THEMATIC ARTICLE

Alternative organization: from critique of organization to organization of critique

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Abstract

The term "alternative organization" (AO) has often been used unsystematically, referring to intuitive and common-sense notions. At the same time, authors who use it strive to incorporate critique as a distinctive element of organizational practice. This essay aims to problematize the concept of open access by searching the literature for elements that allow critique to be conceived as a component of organizing practices. It was necessary to situate the confrontation with the problems of social reality without falling into dogmatic conceptions or relegating OA to a position of subordination. This essay contributes to the debate by presenting a set of critical perspectives found in the literature dealing with OA, adding the relatively recent approach of immanent criticism, as conceived by Rahel Jaeggi (2018). This is a non-essentialist, dialectical perspective that takes the claims and conditions posed in social reality as its starting point, responding to the problems and crises that arise in the context. From there, the transformative potential falls on the practices of organizing themselves and seeks to transform them. This perspective points to a concept of organization that mediates partial solutions to problems arising from the contradictions of social reality.

Keywords: Alternative organization. Immanent critique. Ideal type. Prefiguration. Philosophy of difference.

Organização alternativa: da crítica da organização a organização da crítica

Resumo

O termo "organização alternativa" (OA) tem sido, frequentemente, utilizado de forma assistemática, remetendo a concepções intuitivas e de senso comum. Ao mesmo tempo, autores que o utilizam aspiram incorporar a crítica como elemento distintivo de práticas organizativas. O presente ensaio objetiva problematizar a concepção de OA, buscando na literatura elementos que permitam conceber a crítica como componente das práticas de organizar. Para tanto, foi necessário situar o enfrentamento dos problemas da realidade social, sem cair em concepções dogmáticas ou relegar as OAs a uma posição de subordinação. No intuito de contribuir com a discussão, este ensaio apresenta uma compilação de perspectivas críticas encontradas na literatura que trata da OA, acrescida da abordagem relativamente recente da crítica imanente (CI), conforme concebida por Rahel Jaeggi (2018). Trata-se de uma perspectiva dialética não essencialista, que toma como ponto de partida as reivindicações e condições postas na realidade social, para responder aos problemas e às crises que se colocam em contexto. Portanto seu potencial transformador centra-se nas próprias práticas de organizar, procurando transformá-las. Essa perspectiva aponta para uma concepção de organização como mediadora na solução parcial de problemas decorrentes das contradições da realidade social.

Palavras-chave: Organização alternativa. Crítica imanente. Tipo ideal. Prefiguração. Filosofia da diferença.

Organización alternativa: de la crítica de la organización a la organización de la crítica

Resumen

El término "Organización Alternativa" (OA) se ha utilizado a menudo de forma poco sistemática, remitiendo a concepciones intuitivas y de sentido común. Al mismo tiempo, los autores que lo utilizan aspiran a incorporar la crítica como elemento distintivo de las prácticas organizativas. Este ensayo pretende problematizar el concepto de OA, buscando en la literatura elementos que permitan concebir la crítica como un componente de las prácticas organizativas. Para ello, fue necesario situar la confrontación de los problemas de la realidad social, sin caer en concepciones dogmáticas o relegar la OA a una posición de subordinación. Con el fin de contribuir a la discusión, este ensayo presenta el conjunto de perspectivas críticas encontradas en la literatura que aborda la OA, añadiendo el enfoque relativamente reciente de la crítica inmanente, tal como la concibe Rahel Jaeggi (2018). Se trata de una perspectiva dialéctica no esencialista que toma como punto de partida las reivindicaciones y condiciones planteadas en la realidad social, respondiendo a los problemas y crisis que surgen en el contexto. A partir de ahí, el potencial transformador recae sobre las propias prácticas de organización, buscando transformarlas. Esta perspectiva apunta a un concepto de organización mediadora de soluciones parciales a los problemas que surgen de las contradicciones de la realidad social.

Palabras clave: Organización alternativa. Crítica inmanente. Tipo ideal. Prefiguración. Filosofía de la diferencia.

INTRODUCTION

Criticisms to management practices and forms of capitalist organization are by no means recent. The "founding fathers" of Sociology, notably Durkheim, Marx and Weber, in their own way, exposed negative consequences arising from the modern capitalist corporation, pointing to its dehumanization, anomie and exploitation. In Brazil, authors such as Maurício Tragtenberg, Guerreiro Ramos and Prestes Motta were pioneers in denouncing *management* as an ideology, social control and the disciplinary power of bureaucracy, the uncritical assimilation of theories and cognitive policies[1]. In the context of Critical Management Studies (CMS), several problems of "organization" and management are repeatedly cited to justify the need for approaches to the negative effects of management and critical organizational research (Alvesson et al., 2009). To produce critical reflections in the area of Management and Organizational Studies (MOS), researchers tend to turn to self-declared critical authors in the areas of Sociology and Philosophy, directing these reflections to organizational contexts and management instruments. The different forms of "criticism", however, address different objects, assume different assumptions, produce multiple explanations of phenomena and indicate different ways of facing problems.

We join Rahel Jaeggi (2018) in his definition of criticism as a subjective aspect of normative failures (objective aspect), which awakens the contestatory disposition regarding the situation, the agents or the norm itself. Criticism can, for example, emphasize the contingency and openness of the social, as well as analyze institutions and organizations "in permanent movement", subject to "continuous transformations, changes and ruptures" (Hartz, 2017, p. 169). It addresses a socially articulated state of things, questioning the need to be as they are. When social contexts are understood as intrinsically normative, criticism appears linked to the violation of norms, applying to the corresponding formation or occurrence and indicating the possibility of accountability. At the same time, the recent history of crisis events – such as the 2007-2008 financial crisis and the expansion of financialization, the Arab spring and the Taliban's retaking of control of Afghanistan, recognition of minority rights and the return of extreme governments right, etc. – is also the story of frustrated expectations, the lack of alternatives and the consequent devaluation of comprehensive criticism, focused on the forms of social totality.

Within the multidisciplinary scope of MOS, alternative organization (AO) has stood out as one of the critical aspects. The "alternative" perspective became particularly influential from the 1970s onwards, when social movements qualified their practices as a way of opposing the corporate establishment. These included feminist organizations (Freeman, 1972), ecologists, regionalists and anti-globalization organizations (Sicinski & Wemegah, 1983). In addition, there was the counterculture movement of "free schools" (Swidler, 1979), medical clinics, legal communes, alternative press, community housing (Case & Taylor, 1979), etc. "Alternative" practices were used in an attempt to overcome personal and social alienation arising from social divisions established between "actors and spectators", "thinkers and doers", "producers and customers" (Sicinski & Wemegah, 1983); to overcome the restrictions and blocks to the development of the human personality resulting from the bureaucratic order (Case & Taylor, 1979); and to defend democratic forms of economic organization (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979).

Currently, the adjective is in wider and more widespread use. Alternative organization is used synonymously with a variety of terms, such as: "non-capitalist" organization (Parker et al., 2014), "alternative food", referring to different forms of food production and distribution (Michel, 2020), "off-axis organization", which points to the "existence of a multiplicity of social experiences wasted by the dominant discourse" (Barcellos et al., 2017), "solidary initiatives" denoting flows of socio-spatial solidarity between autonomous resistance units (Daskalaki & Kokkinidis, 2017), among others. Such popularity was not accompanied by a consolidation of theoretical and epistemological foundations. Conceptual imprecision[2] and apprehension through different theoretical perspectives are recurrent, after all, it is not always easy to decide what is "alternative" (Parker et al., 2014, p. 34). Although terminological indeterminacy contributes to the dissemination of diverse organizational forms and arrangements, uncommitted to onto-epistemic assumptions, the absence of a systematic theoretical framework, focused on the problems of reality, compromises and weakens the field.

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[1] For a summary of these contributions, see Paes de Paula (2008).
[2] Problems arising from conceptual impressions are a recurring theme in the MOS area. See Faria (2017).

In order to identify concepts and theoretical perspectives associated with the term in the area of MOS, in February 2021 we carried out a systematic bibliographical search[3] on journal portals in the area. Through it, we undertook a search for the terms *"organização alternativa", "organizações alternativas", "alternative organization", "alternative organizations"*. The following magazines were included: Academy of Management, Organization, Organization Studies, Ephemera, Organization and Society (O&S), Cadernos EBAPE.BR, Revista de Administração de Empresas (RAE), Revista de Administração Contemporânea (RAC), Revista de Administração Mackenzie (RAM) and Farol – Journal of Organizational Studies and Society. 195 results were identified, 108 were screened and 36 articles were considered eligible.

The significant result was the identification of a dissociation between the frequency of use and the authors' concern in defining the term "conceptually" (Bourdieu et al., 2007). Only 12 articles presented explicit definitions with notable differences between them: although 8 referenced The Routledge Companion to Alternative Organization (Parker et al., 2014), each article emphasized a different aspect, privileging the discussion on distinctive characteristics, without explaining their coherence in relation to the foundations of the theory that explains the phenomenon. Among the diversity of theoretical references, of the 36 eligible articles, Martin Parker was the most cited author (24), followed by George Edward Cheney (20). Other names were also mentioned: Gibson-Graham (14), Joyce Rotschild-Whitt (9) and Marianne Maeckelbergh (8).

To address the disarticulation of the "alternative" adjectivation[4], this essay discusses the ways in which criticism is constituted, introducing a new approach with the potential to overcome some of the identified limitations. The literature analysis shows the alternative organizational phenomenon in three main critical registers: *ideal type, prefiguration, philosophy of difference*. Finally, an approach that is still strange to MOS is presented, called *immanent criticism*. The idea is to examine each of the three perspectives, identifying their absences and limitations, with emphasis on the perspective of immanent criticism, which would allow thinking about criticism of the organization as a possibility of organizing criticism.

ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATION AS AN IDEAL TYPE

AO was first approached as an ideal type in the article "The Collectivist Organization: an alternative to rational-bureaucratic models", by Joyce Rothschild-Whitt (1979). In the 1970s, the US witnessed a proliferation of organizations that sought to satisfy social needs without recourse to bureaucratic authority. These organizations would seek to define themselves based on the willingness of their members to build alternatives to established institutions, offering services with low capital requirements, such as: medical clinics, schools, legal, media and research collectives, food cooperatives, bookstores, communes, etc.

Motivated by a perceived scarcity of social research in this area, Rothschild-Whitt (1979) identified structural similarities in different collectivist organizations. With this, she outlined an ideal type of collectivist democracy, whose logic of substantive rationality antagonized bureaucracy and proved capable of satisfying "alternative" aspirations of its members. If the Weberian matrix has domination as an unavoidable element, Rothschild-Whitt (1979) admits that the collectivist organization aspires to be free from domination, due to collectivized authority. The structural properties of democratic collectivist organizations are opposed to bureaucratic ones in eight dimensions: (1) authority; (2) rules; (3) social control; (4) social relationships; (5) recruitment and progression; (6) incentive structure; (7) social stratification; (8) differentiation. Some limitations would affect the implementation of democracy, implying social costs as "[...] the democratic-collectivist ideal was achieved" (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979, p. 518), by seeking to avoid the normative bias associated with bureaucratic society surrounding. Among the social costs, the following stand out: (1) time: since democracies require time for their implementation; (2) consensus: the need to achieve it can lead to the homogenization of the group; (3) emotional intensity: personal relationships could constitute a threat; (4) non-democratic individuals; (5) individual differences could restrict the organization's ability to realize its egalitarian ideals.

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[3] Only primary studies were considered, that is, original investigations that provide unpublished empirical data. Thus, calls for papers, book reviews, editorials and theoretical articles were excluded.

[4] Instead of seeking to create a systematic framework for the concept of "alternative organization", some authors used it in an idiosyncratic way or created concepts. Our position is that the adjective "alternative" has political power in itself, which can be observed in its frequent mobilization by different social movements. Just as the defense of "lack of alternative" is also evoked by those who seek to perpetuate the agreed order. The theoretical enrichment of the concept of "alternative organization" has the potential to assist in the systematization of academic research and promote dialogue between academia and the activities of social agents.

Rothschild-Whitt (1979) explains that, when contrasting collectivist democracy with rational bureaucracy, she emphasizes the differences categorically, obscuring differences of degree. Hence the proposition of a continuum of organizational forms, ranging from collectivist democracy to hierarchical bureaucracy, in a conception still influential in AO studies, referenced in works such as Barros and Michaud (2019), Bretos and Errasti (2017), Fischer et al. (1993), Hensmans (2021), Rodgers et al. (2016), and Varman and Chakrabarti (2004).

Rothschild-Whitt (1979) finds in Weberian theory a metacritical normative resource capable of showing that new organizations have different "social mechanisms" that can represent a solution to the problem of the order of totality. AOs would constitute an alternative to the authoritarianism legitimized in bureaucratic hierarchies, or a social order without domination. However, a contradiction is evident in the construction of a model of democratic organization through the subsumption of difference and otherness to the "collective" sovereign figure. In this case, above all, the methodological inadequacy of constituting a model based on the Weberian figure of the *ideal type* is observed, since the model produces "[...] a copy that forms pleonasm with the real and that, when obtained by a simple adjustment and extrapolation procedure, does not lead in any way to the principle of reality that it imitates" (Bourdieu et al., 2007, p. 68). The *ideal type* would be a "coherent fiction", an abstraction that starts from singular realities becoming empty of content, in favor of a greater univocity of concepts and their relationships (Weber, 2015). The "ideal" form cannot be confused with the utopian projection, it does not constitute a goal or objective to be achieved, nor does it allow a deduction of reality. Therefore, it is appropriate not to treat it as an 'in itself' or sample of a set, but as a privileged element for understanding a set of transformations. The ideal type allows the elaboration of inferences or "generation of hypotheses", precisely because, as explained by Bourdieu et al. (2007, p. 66), it "[...] it is measured in relation to reality and is defined with accuracy by determining precisely the difference that separates it from reality".

The construction of an ideal type could help to understand the transformations produced by the initiatives of certain social groups, but it could never indicate real existence, in the terms of Rothschild-Whitt (1979). By taking the "collectivist organization" as a "transformation" isolated from others, instead of the creation of an ideal type formally expressing the implications of the development of social relations guided by substantive rationality, we have a model of democratic organization, reductive of democracy to formal decision-making procedures. Obliterated from the other components of capitalist market society, whose institutions reverberate instrumental rationality, the model assumes collectivist and democratic organizations, capable of suppressing relations of domination simply by the *will* of the subjects.

In Brazil, Maurício Serva (1997), undertaking a similar analysis, strives to empirically characterize manifestations of substantive reason in productive organizations, based on the theories of Guerreiro Ramos and Jürgen Habermas, building a continuum of intensity of substantive rationality. Serva (1997, p. 25) explains that the "[...] extreme poles of the continuum [...] would denote [...] the unlikely existence of an organization totally governed by substantive reason or instrumental reason". The scale has a heuristic or purely referential value, "[...] it allows the reader to theoretically exercise hypotheses about what a straight progression towards any of the ends of the continuum would result in" (Serva, 1997, p. 25). Serva's (1997) analysis framework has been used in the country in several studies on rationality in organizations (Serva et al., 2015).

In contrast, Paes de Paula (2009, p. 501) emphasizes that Ramos "[...] boldly stated that there is no emancipation possible for men in economic organizations". In fact, in the *paraeconomic* paradigm (Ramos, 2022, p. 173), "[...] experimental isonomic environments" shape civil society organizations – such as student associations, urban communities, artistic and religious associations. In it, "productive organizations" are restricted to the instrumental sphere of the *economy*. Ramos (2022) himself warns about the dangers of operationalizing macrosocial historical approaches in microsocial empirical research. The author denounces the loss of meaning of categories identified as wide-ranging phenomena, such as alienation and reason, when transformed into conceptual frameworks for "empirical validation" in the context of restricted practices in an organization.

ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATION AS PREFIGURATION

Initially used by Carl Boggs (1977), the term prefiguration designates the incorporation of forms of social relations, decision-making, human culture and experience, within the ongoing political practice of a social movement, as an anticipation of the final objective of that movement. It gained notoriety with the work of Winifred Breines (1989) on the New Left, in the 1960s, associated with the constitution of the "community" within social movements, in permanent tension with the instrumental forms of authoritarian power. Refusing parliamentary maneuvers and bureaucratic manipulation, egalitarian and cooperative experiments would constitute a political difference in the quest to prefigure, in effective practices, the values they intend to disseminate – freedom, equality and community. Recently, prefigurative politics emerges as *self-description* among people engaged in the alterglobalization and Occupy movements (Swain, 2019). In the area of MOS, prefiguration is associated with AO by several researchers (Bryer, 2019; Cheney, 2021; Daskalaki & Kokkinidis, 2017; Jaumier, 2016; Kokkinidis, 2015; Land & King, 2014; Reedy et al., 2016; Reinecke, 2018; Zanoni et al., 2017).

The "direct action" tradition emphasizes the importance of exemplary action in demonstrating other forms of action, as opposed to a single possible form, as expressed in Thatcher's (1980) famous phrase during her speech at the Conservative women's conference: "There is no Alternative" (TINA). If conservative policies reinforce disbelief in alternatives, they must be fought against by showing the practical effectiveness of other ways of acting, constituting an opposition between prefigurative and strategic politics: "[...] should we fight against power or be the change? " (Polletta, 2002, p. 7). This bipolarity between "strategy" and "prefiguration" results from the tension between the *bottom-up* commitment to participatory democracy and the need for a formal organization to implement political changes. The solution has been to defend prefiguration as a strategic alternative, contesting the insufficiency of direct action. Locally based decentralized participatory organizations produce benefits by establishing bonds of solidarity, creating innovative organizational methods and structures, and developing political skills (Polletta, 2002). In this case, the movements of the 1960s were both prefigurative and strategic.

For Maeckelbergh (2011), "strategy" is shaped by communist and socialist theories of social change, which postulate a linear march towards a future moment, with predetermined paths and objectives. Prefiguration, on the other hand, would be considered cultural, disorganized and without any objective other than the promulgation of new cultural relations, in the here and now, between the movement's actors. The author defends a procedural perspective of the strategy, in favor of gradual practices of social change. This occurs as social actors experiment and establish more democratic and inclusive structures. Thus, prefiguration would be strategic in replacing governance structures, due to its mediating role in the creation of diverse (with multiple objectives) and horizontal structures. It will be more strategic the more it contemplates two crucial practices: confrontation with existing political structures; and the development of alternatives. In the latter, given the need to maintain multiple, open and context-specific objectives, prefiguration can be considered the only viable strategy.

For Swain (2019), the fundamental tension is in the way of decreeing the future in the present, that is, between prefiguration guided by ends and that which eliminates ends. The first leads to the practical dilemma between "[...] trying to live up to an ideal that is impossible to achieve in societies as they currently are, or recognizing that this ideal is just a goal, and working to achieve it" (Swain, 2019, p. 53). By taking the future as already achieved, movements risk drifting away from the goal of social transformation – which actually makes them political and not just an alternative lifestyle – or living their "ideals" in bubbles of isolation. By assuming their ideals as objectives, groups risk promoting a consequentialist strategic logic, subordinating all practical mediation to objectives. However, present action should equally "[...] meet and create the standards of a future society that is radically different from it, and this delicate balance seems prone to collapse" (Swain, 2019, p. 54).

Prefiguration, by "eliminating ends", manages the relationship with becoming aiming to "collapse the future into the present" (Swain, 2019, p. 55). Experimentation is a privileged way of resisting determined political objectives, because the ends are potentially rearticulable, emerge from practice, are provisional, context-specific and potentially subject to review and critical examination in the process of their promulgation.

If attempts to incorporate future practices play a formative or educational role (Swain, 2019), prefigurative practices would be defined by their pedagogical character, as they prepare and accelerate the implementation of alternatives. Thus, it is possible to represent new ends with the identification and elaboration of specific ways of improvement through practical action

processes, whose attempts provide previously unthinkable alternatives. However, there remains a difference between the attempt at enactment and its successful realization. Although retrospective reflection is possible to identify the contribution of previous stages from the perspective of later stages, it would not be possible to anticipate the entire process (Swain, 2019).

Even though the incorporation of a notion of formation, anchored in a learning theory, could represent a resource capable of responding to accusations of lack of results from the "direct action" tradition, it is necessary to emphasize that this development is considered only from the point of view of local view. Practitioners and theorists reject the possibility of articulating structural considerations, directed at some form of totality, their problems are always understood in a contingent way and their evaluative criteria are restricted to small-scale local perspectives. The small scale is, mainly, qualitative, in that it gives up understanding the dynamics of forces located on another scale, that is, in the form of totality.

Prefigurative politics would have the merit of trying to solve problems with practical experiments, *without creating models*. However, it reveals its insufficiency as a political and theoretical program. Fraser and Jaeggi (2020) warn that change through a localized "prefigurative" policy tends to become a "petty-bourgeois" practice, however less hierarchical it may be, as each collective will continue to be a company competing with others in the Marketplace. In the end, collectives end up replacing individuals and companies in what is otherwise still the market system – unless some additional overarching structure can be instituted to regulate relations between actors.

ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATION AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF DIFFERENCE

Gibson-Graham's (2006) post-capitalist proposal considers as the main deficits and challenges of economic policy the need to produce a new language to expand the field of economic possibilities, the self-cultivation of subjects who can desire and realize other forms of economy, and the collaborative pursuit of economic experimentation. They advocate the "making" of a new political-economic *imaginary*, which presupposes certain ways of being, actions of power, modes of aggregation, connection and paths of change, with the use of ontological resignification as a *thinking technique* aimed at a politics of possibility. This approach, called *reading for difference*, is used as a starting point to bring visibility to the variety of non-capitalist practices, which languish on the margins of economic representation. Deleuze and Guattari are particularly important for the development of this approach (Gibson-Graham, 2006), because they install difference and differentiation as a generative ontological centripetal force, contrary to the attraction of essence or identity.

Just like prefigurative politics, the proposition of a post-capitalist politics is very influential among authors in the field of AOs, being an important reference for several authors (Bousalham & Vidaillet, 2018; Daskalaki & Kokkinidis, 2017; Esper et al., 2017; Farias, 2017; Husted & Plesner, 2017; Land & King, 2014; Pansera & Fressoli, 2021; Paranque & Willmott, 2014; Reedy et al., 2016; Willatt, 2018; Zanoni et al., 2017). This perspective forms the basis of the entry 'AO' in the work *The Routledge Companion to Alternative Organization* (Parker et al., 2014).

The reading for difference offers a *weak theory* of economics, little better than a description, or simply a set of categories and concepts. Its politics of possibilities seeks to *create new economic positivities* in the negative terrain of "subject" and "place", whose practical engagements comprise three distinct intertwined moments: a politics of language, a politics of the subject and a politics of collective action (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xxxii).

Poststructuralist thought introduces the ultimate undecidability of meaning and the constitutive power of discourse as a means to question dominant ideas and practices, providing openings for alternative and emergent forms of practice and power. This theorization has the advantage of not reducing what it aggregates into categories, but of extending it to the limits tolerable by researchers in relation to dimensionality and detail. So that this ontological reformulation is not confused with the simplistic statement that it is possible to consider such practices external to the materiality of capitalism or repressive state practices, the authors explain their orientation as a reframing that encourages denying the fundamental, structural or universal reality of ontological status of the forces of order.

In relation to the politics of the subject, they deal with a subjective dimension of openness inspired by Foucaultian[5] theory. They report potential strategies for overcoming habits of thinking that block the possibility – such as the pleasures of friendship, trust, affectionate coexistence, including tactics of seduction, flattery and enlistment–, for which it is necessary to develop an interest in unpredictability, contingency, experimentation, or even an attachment to the limits of understanding and the possibilities of escape (Gibson-Graham, 2006). They state that cultivation and self-cultivation experiences, if practiced regularly, can translate momentary shifts from negative to positive affect into a more permanent state of being.

The politics of collective action would involve conscious, coordinated efforts to build a new kind of economic reality. This requires a broad vision of what is possible, a careful analysis of what can be used to begin the construction process, the courage to make a realistic assessment of what might stand in the way of success, and the decision to move forward, with a mixture of creative disregard and protective caution. The selected empirical initiatives illustrate the arguments for not refusing funding from governments, international agencies, foundations or collaborating partners, even if they do not share the same values and objectives. Cooptation is not a condition arising from association with power, but a threat that requires vigilant exercise of self-scrutiny and self-cultivation of ethical practices (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

Gibson-Graham (2006) develop a new language of radical diversity of economic relations and conceptualize it in terms of three practices. In the first, they categorically decompose *market transactions* – free, naturally and artificially protected, monopolized, regulated and niche markets – *alternative markets* – informal, clandestine markets, exchanges between and within cooperatives, "fair" trade, local trade systems, alternative currencies – and *non-market transactions* – domestic exchanges, donations, aid paid by the State, hunting and fishing, robbery. In the second, they discriminate between *forms of paid work* – formal salaried work, contracts with reduced working hours, temporary services, seasonal work and family work –, *alternative forms of remuneration* – self-employment, cooperative work, work under the exchange system – *and unpaid work* – domestic work, family care, voluntary work, slave labor. Finally, they differentiate between *capitalist enterprises* – family business, private company, joint-stock companies and multinationals – *alternative capitalist enterprises* – state-owned company, company committed to ecological causes and social responsibility, non-profit organizations, cooperatives – and *non-capitalist enterprises* – feudal agricultural establishments, independent, autonomous and community producers.

The "reading for difference" approach substantiates the coexistence of a multiplicity of economic relations that, due to their openness to context and contingency, could not be previously determined. The disparity of power cannot be assumed *a priori*, even between a multinational corporation and an NGO, between subsistence hunting and fishing and market transactions, between paid work and barter work. Weak economics theory does not presuppose structured relationships, but rather looks at the ways in which relationships are produced diversely, with specific geographies, histories, and ethical practices (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

Now, it is worth questioning the "[...] need for a new language of economics to expand the field of economic possibility" (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xxiii), since economic diversity is already practiced and the conditions (social, political, cultural, technological) for the experience of a diverse economy are already present. It is not easy to understand the indispensability of the exercise of expanding the imagination if it concerns forms of economic relations already practiced. When conceiving coexisting and independent terms, the authors consider a list of categories available to choose from: economic production (e.g., private company) and social reproduction (e.g., domestic care); exploitation (e.g., paid work) and expropriation (e.g., unpaid work). Thus, the interdependence between the terms, their historical roots and integration into the current social order are lost. Finally, the connection to the historical process that promotes new emergencies is lost.

The philosophy of difference is anti-dialectic par excellence, because, according to Safatle (2019, p. 51), "[...] the forms of unity and identity are not forms of thought, they are real forms against which our desires clash, our bodies, our activities, our speech, in the sense of fundamental forms for the production processes of capitalist society". Thus, Gibson-Graham (2006) fall into the trap of imagining a thought capable of dispensing the mediation of reality, by thematizing difference as an instrument to produce freedom.

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[5] Mainly in the works: "The ethics of self-care as a practice of freedom" and "History of Sexuality, Vol. 2 – The Use of Pleasures".

By succumbing to the temptation of looking for something "outside capitalism", Gibson-Graham (2006) obliterate interdependencies that, historically, make up the capitalist order. In the words of Nancy Fraser:

> In fact, I want to resist the inside/outside image of capitalist society, and here's the reason. Everything I have said up to this point implies that it would be wrong to constitute society, politics and nature romantically, as "out" of capitalism and inherently opposed to it. This romantic vision is widely defended today by a fair number of left-wing activists and thinkers, including cultural feminists, radical ecologists and neo-anarchists, as well as by some defenders of a "plural", "post-growth", "solidarity" and popular economy. Often, these currents treat "care", "nature", "direct action" or "sharing" as intrinsically anti-capitalist. As a result, they overlook the fact that their favored practices are not only sources of criticism but also constitutive parts of the capitalist order (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2020, p. 75).

However, this is not to deny that something could be out of the "totalizing grammar" of capitalism, as capitalist societies institutionalize multiple normative and ontological orientations. For Fraser and Jaeggi (2020), commodified zones of capitalism depend on non-commodified zones, and it would be possible to understand how these different logics inform each other in a web of economic and non-economic relations. Therefore, it would not be reasonable to take widely integrated elements as something from "outside" and, even less, for this to be the basis for overcoming the capitalist order.

IMMANENT CRITICISM AS AN ORGANIZATION OF CRITICISM

Immanent criticism (IC) is linked to methodological premises of Hegelian theory, which, in its criticism of Kant, opposes the use of categories defined *a priori* – dogmatically –, in favor of the use of institutionalized forms of knowledge – historical practices – as a starting point (Stahl, 2013). This methodology would have followed, through Marx, with critical theory, psychoanalysis (Jaeggi, 2018) and the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, notably in the work of Theodor Adorno (Stahl, 2013). Contemporaneously, these premises are defended by several self-declared critical authors, such as Axel Honneth (2001), Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi (2020), Vladimir Safatle (2019), among others. Although it is not a recent approach, references to IC are not frequent in the area of MOS_6 (Curtis, 2014; Hancock, 2022; Hartz, 2017). Despite this, Hartz (2017) understands that some contributions from neo-institutionalism could be classified as IC, especially in relation to the "demythologization of organizations", questioning claims of rationality and organizational research as genealogical criticism.

The IC perspective presented here was proposed by Rahel Jaeggi (2018), in *Critique of forms of life*. It is a critical theory of forms of life, conceived as an alternative to theories that arbitrarily impose norms, arising from philosophical reflection, as well as moral relativism and theories that agree with liberal ideology and the ethical pluralism of modern societies, attributing a neutral character to social institutions (as in John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas). Jaeggi (2018) develops a way to morally evaluate social constellations and the changes that occur with them. To this end, it faces two main questions: (1) the definition of a unit of analysis called "form of life"; (2) the establishment of a critique that escapes a general conception of a correct form of life in the abstract, as well as the possibility of justifying ethical values, called IC. The discussion proposed here is limited to the IC proposition, which was developed by the author.

IC is generally conceived in opposition to external criticism. In the latter, external parameters are used to confront a situation, evaluating it according to claims that transcend the principles inherent to the situation. Criticism, in this case, aims to transform, supplant or reorient what is given, based on norms that are imposed from outside (Jaeggi, 2018). These external standards, sometimes considered universal criteria, are not necessarily linked to a specific socio-historical circumstance, but to every conceivable form of human coexistence. They are evoked by association with potentially desirable beliefs, ideals and values, regardless of link to existing institutional and social structures.

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[6] A search carried out on Organization Studies for the term «*immanent critique*», on 07/01/2022, returned only four results; only one of the articles (Curtis, 2014) on immanent criticism appeared as a theoretical/methodological approach. In the publication Organization, the search returned only eight results and also only one of the articles (Hancock, 2022) to immanent criticism appeared as a theoretical/methodological approach. At RAE, Organization & Society and Farol, the search did not find any results.

Jaeggi (2018) highlights the divergence on the statement that patterns must be found within what is criticized, hence the distinction between internal criticism and IC. Internal criticism tends to confront ideals and norms belonging to the self-understanding of legitimate, accepted and defended social forms with what is actually carried out within them, so that the reality of certain practices and institutions is measured in relation to these ideals. Inconsistencies are identified between statements and facts, between accepted norms and practices, between appearance and reality, which highlights normative justifications and claims and points to the contradiction established between these and what happens in reality. This type of criticism aims to recover or reestablish norms that have been partially overcome by deviant practices, and reactivate the meaning of their ideals, even if this implies drastic changes (Jaeggi, 2018).

Internal criticism would have pragmatic and systematic advantages in the activities of social criticism. When criticism is expressed in terms already accepted by the party subject to criticism, it tends to be easily understood. Furthermore, the reasons for changing a situation – trying to adapt reality to ideals – become intrinsic. This effectiveness also motivates reflections on the possibility of social criticism encompassing the figure of the "engaged critic", committed to the community and, due to his links with it, having the best interests of that community as a tacit assumption. An additional advantage would be that there would be no need to justify the validity of the criteria used for criticism, since it is not linked to a utopian project of a desirable social order. The advantages also expose the limits of internal criticism, related to two main aspects. First, the contradiction between norms and practices requires interpretation, as the applicability of a norm to a given situation is not self-evident. The norms are not presented in an explicit and direct way; they need to be articulated and updated through criticism. The margins of indeterminacy that require hermeneutic activity open a field of conflict and make the idea that engagement would mobilize consensual resources implausible, as justification does not eliminate the dispute over the correct interpretation. The second objection is aimed at limiting the scope of locally agreed normativity, since, by indicating internal contradictions of an existing social order, criticism seeks to re-establish agreements, restoring a previous state. The counterpart to this normative conventionalism would be structural conservatism.

Jaeggi (2018) then proposes a crisis-oriented conception of IC, assuming that the significant position of criticism will not exist external to what is criticized. The approach constitutes a stronger normativity compared to the conventionalist relativism of internal criticism, without resorting to dogmatic conceptions. The IC would be mobilized by crises that threaten the existence of certain practices and ideals, thus aiming at their transformation, never their reestablishment. The procedure is based on existing contexts and standards, based on a specific understanding of the effects of norms on social practices. This approach locates the normativity of these practices in their performance conditions, assuming that the contexts from which their standards derive are intrinsically contradictory. Therefore, the insufficiency of standards would not only be contingent, but marked by systematic problems. In this approach, reality is not confronted, nor is a predefined ideal extracted from it. What we seek is to develop it through the contradictory movements presented by reality, combining (1) the idea that the standard of criticism resides in the thing itself; and (2) the intention to provide a critique that transcends context.

IC must be theoretically informed in its theoretical effort to make explicit the norms inherent to reality (Jaeggi, 2018), taking as a reference the implicit normativity of social practices: the normatively charged functional conditions of a practice. What is intended is not the non-realization of norms in reality, but the internal contradiction of reality and its constitutive norms, revealing the systematic reasons for this discrepancy. The internal contradictions[7] of reality are marked by practical impediments and dysfunctionalities, hence the propensity for crisis linked to instabilities and deficiencies in practices and institutions. The contradictions diagnosed do not only pose a problem of consistency, but are related to practical distortions and crises. Problems and crisis trends point to issues systematically inherent to the described constellation itself, which, in turn, interrogate it.

IC not only evaluates reality in relation to the norm, but also the norm in relation to reality. It functions both as a critique of practice that does not conform to norms, and as a critique of the norms themselves. The criticism pattern is changeable according to the criticism process. The contradiction cannot be eliminated by adjusting reality to the norm, but only through a change that affects both, seeking to transform the situation, contradictory and torn apart by the crisis, into something new.

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[7] The "contradiction" – which for the internal critic is synonymous with "inconsistency" – becomes a "dialectical contradiction" in which the two contradictory components of a connection are at the same time constitutively dependent on each other, so that what seems being disconnected shows being connected (Jaeggi, 2018).

Therefore, overcoming unilaterality eliminates the deficits revealed by IC and leads to a transformation in which both sides – reality and its concept, the "object" and its "metric" – undergo changes (Jaeggi, 2018).

In this dynamic that catalyzes experiential and learning processes, the criticized reality is compelled, by experiences of failure or deficiency, to embark on the process of change. Thus, failure and overcoming failure take the form of a movement of differentiation, enrichment and "progress". The development that transitions from a deficient practice to a new one – and a new self-understanding – becomes a progressively richer and more differentiated experiential process, precisely because it does not involve the unilateral destruction and overcoming of a wrong position, but rather reaches a new position, by the experience of failure. The development initiated by IC can, therefore, be understood as a kind of problem-solving process whose veracity or plausibility resides in the fact that it contains within itself the processing of the inadequacy of the previous position.

Internal criticism has weak normative power because it links its validity to conformity with particular and contingent norms of a social order. This makes it unable to justify why they should be applied. The normative and critical force of external criticism is derived from a standard external to all particular forms. In IC, the claim to truth and validity appeals to the rational potential of norms incorporated in social practices, albeit in a negative and crisis-prone form (Jaeggi, 2018). The rational character of norms can be established in terms of successful overcoming of the problems, crises and contradictions that lie in the conditions to be criticized. Social change assumes the character of a response – more or less successful – to crises and problems resulting from the erosion or obsolescence of existing social formations. This change would be thought of as resulting from processes of social transformation driven by conflict, whose rationality would be understood and judged as a history of problem solving. This occurs amidst the history of these processes, characterized by learning and learning blockage. A comparative synthesis between internal and immanent criticism is found in Box 1.

Box 1
Structure of immanent critique

Internal Criticism	Immanent Criticism
Preconditions	
A given situation is characterized by the fact that a norm N is accepted and simultaneously a practice P is exercised in it.	It adds that neither the norm nor the practice are contingent; rather, they are in a necessary relationship.
It states that a norm N is applicable or concerns a practice P.	It formulates the connection in more demanding terms: N is constitutive of P and also in fact constitutes P (albeit in a contradictory way).
It states that there is a contradiction between the norm and practice, or N is not realized in P.	It states that if N is performed in P in a deficient way, this is shown by the internal contradiction or deficiency of N and P and, therefore, by the contradictory character of the practice constituted by N.
Procedures	
Displays a connection between N and P and makes it explicit. Thus, it establishes that N is a norm that aims at practice P, or that P is a practice that fits into N.	It reveals how N exerts effects on P and P is dependent on N. Thus, the connection in question involves a stronger form of mutual dependence and, moreover, one that must be produced through analysis.
Points out the discrepancy between N and P.	Analyzes the internal contradiction of practice P constituted by N.
It requires P to be brought into conformity with N.	It works as the "yeast" of the practical transformation of N and P.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Jaeggi (2018).

The idea of a "history of problem-solving processes" can convey a false impression that we are facing a conception of linear progress, which presupposes incremental changes. However, Jaeggi (2018) proposes an instructive connection to be established, retrospectively, between dynamics of continuity and discontinuity. When a tradition in crisis is confronted with a new one, the social constellation can adopt the new tradition or produce a third, arising from the confrontation of the previous ones. It presents itself with a new interpretative structure and conceivable practices that enable the integration of more, or new, experiences. The new tradition must point to a solution and articulate an explanation for the crisis in question, through the construction of a link between previous and new concepts – before/after, continuous/discontinuous. The new solution is

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pragmatic, functional – it solves a problem –, hermeneutic – it establishes a new interpretative framework – and also moral – it claims the authority of being the best option. Factual "progress" in solving problems or overcoming crises does not just consist of refuting a false condition or overcoming a dysfunction, it is measured by the fact that the latter can be narratively "incorporated" in retrospect.

The possibility of establishing a critical standard to evaluate a successful solution depends on the ability to describe it as a rational learning process, given that IC's claim to validity lies in the rational character of the transformation process that it uses. However, the rationality of a learning process can only be defined negatively, that is, by the absence of new blocks to the experience, and retrospectively, considering progress as the determined negation of setbacks. The identification of a progressist movement, as well as the attempt to define criteria for what constitutes such a movement, does not mean that history will not present setbacks. The decisive point is that such an analysis provides criteria for evaluating setbacks and not just considering them as changes, or the production of difference devoid of evaluative qualities. Thus, progress need not be defined in positive or content terms. Progress is assumed as the determined negation of setbacks and the practical development of self-determined living conditions makes evident the intrinsic measure of the rationality of forms of life and their critique, even if this measure is guided based on the occurrence of historical processes of transformation (Jaeggi, 2018).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The growing presence of AOs at congresses, calls for papers and research groups in the area of MOS has not been accompanied by an increase in their definition as a conceptual category or theoretical systematization – as an object of research. It is often used as a common sense term and in competing theoretical currents. Terminological indeterminacy may be one of the factors that have guaranteed its wide use, allowing researchers to approach different trends and emerging forms, without committing to dogmatic assumptions. However, this character arouses skepticism regarding the potential of the concept. Thus, due to the absence of a consistent theoretical framework, with proposals to face the problems of reality, it is relegated to a situation of low relevance. The condition of "alternative", in this way, ends up being assumed as a position of subordination.

To address the lack of articulation of "alternative" forms of adjectives, this essay held a discussion on the forms of constitution of criticism, in addition to presenting a relatively recent approaach, with the potential to overcome some of the limitations of current theories. We show that Rothschild-Whitt (1979) proposed the construction of an ideal type of "collectivist organization" to understand organizational transformations in the 1960s. However, by taking the "collectivist organization" as an isolated "transformation", it is created a *model* rather than an *ideal type*. This *model* of "democratic" organization would suppress singularities in favor of the sovereignty of the collective, assuming that, within a capitalist society, it would be possible to establish organizations at the self-conscious of the subjects, in which relations of domination would be absent.

Prefigurative politics, the second approach analyzed, would have the merit of seeking, instead of models, solutions to organizational problems with practical experiments. This political and theoretical program seems insufficient because it disregards the dynamics of macrosocial forces; in it, problems assume a contingent nature and the evaluation criteria are restricted to specific locations. Even denying the internal hierarchy, each collective would remain an agent competing in the market, replacing individuals and companies, as actors in the same market system.

To overcome the limitation of not considering macrosocial structures, Gibson-Graham (2006) state that they do not deny the forces that militate against the forms of economic relations that they characterize as non-capitalist. They seek, however, a way of ontological reframing to prevent these forces from assuming a fundamental, structural or universal reality. Thus, the authors elaborate a "weak theory", creating a multiplicity of economic relations, so that the interaction between categories cannot be predicted, as it is subject to context and contingency. However, by resorting to an anti-dialectical approach, instead of creating a new "imaginary", they end up committing "an attack on the productivity of effective freedom" (Safatle, 2019, p. 51), because they decide to thematize the difference, anticipating the form of freedom that does not exist in the current situation. By emphasizing contingencies in updating norms, the authors deny the systematicity of the relationship of forces. They thus end up romanticizing elements historically integrated into the production of the social order, which are treated

as something "external" and, for this reason, the basis for overcoming that same order.In view of a possible advance in the organization of criticism, this essay introduced the IC method, proposed by Rahel Jaggi (2018), as inspiration for a conceptual framework aimed at alternative organizational processes, which promote criticism as a constitutive element of the practices of organizing. The approach consists of a non-essentialist[8] dialectical perspective, which takes into account the fundamentals of indeterminacy of terms. This perspective suggests a conception of organization centered on critical experiment, in a permanent search for partial solutions to problems that emerge from the contradictions of social reality.

We understand that the critical perspective implies implementing a conception of organization oriented towards social transformation and capable of indicating paths for solutions to problems arising from the contradictions of reality. This depends on a theoretical framework that articulates the different initiatives, not as isolated elements, but as a constellation of activities that articulate their differences around common points. Evidently, the theoretical-methodological development of the IC approach needs to advance in order to provide a study and analysis roadmap for efforts to create organizational forms. The path in this direction would include the enrichment of the IC concept through dialogue with other authors in this line, the articulation between different social contradictions and the initiatives that aim to address them, in addition to the consequences resulting from this confrontation, and also the deepening of the debate on the viability of this new epistemological reference in the MOS area.

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[8] In other words, in which terms do not crystallize around particular identities (Jaeggi, 2018).

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DATA AVAILABILITY

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