

**Power, Politics, Friendship: Illich Offers Hope In Our Hard Times**  
*A Conversation with Gustavo Esteva<sup>1</sup>*

**Madhu Suri Prakash and Dana L. Stuchul**

***In the 60s and 70s you were living in Mexico City, only 60 kms. from CIDOC. Yet, you never sought to meet Ivan until the 1980s?***

For many of us in the Marxist left, Ivan was merely a reactionary priest. We were not interested in reading him: even less meeting him. Vaguely, we were aware of the fact that he had become famous for his critiques of education and health. For us, that was irrelevant: mere tools of control and domination for reproducing the systems of capitalistic societies. We were still dreaming of socialist societies promising universal excellent systems of education and health. Cuba nourished our dreams. In spite of being a small, poor and sieged country, *Cubanos* had been able to establish what were probably, at the time, the best systems of education and health in the world. And they were remaining fully revolutionary!

The fact that Ivan was friends with Octavio Paz confirmed our prejudices. We acknowledged the courage of Paz in resigning as ambassador to India after the massacre of students in Tlatelolco in 1968. Still, Paz remained for us a reactionary poet and, at best, a liberal, very hostile to socialist thinking.

In our leftist jargon, “reactionary” meant someone who “reacts” against social change, revolutionary change, and someone who is trying to go back in history. People affiliated with the left, like Octavio Rodríguez Araujo, still dismiss Ivan as an enemy of progress and modernity and classify him in the ultra-right (*La Jornada*, 09/08/2016, “De mentiras y ultraderechistas in Morelos”). This is, of course, pure ignorance: they don’t read Ivan. It is a prejudice. They hear bells, but they don’t know where.

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<sup>1</sup> The conversation, occurring in Cuernavaca and Mexico City, Mexico U.S.A, began in July 2016.

I must confess that a short presentation of Ivan was published in a leading Mexican newspaper, *Excelsior*, in the early 70s. I was very impressed with the text. I quoted Ivan in the first page of my first book. But I did not associate the guy of the article with the reactionary priest of Cuernavaca. And this basically implies that he was not in my personal radar.

***What made you meet him finally? What was your impression of him? How did you become friends and co-conspirators?***

Rodolfo Stavenhagen invited me to a seminar in *El Colegio de México* about the social construction of energy. Wolfgang Sachs would be the speaker. Rodolfo knew very well that I was not an academic or involved in the academic life, but he also knew that I had been reflecting on those lines and invited me to share my ideas about the “issue” of energy. In doing so, he assumed that I would offer a radical contrast, not convergence with Sachs’s ideas. I did not know that Ivan would be there. After Sachs’ presentation and two or three comments, Ivan intervened. Two sentences into the intervention by Illich, I was completely fascinated ... really fascinated. José María Sbert, my friend and Ivan’s protégé conspirator<sup>2</sup>, also attended the seminar and invited us both for dinner at his home. This was my first opportunity to have a long conversation with the great guy.

I borrowed from José María several books by Ivan and started that very night to read them. I could not stop. His writing was a pure revelation ...smashing all my misconceptions of his being a mere reactionary priest.

It is important for me to put encountering Ivan in the context of my life and work. Since 1976, I had been living and working at the grassroots, with peasants and urban marginals. I was fascinated with my experiences there, but unable to understand their radically different worlds from the one in which I studied, lived and worked. Assuming for some time that it was my ignorance of that world, I frantically studied economics,

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<sup>2</sup> Ivan asked Valentina Borremans (co-founder of CIDOC, Centro Intercultural de Documentación) to look for two very smart young guys in the faculty of economics of the National University. Valentina found José María Sbert and José Andrés Oteyza and both worked for Ivan over several years. José María remained a very close friend of Ivan until his death. José Andrés became a Minister and CEO of several transnational companies.

sociology, anthropology, political science. The more I studied, the less I understood. And then, one day, I don't know how and why, I took off the lenses of development, the categories in which I was educated. At the beginning, I was dazzled, as when you come out of a dark room to the light. But later I started to use my own eyes. Taking off the lenses of an educated man, the first personal transformation started with re-memembering my beloved *Zapotec* grandmother. Development had transmogrified – destroyed all my memories of what I learned from her when I was a child visiting her in Oaxaca. These had been junked ... pushed callously back into the forgotten recesses of my educated mind. Clearly, as an educated activist and intellectual, my grandmother's *Zapoteco* world was not something to keep alive in my conscience, my awareness of the modern reality. After abandoning the development lenses, those memories helped to re-member my self with my people, at the grassroots.

Still, I remained very confused. With Teodor Shanin as a guide and guru, I participated in the 70s in a national and international debate on peasantry. I had already abandoned my Leninist eyes, and without the compass orientation of development, I was completely confused about alternatives to the dominant development paradigm—the highways to universal progress-growth-expansion. All socialist countries had adopted the development catechism. How to conceive the revolutionary transformation of injustice and inequality without development? I already knew that the peasants and common women and men at the grassroots were not interested in development and were resisting all kinds of developments; they were looking for autonomy and avoided any political and ideological center. (After listening to them, the name of my organization changed from Analysis, Development and *Gestión* to Autonomy, Decentralism and *Gestión*). But I could not shake off my confusions. I was still assuming that the economic society was a given, a fact, a reality; that we were resisting capitalism, not the industrial mode of production; that the nation-state and formal democracy were still appropriate political horizons; and so on and so forth.

Ivan, from the very first minute, revealed what I would come to call “the discourse of the people,” a brilliant articulation of people's perception and reactions in the time of crises. “Conviviality” and “vernacular,” fundamental categories in Ivan's thinking, I had already discovered—NOT in the world of academics or within my

intellectual research. Instead, working at the grassroots, I had had direct experience of the concepts I was discovering with Ivan. He wrote that he took “conviviality” from Brillat-Savarin, but I am convinced that he also heard the word at the grassroots in Mexico. Since then, whenever I use Ivan’s ideas or concepts in my grassroots worlds, I enjoy an immediate “Aha” effect. “Aha,” say the people, as if they already knew those ideas but had been unable to articulate them in Ivan’s way.

Yes, Ivan’s ideas became a very powerful light to illuminate my reality and my grassroots pathways. I started to collaborate with him. Soon we became friends. He invited me to his homes in Mexico and State College, among other things to write the lead essay for the dictionary of toxic words, edited by Wolfgang Sachs.<sup>3</sup> By the way, as Ivan clearly anticipated, there is today new interest in the book; we will have meetings and publications on its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in 2017.

***We know that “interculturality” was important for Ivan. Do you know how his interest in the fundamentals of interculturality became important in his life and work?***

My sense from hearing his stories is that it started with the cultural context in which he was born and which defined his childhood. He was a polyglot before he was eight years old. Very early in life he was immersed in radically different worlds—from the “civilized” Vienna, soon to fall under Nazi control, to the Croatian island where his grandfather was living. David Cayley narrates, I think, that the same boat which carried him as an infant from his ancestral home in Dalmatia also brought the first loudspeaker that would inevitably change not only Illich’s island, but the rest of his life. His childhood evidently posed his earliest intercultural challenges, starting with his parents: his mother a converted Sephardic Jew, his father a Croatian Catholic aristocrat.

The first major challenge was to come later in Nazi Vienna. Identified as a Jew, he was immediately humiliated in the classrooms. When he was 13 years old he took the decision of not birthing another child in this terrible world. He was to become a Catholic priest. He went to Rome where his genius was quickly established. He was offered a

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<sup>3</sup> *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, London: Zed Books, 1992.

brilliant career in the Vatican, which he escaped leaving for New York immediately. During his training for priesthood, the discipline he loved the most was ecclesiology and he became particularly interested in Albertus Magnus, whose manuscripts were in Princeton. Ivan yearned to continue his studies on Magnus, immersing himself in theory and scholarship. The world stretching wildly beyond academia, however, pulled his scholarship into the complex realities of interculturality.

Under the protective umbrella of Cardinal Spellman, he tumbled into the mayhem of Harlem. Soon after arriving in New York, serendipitously he crossed a church attended by Puerto Ricans. Entering the church to pray, he witnessed the horror, the indignities suffered by poor *jibaritos* in the hands of American priests considered gentle. Shaken up, the very next day he requested from Cardinal Spellman to minister to church newcomers. Immediately, he began practicing as a priest. People still remember his amazing transformation when he was conducting the mass or the sacraments, fully immersed in the sacred mystery. He began changing every aspect of the rituals of mass, long before Vatican II. He was courageously adapting the universality of the Church's message to the particularity of the *jibaritos*' faith and culture and reality in New York. As we all know, *catholic* means *universal*. But for Ivan, love can never be universal nor abstract. And for Illich there was nothing more important in the Christian message than love.

After some time, he was appointed as Vice-Rector of the Catholic Ponce University of Puerto Rico. Some old people in New York still remember his last mass in his first parish, when 30,000 *jibaritos* participated in the ceremony. *That* is Ivan. *That* gives a glimpse of his life long journey practicing interculturality. The same episodes transformed the amazing scholar Ivan into the man of action, one whose actions and theories belonged to the same fabric of his social thought. I am continually surprised and frustrated when I see Ivan treated and applauded and celebrated as the great erudite theoretician, the supreme scholar, that he in fact was. Sadly, his admirers are blind to how his erudition, research, his impressive knowledge of language and history and philosophy and everything he wrote or spoke about was always at the service of his commitment to the real world ... his strong desire to participate in the transformation of this world, here, now, not in the future which he refused to be tantalized by... procrastinating the present to the future of abstract ideals.

In Puerto Rico, he really engaged with the people, instead of isolating himself in an office or within the ivory tower. It is hard to imagine Ivan in a monoplane flying to reach isolated *aldeas* (hamlets). Ivan wrote in *Deschooling Society* that he owed his interest in public education to Everett Reimer, who he met in 1958 in Puerto Rico. (Later, in CIDOC, since 1967, he met regularly with him and with many others.)

To further explore Latin American cultures, Ivan went to Brazil, where he met Dom Helder Câmara, who was ready to “educate” him. He gave Ivan a book and then the next day arranged for a meeting with the author. That is how he met for the first time with Paulo Freire. As Ivan told David Cayley, they became instantly friends, and remained friends for the rest of Freire’s life, in spite of the fact that they parted ways philosophically and oriented their lives in entirely different paths. Both of them had a profound interest in social transformation. While Freire was interested in educational reform and particularly literacy for emancipation, and oriented his life and work to equip a group of “mediators” to support the people in their emancipatory process, Ivan was interested, first, in answering the fundamental question: What kind of society wants to educate all its members?, and then, once he suspected the answer, he wanted to change that society, the contemporary, economic society, capitalist or socialist. *Deschooling Society* is not really against the school or even against the “banking education” theorized and criticized by Freire. Ivan uses the analogy of the separation of Church and State, as precondition for the democratic societies, to claim for the separation of Education and State. People in the left postulate exactly the opposite: they claim for the universal right of education, for lay, free and public education and attribute that fundamental social function to the state, no matter what they conceive as “State.” People in the right seem to look the same than Ivan—they want to privatize education and suppress any intervention of the state in what they want to control, although most of them will accept public resources for the schools. Ivan opens a different path, or rather paths, which cannot be classified in such positions. He is looking for the freedom to learn, he is resisting capitalist or socialist state plans to educate all the members of the society according with specific interests. His reference to Comenius is very clear: in conceiving modern education, Comenius was literally trying to create his country, in a fragmented way and under several empires. Comenius’ effort can be examined in the frame of national

independence, but the tradition of education is no longer about independence, but about domination and control.

Dom Helder Câmara, very well known for his profound commitment to social and political transformation and particularly the poor, had another suggestion for Ivan: “If you want to know Latin America, you must walk it.” Obediently, Ivan walked. I don’t know how many miles he walked in Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Chile and of course Mexico. Years later, Grimaldo Rengifo, a Peruvian guy that was one of the Latin-American socialists who participated in Ivan’s seminar at CIDOC that generated *Tools for Conviviality*, asked Ivan about what to do during the month he still had to stay in Mexico: “Walk Mexico,” he told him. And Grimaldo dutifully followed the advice and walked from Cuernavaca to Oaxaca and Chiapas.

Given this background, Ivan was the obvious candidate to educate the nuns and priests going to Latin America, according to the agreement between the Pope and President Kennedy, to send to Latin America 10% of the priests and nuns of North America, around 40 000 people. He first created, in Fordham University, the Center for Intercultural Formation, and later, in Cuernavaca, CIDOC, the Center for Intercultural Documentation. All this is well known. I am bringing it here only to underline Ivan’s concern with interculturality, something that had many other expressions in his complex life, for example, learning so many languages.

At one point, Ivan told me, for some time I was thinking to go to China and spend the rest of my life in a little village. I wanted to take a radical distance from my condition as a Westerner, from all the certainties and “evidences” assumed and presupposed by a person like me. But it was immediately evident that such a move was stupid ... I would be the Westerner Illich in the small Chinese village, no matter how well I learned the Chinese language or ways of life, or how well I related with the Chinese people. And that is how I decided instead to go backwards in Western history, trying to identify the moment in history in which every one of our certainties were impossible to understand, in order to discover how and why they were conceived. In my view, that was his main motivation to become a historian, beyond his original interest in ecclesiology.

I am sharing these stories only to underline that, in my view, Ivan was fully aware that the relation between cultures had already been tragic and will continue to create

increasing violence and confrontation. In the last years of his life he was fully aware of what was happening in Yugoslavia, in the region so close to his heart, with the series of events that produced what now is called “the Yugoslavian syndrome”—when people of different cultures that have been neighbors for centuries begin to kill each other, a kind of syndrome that seems to be today epidemic.

There is something more and more profound. During the last decades of his very rich life, Ivan used frequently the dictum: *corruption optimi quae est pessima* (the corruption of the best is the worst) and even more the parable of the Good Samaritan. For him, the parable was the quintessential element of Christ’s message: that a person, out of love, trespasses the limits of his own *ethnos*, his culture. This is the message, he said time and again, a message of love for the other, particularly when this other belongs to another *ethnos*. For Ivan, when Christ is asked “who is your neighbor?”, his answer, the very explicit message is, your neighbor is the person that you transform into your neighbor by loving him or her. For Ivan, this is the best (of the Christian message) and it has been corrupted when the Church has institutionalized love and transmogrified it into help, aid, charity, care, a professional service, what John McNight calls “the mask of love.”

***You just said that Ivan is for you a man of action, someone who wants to participate in social and political transformation. Was he looking for power?***

He knew very well what power is and does and he could have had a lot of power, first within the Catholic Church, when he was offered a very important position in the Vatican, and later in the secular world, given his connections, his fame, his genius. He knew, for example, how to use the media. At one point he was able to publish the same article, in a certain date, in the ten most important newspapers of the world, including *Le Monde*, *the New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, *Asahi Shinbun*, etc. Or he knew how to use the power of the government. For example, he made a series of calls to get Paulo Freire out of jail and succeeded. But he abhorred power, precisely because he knew what it means. He knew that power corrupts its user and he also knew that power becomes counterproductive if you want to use it for freedom and emancipation. He escaped the



limelight to reflect aloud with conspirators and friends and he explicitly avoided the kind of writing that would transform him into an overnight superstar. At the end of *Tools for Conviviality* you can find some pages that can be taken as a magnificent guide to act in times of crisis, with brilliant and imaginative suggestions. But he was not offering a guideline, an instruction, a political proposal to follow. As in many other cases, he was anticipating how the people would react in the time of a crisis. That is why those pages can be seen today as a very good description of what the people are doing now, everywhere, when the institutions are collapsing exactly in the way Ivan anticipated. In his conversations with Cayley<sup>4</sup> you can see—Ivan mentions that at one point he anticipated something like a sudden collapse of Wall Street, but what was happening instead is that millions of people were re-functionalizing the institutions, by using them in their way, not the prescribed way, in the time of their collapse. This was not a prescription, a design, a model. In the last years of his very productive life, Ivan was observing that we were evolving from the era of tools to the era of systems, that we were becoming subsystems of the system. A tool is something you use according to your intention. The system is no longer a tool: it cannot obey you! I do still belong to the generation that becomes irritated when MS Word does not allow me to do what I want and it auto-corrects me. The best example is, of course, transportation. When I use an automobile I am no longer auto-mobile, I am part of a very complex system, that includes the streets and roads, traffic signals, car factories, gasoline, etc. The “system” is imposing on us all kinds of attitudes and behavior and is becoming counterproductive. They are not falling apart as a collapse of Wall Street, but they are in the process of collapse. Many people are not waiting for that final collapse of all modern institutions, but “misusing” them, for their own purposes, transforming them into tools again. Ivan himself misused the universities for his own purposes, in his seminars. More and more people are misusing the education system, to be able to learn in freedom. Others are resisting the medical dictatorship, using modern technologies for their own purposes. In the Zapatista clinics you can find X-Rays and ultrasound and even some antibiotics; but you will not find the medical system in operation. That is why even non-Zapatistas come to the Zapatista clinics. They consider that they are a lot better than public or private clinics.

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<sup>4</sup> David Cayley, *Ivan Illich In Conversation*, Toronto: Anansi Press, 1992, p. 117.

Ivan once explained to me how and why he opted for influence instead of power. It is not as easy as it looks, but the central point is crystal clear: to carefully avoid control, domination, hierarchy, oppression—in every possible aspect of the reality. He explained many times how a microphone is a tool of power; he tried to avoid using it as much as he could. He refused to be in command, even in conversations in small groups. He did not have much patience and he could use all the power his figure represented for most people to silence arrogance or dismiss assaninity—the participation of some people that, in his opinion, were affecting the flow of the conversation.

He had in fact an immense influence on millions of people, sharing with them ideas, experiences, the collective outcome of his seminars. But he never transformed that influence into a tool of power to dominate or control. Yes, he had a profound commitment to social and political change, he fought courageously and continuously against the degradation of the human condition he saw in every aspect of the contemporary society. But he refused to become a leader, or even less a boss, to guide the masses to any kind of Promised Land.

In my view, his continual refusal to offer specific “alternatives,” to formulate utopian designs, or to offer specific advice, had many reasons. The most important is that he anticipated many different forms of the new society, many paths and ways of life, not only one. He fully acknowledged the radical plurality of the world. I think that he considered it inappropriate to share his own dreams or preferences about possible futures because he was aware that his influence, out of the intrinsic power of his ideas, would have coerced some people to “follow” him instead of appealing to their own imagination. Perhaps he shared with Marx the conviction that any person conceiving the shape of the society after the revolution would be a reactionary. And he said time and again that he did not want for the shadow of the future to affect his perceptions of the present. He could express a very clear conviction, for example at the end of *Gender*, that it is possible to recover a contemporary art of living, if we can avoid sentimentality and be open to surprise beyond the genderless economic individual. But he did not offer specific clues about that art.

***Really? Do you think that he did not offer suggestions and proposals about the alternatives, beyond the society he criticized so well? What is the relevance of his life and thinking for our current predicaments?***

He offered some examples about alternative paths in many areas. At the end of *Deschooling Society*, for example, he described some of them. And he also mentioned that many people were doing certain things to go beyond the contemporary predicaments; this is particularly clear at the end of *Tools for Conviviality*. But all these were only, in my view, illustrations of those paths to present his ideas as something fully incarnated in reality, not just abstract elaborations. It was not to define specific paths as the best way to transform into behavior a radical critique of conventional ways of thinking and doing.

I have been saying, for a long time now, that the three pillars of alternative paths are hope, friendship and surprise. I find this “formula,” openly inspired by Ivan, very effective to share his approach to this moment of danger and crisis. In “The Rebirth of Epimethean Man,” that extraordinary essay at the end of *Deschooling Society*—that in my view functions better separated from the book—Ivan clearly expresses that the recovery of hope as a social force is a condition for the survival of the human species. He establishes in that essay a clear distinction between hope and expectation and delineates a line of thinking and action that many years later was beautifully expressed by Vaclav Havel: “Hope is not the conviction that something will happen, but the conviction that something makes sense, whatever happens.” Apparently, he (Ivan) liked for this purpose some of my stories, for example about pregnancy. In my world, “*Está esperando*,” they say about a pregnant woman; she is hoping. It would be terrible, very bad taste, to talk about the baby. The woman knows that many things can happen before the baby she is hoping for really is born. It is a kind of challenge, a dare, to the gods to “expect” the baby. In the time when ultrasound started to be used, I got a card from a friend. In the left side it had a kind of shadow; in the right part, it was: “Hi. I am Johnny. I will be born on August 3, at 10:00 in the morning.” The mother was dutifully following the medical program, which will end in a C-section prescribed by her doctor, and she was “expecting” Johnny. In these times of great despair, given the terrible conditions of the world, what we see is the recovery of hope as a social force, not a construction of new expectations.

When the occupiers of Wall Street were asked what were their demands, they answered that they had no demands because they could not hope that they were satisfied by a regime dedicated to serve the 1%. They were explicitly rejecting any form of expectation, fully aware that they were driven to frustration and near despair, but they were not paralyzed. They were nourishing hope, the hope that comes when something makes sense.

Many people in the United States have started to become “occupiers,” basically concerned with local threats and transformations. In these times of global fear, said the Uruguayan poet Eduardo Galeano, those who are not afraid of hunger are afraid of eating. It would be foolish to expect that the governments or Wal-Mart and Monsanto will have a moral epiphany and will begin any time soon to do the opposite of what they are doing. *Via Campesina*, the biggest peasant organization in history, took the matter into its own hands. They redefined food sovereignty, saying that we must define by ourselves what to eat and we must produce it. And that is what they and many other people are doing everywhere. Today, small farmers, mainly women, feed 70% of the people in Earth, while agribusiness, controlling more than half of the food resources, feed only 30%. When a peasant sows seed on the prescribed day, he is not expecting the crop—he or she knows that many things may happen. But he does what makes sense that very day. I have a thousand stories of this kind, that clearly apply to what is happening today in my world and everywhere. Hope is the very essence of popular movements. People are mobilized because they believe that their action may produce the change they want. As Ivan wrote, we need to bring back hope as a social force – and that is, by the way, the main contribution of the Zapatistas.

Friendship is for me the main category in the life and thinking of Ivan, the category that most defines his position about the world. That is my sin, he said many times: *poliphilia*. And he knew how to be a friend. He cancelled once all his seminars and lectures in State College and took a flight to Switzerland. An old woman, Ivan’s friend, was dying and wanted to see him before dying. He stayed with her for 20 days, until she died. Gabriel Cámara used to say: if you are a friend of Ivan, you need to have your luggage ready, because he may call you at any time to meet with someone in another country. I can remember very well how I went to Germany to meet with Teodor Shanin

and Claudia von Werlhof, after Ivan urged me to take immediately a flight. I cannot thank him enough for the many friends he shared with me and I can tell a thousand stories about the meaning of friendship in his personal life. Perhaps the most important point to remember is that the stuff allowing us, those who had been constructed as individuals, to create and regenerate commons, community spirit, in the urban world, is friendship, with its characteristic component of gratuity.

Surprise expresses for me the position according to which we are back from the future, that we are explicitly abandoning the construction of the future as a tool of manipulation and control. Yes, I can agree with Galeano, when he tells us that the utopia is what makes us walk the next step, but never be there. But I cannot agree with the contemporary construction of utopias and utopian thinking, Wallerstein style, to renovate the death utopias of the twentieth century.

Yes, this is the time of Illich, that is, this is our time with him. I cannot conceive of a more powerful and effective light to illuminate these very dark times and then be able to understand the horror. He can be a good guide to understand the general trends and also of the rise of Mr. Trump or Brexit. Ivan offers great clues to dissolve the veils covering, hiding what is before our eyes but we cannot see. On the one hand, we don't see how small acts, daily acts of ordinary men and women, are constructing the new society in the womb of the old. These are revolutionary acts, as Ivan defined them. "I call an act 'revolutionary'," wrote Ivan, "only when its appearance within a culture establishes irrevocably a (significantly) new possibility: a trespass of cultural boundaries which beats a new path. A revolutionary act is the unexpected proof of a new social fact, which might have been foretold, expected, or even called for but never before was irrevocably shown as possible."<sup>5</sup> These revolutionary acts don't belong to the old revolution, 20<sup>th</sup> century style, but to the ongoing revolution, undermining the system oppressing us. Instead of the fear used by Trump to get support for an authoritarian and nationalistic way, entirely obsolete but very dangerous, we need to open minds and hearts to the ocean of hope we can find in the behavior of millions of ordinary people. Instead of being intimidated and paralyzed when you loose your job, the intimidation and paralyses

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<sup>5</sup> In "Appendix: Dissidence, Deviance and Delinquency in Style." CIDOC Cuaderno No. 54, Cuernavaca, 1970, pp. 8/1-8/9

that you see in the faces of many Trump followers who have the expectation that he will magically solve all of their problems, you can enjoy the freedom of a third of Americans who are now abandoning the 9 to 5 prison, as the Fall 2016 issue of *Yes!*<sup>6</sup> celebrates.

Ivan can help us to understand people's mobilizations in Oaxaca or New York. Oaxaca is burning. We have something that can be legitimately called a popular insurrection, very traditional and totally new, a real novelty where the people are looking for self-affirmation, autonomy, freedom, not for conventional demands, while being affected and stimulated by brutal repression and impressive incompetence of the government and the powers that be. From the sediment of experience and many struggles, new forms of lucidity and courage are emerging. Among them, one very special demand: the disestablishment of education, as Ivan suggested—that the government should be excluded from any definition of the content and forms and methods to learn in freedom. This is not coming from any ivory tower or academic prescription, but from the depth of the experience of long struggle, lead by the well organized teachers and joined by the parents and the teachers. People are clearly adopting political horizons that go beyond the nation-state and representative democracy, the political horizon that Ivan had in his mind during the last 50 years of his productive life.

And Ivan can also help us to understand why Occupy Wall Street was possible, why it produced such an impact in the minds, hearts and behavior and the hopes of millions of people as well as what follows, what is embedded in that moment of lucid courage. Reading Ivan today is lighting a powerful lantern in the darkness. His light illuminates the current reality, and allows us to better understand what is happening, both the institutional collapse and people's reactions, and even more to see the paths ahead. Ivan cleans our eyes, eliminating from them the old, conventional, obsolete ideas in which we have been educated and shaped, thus enabling us to use our own eyes, in our own way.

Yes, with Ivan we can understand what is happening, how the people are reacting and what kind of awareness we need today before the horrors of our modern times. The most important thing, perhaps, is that Ivan gave us back the agency we lost in the

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<sup>6</sup> See *Yes! Magazine*, Issue 79, Fall 2016, "The Vanishing 9-To-5: Welcome to the Gig Economy: Ruthless and Liberating."

confusion of all leftist preaching about masses and parties and the national/global scale of the needed change. Ivan reinstated our agency, our personal capacity to act (with friends), by giving us back the sense of proportion, the sense we lost in the hubris of modernity and the patriarchal arrogance that brought us to the extremes of violence we are living today.

This is the time to recover the art of living and dying, a contemporary art of living and dying, beyond any form of nostalgia, paralysis or despair. And that is quintessential Ivan.