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Dialectical roots and praxis routes: A contribution to critical information literacy from Hegel, Marx and Bloch

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Abstract

The "critical" element present in many critical information literacy (CIL) studies shows a commitment to the practical challenge of the power structures that shape current information regimes. In this article, we argue that it is necessary to analyse how such power structures, organised under a capitalist social order with neoliberal contours, benefit from disinformation, scientific denialism and class, race and gender oppression. In addition to discussing how philosophical notions of language and postmodern relativism appear in the present time, our main theoretical objective is to highlight some thoughts of Hegel, Marx and Bloch on the notions of dialectics, praxis and concrete utopia, aiming to contribute to strengthen the critical element that names and distinguishes CIL as a field of inquiry in library and information studies.

Keywords

Brazil; critical information literacy; concrete utopia; dialectics; disinformation; information literacy; praxis

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1. Introduction

Studies addressing the concept of critical information literacy (CIL) emerged in the first decade of this century as a reaction, from both researchers and educators, to institutional definitions of information literacy (IL)—especially the one proposed by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2000)—which were committed to the rhetoric of business and competitiveness, instead of stimulating the critical consciousness of individuals. Simmons (2005, p. 299), for example, criticizes ACRL's "positivist epistemology", which reduces information literacy (IL) to a set of skills presented as neutral, objective, and functional. On the same note, Elmborg (2012, p. 87) writes that "much of the rhetoric surrounding information literacy resonates with the language of productivity", also stating that ACRL's "Information Literacy Competency Standards have been rightly called to task for turning the research process into a formulaic and production-oriented concept". Jacobs (2008, p. 258) argues that, when IL is limited to such standards, "we run the risk of minimizing the complex situatedness of information literacy and diminishing – if not negating – its inherent political nature".

The very notion of CIL emphasises the critical element either absent or not sufficiently present in traditional IL studies, practices and institutional prescriptions. But what exactly does this

critical element mean in CIL literature? And what does it mean beyond that field? The answer for the first question has been largely established in the CIL literature since the first uses of the concept (Elmborg, 2006; 2012; Jacobs, 2008; Tewell, 2015). This paper tries to partially answer the second.

CIL is committed to "encourage students to engage with and act upon the power structures underpinning information's production and dissemination" (Tewell, 2015, p. 25). But is substantive and general emancipation from power structures conceivable under capitalism? Can one seriously understand the power structures that maintain class, race and gender oppression without understanding what capitalism is, in a general way and in its specific current configuration, in which the business model of digital information platforms (Bezerra & Almeida, 2020; Cassino et al., 2021; Morozov, 2018; Noble, 2021; Zuboff, 2020) plays a central and articulated role of surveillance, consumption induction and ideological reproduction?

Our answer is negative for all the previous questions, because capitalism is a social system historically and structurally based on class, race and gender oppression, both inside each country and across countries, through colonialism and imperialism. Modern racial oppression, exploitation of surplus-value from wage workers and the unpaid reproductive work of women at home—nutrition and care of children and elders—are undeniable facts (Losurdo, 2013/2015). So are the consequences of the commodification of the internet, which turned it from something close to a digital agora, marked by the free exchange of ideas, to a marketplace ruled by the interests of big tech corporations and their associates. These wealthy players have been showing, at best, a "radical indifference" (Zuboff, 2020) towards the growth of right-wing hate speech, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, scientific denial, fake meritocracy, and the entire network of neofascist information flow that has flourished in recent times. Thus, to face them more effectively, CIL studies should dedicate some effort towards understanding the common background of such issues: capitalism. It is particularly important to understand how capital grows due to its control of information flows, shaping hearts and souls to defend and elevate the status quo while tolerating and profiting through even the most reactionary and fake questionings of the same status quo.

The roots and routes from which we intend to bring our contribution to the contemporary debate over CIL (by discussing the power structures that sustain capitalism and its corollary of oppression) come from some very important philosophical works—mainly German—about the concepts of *dialectics*, *praxis*, and *concrete utopia*.

It is well known that one of the main roots of CIL is the work of the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1968/2005), who was influenced by Marx, Engels and their critical legacy. It is also important to bear in mind that Marx's own work is influenced by Hegel. Lenin (1929) indeed wrote that Marx's *Capital* couldn't actually be understood without knowing Hegel's *Logic*. Marcuse helps us to understand why:

> Sufficient notice has not been given to the fact that Hegel himself introduces his logic as primarily a critical instrument. … Hegel's first writings have already shown that his attack on the traditional separation of thought from reality involves much more than an epistemological critique. Such dualism, he thinks, is tantamount to a compliance with the world as it is and a withdrawal of thought from its high task of bringing the existing order of reality into harmony with the truth. … If, then, truth is to be attained, the influence of common sense must be swept away and with it the categories of traditional logic, which are, after all, the philosophical categories of common sense that stabilize and perpetuate a false reality. And the task of breaking the hold of common sense belongs to the dialectical logic. (Marcuse, 1941, pp. 122–123)

Rooted in Hegel's critical (although contemplative) dialectics, Marx (1924/2002) takes a step forward in the route of critical thinking, summed up in his famous 11th thesis on Feuerbach: "Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it."

This proposition doesn't at all mean a refusal of the necessity of theoretical work; instead, it appeals towards its relation with political commitment and action, articulating a single, coherent epistemological and ethical approach. If ethics, or practical philosophy, necessarily involves action; if we have come philosophically to the conclusion that converting human subjects into objects is no longer tolerable, because we are all human beings and the inequality of property based on work exploitation is not a fate determined by our biological nature; and if the concrete conditions for stopping work exploitation are present due to the high level of productivity attained by the technological advances of the industrial revolution, together with the growing number of industrial wage workers and the strengthening of their class consciousness; then the role of rational intellectuals should be to stand with them, developing together the revolutionary praxis, a feedback between theory and practice committed to the social emancipation of all, that had become reasonably conceivable by this period.

During the lifetime of Marx, the industrial working class was the avant garde of this revolutionary process. Today, who knows? Whatever it is, this was the original meaning of praxis in Marx's thought, a concept that Bloch (1954/2005) considered a turning point in the entire history of philosophy, as we shall see in this article.

We claim that Marx's notion of praxis constitutes a milestone for the critical legacy that extends throughout his work and leads to contemporary CIL studies, which propose the notion of "theoretically informed praxis" (Elmborg, 2006, p. 198; Jacobs, 2008, p. 2) mediated by Freire's (1968/2005) critical pedagogy. Following the roots and routes of this work, in the next section we will highlight some thoughts of Hegel, Marx and Bloch over the concepts of dialectics, praxis and concrete utopia, aiming to contribute to the strengthening of the eponymous critical element of CIL. After that, we shall discuss how philosophical notions of language and relativism appear in what we can call the age of disinformation (Schneider, 2022), a time when postmodernism and neoliberalism go hand in hand. We hope that this debate will be useful to better understand, resist and combat disinformation and scientific denialism in classrooms, libraries and elsewhere.

2. From critical thinking to concrete utopia

In Ancient Greece, Plato's disciple Aristotle already saw potentialities in the surrounding reality, with possibilities of effective actualisation. Plato's master Socrates, in turn, questioned the limits of the capacity of human knowledge, a task to which, in the context of modern science, Kant would dedicate a decade of his life. As a result of his study, the methodical Kantian *Critique of Pure Reason* presents itself as "an invitation to reason to undertake again the most difficult of its tasks, that of knowing itself and the constitution of a court that assures it of its legitimate and illegitimate pretensions, and on the other hand, can condemn it for all unfounded presumptions" (Kant, 1781/2001, p. 32).

One of the philosophers most committed to the production of persistent scientific criticism was Marx, as evidenced by the content and even the titles of several of his works. It is often said that in philosophy Marx criticized his German compatriots; in politics, the French; and in economics, the British. In the words of Lenin (1913/1996), Marxism "is the legitimate successor to the best that man produced in the nineteenth century, as represented by German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism."

Between Kant and Marx, there stands the giant figure of Hegel, whose work largely consists of a critique of the entirety of the philosophy that precedes him, with the emphasis on Kant. Such critique was carried out in the dialectical perspective of the *Aufhebung* (in its Hegelian usage,

generally translated to English as *sublation*): to deny what is set, in search of a superior arrangement, understanding or argument, preserving the best of what was confronted.[1]

2.1. Hegel's modern dialectics

Hegel and Marx, together with Freud, established the main foundations of the critical theory that characterises the studies developed by the philosophers of the so-called Frankfurt School, such as Marcuse and Horkheimer. The latter points out, in a note in what is considered the inaugural essay of his proposal for a critical theory of society, that his use of the predicate "critical" carries rather a Marxian than a Kantian inflection, that is, "not so much in the sense of critical idealism of pure reason as in the sense of the dialectic of political economy. This term indicates an essential property of the dialectical theory of society" (Horkheimer, 1937/1980, p. 130).

Assuming the perspective of the Marx and Engel's dialectical historical materialism, Horkheimer presents critical theory as a critique of what he calls traditional theory. Traditional theory, in this formulation, limits itself to understanding and trying to solve the problems of the current social order, without questioning the structural inequalities of such an order. In other words, it is a theory restricted to analysing how things are and seeking solutions to existing problems, rather than questioning why things are the way they are and what prevents them from being better than they are.

The Marxist critique of political economy that fostered the critical theory of Frankfurt is also one root of the aforementioned critical pedagogy inspired by Freire (2005), who tackles the limits of the "banking" model of education for achieving the autonomy and emancipation of individuals from the conditions of oppression imposed on them. Marx, Horkheimer (alongside Adorno) and Freire all undertake diagnoses—mainly, respectively, of 19th century English capitalism; the North American cultural industry; and the 20th century Brazilian educational system—guided by the "critical recognition of the dominant categories in social life [which] at the same time contains its condemnation" (Horkheimer, 1937/1980, p. 131).

The criticism of all these thinkers was of a dialectical kind not only in the old Socratic sense of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, but also in the modern Hegelian sense of the word, according to which "every effective reality … contains in it opposite determinations, that is, contradiction" (Bavaresco, 2011, p. 15). In other words, contradiction is not only a matter of insufficient reasoning and dialectics is not only a subjective way of thinking and arguing; they are, in fact, the immanent objective dynamic of reality, from nature to human history. Every theoretical and practical contradiction effectively searches and pushes for its own *Aufhebung*.

Aufhebung was only an ordinary German word until Hegel gave it a philosophical stature in his renewal of dialectics. This renewed dialectics was to become the main root of Marx's criticism, including the critique directed at Hegel himself, from whom Marx got his basic methodological orientation. Besides the updating of the old general dialectical schema, Hegel also introduces both history into reason and reason into history, for the first time in the entire history of philosophy, under the aegis of the principle of contradiction, of the negative:

> Hegel repeats over and over that dialectics has this 'negative' character. The negative 'constitutes the quality of dialectical Reason,' and the first step 'towards the true concept of Reason' is a 'negative step'; the negative 'constitutes the genuine dialectical procedure.' In all these uses 'negative' has a twofold reference: it indicates, first, the negation of the fixed and static categories of common sense and, secondly, the negative

1 According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: "The English verb 'to sublate' translates Hegel's technical use of the German verb *aufheben*, which is a crucial concept in his dialectical method. Hegel says that *aufheben* has a doubled meaning: it means both to cancel (or negate) and to preserve at the same time" (Maybee 2020). It also has a third meaning: to elevate to a higher level.

> and therefore untrue character of the world designated by these categories. (Marcuse, 1941, p. 123)

For instance, in Marx's critique of political economy—which is the subtitle of his magnum opus, *Capital* (Marx, 1867/2013)—he recognises the scientific advances of English political economy and, at the same time, identifies the limitations that the liberal ideology of theorists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo imposed in their analyses of the capitalist system, by not paying attention to the structural role of workers' exploitation in the process of capital accumulation. Thus, the Hegelian approach led him to sublate Smith and Ricardo, mainly by the perception and theoretical expression of wage workers' surplus-value exploitation.

However, beyond the refined adoption of the Hegelian dialectics to historical and economic analysis, Marx takes a decisive step forward and introduces something unprecedented in the entire history of philosophy: his notion of praxis.

2.2. Praxis and concrete utopia

Ernst Bloch, in his monumental and unique *The Principle of Hope*, develops the ideas of *hope* and *concrete utopia* not as cheap optimism, but as necessary counterpoints to despair and resignation, grounded in serious realistic theoretical reflection and ethical commitment, and orientated towards transforming action: a call to praxis. We believe that this call is an important contribution for CIL studies and practices, as a motivation, and also as a solid philosophical basis that links the ethical commitment with human emancipation to a scientific approach on feasible social changes.

Starting from a criticism of the limited attention given by psychoanalysis and by Freud himself to one of his own insights, the notion of *Tagtraum* (daydream), Bloch (1954/2005) undertakes a fine categorization of the concept of *novum*, which involves the notions of *new* and *possible,* in the history of human thought:

> The category of the possible, although so well-known and used all the time, was a *crux* in terms of logic. Among the concepts that, over the centuries, have been elaborated and brought to a degree of precision by philosophy, this category is the one that until now has remained more undefined. (Bloch, 1954/2005, p. 238)

Bloch (1954/2005, p. 243) remarks that this general idea of the possible was poorly systematically explored until Marx, who synthesized it in the *11 Theses*, mainly in the 11th. The *Theses*, by the way, for Bloch, announce an inflection, even a revolution in the entire history of philosophy, largely because they deal with the *new* and the *possible* no longer as residual, but as central issues.

The Pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus focused on the centrality of change as a constitutive element of the real; many centuries later, in the modern age, Hegel gave to the concept of change, or *becoming* (Werden), a new stature in philosophy. Nevertheless, he stated that Minerva's owl only begins its flight after twilight (Hegel, 1820/1896), that is, philosophy can only be concerned with what's in the past, not with what can happen in the future, or *become*. Unlike all his predecessors, Marx gives to the *new*, to what can or must become, to the desired and possible becoming, an original attention. The category of praxis thus emerges as the decisive mediation of the new and the possible as generated by the daydream, from the most youthful and naive wishful thinking about a better life, present in the daily life of all individuals, peoples and times, to the most mature, realistic and feasible projects (in arts, architecture, science, or politics), which Bloch will call concrete utopias. The notion of concrete utopia, for Bloch, is something very different from the common-sense notion of utopia criticized by Marx and

Engels—and also by Bloch himself, even though he glimpses in the unrealistic utopias of all times a kind of grain or anticipation of the concrete ones.

After an instructive exegesis of the 11 theses, their meaning, their grouping and their connections, both with each other and with the work of other thinkers, Bloch advances into the territory pioneered by the *Theses* to the novum and to the concrete utopia. Following this path, he presents several intermediate, subjective, objective, and interdependent categories of the novum*,* the new and the possible, against the backdrop of what he distinguishes as the hot and cold currents of Marxism: activism and scientific analysis, that feed back into and transform one another through praxis. Then he condenses this reasoning in the notion of militant optimism.

In Bloch's perspective, a realistic pessimistic reading of reality is better than naive optimism, provided that pessimism does not become absolute irrationality in despair and consequent inaction. Militant optimism, nevertheless, opens up a superior perspective compared to realistic pessimism, as it is also realistic, but in a broader and deeper sense, attentive not only to immediate facts and the most obvious negative tendencies of the real, but also to the fissures and potentialities for effective concrete transformations of this real. This is concrete utopia, a perspective corresponding to the Marxist notion of praxis, without which these potentialities cannot be updated and put into effect.

3. Language and relativism in the age of disinformation

The philosophy of consciousness (or of the subject), from which the great part of modern and contemporary epistemology derives, was proposed by Descartes and established as the most influential philosophical perspective in the modern academy under the influence of Kant (Ilyenkov, 1974/1977). It essentially promotes a rupture in the history of philosophy, with the displacement of the central ontological question *what is being* by the epistemological question *what can I know*.

Subsequently, with the growing understanding of the role of language in the production, recording, circulation and use of information and knowledge, language stops being thought of as a simple *medium*, a representation or expression of what is produced by the consciousness of a subject, instead becoming the social raw material and structuring system of consciousness itself, which in turn becomes a mediating element, mixing together sensations, perceptions and ideas that only language allows us to structure, formulate, communicate, and criticise.

Language thus acquires a new status in philosophy, with the philosophy of language becoming more and more influential throughout the 20th century, in the midst of a moment when the death of the subject, of consciousness, and of representation—at least as protagonists of philosophy—were in many ways decreed. More than knowing “what being is” or “what can be known”, it became essential to bear in mind that both issues depend on a previous answer to the question formulated by Wittgenstein: *what can be said?*

During recent decades, there has been a kind of hypertrophy of the philosophy of language, whose main steroid is postmodern thinking. Eagleton (2003) says that postmodern is, “roughly speaking, the contemporary movement of thought which rejects totalities, universal values, grand historical narratives, solid foundations to human existence and the possibility of objective knowledge”. The Marxist author describes postmodernism as an epistemology that is “skeptical of truth, unity and progress, opposes what it sees as elitism in culture, tends towards cultural relativism, and celebrates pluralism, discontinuity and heterogeneity” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 13).

Rather than saying, correctly, that everything can be understood semiotically, for postmodernism everything becomes semiotics above all. Objective reality, according to the critique of postmodern thought by Brazilian Marxist José Paulo Netto, tends to be something

minimalist “since its objectivity is reduced to symbolic dimensions, occurring a semiologization including its material levels – the reification of the imaginary optimally signals this process of deontologization of reality” (Netto, 2002, pp. 95–96). Attached to this passage is the illustrative footnote of Netto, quoting Vattimo’s *En torno a la posmodernidad*:

> The formulation of Gianni Vattimo (Vattimo, Ed., 1990) is canonical: “In fact, intensifying the possibilities of information about reality in its most varied aspects makes the very idea of a reality is always less conceivable. In the world of the media, perhaps a 'prophecy' of Nietzsche's comes true: the real world, after all, becomes a fable. ... Reality, for us, is, above all, the result of the intersection and 'contamination' ... of the multiple images, interpretations, reconstructions disseminated by the media.” ... In this field, the contributions of J. Baudrillard and a good part of the French New History theorists are fundamental, to whom the influence of Foucault is not strange .... (Netto, 2002, p. 95–96)

So, instead of saying that we need language to think, that we only think through language, language begins to think for us, through us. Any possible disruptive rational agency is killed. What's left are only disruptive desires and narratives, together with a very negative conception of reason, as a fictional and illegitimate authority.

For the Indian Marxist Aijaz Ahmad, “many of the postmodernist ideas of today are embedded in the unacknowledged and possibly unrealized influence of the fascist philosophical positions against Reason and Modernity” (Ahmad, 2000, p. 226). So, language—which is a social creation—comes to be seen as a device that subordinates all individual subjects and thus (in)forms them as subjects. As in the case of religion, the creation becomes the creator; the medium and expression of unsatisfied practical needs and desires, of trickeries, love, hate and so on becomes their source, non-dialectically. Language becomes an erudite fetish.

Rather than offering a level playing field by opening the doors of academia to other epistemologies, postmodernism’s extreme relativism, often steeped in a populist bias, can sometimes dangerously blur the boundaries between serious theory and common-sense prejudice. Then the very notions of reality, social oppression, or emancipation, even in their most theoretically grounded formulations, tend to become … narratives.

These, let’s say, socio-epistemological events took place together with a growing subordination of information and culture as a whole to market standards. Reactions of the US and UK against the MacBride Report (1980) over international information flows effectively illustrate this tendency.

The MacBride Report denounced the oligopolistic character of the media and the problematic element of the unregulated commodification of culture, which favoured the economically richest companies and nations to the detriment of others, making international infocommunication flows increasingly unidirectional, with the US as the main centre of diffusion. However, although the report gained substantive international support, it was condemned by the United States as an attack on the “free flow of information” (Mattelart & Mattelart, 2008, p. 121).

Both the US and the UK were the avant garde of the neoliberal route. And all these facts illustrate, after all, the reaction of capital against the successful Chinese and Cuban revolutions and the revolutionary wave in South American countries, in Indonesia and beyond, despite their bloody repression; and also, to the political and cultural riots throughout the world in 1968. Then, slowly but strongly, emerges a new zeitgeist from the mid-1970s. Its critical side is known as postmodernism; its pragmatic one, neoliberalism.

Two key authors of information studies from this period are Lyotard and Zurkowski, with their ideology positing the end of big narratives (Lyotard’s metanarratives (‘big stories’, or *grand*

récits): universalising narratives such as bourgeois progressivism or Marxism (Gratton 2018)) more or less explicit as to what these overarching narratives should be replaced by: respectively, knowledge performance and IL.

In a recent paper, Elmborg (2022) called our attention to an impressive affinity between Lyotard's performative notion of knowledge and Zurkowski's original IL programme:

> A dramatic shift in the nature of knowledge/information was signaled in the mid-1970s. In 1977 [sic], Jean François Lyotard wrote *The Postmodern Condition*, which he subtitled "A Report on Knowledge." This "report" was commissioned by the Canadian Higher Education Commission, and in it Lyotard made several speculative claims about the emergence of a new kind of "postmodern" knowledge, one that involved a significant shift from the earlier focus on "human-centered" learning and toward a more purposeful education intended to more directly leverage information for national advantage. He claimed that traditional ways of knowing had arrived at a crisis in legitimacy as knowledge was increasingly challenged by questions of "performativity" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 48). In other words, the fundamental and central questions for knowledge had begun to shift. The older questions, "What do you know?" and "Is what you know important or interesting?" became displaced by new performative questions, including […] "What useful purpose can your knowledge serve?" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 43). (Elmborg, 2022, p. 205)

In the next page, Elmborg states:

> The origin of the concept of Information Literacy is generally attributed to Paul Zurkowski, who coined the term in 1974 while President of the [American] Information Industry Association. Coinciding almost directly with Lyotard's observations about the changing nature of knowledge, Zurkowski's advocacy for Information Literacy is noteworthy. In essence, Zurkowski aims to operationalize the new conceptualization of knowledge described by Lyotard. (Elmborg, 2022, p. 206)

When it comes to the facts, postmodern relativism suits the whims of the market perfectly well, despite the good will or even revolutionary commitment of this or that thinker. It is therefore no coincidence, as Eagleton reminds us, that "The postmodern philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard found Marxism irrelevant to information theory" (Eagleton, 2003, p. 34).

If relativism is not the main ground of recent phenomena such as post-truth and the growth of right-wing disinformation practices—a big bowl of lies in which we can include hate speech, scientific denial, and conspiracy theories—it's certainly not the best way to fight it. And CIL, at least as a matter of coherence, should fight it. But how?

More or less clandestinely, for the last two and a half centuries, Marxism provided good insights for facing these issues. Especially as we trace the routes of its Hegelian roots, the ontological question remains central, although it was converted, in the words of Lukács (1984/2010), into an ontology of the social being. It concerns—and connects—both natural and social history, in which language certainly plays an important role; nevertheless, the role of protagonist still belongs to political economy and class struggle, a conceptual expression of human alienation and agency amidst the growing historical contradictions between productive forces and the relations of production in which they operate. This route does not reject contributions from the philosophy of language (see Bakhtin, 1929/1992). But, for its explorers, consciousness continues to play an important role; because it might not only be contemplative, but also teleological, it can mediate language and impressions in such a way that its projects, through *praxis*, aspire to become new and better realities.

4. Final Remarks

The roots and routes of the winding path of dialectics, traversed by most of the authors who appeared in this article, lead our reflections to confront the terrain of the real with the horizon of the possible, launching an arrow towards a future that can be forged by information from the past that philosophical thought and scientific knowledge already possess in the present. This understanding helps us to imagine a CIL that is open to the prospect of changing the informational environment towards a fairer and less unequal ecosystem, with emancipation and informational autonomy as basic conditions for achieving this concrete utopia.

As we saw, Marx's main contribution to the history of philosophy is, for Bloch, to have been the first thinker to have thought systematically and deeply about the possible, about the new, consciously avoiding wishful thinking as much as he could:

> Since Marx, no research into truth and no realistic judgement is possible at all which will be able to avoid the subjective and objective hope-contents of the world without paying the penalty of triviality or reaching a dead-end. Philosophy will have conscience of tomorrow, commitment to the future, knowledge of hope, or it will have no more knowledge. And the new philosophy, as it was initiated by Marx, is the same thing as the philosophy of the New, this entity which expects, destroys or fulfills us all. Its consciousness is the openness of danger and of the victory which is to be brought about in those conditions (Bloch, 1954/2005, p. 17).[2]

The future, then, is no longer a blind force to which we are all subordinated, a good or bad fate, as Machiavelli's *fortuna* (1532/2021, pp. 130-132). On the contrary, from the roots quoted above, the future, the possible, the novum acquires some plasticity. To deal with it, to shape it in accordance with our good will for a better life for all, including nature itself, we should explore these routes and open new ones, increasing our individual critical consciousness together with the necessary class consciousness, the strategic *virtu* of praxis (for Machiavelli's *virtú*, see Nederman 2022). By doing this, we might be able to follow CIL's vocation, expressed by Tewell (2015, p. 25) at the beginning of this article, to "encourage students to engage with and act upon the power structures underpinning information's production and dissemination".

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2 See https://www.marxists.org/archive/bloch/hope/introduction.htm

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