceptual stagnation. At one pole stand the near-Hegelians, for whom the idea precedes and constitutes the act; at the other, the Marxists, for whom material acts generate ideas. Between them operate various psychoanalytic positions that translate this opposition into a moral idiom: ordering one's thought becomes the way to live well; reordering one's material conditions becomes the way to make life good. Despite their differences, all presuppose a stable relation between theory, subjectivity, and social commitment, taking it as an established foundation rather than as a question to be reopened.

The result is a curious paradox: diversity of context coexists with homogeneity of theoretical posture. What appears as pluralism is often the replication of a canonical intellectual stance. Critique of academia replaces critique of theory; questioning institutions substitutes for questioning the very figure of the "committed intellectual." The recurrent "call to think" that runs through these responses arises from a specific historical and philosophical formation—the European modern—while being presented as universal. Moreover, theory itself is largely conceived as a practice of self-knowledge and self-analysis, emphasizing individual transformation over social association. The intellectual's role thus loses its associative and collective dimension: the "social" is rarely examined as a space of interdependence or collaboration among equals or divergents.

What ultimately emerges is a widespread institutional dissatisfaction that nonetheless leaves intact the intellectual position produced by the institution itself. The voice of critique speaks from the margins but never beyond them; it remains the insider-outsider par excellence. Social commitment is consequently framed as an asymmetric relation between the intellectual (who works on themselves) and those presumed to inhabit "everyday life." Yet the notion of the everyday remains undefined: why should the intellectual not be part of it? What conditions this separation?

A possible interpretation, then, lies in the uniformity of these theoretical frameworks across divergent contexts. A historically situated conception of "theory" continues to determine

what theory can mean, regardless of geographical variation. What interests me most, however, is the *medial* aspect of this persistence. When philosophy or psychoanalysis function as expressive or communicative media, they inevitably shape what they express according to their own structural logic. In McLuhan's sense, the medium becomes the message: it absorbs the content and reproduces it in its own image, even when the "medium" in question is a theoretical discipline. Theoretical infrastructures—philosophy, psychoanalysis, social science—thus act as channels that organize the very desires they claim to articulate.

To acknowledge this is to argue for a transformation of these infrastructures into *interfaces*. Choosing to articulate a "personal necessity" through a given theoretical apparatus means entering into the web of relations that apparatus sustains. Theory is not merely an instrument of expression but a mode of mediation that reshapes the needs and possibilities of those who use it. The task, therefore, is not to abandon theoretical traditions, but to refunction them: to treat them as interfaces rather than as sovereign languages, as forms of participation rather than as legislations of the Real.

RV: Reading your comment, Filippo, I kept thinking about Bourdieu's (2000) idea of responsibility — that those who can understand how the social world works also carry an ethical duty for what they say and do within it. When you mention that the participants, despite their different contexts, share similar theoretical lineages, I see this as part of what Bourdieu would call the *field*. Our tools of thought are not neutral — they're shaped by the very systems we're trying to question.

So when many of us turn to Hegel, Marx, or psychoanalysis, maybe it's not just because these are the best tools available, but also because they give legitimacy inside the academic world. As Bourdieu (1990) might say, even when we want to think differently, we often do it within the rules of what the field recognizes as "serious" thinking. That's why reflexivity matters: not only asking *what* we think, but *from where* and *with which tools* we think.

At the same time, I also hear Foucault (1983) in your comment — his idea that critique starts when we question how certain truths gain power over us. Many of the reflections in our study show this tension between freedom and structure: people want to think critically, but their very frameworks of critique already belong to established traditions. In that sense, philosophy's task today might be to turn that critical gaze on itself — to see how our own discourses shape the possibilities of thought.

But maybe the challenge isn't only critical. Latour (1993) and Viveiros de Castro (2015) help me think about this in another way. Latour invites us to imagine philosophy not as a tool

for separating truth from error, but as a way of *connecting* different worlds — human and nonhuman, Western and non-Western. Viveiros de Castro goes further: he reminds us that there isn't one world described in many ways, but many worlds that exist through different relations and perspectives. Thinking with others, in this sense, means accepting that our concepts will also change in the process.

Trouillot (2003) adds a final warning: even when we talk about plurality or "planetary philosophy," we can still reproduce the old hierarchies of modernity. Universalism can easily turn into a new kind of dominance. That's why he speaks about the "otherwise modern" — a way of being modern that accepts difference and unevenness instead of hiding them. I think this is what social commitment really means today: not just speaking about inclusion, but letting our own frameworks be questioned and transformed by others.

So perhaps our task as intellectuals is to reinvent not only the content of thought but its *form* — the ways we write, speak, and share ideas. In Bourdieu's sense, that means practicing reflexivity; in Foucault's, caring for the way we shape ourselves through discourse; in Latour's, building connections instead of walls; and in Viveiros de Castro's and Trouillot's, learning to think *with* others, not just *about* them. Maybe real commitment begins there, in creating spaces where different worlds can actually meet, without one claiming to contain them all.

The question that remains for me, then, is this: are intellectuals truly capable of becoming change, or are they only good at describing it? And if they really want to be so, what kind of mediation must they invent between what they think, what they study, and the realities they come from — especially when those realities are not Western, yet their academic path makes them influenced by and dependent on Western theories?

FS: Your question is crucial, and perhaps even more unsettling than it first appears. We can extend it further: what happens when intellectuals do not simply *describe* change, but when their very descriptions *become instruments of governance*?

It's worth recalling that Michel Foucault's analyses of power and discipline were reportedly studied by agencies such as the CIA during the 1980s and 1990s to refine models of social control and counterinsurgency. His critique of surveillance was itself surveilled. The paradox is clear: the more lucid the intellectual becomes in diagnosing systems of power, the more easily those diagnoses can be folded back into the systems they sought to expose.

So the question "who is this description for?" is fully political. Every act of theorization is also an act of *distribution* of visibility, of access, of operability, of *use*. If knowledge circulates primarily within institutional and infrastructural architectures shaped by Western

academia and corporate platforms, then even the most radical discourse risks becoming part of the *Stack* that Benjamin Bratton (2025) describes—a planetary-scale computational apparatus where power is exercised not only by states, but by software itself.

In Bratton's terms, the Stack is a *governing machine*. It is "the machine as the state," a planetary megastructure of Earth, Cloud, City, Address, Interface, and User layers that together constitute a new nomos of power. It absorbs and reorganizes all political and epistemic production, including critique. Even oppositional or emancipatory discourses, once digitized and circulated through these layers, can be recomposed as data, fuel for predictive algorithms, recommendation systems, or securitarian archives. The world, as Bratton writes, becomes "a library of the real", a total simulation of human communication, permanently stored and mined.

From this perspective, the intellectual is indeed a *weapon*. Not in the romantic sense of the engagé writer, but literally as an epistemic device, "just a gun" that can be aimed, repurposed, or hacked. Knowledge is a vector, and vectors can be reversed. Every act of critique, every conceptual innovation, introduces a new affordance into the global architecture of mediation.

The ethical problem, then, is not whether the intellectual is good or bad, but whether she can remain aware of her own insertion within the machinery she studies. The weapon cannot unmake itself; it can only choose how to *aim*, or in Laruelle's terms, how to suspend its claim to legislate. A non-decisional or non-legislative stance would mean recognizing that *thought is itself one layer of the Stack*: a medium among others, instead of a sovereign arbiter above them.

In that sense, the task is not simply to "become change" — which does not, by itself, mean much — but to invent *modes of mediation* that are reflexive and non-appropriative. Forms of knowledge that thus do not legislate from above, but participate horizontally, in solidarity with what they cannot master. Otherwise, intellectuals remain what the Stack already presupposes them to be: privileged Users whose every act of critique is instantly logged, mirrored, and monetized.

The intellectuals are a weapon to themselves, and this operativity is often hidden beneath presupposed ethical positions that equate intellectual labor to progressive, globalist, universalistic and humanitarian work. This is romantic, almost cute, and dangerously so. The intellectual can be the motor of the very opposite change they strive for, especially today — something Plato himself was fully aware of at the foundation of the philosophical discipline: there can't be "philosophical guidance" without philosophical governance. Something, furthermore, that he opposed later in life in the last dialogue, where the philosopher-king, fully

disclosed in their position, was substituted by the secret *Night Council* of sages who legislate over the *polis* after dusk, when no one can hear and see them. Intellectual work remains superstructural in respect to other domains that possess power, and just *being an intellectual* is far from contributing to something concrete outside the production of theoretical weapons for unpredictable hands. Paradoxically, the ideologically power-aligned intellectual is, systemically, an element of much more consistency and density. Intellectual work still needs a container, a husk, and this will forever reinstate the very dependency that it looks to erase. I think that the task is or to rethink the intellectual's function completely, maybe toward the production of performed knowledge (not analysis, but enactment; not descriptions, but fictionalizations), or to be engaged is this relation of dependency, e.g. the intellectual's dependency on the University: with Trump government we see already and in a critically direct way how Universities are not safe spaces, and probably never have been.

RV: To sum up our reflection, Filippo, I believe that what is left for us is not to try to bring back the purity of the intellectual role, but to learn to accept its impurity and live with it. If we agree that all critique is infrastructural, then we need to learn how to invent practices that don't deny nor romanticise this condition. What you call "performed knowledge" translates in producing thought that acts in the world, that performs in it, instead of just describing it. Therefore, the intellectual must acknowledge that performing knowledge requires a continuous exercise of responsibility. To *think*, of course, but to *think with and through* the structures that shape us.

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