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Preface

The Political Subjectivation of Social Movements

Sergio Tamayo

This book provides a critical Marxist explanation of sociopolitical movements. It is a breath of fresh air in the broad spectrum of social movement studies, one which holistically analyzes political action from a critical Marxist perspective, a point of view whose presence has been greatly reduced in contemporary academic debate. In this brief introductory space, I would like to reflect on this fascinating subject, which is rooted particularly within the best Gramscian tradition in politics, positioning itself clearly within a current that is distinct from the dogmatic Marxism of the twentieth century and its single-minded, rigid, and unchanging thought. In the intersection and triangulation of visions and concepts, the criticism here finds an opportunity for a different kind of explanation of contradictions and the options for social transformation and political change.

Massimo Modonesi's book locates itself within this novel kind of Marxism. But in order to do so, it must necessarily free itself, not only of the dogmatic Marxism that has done so much damage to academia as well as to movements, but also of those hegemonic currents in the study of social movements, be they the theories of resource mobilization that prevail in the United States, or the European theories of post-social identities. Many readers are surely acquainted with the heated arguments that have caused splits in the research orientation of some academies. I am thinking here of groups like the American Sociological Association (ASA) or the International Sociological Association (ISA), some of which have formed study groups differentiating between collective action and class struggle. Still, these debates have enabled us to rethink and render more flexible the rigidity of theories of
social movements, to the point of reaching certain glimmers of approximation. In spite of the forceful criticism of ideas ranging from James Jasper's theory of the emotions to the so-called structuralist perspectives, centering on political processes, of Tarrow, McAdam, and Tilly, these scholars have, since 2001, sought more dynamic analyses of collective action, recognizing that previous models had become static and that it was necessary to rethink them. The political perspective of movements, concerned with the definition of structures of opportunity, cycles of protest, political challenge, and repertoires of mobilization, went on to include the interlinkage of processes and mechanisms, as well as the structures themselves. It likewise incorporated the study of identities and narratives, combining them with facts and measurements that explained political actors' attributions of meaning to the structures of opportunity and to the processes of action themselves.

In such a conceptual morass, this book has the advantage of a lucid presentation of the subjective construction of political confrontation. It locates itself in the debate with these currents, but it goes beyond them by reaffirming the value of critical Marxist theory. The same takes place in the classical traditions of Touraine and Melucci, who are mentioned in the necessary delimitation and definition of the social subject, and in the new generations, with Wieviorka, and with others positioned within symbolic interactionism, like Olivier Fillieule and Daniel Cefai, to mention only a few.

In his elaboration of the theory of antagonism, Modonesi must argue with many Marxisms. He pushes aside the most dogmatic, critiques others, and incorporates still others. He highlights authors who have been inclined to stress the role of culture in the class struggle, like E.P. Thompson, James C. Scott, and Ernesto Laclau, and those who have expressed the need to rethink the Marxism of the twenty-first century, as suggested by Daniel Bensaid and de Antonio Negri, with whom he has no difficulty rethinking
revolutionary theory, together with Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, and Antonio Gramsci.

Within this framework of debate, I would like to consider the book in relation to my own work, and not so much as an abstract reconstruction of theory as, above all, an inevitable task. The topic of culture has been incorporated into the study of social movements at least since the 1980s, with the contributions of Melucci, Johnston, and Touraine himself. Others subsequently introduced it in narratives and production of frameworks, with David Snow, and with the imaginary and autonomy of Castoriadis. Since the late 1990s, I have returned to a recognition of the leading role of culture in social action, picking up the central question of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School in its first and second periods. Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, and Marcuse explain social and political change based on the cultural transformation of the subject, and responded in a general way to the following questions: Why has the proletariat been incapable of a revolution to emancipate itself from exploitation and domination? Why has the revolutionary utopian prophecy of Marx not been fulfilled? The answers have, generally speaking, been built upon considerations of culture and the notion of hegemony. And this assertion is consistent. An alternative operationalization of culture toward social movements can thus be carried out in the study of collective identities that in turn must be deconstructed into observable categories. A critique of citizenship, for example, defined in neoliberal terms, can be made on the basis of political culture, as long as we think of it by way of a critique of identity, which arises precisely in the epistemological decomposition of culture. This approach allows us to understand citizen movements not only as simple apologies for imagined successes that describe fantasies of what must be, but as dialectical processes of mobilization and demobilization, success and failure, production of identities
that are open or closed, institutionalized or anti-systemic, violent or non-violent. It is thus
about re-elaborating a process of construction of the social subject, in terms of what
Touraine initially associated with social movements, those that Wieviorka himself would
claim as a subject that conceives of itself, in the space of daily life, prior to the constitution
of the movement itself. It is about the possibility that in the very performative act of the
daily reproduction of the symbolic order of gender, as described by Judith Butler and with
acknowledgments to Michel Foucault, we also find acts of resistance. And along the same
lines we find James C. Scott's notion of reconstructing the art of the dominated, based on
culture.

The subject constitutes itself in daily life, as an individual and as a social actor,
forming connections as part of a community, in a family, at work or school, in the street.
Although he operates within the structural theory of resource mobilization, McAdam's
consideration of the biographical consequences of activism can therefore be of service to
the study of militantism and the formation of consciousness, addressing the questions posed
by E.P. Thompson and other Marxists, like Ira Katznelson, who associate culture with
politics and economics: Where and how do workers live, and where and how do they work?
How can we know these things? We find the answers by triangulating politics and
economics, structure and process, system and action, sociology and anthropology, by
means of ethnographic and narrative experience, and with that resource for the construction
of identities that is the history of personal and social life. In this way, Guadalupe Olivier
and I studied the process by which two militant women came to inject themselves into the
student movement of 1968 and continue their process of political radicalization. In
Modonesi's terms, they discovered a process of socially constructed subjectivation, one that
arose out of subalternity. In that same space of domination and subordination, they found,
through culture, forms of resistance and processes of solidarity, and gradually passed into an antagonistic space. Context and structures of opportunity were key to explaining the styles and the ideological and political orientations of each of them. But also, along these paths, it was possible to deduce the effects on their processes of subjectivation, on their levels of subalternity and above all of antagonism, as well as on their level of autonomy, even if at this stage they had not gone beyond the formulation of emancipatory utopias.

The role of the militant, as Modonesi defines it in a section of this book, is therefore fundamental, and it is worth discussing categorical aspects of this role that coincide with or differentiate it from theories of activism as an instrumental promoter of action, like the theory of resource mobilization and theories of the militant as educator, organizer, promoter, and organic intellectual, as they are understood in critical theory. Bourdieu's analysis of the representations and fields that frame politics can also provide illumination.

In a work on the 1968 movement, Guadalupe Olivier, Michael Voegtli, and I addressed a topic that has been little developed in theories of social movements, that of the mobilization/demobilization nexus. There has been interesting work from the resource mobilization perspective that considers demobilization as more of an absence of commitment, as Klandermans defines it, through the lens of the psychology of activism, or as a process observable in the cycles of protest related to repressive action of the state. However, the process of mobilization/demobilization, as a relational field, is a binding dialectical process arising from collective action and the construction of identities. Commitment and experience may have to do with the multidimensionality of subjectivity, but they are also a result of state repression, not only within a linear process of repressive action-demobilization, but also as part of a global political strategy of the state aimed at breaking the structure of organizations and the construction of networks, alliances, links to
audiences, identities, and individual and collective intentions. Likewise, demobilization, in its connection with the processes of demobilization, is based not only on external or psychological factors, but also on internal processes of struggle for hegemony over the leadership and political orientation of a movement. These struggles for vectors of internal forces, as Melucci describes them, can initiate either the hegemony of a sociopolitical movement or demobilization.

The fundamental aspect of Modonesi's theory of subalternization and passive revolution is a basic perspective in this holistic vision of demobilization. Movements must be studied not only as linear, progressive experiences moving toward the instrumental winning of demands, but also as dramatic processes of demobilization and collapse, to the extent that they can set back any possibility of pedagogies of emancipation or the development of consciousness. Experience shows that they are systematic regressions to the field of political domination and subordination, even in more profound situations. In this respect, Modonesi is optimistic, because he argues that the process of de-subjectivation is not complete; it is anchored still in the domain of subalternization and resistance, even if the subject has been deactivated, demobilized, and passivized. As he shows, the margins of antagonism and autonomy have been reduced but not eliminated. The debate over the notion of passive revolution between Gramsci and his critics is enormously important, positioning itself always in the dialectic between restoration and renovation, preservation and transformation, and conservation and innovation.

How can we think about and explain the existence of class struggle in theoretical and methodological terms at a moment in which political history, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, has destroyed all possibility for Marxism to explain the contemporary contradictions of capitalism? In _A Critique of Citizenship_ I developed theoretical categories of explanation
for the values and practices associated with citizenship in a world of neoliberal late
capitalism that is consistent with formal representative democracy. However, citizenship as
it actually exists is socially constructed not only on the basis of democratic political
representation, but also on class struggle. Understood in this way, citizenship is a
substantive citizenship, one that is founded in a struggle that defines spaces of conflict,
with a basis in projects of transformation, many of them utopian, that oppose one another
among a diversity of classes, segments, blocs, and alliances.

Actually, the support for this positioning is based largely on Modonesi's
characterization of the class struggle and the process of subjectivation. Dogmatic Marxism
helped to facilitate the reactionary critique of the existence of class struggle, conceived as
the mechanical move between class in itself and class for itself, of the idea that class is
spontaneously present, like a geometric relationship, and of the fact that class struggle is
therefore expressed between those with a determining location in the area of production.
Modonesi takes up the observation of E.P. Thompson, who has noted that "classes do not
exist as separate entities, look around, find an enemy class, and then start to struggle. On
the contrary, people find themselves in a society structured in determined ways (crucially,
but not exclusively, in productive relations)." This means that the contradictions of
capitalism are expressed in every area of social life as well as in the dynamic processes of
production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. And as David Harvey notes,
contradictions are produced and reproduced in each of these areas that motivate and sustain
the class struggle. Thompson proceeds to explain, in an observation Modonesi quotes, that
classes "identify points of antagonistic interest, they commence to struggle around these
issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to
know this discovery as class-consciousness. Class and class-consciousness are always the
last, not the first, stage in the real historical process.” In my view of citizenship, the
struggle for rights and citizen participation create the possibility (though not always) of
defining alternative projects of citizenship, and these, through their confrontation with other
antagonistic projects, represent class struggle and class consciousness. In this process of
passing, as Gramsci describes it, from the economic structure to the political superstructure
is the catharsis where class consciousness is defined and redefined.

I wish now to comment on the principal orientation of Modonesi's antagonistic
principle, which is the nodal point of the dialectical relationship between subalternity,
antagonism, and autonomy. I have highlighted here various themes that he develops and
that in an original way touch upon topics and categories in social movements that should be
studied, specifically from the perspective of critical Marxist theory. I would like to
conclude with a general vision of these movements, though I will do so with a reiteration of
my own concerns about the study of social movements.

Guadalupe Olivier and I have also begun a study that attempts to reconfigure the
utopias of citizenship based on the struggle of social movements. We differentiate
ourselves from the dogmatism, based on Marx and Engels' critique of the utopian socialists
in *The Communist Manifesto*, that positions itself against the entire notion of utopia to
defend the objective explication of the revolution. In contrast, we take up Gramsci's
expansive idea that defines utopia as those concrete fantasies that act upon isolated and
frustrated people to awaken and organize their collective will. Here there are many
theoretical notions that have to be defined through analysis: notions such as subalternity,
antagonism, the role of the organic intellectual, and emancipation. This book addresses all
of these ideas.
On the basis of Gramsci's idea, the study of social movements can be oriented toward the inclusion and production of fields proposed by Lefebvre, Habermas, and Heller regarding the production of utopias: project, action, and historical experience. In the historicity of contemporary movements, autonomy has been raised as an objective, a utopia to be reached, that must focus on emancipation as a goal, built upon experiences of self-determination and the exercise of the power-to of autonomous subjectivity. Still, the notion of autonomy is also a polysemic field that does not mean the same thing, that may mean many different things, to different social and political actors—which is precisely the source of its complexity.

A second dimension is collective action, the experience of social movements, or, in Modonesi's terms, the field of antagonism. Antagonism means the consciousness of contradiction and the experience of struggle. It is in this field that the subject configures itself through conflict, with insubordination as the factor in subjectivation. It is here, as Thompson notes, that the first steps are taken toward class consciousness, or, in our words, the identification of the project of critical citizenship.

A third dimension is that of historical experience, understood as memory and as support for future possibility. We could think of it in the field of subalternity or of re-subalternization, above all because, as Modonesi notes, the field of subalternity does not mean only domination and total subordination; it is also a place where dialectical processes of passivity and intransigency, of conformism and resistance, are established.

In the triad of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy, I see a dynamic model that allows us to rethink social movements from the perspective of political culture, but not the political culture formalized in institutionally constituted values, or not only that, but also the profound and difficult processes of political subjectivation. This excellent critical
Marxist contribution to the theory of social movements positions itself within this broad field of analysis.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Modonesi has contributed a different definition, one that clarifies the sociopolitical nature of these movements. He considers that to speak of social movements limits the character and the possibility of political change, not only in terms of change within the system—the limit, in most academic approaches, to their effectiveness—but also the possibility of radical transformation. He thus returns to Michel Vakaloulis's definition of social movement and singles out its antagonistic character: a movement, as I said, is the persistence of a prolonged antagonistic interaction. It is not a phenomenon devoid of control or a unified homogeneous actor. It is a set of social relations of protest that emerge at the heart of contemporary capitalism and that project themselves, in uneven ways, toward the future. The projects embodied by these movements are not always explicit. Their formalization may be incomplete, their maturity insufficient, and their power, as Vakaloulis notes, weak and symbolic. They may, however, make themselves explicit in antagonistic experience.

Finally, this book has a methodological appendix. In spite of its modesty, this section is not an afterthought. On the contrary, it is a central aspect of the logic of the theory presented throughout the text, and its natural conclusion. It should be read and studied closely, as an integral and indispensable element, for a true understanding of the text.

In sum, we have here a pedagogical, didactic, and fundamental book for thinking in a new way about the possibilities and the weaknesses of contemporary sociopolitical movements, movements that emerge in subalternity, that develop and consolidate
themselves in antagonism, and that project themselves in autonomy toward emancipation, in a constant and dialectical back and forth.
Introduction

This book seeks to advance a project—begun almost ten years ago—to examine and reconstruct the Marxist conceptual tradition, with an analysis of the processes of subjectivation and the forms and dynamics of political action, particularly those in what I call *antagonistic movements*. To this end, I have undertaken a series of exercises in neo-Marxist theorization—or, to be more precise, Marxist metatheorization, that is, theorization from preexisting theoretical elements—of the connection, articulation, deepening, and projection of theoretical concepts and approaches, both traditional and also those that have emerged in contemporary Marxist debates.¹ As a defined and delimited theoretical field, Marxism lends itself to this type of exercise. It is at the same time an open and plural field, riven by a variety of Marxisms, currents, and perspectives. These are sometimes at loggerheads: they do not merely pay homage to the mythical founding father of unquestionable contributions who has nonetheless become the fetishized object of a philological cult that obscures the riches of the theory he inspired.² They address a common agenda in a fertile theoretical field that lends itself to the cultivation of metatheoretical exercises. This is an effort with contemporary vitality as much as historical depth, so long as it poses its questions directly, without dodges or inhibitions, going beyond what is nowadays considered politically or academically correct.

In this book I revisit and expand upon ideas I offered in *Subalternity, Antagonism, Autonomy* (Modonesi, 2010), published in Argentina, the U.K., and Italy, weaving them

¹ With respect to the options proposed by Michael Burawoy and Erik Olin Wright for the development of what they call Sociological Marxism, it is about combining the construction of Marxism with its use, ultimately, in the best of cases, having an impact on its propagation (Burawoy and Wright, 2010).
² In this sense, although it is possible to understand the idea of recovering a "Marx without -isms" (Fernández, 1998), it is not necessary to fall into the depoliticizing trap of assuming a "non-Marxist Marx," a simple universal thinker statically placed in a crucial moment in the history of ideas, with the intent of dismissing different forms of Marxism as anachronistic, outdated ideologies.
together with others from the collective work I recently coordinated (Modonesi, 2015). In broad terms, the argument I make here, which also inspired my title, is that it is possible, useful, and necessary to recognize and reconstruct a Marxist theory of political action based on the centrality of a notion of antagonism, what I call the antagonistic principle. If, for Marxism, political action from below, as a vector of the politicization of subaltern classes, is in the strict sense antagonistic action, what I try to outline here are elements of a Marxist theory of that action in which the adjective "antagonistic" implies the recognition of a specific quality: the distinctive and decisive characteristic of struggle and the experience of insubordination as factors in political subjectivation.

I make an argument for this idea and its correlates in four chapters and an appendix. Chapter 1 describes in broad terms the setting in which the fundamental elements of a Marxist theory of political action and the principle of antagonism are situated—a theory different from and partially opposed to dominant theories of social movements—based on the concepts of social class and struggle, and on their intersection in the formula class struggle. Chapter 2 presents a synthesis of a theoretical proposal based on the triad subalternity-antagonism-autonomy, as well as a thesis related to the combined and unequal nature of the processes of political subjectivation. Drawing on these ideas, and in particular the idea of the dynamic centrality of antagonism, Chapter 3 provides an in-depth analysis of this concept, highlighting its character as a key logical principle of a Marxist theory of political action. Chapter 4 provides a counterpoint with a return to the idea of subalternity, showing that it represents more than the starting point of a linear ascending process of political subjectivation: a process of resubalternization, arising from contradictory dynamics and tendencies, frequently appears as an ebbing of antagonistic activation and autonomous practices, as a return to the condition of subordination, particularly in the form
that Antonio Gramsci characterized as "passive revolutions." In this sense the antagonistic principle can also be seen in its negation, insofar as that negation determines the forms and concrete practices of the projects and processes of resubalternization. In the appendix, I offer an exercise in operationalization that envisages the translation of these concepts and their theoretical perspective to the investigation of concrete phenomena and processes, in particularly those generically called "social movements."

I will conclude this brief introduction with the ritual of acknowledgements, since the conception and production of this book, or rather the ideas it contains, owe much to the intellectual stimulation provided by dear friends and comrades like Guido Liguori, Maristella Svampa, Hernán Ouviña, Franklin Ramírez, Enrique Pineda, and Mónica Iglesias. And I thank Tere once more for her scrupulous review of the syntax and the logical argument of the initial draft. All of them, and others as well, offered questions and comments that allowed me to advance as far as I could, to the result that finds expression in these pages—scripta manent—which is, however, theoretically provisional and open to new elaborations and developments.

Finally, I cannot fail to mention that it is research, teaching, and political analysis that have allowed me to contrast abstract ideas with the concrete study of sociopolitical movements in Mexico and Latin America, and all of these have taken place subject to the demanding criticism of students from different parts of the world and the circulation of political ideas in the undergraduate program in sociology and the graduate program in Latin American studies of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). The collective space generated around the project "Subalternity, Antagonism, and Autonomy in Sociopolitical Movements in Mexico and Latin America," whose funding by the Program in Support of Research Projects and Technological Innovation (PAPIIT) made this book
possible, was a privileged environment in which to nurture reflection. The questions, ideas, and debates stirred up in the biweekly sessions of the program seminar and at the 2014 international colloquium held at UNAM were highly stimulating and gave rise to intense and fruitful discussion about the conceptual triad and the series of empirical investigations into Mexican and Latin American movements that were later detailed in a collectively-produced book. For all of this I thank the students and faculty who participated in the project, and in particular María Vignau, who was my assistant for nearly four years.
I. Coordinates of a Marxist Theory of Political Action

Meanwhile the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, a struggle which carried to its highest expression is a total revolution. Indeed, is it at all surprising that a society founded on the opposition of classes should culminate in brutal contradiction, the shock of body against body, as its final dénouement?

Do not say that social movement excludes political movement. There is never a political movement which is not at the same time social.

Karl Marx

In this chapter I will sketch out some concepts directed at maintaining the possibility and the necessity of reconfiguring and promoting a Marxist theory of political action: a theory anchored in the conceptualization of political subjectivation, one that gives rise to a theorization of sociopolitical movements and that revolves, as I will argue in detail in the chapters that follow, around the principle of antagonism. Following this series of theoretical connections, I will briefly describe the context and the current state of critical Marxism in the study of social movements, and then present some coordinates that can be used to define a perspective rooted in the specific agenda and concepts of Marxism.

Before proceeding to argue for the validity and importance of the principal contributions of critical Marxism, it is necessary to point out certain important limitations that have inhibited and continue to inhibit its development, and that serve as an argument in

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3 I refer here to "sociopolitical movements," in keeping with a Marxist perspective, as a specific phenomenon contained within the conventional notion of "social movements," a term I will use throughout this text to refer solely to the object of study of a sociological subdiscipline.
many places in academia for denying its existence or value as a school of thought within political sociology, as an approach to social understanding.

Although it is possible to discern in the critical Marxist tradition a relatively structured set of rich and fertile concepts for the analysis of sociopolitical processes, the approach was weakened and partially abandoned in circumstances related to the defeat of revolutionary socialist movements in the last quarter of the twentieth century. A radical change in power relationships manifested itself not only in the terrain of the strictly political, but also in the world of ideas and the production and distribution of knowledge. In universities, Marxism was marginalized or simply expelled, not so much through repressive means as through the dissemination and naturalization of the idea that History—and not the victors in the class war of the twentieth century—had decreed the obsolescence of an entire school of thought and laid it to rest.

Without pursuing this question, I will just point out that although Marxism unquestionably suffered a profound crisis, and was threatened and destabilized by the transformation in capitalist as well as "socialist" societies, the intentional—and ill-intentioned—manipulation by which the dominant thinking rushed to declare the death of a rival is evident. In effect, it was assumed that what characterized and validated Marxism was its predictive ability; thus, when the victory of the working class, the fall of capitalism, and the implementation of socialism did not come about, all of its theoretical scaffolding was rendered obsolete. What was ignored was that apart from the optimistic predictions and the verbal triumphalism that generally accompanied the most militant and partisan currents of the doctrine, Marxism is a sophisticated, critical school of thought, a well-founded, solid, radical critique of capitalist society. It is neither automatically nor necessarily a predictive exercise in mechanical reductionism or ideological raving, even if it does have an
anticapitalist perspective, perfectly compatible with a scientific approach, that is oriented toward the construction of social consciousness. As Gramsci rightly pointed out, a Marxist perspective can scientifically predict only the struggle and not its concrete moments or results (Gramsci, 2000, vol. 4, C 11: 267).

In this sense it is necessary to defend and rescue the validity of a school of thought, against all of these annihilating tendencies. Its erasure is an operation of ideological mystification that denies the possibility of a penetrating critical view, artificially limits debate about contemporary society, and deserves to be unmasked and denounced. Erik Neveu, a sociologist about whom there can be no suspicion of Marxism, argues that there is an asymmetry in the recovery of theoretical traditions relative to studies of social movements, and that the rejection of Marxism is indicative more of an ideological posture than a consideration of its real contributions (Neveu, 1996: 37). In the study of collective action, the topic of "social movements" has been transformed from a mere field of study into a theoretical approach that has led to anti-class and post-class sociological paradigms.

Recovering Marxist concepts and hypotheses does not, however, mean a failure to recognize either the gaps in relation to certain theoretical connections, or the lack of operative bridges to allow the full analytic deployment of concepts that, kept on an abstract level, hinder the dissemination and influence of a critical Marxist perspective in concrete studies of sociopolitical movements. Even though more or less important echoes of 1960s and 1970s Marxism have permeated the theoretical bases of various approaches, it is notable that not only are there no specifically self-identified Marxist approaches to the
study of social movements, but also that no developments or applications of fundamental Marxist concepts have found broad acceptance.⁴

This absence has been noted by the sociologist Alberto Melucci, who borrowed concepts and critiques from the Marxist approaches that permeated Italian movements and debates of the 1960s and 1970s, yet declared the inadequacy of Marxism as an approach to studying collective action and emphatically rejected the paradigm of class struggle and the "forced politicization of demands" (Melucci, 1982: 74).

There is little to say about the Marxists, because I do not believe there is, strictly speaking, a Marxist analysis of social movements in contemporary sociology. There are, on the other hand, excellent analyses of the crisis in the capitalist mode of production and of its transformations. [Marxism] concentrated its attention on the logic of the system itself and almost completely ignored the processes by which collective action of movements is formed and maintained. (Melucci, 1982: 12)

Starting from true assumptions, Melucci puts into play a reductionist oversimplification that has frequently been used as a device to discredit Marxism: he announces that it oversimplifies collective action by mechanically attributing the role of demiurge or deus ex machina to a class in itself, to a party, or to intellectuals (Melucci, 1982: 12).

Oversimplifications, caricatures, and a simple lack of awareness of intra-Marxist debates aside, we cannot ignore that the accelerated theoretical-methodological development in the study of social movements (of which Melucci himself was a driving force) took place in parallel with the historical defeat of orthodox Marxism and the paradoxically simultaneous retreat of critical Marxism. An imbalance then emerged that

⁴ Apart from studies of workers' and trade union movements that tend to come from a theoretical perspective related more to the sociology of work than to collective action and social movements.
could well have given the impression that the history of Marxist thinking relative to certain
topics closely linked not only to the analysis of revolutionary processes, but also, by
extension, to the entire field of mobilization and social and political struggles, had come to
an end.

In this respect, the entry "Marxist Analysis" in a 2007 French dictionary of
perspectives and concepts for the study of social movements—the only such dictionary I
know of—is symptomatic. In spite of an evident desire to recover this school of thought,
after asserting the fundamental propositions of Marx and Engels regarding class struggle,
the author, René Mouriaux, dedicates the final two paragraphs to a list of classic authors
(Rosa Luxemburg, Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, Wilhelm Reich, Ernst Bloch, and Henri
Lefebvre), noting simply that they produced "stimulating works on the social movement,"
with no mention of specific contributions or later authors (Fillieule, Mathieu, and Péchu,

For various reasons we thus have a theoretical field that is relatively stagnant and
forgotten, a field that could have been revitalized by the studies generated by the
mobilizations that have recently shaken the national and international political stages. The
case of France since 1995 and Latin America in the decade of the 2000s have restored the
topic of movements to the field of academic research, paralleling the studies of
altermundismo in various Western countries. One of the most recent centers of attention is
the role played by new technologies and the phenomena of "mass self-communication" in
the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, the Spanish, Turkish, and Brazilian Indignados, and
their Mexican counterpart, #YoSoy132 (Castells, 2012). At first sight, Marxist approaches
or concepts do not seem to be the order of the day for the analyses of these movements.
What is seen is the persistent influence of the same theoretical perspectives dominant since the 1980s, with the simple addition of the role of the social networks. This no doubt encourages the production of new theories and methodologies of these problems in limited dimensions, but they are, however, multidimensional, and there is thus a risk of an overwhelming focus on the "form" of these social movements at the cost of explaining their content.

In the last five years of the twentieth century and the first five of the twenty-first, Latin America lived through an extraordinarily energetic cycle of sociopolitical mobilization that produced a notable theoretical and conceptual fermentation in the field of sociopolitical movements, collective action, and processes of political subjectivation. However, although there have been suggestive exercises in theoretical problematization, there is still no alternative paradigm or significant revitalization in thinking about processes of sociopolitical mobilization, or about Marxist or neo-Marxist perspectives, to counter the persistent dissemination of the dominant theories and approaches (Modonesi and Iglesias, 2015).

It is necessary to stress that the return in the last few years of Marxist overtones to this debate has taken place mainly in the area of political philosophy and not in political sociology, meaning that it has produced a high level of abstraction. This may have to do with the embryonic nature of the critical Marxist return to the fundamental debates of our time, a return that could be reemerging in abstract form, though committed to and linked

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5 I am thinking here mainly of the implicit or explicit debate between Antonio Negri, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière, Ernesto Laclau, John Holloway, and Enrique Dussel. Another important arena for the return of Marxism has been the "structural" over the "subjectivist" in economics and geography, owing to the popularity of the works of David Harvey, as well as the Brazilian and other schools of thought.
with movements and struggles, in order to later become more concrete and operative in the study of sociopolitical processes.

It is also worth noting that I share various points of this diagnosis—mainly from following the literature in Spanish, French, and, to a lesser extent, Italian—with a group of authors who have drawn these conclusions from work in English. In particular, I agree with them about the necessity to point out what they call "Marxist silences" with respect to central themes in the study of social movements, and also to criticize the unfortunate caricaturization through which the dominant theoretical currents close off all dialogue with Marxism (Barker et al., 2013b: 23-24). However, I differ with these authors when, in their enthusiasm to demonstrate the reach of Marxism, they praise supposed Marxist influences in major theorists of social movements like Melucci, Tarrow, Tilly, and McAdam. I see in these the half-empty glass of an anti-Marxist reaction based precisely on the caricaturization used to close off dialogue. Where to draw the lines between Marxism, neo-Marxism, post-Marxism, and anti-Marxism is a delicate question of nuances and perspectives.

Thus, for various reasons, Marxist theorization does not seem to be at the center of the debate. On the contrary, it has been weakened by historical processes and still has not managed to resuscitate itself even in response to the recurring conflicts and antagonisms at the heart of contemporary capitalism. A particular weakness I will address in this chapter is the lack of a systematic, specifically Marxist agenda—one that can always be modified—with respect to certain fundamental concepts. With this caution, we can grant Marxist

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6 This diagnosis is outlined in the introductory essay to a collective work about Marxism and social movements, a unique example in its genre, that I read after I had drafted the present chapter. Two of the authors (Cox and Nilsen, 2014) later published another book that reiterated and elaborated upon some of the ideas from the first.
thought its rightful place, recognizing its theoretical and conceptual potential without risking accusations of dogmatism or apologism.

A series of analytical perspectives have emerged from the crucible of Marxist criticism: hypotheses and categories of analysis that we can and should assume to be open, as they have been in a school of thought that could generally, despite internal divisions, be termed "critical Marxism," in contrast to the "dogmatic Marxism" that constituted the orthodoxy of an important part of the twentieth century—before the drift of a few to neo-Marxism and many more to post-Marxism. The adjective "critical," claimed by many different currents of Marxism, is its epistemological principle par excellence. It is used as a shorthand that refers to a set of authors who are against determinism, positivism, historicism, and mechanical or romanticized analysis, whose anti-dogmatic characteristics and approaches translate into critical postures oriented not only toward bourgeois capitalist societies and their reigning ideologies, but also toward socialist movements and Marxism themselves, and at some of the ways in which these express themselves.

This anti-dogmatism is fundamental to the argument I will make here: the adjective "critical" aims equally at the tradition woven by many heterodox Marxist thinkers as at a heterodoxy that has become a school of thought. It is directed at a heterodoxy that crystallizes a critical posture that must, on the contrary, be pluralistic and in a permanent state of debate, that must become a metatheoretical mechanism—that is, a mechanism of theoretical reflection on Marxist theory that produces new Marxist theory. It is this mechanism of epistemic vigilance that sustains the permanent dynamic of crisis/reconfiguration and of breakdown/reconstruction by which critical and self-critical Marxism has passed through difficult periods in its history, and can therefore emerge strengthened by the current challenge.
Within the framework of this chapter I will highlight three starting points that I consider important, both because they are located at the historical and theoretical heart of the Marxist project, and also because they are particularly productive for thinking about future reconfigurations. First, I will shift the emphasis placed on social movements toward the notion of political action. Then, I will briefly foreshadow the next chapter by describing the specific nature of an analytical perspective organized around the triad of domination-conflict-emancipation and its subjective correlate of subalternity-antagonism-autonomy. At somewhat greater length, though insufficiently for the magnitude of the question, I will demonstrate the power and the strength of the concepts of class and struggle, and of their meeting point in class struggle.

In order to promote a Marxist perspective or a Marxist sociology of political action, it is necessary to take a step back, or perhaps a step up. Instead of focusing directly on social movements, this level of analysis should derive from a theory or philosophy of praxis, or, to save ourselves the philosophical detour, from a theory of subjectivation and political action: that is, from the configuration of a subject who acts politically, which can frequently and significantly lead to the formation of sociopolitical movements that are a

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7 Does it make sense to speak of "Marxist political sociology" or "Marxist sociology of sociopolitical movements"? We know that Marxism has shunned disciplinary divisions, which allows it to maintain the possibility of a universal knowledge, a principle of totality or rather a tendency toward totalization that must be carefully preserved in times of postmodern relativism. On the other hand, it is necessary to recognize the unfolding of a deepened understanding of the dimensions of the social as part of a universal heritage of the social sciences. These dimensions must also be distinguished and analyzed in their specificity, assuming a relative degree of autonomy while remaining mindful of their interactions. An illustrious example is Henri Lefebvre's essay *Sociologie de Marx* (1968), with its central themes of praxis, ideology, social classes, and theory of the state, in which only the latter concern is identified as "political sociology," to the exclusion of the others. At the same time, in order to avoid disciplinary pigeonholing and overstepping the line between political sociology and political science, I prefer the term "Marxist theory of political action."
specific, particularly important form of subjectivation and collective action. At the same time, from the perspective of the totality and logic of the class struggle, as Colin Barker has pointed out, we cannot do without the notion of the social movement as a "movement as a whole," or, put another way, as a "historic movement" at whose heart it is possible to discern distinct movements or sub-movements (2014).

Political action can be imagined only in coexistence with a political subjectivity. Both must exist simultaneously, not sequentially, in a logical biconditional: there is no action without a subject and no subject without an action. The adjective "political" is theoretically important, since it marks a horizon that points to specific forms of collective action and helps avoid the confusion that reigns under a more general formulation.\(^8\) The notion of subjectivation originated in the poststructuralist (or post-Althusserian) debate, relative to the "process without subject": from the internal evolution, in the work of Foucault, between objectification and subjectivation of the subjected but resistant subject, to the contributions of Jacques Rancière—who added the adjective "political" to this subjectivation—and the effects on the debate in political philosophy about the subject that subjectivizes itself (Tassin, 2012; Žižek, n.d.; Bolmain, 2010). According to Rancière's definition:

> Politics is a matter of subjects or, rather, modes of subjectivation. By subjectivation I mean the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose

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\(^8\) Indeed, theories of collective action and social movements tend to generalize to the point where they lose analytic power. For example, in Charles Tilly's latest book, written with Sidney Tarrow, this generalization creates confusions and absurdities such as the inclusion of ethnic-religious conflicts, civil wars, and revolutions under the rubric of "lethal movements".
identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience. (1996: 52)

In sociological rather than philosophical terms, closer to concrete reality, I reaffirm what I wrote in 2010 with respect to the distinction between subject and movement:

The processes of political subjectivation refer, on a more concrete but equally broad level, to the formation and development of sociopolitical movements. From the Marxist viewpoint, they are sociopolitical insofar as this articulation excludes and denies any hypothesis of absolute autonomy of the political or autonomy of the social, while recognizing specific domains within this unyielding and constant overlap. In this sense, I consider the designation "social movements" to be so all-encompassing that it becomes ambiguous and, on the other hand, results in a depoliticizing connotation specific to the time in which it was created and disseminated in the academic world and the world of its "objects of study"—the 1970s and the "sociocultural movements" (Touraine, Melucci, etc.) respectively. At the same time, the analogy between the notions of movement and subject might turn out to be erroneous; the first presupposes a higher level of internal consolidation, particularly of an organizational kind, than the latter. On the other hand, the notion of subject presupposes an internal coherence at the level of identity superior to that of the movement, understood as a shared framework in which some diversity or plurality might coexist. However, from the point of view expressed in this book, the reference to the subject belongs to the more general and abstract level on which we distinguish and order analytical elements, while movement refers to the concrete referent in the application of the analysis. (Modonesi, 2010: 16)
Without entering fully into the conceptual dispute over the definition of the notion of politics, I will note in passing that it is more useful and relevant to refer to the idea of politicization, since the non-linear line of the process of subjectivation corresponds in fact to a path of politicization, of attributions of meaning, of experience, and of political practices.

With respect to what can be understood as politicization, consider the description offered by Luis Tapia:

The politicization of parts of a society is a process that experiences phases of expansion and contraction, compression and decompression. The politicization of areas of life is a product of the manner of defining and delimiting the politics practiced by political subjects, of the manner of demarcating and configuring spaces, of converting them into public sphere or state, battlefield or political community. Politicization is a process of generating meaning, of adding a political dimension to practices and areas that had none, or simply of generating new practices. Politicization as expansion and as intensification is a process of semanticization or resemanticization, of charging things with political meaning. Politicizing is also to signify. One signifies by organizing and directing a set of practices and relationships in a specific way, opening at the same time a process for contesting their meaning and the political space they configure. . . . Politicization is the manner in which men try to direct their history. Politicization is thus the constitution of subjects and their development; it is history, insofar as it is movement with meaning and struggle over its direction. (1996: 33, 61)

This is a politicization, from my perspective, that is marked by the experiences of subalternity antagonism, and autonomy—as I will show in the next chapter. But we should
not ignore the fact that against the grain of politicization, processes of depoliticization and demobilization are activated that try to deactivate and return to passivity and subalternity— as will be emphasized in Chapter 4.

It is also necessary to point out that the question of political subjectivation as a constitutive process concerns the subaltern and not the dominant classes, whose germinal process of subjectivation is complete: in order to become dominant, they had to emerge from subalternity and become autonomous. This is true even though phenomena of reconfiguration, fragmentation, and rearticulation continue to be produced in them and lead to dynamics of subjectivation—a reason why such phenomena deserve to be studied and understood. However, Marxism has concerned itself fundamentally with the genesis and the development of subjectivities in the line drawn by the relationships of domination and conflict that run through the scenarios of history and in particular, for obvious reasons, of political subjectivities. Its attention has been directed at the ability and possibility for the subaltern classes to become autonomous and hegemonic in order to emancipate themselves. This was the case of the bourgeoisie under feudalism, and it has been the possible, ongoing, and desirable process of the proletariat under capitalism. In this sense, every process of political subjectivation develops from below and, with time, extends itself above.

Cox and Nilsen (2014) note the necessity for a Marxist sociology to take social movements as an object of study, based on a common definition that includes movements "from above" as well as those "from below." However, although these movements are political expressions of class struggle, they are also phenomena that respond to different forms of subjectivation and political action, and therefore require different approaches, as the authors ultimately recognize. Recourse to the form of a movement is not, in the strict sense, characteristic of action taken "from above" at the initiative of the dominant classes,
except when the dominant classes interpellate and involve other sectors and middle or popular classes, calling on them to mobilize (but not to organize themselves autonomously or be fully antagonistic) as cannon fodder in what are presented as conflicts cutting across civil society, hiding the underlying class interests. These cases too should be studied, distinguishing between the drive "from above" and the inevitable dynamics "from below," not always controllable from above, that point to the margins of a subaltern maneuvering that is antagonistic and autonomous, even when it is minimal. In order to understand the processes of political subjectivation, it is undoubtedly important to show how the initiative of the dominant classes operates in opposition to antagonistic and autonomous tendencies, even when that initiative is partially determined by those tendencies, as when it guarantees continuity at the cost of concessions and reconfigured relationships of authority and obedience, in what Gramsci called "passive revolutions." This phenomenon will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

In order to outline a Marxist theory of sociopolitical movements it is necessary to begin with a theorization of experience and political practices, of the forms and dynamics of subjectivation and political action, respectively. To this end it is necessary at first to step back from the logic of current work on social movements, in order to approach it later from another angle. For this reason, Nilsen and Cox, in spite of their desire to connect the class question with movements and introduce key elements of Marxist and Gramscian readings, fail, in my view, to break through the logical limitations of the currently dominant frameworks when they offer a definition of social movements like the following:

Social movements from below can be defined as collective projects developed and pursued by subaltern groups, organising a range of locally-generated skilled activities around a rationality that seeks to either challenge the constraints that a
dominant structure of needs and capacities imposes upon the development of new needs and capacities, or to defend aspects of an existing, negotiated structure which accommodate their specific needs and capacities.\(^9\) (Nilsen and Cox, 2013: 73) Or when, by the same logic, they take as fundamental concepts local rationality, militant particularism, and the notion of campaigns inherited from other currents, as well as the Touranian idea that there is a project that gives meaning to a movement only to the extent that it meets certain requirements, which include, by the way, neither the principle of antagonism nor that of class struggle.\(^10\) In addition, as a demonstration of the difficulty for a specifically Marxist theorization, in the same book John Krinsky addresses the question, suggesting coordinates that are valid but very general and abstract (totality, contradiction, immanence, coherence, and praxis), and are difficult to consider as tools that specifically affect the field of a Marxist theory of social movements (Krinsky, 2013). Indeed, categories taken from British social history, in the same book, are more theoretically suggestive for being more rooted in Marxist debate and less in the sociology of collective action (Cox, 2013; Blackledge, 2013).

From the perspective of subjectivation and political action, it can be argued that in studies of sociopolitical processes in capitalist societies, Marxism is characterized by its analysis of social relationships as relationships of power organized around a tripartite concept of domination-conflict-emancipation, where the analysis distinguishes and

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\(^9\) The definition that covers movements from above and below is the following: "a process in which a specific social group develops a collective project of skilled activities centred on a rationality—a particular way of making sense of and relating to the social world—that tries to change or maintain a dominant structure of entrenched needs and capacities, in part or whole" (Nilsen and Cox, 2013: 65).

\(^10\) The requirements are: "(a) challenges to the social totality which (b) aim to control the self-production of society and (c) have or are developing the potential for the kind of hegemony—leading the skilled activity of different social groups—that would make (b) and hence (a) possible. At the heart of these challenges, there lie emergent structures of radical needs and capacities, and the transformative potential of a movement project lies in the goal of realizing these structures. The anti-capitalist movement is a good example of a social movement Project" (Nilsen and Cox, 2013: 78).
articulates the forms of exploitation-alienation-domination,\textsuperscript{11} the relationships of tension they generate, and the confrontation specific to class struggle and the practices and processes of emancipation that arise in that context.

Apart from the distinctive form in which this issue and each of its components is approached, it should be noted that no other school of sociology structures its field of knowledge so comprehensively. Although there are perspectives that consider the dimensions of domination and conflict, particularly in the sociology of social movements, these rarely consider the issue of emancipation, and when they do, they tend to neglect one of the other dimensions. Introducing the dimension of emancipation not only adds a thematic area linked to the forms and experiences of autonomy, but it also modifies the very way in which the analysis of domination and conflict is approached. The chapter that follows will show how three subjective concepts—subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy—arise out of this three-part division of situational and relational fields, and account for the experiences of subordination, insubordination, and emancipation, respectively.

In an essay scrutinizing the argument at the heart of analytical Marxism over the primacy of productive forces, Vivek Chibber maintains the following:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item With respect to the relationship between exploitation and domination, I refer to the formulation of Ralph Miliband: "Class analysis, I propose to argue here, is basically concerned with a process of class domination and class subordination that is an essential condition of the process of exploitation. . . . Exploitation remains the essential purpose of domination. But the focus on domination does have the advantages detailed earlier and it also permits a more comprehensive and realistic appreciation and identification of the protagonists in class struggle. With this focus, the dominant class in class society is no longer solely defined in terms of the ownership of the means of production" (Miliband, 1988: 328-9). This is in contrast to Erik Olin Wright, for whom there is no interiority, only distinction, since "exploitation with domination, or domination without exploitation, do not constitute class relations," although he argues later that "class relations are the unity of appropriation relations (the Marxist way of theorizing categories of distribution) and domination" (Wright, 1994: 60-61, 63).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Although Marxists have been slow to recognize it, the theory of social forms is committed to some form of philosophical anthropology—a concise description of human nature—that must include the assumption that agents have an interest in autonomy. Without this commitment to autonomy as a basic human desire, it is impossible to justify the idea, so dear to Marxists, that exploitation necessarily generates resistance and thereby class struggle.

Although it can be argued, as I will in another chapter, that the principle of antagonism is at the core of the Marxist theoretical proposition, it is necessary to show how the perspective of autonomy and emancipation is a key original reading that changes entirely the angle of approach to the analysis of social reality. It does so by introducing a factor that operates as experience and concrete practice—emancipation as lived experience—but also as a trigger to action, to the extent that it configures a worldview and a critique of reality that question its limits in ideal terms, based on a critical distance from the status quo. The idea of emancipation opens a broader horizon of knowledge and introduces elements of practical and theoretical improvement to existing reality.

Neither of the two major currents of thought currently in vogue in the study of social movements achieves this opening or attains the clarity—not to mention the political consequences—of the tripartite Marxist approach. The first current includes all of the approaches inspired by the theory of rational action, but two in particular: the mobilization of resources (TMR) and the structure of political opportunities (SPO). These latter two approaches have in recent years been developed under the general rubric of contentious

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12 I am intentionally leaving aside a third major current, including mass psychology and behaviorism, which insists on the irrationality of collective action, because this current is not dominant. I also leave aside the theory of relative deprivation and the most recent sociology of the emotions (Jasper, 2012), as well as the frame analysis of Snow and Benford, which is not a general theory but one of intermediate reach.
politics, and their major proponents are Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (Tilly and Tarrow, 2008). The second current includes theories that emphasize the dimension of identity and subjectivity; these originated most notably with Alain Touraine and Alberto Melucci.\footnote{See Alberto Melucci, \textit{L’invenzione del presente. Movimenti, identità, bisogni individuali} (1982); and Alain Touraine, \textit{Sociologie de l’action} (1965), \textit{La voix et le regard} (1978), and \textit{Le retour de l’acteur} (1984).}

Employing the terms of the subalternity-antagonism-autonomy triad, we can locate the concerns of the rational action current in the subalternity-antagonism axis, while those of the identity current are focused on the relationship between antagonism and autonomy. The first effectively centers its attention on the emergence of mobilization in relation to the context of domination, attempting to understand how and why conflicts are born, develop, and are defused, that is, how antagonism operates as a factor between two different moments and forms of subalternity, serves as an intermediary, and is the variable that allows for a measurement of the transformation between a starting point and an end point. The blind spot this axis fails to illuminate is the dimension of emancipation and autonomy, which lies beyond the systemic horizon of this set of theories and refers primarily to the construction of the subject rather than that of the actor. The positive cost-benefit ratios of rational political action that would in the end be accumulated by means of antagonism would be measured in reforms of the political system or in accumulation of additional resources to be reinvested in organizational dynamics. Theory from this perspective does not contemplate emancipatory horizons or achievements in self-determination that are not expressed institutionally, through advances in democratic procedure. They also do not consider, for example, the idea of defeat that contributes to the shaping of movements and subjectivities, as suggested by Rosa Luxemburg (1919).
On the other hand, the identity current is unconcerned with subalternity, as it is fundamentally interested in the feedback or the cycle of antagonism and autonomy, and in the forms and dynamics by which identity produces a subject that generates action and action creates a subject that assumes identities. The blind spot here is subalternity, as the initial assumption is the existence of an autonomous subject that manifests itself by means of antagonism.

At the level of these general considerations, pending further development of this critical reading, neither of these two currents addresses the breadth of the problem or the field of possible and actually existing combinations and intersections, as does critical Marxism.

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Notwithstanding the question of breadth, in Marxism the dimensions of domination, conflict, and emancipation are presented from a perspective defined and characterized by the centrality of conflict, or what might better be described—to emphasize the connotation of subjectivity and praxis—as the dynamic centrality of the principle of antagonism. In contrast to theories of collective action and social movements, Marxist theory of political action has as its touchstone the most basic, well-known, and problematic concept in all of Marxism: class struggle. As I have already noted, this perspective was so influential as to be hegemonic, only to later be considered obsolete. As Goran Therborn rightly notes: "The recently philosophy of struggle without classes corresponds to the sociology of classes"

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14 This concept is specifically Marxist in its origin and elaboration, although it has been taken up by post-Marxists like Alberto Melucci and Ernesto Laclau. I mention here as an anecdote that a recent republication of Georg Simmel's *Conflict* is subtitled *The Sociology of Antagonism*, although this is an editorial addition to the original.
without struggle” (Therborn, 2014: 157). This is true not only in the dominant theories, but also in the attempts to propose critical perspectives.

In what follows I will offer some coordinates that allow us to reclaim this idea and its theoretical implications from the perspective of political sociology, and not the more frequent ones of political strategy, history, or philosophy, as is the case in Domenico Losurdo's recent book, *Class Struggle* (2013). My central hypothesis is that identifying, describing, analyzing, explaining, and interpreting struggles, classes, and the forms and circumstances of their intersection, under the assumption that struggles are class struggles and that classes struggle, is the essential core of a Marxist theory of political action.

I will not be able here to analyze the set of questions and hypotheses that arise from each of these concepts, or, most importantly, the relationship between them, with the depth they deserve. I will insist on certain ideas particularly linked to the dimension of political action, in order to highlight the originality of the Marxist approach and describe a series of implicit critiques of gaps or limitations in the major theories of social movements.

There is a certain consensus around the idea that there is simultaneity and synchrony between the construction of subjectivity and the action that shapes and expresses it, but I will begin to analyze the substantive struggle in connection with the principle of antagonism, following the path of those currents that assume the primacy of conflict, in order to avoid reproducing, including in the dynamic of the text, the stagist and mechanical sequence of subject formation as a condition for action. As a justification for this decision consider the words of E.P. Thompson:

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15 It will be even less possible here to consider non-Marxist or post-Marxist approaches to class. But see the overview of the various perspectives and the proposal for synthesis offered by Gómez (2014).
In my view, far too much theoretical attention (much of it plainly a-historical) has been paid to "class," and far too little to "class-struggle." Indeed, class-struggle is the prior, as well as the more universal, concept. To put it bluntly: classes do not exist as separate entities, look around, find an enemy class, and then start to struggle. On the contrary, people find themselves in a society structured in determined ways (crucially, but not exclusively, in productive relations), they experience exploitation (or the need to maintain power over those whom they exploit), they identify points of antagonistic interest, they commence to struggle around these issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class-consciousness. Class and class-consciousness are always the last, not the first, stage in the real historical process. But if we employ a static category of class, or if we derive our concept from a prior theoretical model of a structural totality, we will not suppose so: we will suppose that class is instantaneously present (derivative, like a geometric projection, from productive relations) and that hence classes struggle. (Thompson, 1978: 149).

First, it is worth remembering that just as we can recognize in Marxism a principle of intelligibility related to the logic of capital, it is necessary not to lose sight of a second principle linked to the logic of the class struggle, hidden by and subordinated to the first in the works of Marx and his successors (Dardot and Laval, 2012: 219). The Marxist notion of struggle allows for the opening of an array of questions related to action that includes the dimension of what sociologists call "agency": questions about who actors and subjects are and how they organize themselves and enter into conflict. In this approach, struggle is the dynamic and evolutionary substance in the formula "class struggle." With respect to temporality, the Marxist notion of struggle encompasses and allows for the inclusion of the
process as well as the event, and invites a consideration of the relationship between the two. This is not only a quantitative question of whether it is short-, medium-, or long-term, but also a qualitative one: a question that allows us to emphasize continuous, cumulative periods, with ruptures, discontinuities, and historical shocks. Finally, the concept of struggle poses the question of strategy, in which the confrontation between classes turns political and the subjective dimension of antagonism surfaces. Struggle is social, to the extent that it is unleashed in society, and political, insofar as it is a dispute over power. In this way, the internal construction of class is carried out based on struggle, with class struggle as the battlefield, the context for the conflict specific to capitalist societies. The collective and the subjective are forged in struggle, socially and politically located in the situation of class; the confrontation is much more than a structural effect or the simple condition or situation of class. Marxism thus aims at a specific form of social action, a political action that is a class action and an antagonist action. In this task it has a perspective and establishes an analytical logic of mobilization, of emerging struggles, framed by class, whose tendency is to become political.

The notion of struggle, even without characterizing it as class struggle, is a powerful antidote to the institutionalism that permeates the majority of studies in the sociology of collective action, particularly those from the United States, which assume that the origin, the objective, the representative, and the solution to all protest resides in the state, in the government, and in public institutions in general. These studies consider movements as reactive more than proactive, reformist more than revolutionary, and they value their impact more than their driving forces. One could make the provocative claim that Charles

16 For a reading of Marx that recalls the intuitions of Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch regarding non-linear temporalities, see Daniel Bensaid, La discordance des temps (2005). The main ideas can be found in English in his Marx for Our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique (London, 2010).
Tilly is in reality a theorist of the state, of political systems, and of democracy, and that in his extensive work the study of social movements serves to explain the formation of institutions and not the other way around.\(^ {17}\) It is highly symptomatic that the term "struggle" is not part of the conventional lexicon in the sociology of collective action and social movements, most likely because of its political and Marxist connotation, and that more antiseptic terms are used, like "mobilization," "opposition," or "protest." The latter is a word that obviously emphasizes the subaltern nature of the protester and assumes the centrality of the actor or institution toward which the protest or demand is directed, whereas not only Marxists but also the subjects in struggles themselves speak of struggle, demanding precisely a broader debate than the dispute framed in so-called protest politics. The idea of struggle thus implies a recognition of the value an antagonistic expression has in itself, without denying its systemic or anti-systemic reach. In this regard, the perspective introduced by Melucci, influenced by the Italian process and debate of the 1970s, showed more sensitivity and maintained the principle of struggle; it was no accident that it used the concept of antagonism broadly, though in a depoliticized way, emptied of class content, slipping into a questionable culturalism based on identity and communication.

For its part, the notion of class, since it contains a determining element of socioeconomic reality,\(^ {18}\) is a powerful antidote against the postmodern culturalism, politicism, and subjectivism that run through the dominant approaches in the study of social movements. At the same time, although the concept of class in its sociopolitical strain has been deobjectified and defetishized by critical Marxisms, it retains a stake in conceptualizing the political from aggregation and collective action on a level prior to and

\(^ {17}\) Provocation aside, this statement is certainly true for his latest book (Tilly, 2010).
\(^ {18}\) On the relevant conceptual debates, see Marcel Van der Linden (2013).
outside of the state, without excluding a subsequent development in that direction. Thus, class is (also) a concept of political theory. At its heart are some tensions and possible hypotheses of articulation. Indeed, the notion of class is, in Marxist terms, a synthesis of the dialectical relation between material socioeconomic determination and sociopolitical subjectivation, a notion that has one foot in structure and the other in agency, simultaneously class-in-itself and class-for-itself.

For this reason, in the search for a meeting point between Marxism and the new critical sociologies (in particular that of Bourdieu), Philippe Cocuff and Daniel Bensaid emphasize the perspective of constructivism, which in the case of Marxism translates into a conception of class, the subject, and the actor in general as constructors and constructs, which is also a clear attempt to avoid the polarity and the dualism of object-subject (Cocuff, 2001: 18-20; Bensaid, 2005: 32). On another level, conceiving of class as a "field" or a "universe of class" allows for the recognition and analysis of a series of sociopolitical processes of aggregation, without falling into the essentialism of a certain workerism from an era marked by the centrality of the industrial worker—or a search for new immaterial centralities—but also without avoiding the fact that contemporary social reality continues to be marked by the logic of capital and private ownership of the means of production, the exploitation of workers, and the dispossession of the commons. In this sense, class does not exist as a single sociopolitical entity; there is a field of classes and class struggles in which subjectivities and actors emerge and are shaped. As Colin Barker

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19 The notion of field does not refer here to the thinking of Pierre Bourdieu, who by the way adopts a peculiar class perspective that recovers, by means of the *habitus*, the idea of an incorporation of specific and distinguishable forms, but does not order or clearly hierarchize the economic, political, and cultural conditions. Neither does it consider the possibility of a political conscience and praxis—and with it, a fault line in the *habitus*—that does not deny the forms of daily reproduction and a political bifurcation between subordination and insubordination, subalternity, and antagonism.
argues, social movements in this sense are mediations of the class struggle (Barker, 2013a: 47).

Indeed, we should not forget that apart from the subjectively anticapitalist nature of struggles, their class nature puts the question of struggle in the context of capitalism on an objective level. The notion of class requires an understanding of conflict based on certain readings that situate it in the framework of the capital-labor relationship, understood as a matrix that may not describe all of the causes and aims of struggles, but which nonetheless constitutes an unavoidable starting point. A class vision of capitalist societies and sociopolitical phenomena does not preclude recognition of other contradictions and antagonisms related to questions such as gender oppression, national liberation, or the race question. On the contrary, only a class perspective allows for the recognition of the imbrications and tensions that articulate, bind, fragment, or dissociate different social, political, and cultural cleavages.

The alternative, that is, the negation of the class dimension in relation to the phenomena of mobilization, means denying that structural position and material objectification fulfill a social role. The principle of class analysis avoids a collapse into culturalist explanations as well as a drift into the mere study of the forms of social movements and redirects the problem back to the content or, if you will, the foundation.

Along these lines, Burawoy and Wright maintain that the concept of exploitation and the class analysis of the social relations of production in capitalist societies form the conceptual core of Marxist sociology. At the same time, they recognize that the exploited retain a certain power of resistance to exploitation, which poses a challenge to the social

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20 As, for example, the problem of the decisional squares and sphere as a dimension that makes class structure and its political projection more complex. On this topic, as well as the analytic Marxism of Wright, see Jacques Bidet and Gerard Dumenil (2007).
reproduction of capitalism (Burawoy and Wright, 2000). In this sense, Mezzadra recognizes in Marx a "subjective excess," that is, "the excess of the subject with respect to the conditions of restraint" (Mezzadra, 2014: 131). Raymond Williams formulates this idea clearly as follows:

> What has really to be said, as a way of defining important elements of both the residual and the emergent, and as a way of understanding the character of the dominant, is that no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention. (Williams, 1977: 125)

In this sense, class traces itself in its centrality as a political subjectivity hand in hand with the principle of praxis, at a point of intersection between being and consciousness.

> Classes arise because men and women, in determinate productive relations, identify their antagonistic interests, and come to struggle, to think, and to value in class ways: thus the process of class formation is a process of self-making, although under conditions which are "given." (Thompson, 1995: 143)

Ellen Meiksins Wood, recalling Thompson's intuitions, argues that the notion of class is more fertile when it is conceived historically as a relationship, as a process, and, I would add, as a crucible of social and political movements (Wood, 2013: 90-126). Between experience and practice, consciousness and spontaneity, class subjectivity emerges as a "disposition to act."\(^\text{21}\)

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\(^{21}\) "Class is a social and cultural formation (often finding institutional expression) which cannot be defined abstractly, or in isolation, but only in terms of relationship with other classes; and, ultimately, the definition can only be made in the medium of time—that is, action and reaction, change and conflict. When we speak of a class we are thinking of a very loosely defined body of people who share the same congeries of interests, social experiences, traditions and value-system, who have a disposition to behave as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways. But class itself is not a thing, it is a happening" (Thompson, 1965: 357).
We know that one of the problematic and therefore fertile elements of the Marxist debate is the issue of class consciousness. Without trying to synthesize this debate here, I will point out some elements that can be considered conventional, that is, relatively accepted and therefore part of a possible general definition. In Marxism, consciousness corresponds in broad terms to what is currently known in cultural sociology as identity, except that it is not reduced to the cultural dimension, but refers directly and explicitly to the concrete layer of class as social and material referent and translates directly into political attitude and behavior. This connection does not imply that they are entirely the same, since we cannot overlook the specific political situation or the tension-articulation between social being and consciousness, which does not resolve simply into a self-representation of the subject.

Drawing on the elements proposed by Thompson, class consciousness would be the perception—understood as identification and recognition—of the experience of exploitation and domination in an external relationship of differentiation and confrontation with class antagonists, with an internal link of articulation and group solidarity, as well as in collective representation and worldview—that is, in ideology. The question of consciousness is connected, via the "spirit of scission," with the question of autonomy considered as a rupture with domination, as a principle of independence and self-determination of class, which also, on the subjective and cultural level, refers to the capacity of self-representation (Bihr, 2012: 102). Indeed, in Marxist debate the concept of autonomy is also a synonym of independent organization, of class independence in the operative and political sense. Historically and theoretically, class is a social field, but also a political field in which networks are woven, militant paths are constructed, and union and party organizations are
built. In this sense, social movements arise on the terrain of class. The militant, and not the worker, is the unit or atom of class analysis understood and thought of as the field of sociopolitical movements, of antagonist movements. An approach to the question of organization thus emerges from the concept of class that is far from that of the school of mobilization of resources and the so-called "social movement industry" (Zald and McCarthy, 1979).

The question of organization at the heart of class leads to the question of the political party, in the connection between the ephemeral party, understood as a specific organization, and the historical party, conceived as a general movement (Marx, 1860); it leads to a series of qualities and indispensable political functions to give the class cohesion and protection, in a concrete way to the parts that are mobilized. Critical Marxism has understood political party—apart from bureaucratic degenerations and past and present paríedicacies—as a fundamental instance of politicization, of collective consolidation of the impulse to solidarity and social cooperation between different expressions of the working class; it has been seen as an instance of the accumulation of experience and historical memory, of political education of political and strategic orientation and direction. At the same time, but on another level, it is necessary to remember the Marxist criticisms—Luxemburgist, council communist, Autonomist Marxist—formulated on the idea that the party was a concept prone to degeneration, particularly bureaucracy and authoritarianism disguised as "democratic centralism."

From the perspective of the party or parties organized by class, the question of social movements, understood as plurality and diversity, leaves open a series of political

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22 As opposed to when it was considered, in a discursive simplification with multiple ideological implications, that class formed the workers' movement and that this was the social movement.
questions. For example, for Daniel Bensaid, it is essential to maintain unity between the "plurality and relative autonomy" of the field, capital, and domination with a strategic "relative unity" (Bensaid, 2005: 4). And it is precisely the notion of class that allows for thinking, in a Marxist vein, about the passages from the particular to the general that run through the political and the cultural, as well as the tension between pluralism and unity and between universality and difference. Class, as a backbone concept of Marxist sociology of political action, is positioned as a general framework of the processes of politicization, of importance to politics and the universalization of struggle.

At the same time, as a key to sociological interpretation, we must keep open the possibility of disaggregating the notion of class struggle in the analysis of concrete political movements. As much as class struggle refers to a starting point for analyzing movements under capitalism, we must ask how to articulate this proposal within the singularity of movements and the different forms of action presented by classes through their concrete fractions in their daily sociopolitical action. That is, following the path of Marx's own historical analyses, class struggle in a specific time and place means specific inter- and intraclass conflicts that are manifested in different inter- and intraclass alliances, giving rise to distinct sociopolitical configurations and thus various collective identities and multiple scenarios of confrontation.

In conclusion, the combination of class and struggle, of action and subject in the Marxist narrative, configures a synthetic formula that allows for a dialectical escape from the structuralism-subjectivism duality without losing sight of the dynamic centrality of antagonism, of antagonist subjectivation as the trigger for the transformational processes set in motion by emancipatory impulses and desires. The notion of antagonism can therefore be conceived of as a fundamental theoretical element, a specifically Marxist one,
that expresses the relationship between class and struggle, a relationship where struggle shapes class and class manifests itself as a political subjectivity by means of struggle. This idea will be treated in greater depth in Chapter 3.

Given the coordinates described above, let us conclude with a reflection on problematization and opening. Although the general framework of the Marxist approach overcomes the limitations of the major sociological theories of collective action, the current weakness of Marxist political sociology, and in particular of its analysis of social and political movements, does not allow for the immediate construction of its own self-sufficient body of theory. Furthermore, the dominant interpretations, once they have been stripped of their all-knowing pretensions as general theories with essentialist implications, offer a suggestive viewpoint, rich in approaches and empirical applications that can illuminate important aspects of the processes of social mobilization and political subjectivation, a viewpoint that has the added virtue of translating to the methodological level.

Is it possible to generate connections between a theoretical approach and a set of research tools? What are the risks and benefits? Are the tools neutral, or might they contaminate the theoretical approach? We can assume, following a useful intuition of Jean-Paul Sartre, that a living Marxism is heuristic and that its principles are regulatory or simply guidelines (Sartre, 1968: 26). Sartre asked, "Why then are we not simply Marxists?" (Sartre, 1968: 35), pointing at a series of deficiencies in Marxism but counting on its capacity for expansion and integration of contributions from other fields and currents of knowledge. While critical of its assumptions and conclusions, he suggested rescuing useful
tools from empiricist sociology, given its ability to approach "a certain level of the concrete which contemporary Marxism systematically neglects" (Sartre, 1968: 73). He puts it thus:

In this prospective form, with its absence of theoretical foundation and the precision of its auxiliary method—research, tests, statistics, etc.—sociology, a temporary moment of the historical totalization, discovers new mediations between concrete men and the material conditions of their life, between human relations and the relations of production, between persons and classes (or some totally different sort of grouping). (Sartre, 1968: 76)

At the same time, it would be necessary to maintain not only the key ideas of Marxism, but also certain non-negotiable methodological principles, the framework from which an appropriation can be made that does not represent a subordination or blurring of its theoretical basis.

The more sociology is presented as a hyper-empiricism, the easier is its integration into Marxism. Alone it would congeal in essentialism and discontinuity.

Recovered—as the moment of a closely watched empiricism—in the movement of historical totalization, it will find again its profundity and its life. It will be sociology which will maintain the relative irreducibility of social fields, which will bring out—at the heart of the general movement—the resistances, the checks, the ambiguities, the uncertainties. Furthermore, there is no question of adding a method onto Marxism. The very development of the dialectical philosophy must lead it to produce—in a single act—the horizontal synthesis and the totalization in depth. So long as Marxism refuses to do it, others will attempt the coup in its place. (Sartre, 1968: 82)
The idea then is to carefully appropriate practices and exercises that are empirically useful, with a grain of salt—with an awareness that although Marxism does not have absolute autonomy, it should preserve those elements of relative autonomy, its currents of thought, its specific defining and distinguishing characteristics, as well as, remembering Sorel, its sense of scission.

Starting from these considerations, which center on the Marxist perspective but which open a field of debate—an exchange and dialogue with other sociological approaches can be established at various points of contact or, to put it differently, points of appropriation or benefit. Given the impossibility of covering the entire vast field of theories linked to the study of social movements, I would just point out that this exchange is easier to carry out, and with a greater degree of compatibility in techniques of investigation, where there is nothing at stake other than a fundamental instrumentality, which is more often the case in the schools of thought coming from the United States. The presence of methodological devices and conceptual tools operationalized for the study of collective identity and political culture in the context of the "new social movements" is less evident. Paradoxically, the theories from the U.S., even where they are based on highly questionable assumptions and perspectives, are much more operational, and it is possible to engage them in a more instrumental dialogue. In this sense, the theoretical debate about identity, whose origins are in continental Europe, is more appealing, but an instrumental dialogue with Anglo-American theories—of resource mobilization, of framing, of the structures of political opportunity—is more feasible.

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23 For an overview of the current state of theoretical perspectives on the study of social movements, see Daniel Cefai (2007); Nonna Mayer (2012); Lilian Mathieu (2012); and Filliéule, Mathieu, and Péchu (2009).
In sum, if we take these proposals as intermediate theories, relieving them of their interpretative pretensions and salvaging their descriptive and analytic abilities, it is possible to recover, translate, and transfer various of their contributions—at times breaking down the body of theory from which they emerge—to a Marxist agenda of origination and projection. The inventory of concepts, approaches, and topics can and should be selectively extended across the entire range of contributions from the diverse schools of thought regarding collective action and social movements. It would be difficult to accomplish as a general exercise in defining a common set of ideas, but it could be carried out, case by case, to further the specific objectives of any researcher with a Marxist perspective, but who wants to sample other instrumental and methodological waters without the risk of poisoning. The notes above, though schematic and preliminary for obvious reasons of space and opportunity, can serve as an invitation to critical dialogue and selective appropriation.

At the same time, this exercise can only be carried out once a specifically Marxist perspective, based on the critical originality of its concept of class struggle with all its theoretical and analytical implications and derivations, has been recognized and reconstructed within the field of study of sociopolitical movements and the processes of political subjectivation. With this dimension of a Marxist theory centered on the principle of antagonism, established on the terrain of its own irreducible relative autonomy, it will be possible to explore the paths to richer and stronger empirical studies that use and incorporate select conceptual and methodological tools taken from other bodies of theory, including the prevailing and most diffuse interpretive schools of thought in the study of social movements.
II. Subalternity, Antagonism, and Autonomy

In reality one can "scientifically" foresee only the struggle, but not the concrete moments of the struggle, which cannot but be the results of opposing forces in continuous movement, which are never reducible to fixed quantities since within them quantity is continually becoming quality.

Antonio Gramsci

The concepts of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy are a fundamental part of Marxist thought about political action and the subject. They stand out as much for their circulation in academic discourse as in political discourse. In some cases they are at the center of theoretical perspectives and approaches directed at characterizing the processes of political subjectivation: the forms and dynamics of shaping political subjectivities around the collective experience of relationships and processes of domination, conflict, and emancipation.

The notion of political subjectivation goes hand in hand with the concept of experience as it appears in the work of E.P. Thompson. Located at the intersection of being and consciousness, of structure and process, experience operates as a mechanism of mediation and dialogue between the subjective assimilation of productive relations—the material determination relative to a social formation and a mode of production—and its social, political, and cultural projection in the "disposition to behave as a class" (Thompson, 1965: 357). In this sense, we assume that experience refers to the subjective incorporation or assimilation of a material or real condition, an assimilation that already includes a

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24 This chapter is a synthesis, with minor corrections and additions, of my book Subalternity, Antagonism, Autonomy: Constructing the Political Subject (London, 2014), with particular emphasis on the last three sections of Chapter 4. Most of the bibliographic references have been omitted here for reasons of space.
principle or an embryonic consciousness forged in the accumulation and processing of knowledge, experience, and collective practices.

My interest in the three concepts that characterize the different processes of political subjectivation—subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy—has to do with their articulation in a conceptual triad where the respective experiences of subordination, insubordination, and self-determination are conceived of as three faces, areas, or dimensions of the processes of politicization and subjective formation. Before turning to the argument regarding its articulation, I will briefly examine each of these concepts; a more thorough study can be found in a previous work, in which I trace the genealogy of the concepts and discuss the work of the authors who emphasize them and the context of their development (Modonesi, 2014: 9-126).

The notion of subalternity acquires theoretical density for the first time in Antonio Gramsci's reflections on hegemony in his *Prison Notebooks*, motivated by his interest in finding a conceptual counterpart to alienation in the superstructure, and its sociopolitical equivalent in domination: of its stripping of subjectivity on the socioeconomic level by means of subordination. The choice of "subaltern" as noun and adjective was not accidental: it indicates a perspective and theoretical emphasis at the heart of Marxist debate. It provides Marxist theory with a conceptual tool: the subaltern as an expression of the experience and the subjective condition of the subordinated, determined by a relationship of domination—or, in Gramscian terms, of hegemony—as well as an outline of a theory of subalternity. The category of subalternity thus accounts for the subjective condition of subordination in the context of capitalist domination. In E.P. Thompson's terms, we can think of it as the experience of subordination, expressed in the tension between acceptance/incorporation and rejection/autonomization of the relationship of domination. In
addition, as we shall see in Chapter 4, Gramsci's reflections on "passive revolution" center on the tension between subalternity and autonomy and between political action and demobilization. These ideas allow for the analysis not only of contradictory processes of transformation directed from above, but also of the redirection toward subalternity, toward the passivization or subalternization of insubordinate classes and groups.

The concept of antagonism, unlike subalternity, has an important place in the works of Marx—in its more general definition as a synonym for contradiction and in a specific sense to refer to the conflict between labor and capital—as well as in later Marxist language, where it appears frequently as a synonym for conflict, contradiction, difference, confrontation, and struggle. It was in the context of the Italian workers' movement that Antonio Negri began systematically calling "antagonistic" the subject configured in conflict, thus distinguishing the subjective level from a simple objective difference and highlighting its potential as an analytical tool for the definition of the sociopolitical subject. In this way, the reflections of Negri in the 1970s place the concept of antagonism at the center of a Marxist analytical perspective of subjective processes corresponding to the practice and the experience of disobedience, of the forms and dynamics of political subjectivation arising from situations of conflict and struggle. The concept of antagonism thus allows for the identification and naming of the process of shaping subjectivities in conflict, of the interiorization or incorporation of struggle, and of disobedience as experiences and factors of subjectivation, of dialogue between social being and conscious being, of the shaping of a disposition to act as a class.

Finally, the concept of autonomy has a long history in Marxist thought as well as in anti-systemic movements and other schools of thought, such as anarchism. In its Marxist use there are two principal definitions: autonomy as class independence—subjective,
organizational, and ideological—in the context of bourgeois capitalist domination, and autonomy as self-determination, as a model or formation process for an emancipated society. The notion of autonomy I wish to recover here is that developed by Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort of the French political group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in the 1950s and 1960s, and translated for theoretical-practical use as "self-management" by the French workers' self-management movement at the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s. This notion of autonomy is understood as a specific form of political subjectivation that arises out of emancipatory practices and experiences of self-determination forged in the dialogue between spontaneity and consciousness.

On the basis of this reconstruction of the meaning of the concepts and the analysis of their origin, development, and individual existence (Modonesi, 2014: 128-134), we can affirm the possibility and usefulness of articulating them in a single theoretical perspective. I will make this argument in three steps. First, I maintain that in spite of their differences in conceptual development, if we pay attention to their origin and location in a common analytical framework, it is possible to consider these three concepts as homologous categories. Second, the recognition of the differing explanatory scope of each category will allow us to establish its specificity and on that basis justify joining them together. Finally, based on a synthesis of their affinities and differences—which describe them as homologous and specific, respectively—I will argue for their complementarity and thus the usefulness of uniting them in a tripartite scheme that captures and interprets the synchrony of combinations that make up political subjectivity. I will also argue that it is possible and useful to describe the synchrony of the process of their permanent configuration. The next chapter will show how antagonism operates as the central concept at the heart of the triad.
Homology

In addition to the previously outlined assessment, it is possible to maintain the hypothesis of theoretical complementarity of the categories of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy based on the logic of their conceptual construction and the relationship of the levels of analysis in which they are situated. Although different points of view have led to separate agendas, we can think of a path of convergence to the extent that they share a theoretical cornerstone: the centrality of the intersection between relations of power and construction of the subject.

To advance the hypothesis of the relevance and viability of a tripartite focus that connects these categories, it is necessary to demonstrate their complementarity. This exercise will argue that these are theoretically homologous categories, by which is meant that the concepts, which originate in the same factors, share a common characteristic, which means recognizing their location on the same level of analysis. That is, even when their uses might be different, their application and the interpretations they entail have the same theoretical origin, based on similar analytical purposes.

The homology of the concepts of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy refers to the Marxist roots of their emergence and development, and is established in the delimitation of the field of analysis in which they move and operate. This origin/development/delimitation homologizes them, and is revealed in four fundamental approaches. However, because the first two are immediate consequences of the Marxist cast to the categories and the explicit positions taken within them, I will focus on the last two, whose development offers critical tools for maintaining the connection in perspectives derived from the three concepts.
First, the concepts of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy emerge from comprehensive undertakings that suppose the centrality of the problem of the subject in history. In the logic of Marxism, these develop around such problems as the social and political subject, the class in-itself and for-itself, the relation between spontaneity and consciousness, the movement, the party, and the organization.

Second, the categories in question are forged, always in accordance with the fundamental principles of Marxist thought, on a double level—of structure and process—constructed from an understanding of the social reality. From a Marxist viewpoint, this implies an understanding of the nature of the subject based on its position in the structure and its construction as a process of subjectivation, which takes place in the course of an internal configuration relative to the assimilation, processing, or incorporation of given experiences in the context of structural conditioning.

Third, the three categories have been forged, more or less explicitly, to designate forms of experience, which implies their location in a common terrain that answers, as E.P. Thompson notes, to an open conception of the relationship between social being and social consciousness and between spontaneity and consciousness. In this conception, we can discern a point of intersection and subjective activation in the "disposition to act," which arises from the assimilation of experience in the linked sequence between spontaneous emergence and conscious projection. This problem lies at the heart of Marxist debate and, though it does not fully resolve the underlying dilemma or untangle its dualist knot, it clearly lays out the challenge of explanation and illuminates the fundamental issue: the intersection between spontaneity and consciousness as the unifying thread in the process of political subjectivation.
Fourth, the shared field of analysis is formed from two axes or coordinates that are permanent features of contemporary Marxist debate. In effect, it is possible to synthesize the ensemble of Marxist elaborations around the subject in terms of two correlative axes: domination/conflict/emancipation and power-over/power-against/power-to. Sets of dialectical relations focused on contradiction are established among the elements that make up each of these triads. Beyond their evident correlative, while domination/conflict/emancipation alludes to conditions of existence that indicate the relational field in whose frame the processes of political subjectivation develop, power-over/power-against/power-to accounts for manifestations of the existence of subjects through the exercise of force and action.

If the first can clearly be deduced from an analytical three-part division that is characteristic of Marxist thought, the second, less evident triad emerges from its translation onto the level of forms of power as manifestations of the emergence of agents and subjectivities. This translation arises out of the polarity posited by the philosopher Baruch Spinoza, and adopted by Negri, Holloway, and Enrique Dussel, but incorporates at its heart the form of power that emerges from conflict, that has been a central concern of Marxism: counter-power.

Thus, the matrix delineated by these triads, insofar as it is capable of capturing the conditions and manifestations of the existence of the subject, underlies all the uses of the concepts with which we are concerned. This is the case, of course, when the triads support theoretical approaches, when they are consistent, and when they serve as analytical categories and not merely discursive resources. The matrix configures a specifically Marxist way of representing the relationship between structure and action on the sociopolitical level, where the structure is always one of domination until, by means of
conflict, alternative social relations are structured. The action is always an expression of power, oriented toward conservation as much as transformation. As we shall see, the three approaches implicitly put forward a characterization and an ordering of these elements, with differences in emphasis but always in relation to one another, insofar as they reciprocally constitute one another.

Based on the logic of the three approaches, we can outline the following parallel formulations:

a. The perspective of subalternity assumes the relations of domination—characterized by the exercise of power-over—as a field of emergence, formation, and development of political subjectivities, and the experience of subordination as a factor. Underlying this perspective are antagonism and autonomy as projections of subaltern subjectivity, as experiences of insubordination and self-determination: power-against and power-to, respectively.

b. The perspective of antagonism assumes the relations of conflict and struggle as a field of emergence, configuration, and development of political subjectivities and the experiences of insubordination—characterized by the exercise of power-against—as a factor. Underlying this perspective are subalternity as experience of subordination and autonomy as experience of self-determination, as antecedent to and as projection of antagonistic subjectivity, power-over and power-to, respectively.

c. The perspective of autonomy assumes the processes of emancipation as a field of emergence, formation, and development of political subjectivities, and the experience of self-determination as a factor, characterized by the exercise of power-to. Underlying this perspective are subalternity as experience of subordination and
antagonism as experience of insubordination, as antecedent to and as a resource of autonomous subjectivity, power-over and power-to, respectively.

In this way, we can visualize schematically the common frame of reference for the categories of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy, which are located at different intersections of similar coordinates that are arranged along the same axes. If this is correct, that is, if we can homologize these categories from a series of coordinates and shared axes that define a framework of analysis, then it is possible to acknowledge the specificity of each category within that framework: the distinctive feature that allows us to affirm its complementarity.

Specificity

To define the specificity of the concepts of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy, we must start from their degrees of consolidation as analytical categories. We first assume as given a determined explanatory potential precisely as developed by the authors and the schools of thought they draw on. Apart from this potential, if we note the degree to which the categories are consolidated, a review of their trajectories shows a varied panorama. This is evident, above all, if we consider these concepts in linguistic terms, that is, as significant concepts about which there is a certain degree of consensus as to their meaning and a certain precision when they are applied to relatively homogeneous concrete referents.

The adoption of the concept of subalternity by Gramscians and the school of subaltern studies have translated into a relatively stable definition and a relatively precise usage. The frequently imprecise use of the term in common discourse has been made up for by the existence of a field of study whose boundaries and development tend to describe a
school organized around a specific focus. However, the consensus on its usefulness and its continual use conceal a waver ing in its meaning, leading to the possibility of overuse. Put differently, its definition maintains an opening to ambiguity and its use thus tends to dilute the specificity of the phenomena it seeks to name, illuminate, and characterize. The consolidation of the concept is a product of the surrounding consensus, but a rigorous reading of its precision and internal consistency shows it to be incomplete.

The concept of antagonism lacks this consensual consolidation arising from a definition promoted by a school of thought. Antonio Negri's development of the idea from its mainly structural Marxian origin to a clearly subjective meaning suggested and elaborated by Marx himself, pointed toward a particular meaning, but did not end in a consolidation of a concept defined precisely in terms of its referents. In addition, with its continual use in Marxism as synonym for conflict and contradiction, as well as its semantic fluctuation within Negri's theoretical trajectory, the concept of antagonism has found itself in a theoretical limbo. Thus, unlike the category of subalternity, antagonism lacks stability in its meaning and use. Finally, in contemporary Marxist discourses, the word antagonism continues to appear more as a synonym for contradiction and conflict than for struggle, and even less for subjectivation of struggle and the experience of insubordination.

The concept of autonomy is the most slippery from the point of view of its consolidation. Its linguistic openness greatly increases its possible application to deeply diverse realities. Its use in Marxist debate includes a great diversity of meanings and referents. Nevertheless, considering its more or less consistent use in relation to processes of political subjectivation, its varied meanings can be reduced essentially to two: as a principle of subjective independence and as subjectivation related to experience or desire.

\[25\] In addition, a certain consensus could be found with respect to its use as a synonym for conflict.
for self-determination. There is general consensus around the first but not the second. However, the reflections of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* point to a link between the two, where the second, as process, encompasses the first.

In sum, the theoretical consolidation of the concepts of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy is uneven, but produces a shared outlook of an absence of precision and consensus around their meanings. Likewise, the same bodies of theory within which these concepts assumed theoretical quality and density leave margins of variability that prevent the formulation of finished definitions from simple traditional inheritance, or from a simple mechanical recuperation from the authors who introduced them. However, it is still true that each of these traditions contributes to the theoretical consolidation of the categories.

In what follows, the definitions and distinctions I make to establish the specificity of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy ultimately refer back to the intuitions and thinking of the authors who developed them, but I seek to overcome their limitations and take advantage of their heuristic scope, and thus establish a relationship among them. This relational aim is possible to the extent that the categories, as I have already argued, are homologous. The specificity of one category in terms of the others is important insofar as these are located on the same level of analysis, which makes it possible to connect them.

Because we have arrived at a crucial step, it is important to make some methodological notes before we proceed to the specification of the concepts. It is worth noting here that while the eagerness to define may at first seem arbitrary and self-defeating, the search for greater conceptual precision constitutes a necessary step. Although as a methodological resource it is not part of the theoretical conclusions we will reach, it makes these conclusions possible insofar as it allows us to trace important connections. In what follows I will define and differentiate the fields of influence of the categories with
definitions that bolster their specificity, without which they are fated to float in ambiguity, suggestive and useful for guiding hypotheses but insufficient for deeper analytical purposes. I assume that it is possible to define, in an open and general way, the categories of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy without betraying and indeed including and benefiting from their theoretical referents.

Specifying the content and the scope of the categories constitutes an exercise that seeks to maximize their "semantic availability" without abandoning the theoretical horizon on which they appeared, for which they have meaning, and on which they can operate. It is not about assigning fixed meanings, semantically closing the field of action, or syntactically enjoining certain uses; it seeks, rather, to turn the categories into tools that can be appropriately brought together to address the field of phenomena related to political subjectivation. Defining and making distinctions among categories does not disregard relationships, impurities, intersections, or superpositions. On the contrary, it establishes criteria to recognize these, assuming, as we shall insist, that the processes of subjective configuration can be visualized as uneven combinations of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy.

With these methodological points in mind, we can now continue with the specification of the categories starting from three definitions that highlight their differentiation.

a. The specificity of the notion of subalternity refers to the subjective formation inherent in and derived from relationships and processes of domination. This formation occurs through the incorporation of collective experience of

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26 Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron describe how "as Freud would say, 'the elasticity of definitions,' or as Carl Hempel argues, 'the semantic availability of concepts' . . . is one of the conditions of discovery, at least in certain stages of history, of a science or the development of an investigation" (Bourdieu et al., 1998:21).
subordination, characterized fundamentally by the combination of acceptance and resistance within the frame of existing domination, projecting toward a renegotiation or adjustment of the exercise of power-over.

b. The specificity of the notion of antagonism refers to the subjective formation inherent in and derived from relationships and processes of conflict and struggle. This formation is constructed through the incorporation of collective experience of insubordination, characterized fundamentally by contestation and struggle (or rebellion) against existing domination, projecting toward the establishment and exercise of power-against.

c. The specificity of the definition of autonomy refers to the subjective formation inherent in and derived from relationships and processes of emancipation, constructed through the incorporation of collective experience of self-determination, characterized fundamentally by negating and overcoming existing domination, projecting toward the establishment and exercise of power-to.

A disaggregation of the definitions will now show both the common framework and the specificity that distinguishes each concept. The criteria defining the formation of political subjectivities are: field, modality, expression, scope, and projection. That is, we assume that the subjective constructions derive from a specific relational and process-based field from which specific modalities of experience arise, manifesting themselves in different forms and referring to differentiated scopes and projections. With respect to these criteria, the specificity of each concept stands out according to three axes of differentiation:

1. Field: domination/conflict/emancipation.

3. Expression: acceptance and resistance/contestation and struggle/negation and overcoming.


5. Projection: renegotiation of power-over/establishment of power-against/establishment of power-to.

Let us examine the limits of these defining criteria. The differentiation of the first refers to the specific fields that frame and condition the general characteristics of the relationships and processes of subjectivation. The distinction is evident between domination understood as a relatively stable frame, conflict as a field of tension that destabilizes and is able to dismantle domination, and emancipation as overcoming domination with the establishment of a new equilibrium. On the second level, that of experience, the qualitative difference is evident to the extent that the modality of insubordination marks a rupture with subordination, which it negates, just as the positive character of self-determination marks a clear discontinuity with the fundamentally negative character of insubordination. For the third criterion, which alludes to expression as a form of experience, we should note that the line of acceptance-contestation-negation expresses a posture in the face of domination, while its correlate, resistance-struggle-overcoming, refers to its corresponding action. With respect to the movement along these lines, acceptance is clearly distinct from contestation, or a complete questioning, even where the relative character of acceptance, the extent to which it implies its reverse in a certain degree of non-acceptance, should be made clear. The difference between relative non-acceptance and contestation corresponds to the distance between the partial questioning of domination, within its accepted limits, maintaining and defining itself within its perimeter, and a complete questioning of the perimeter, the rules, and the form of domination itself. The
difference between resistance and struggle can be established qualitatively according to a limited but precise, specific definition of resistance, by linking it with a defensive action within the framework of a relative acceptance of domination. Obviously, the expansion of resistance tends to overflow into struggle, understood as expression that openly takes the offensive. The distinctive passage between contestation/struggle and negation/overcoming is marked by the distance between the negativity of antagonism and the positivity of autonomy, between interiority and exteriority at the margins of the relationship of domination.

The fourth criterion clarifies the scope of the third, to the extent that it explicitly differentiates between what lies inside and outside of domination, as well as the transient character of the passage from antagonism. "Within" and "beyond" clearly refer to the interiority of subalternity and the exteriority of autonomy. But it is more problematic to define "against" in these terms. On the one hand, it is undeniably internal, in the degree to which it emerges and manifests itself in the context of an existing domination. On the other hand, it carries the idea of a desire and a hypothesis of exteriority, to the extent that it questions domination and alludes to overcoming it. In other words, it is concretely internal and potentially external.

For the fifth criterion, the projections in terms of the exercise of power are defined according to their differentiated balances. The renegotiation of power-over does not imply the emergence and establishment of a different field of power, either negative, like power-against, or positive, like power-to. Subalternity as a dimension of subjectivity would be

27 I am aware that resistance can be understood as a form of struggle, and that the distinction could be made clearer if it were counterposed to the notion of rebellion. At the same time, the notion of rebellion alludes to a specific form of struggle that not only implies the explicit repudiation of authority but is also associated with a violent form, relatively disorganized or without an agenda, which reduces the field of the phenomenon for which we seek to include all forms of struggle that go beyond resistance, as defined in this sentence. I will return to the relationship and distinction between resistance and rebellion in Chapter 3.
projected, for example, in the reestablishment of a broken legal order or in the tendency toward adjustment in the relation of domination, be it through negotiation among parties, systemic regulation, reforms, concessions, changes, or the simple restoration of the order prior to the grievance or demand. In addition, antagonism would designate the emergence of a counter-power that goes beyond subalternity, openly contesting the existing order through rebellion, revolt, or insurrection, but also through other forms, less easily typified, that go beyond resistance. Finally, autonomy would designate the creation of fields, self-regulated by subjects through the construction of new social relations. These new social relations would begin with those that emerge from the birth of a "disposition to act," as subjectivity-for-itself, passing from spontaneity to consciousness at the outer margins of the structure of domination, whether or not they tended toward the establishment of a new social order based on generalized self-regulation and power-to.

This differentiation of fields and forms allows for the establishment of criteria and should not be confused with a typological pigeonholing of concrete subjective manifestations. It is only through a differentiation based on defining the specificity of the analytical scope of categories that we can recognize the connections and superpositions that, taken together, structure their complementarity.

Complementarity

We have seen how each concept, defined according to its specificity, is susceptible to illuminating or understanding an aspect, a dimension, a level, or a field of the total reality of the phenomena and dynamics of subjective configuration. Aspect, dimension, level, and field allude to the coexistence of diverse forms or modalities; in temporal terms, they refer to a simultaneity. Each category points out, illuminates, and identifies a part of
the whole. Its virtues are thus not limited to presenting a distinguishable and recognizable
form of a field of reality: stripped of its all-encompassing and reductionist ambitions, it can
attune itself to complementarity on two levels of articulation, one synchronic and another
diachronic, according to its specificity.

This harmony can structure a synchronic articulation in which each concept
illuminates a simultaneous aspect of the real configuration of sociopolitical subjects. In this
way, the notion of subalternity can be an analytical instrument, capable of capturing how
the processes of political subjectivation are anchored in the terrain of domination, as well as
their development in practices of resistance, in the tension between relative acceptance and
rejection of power-over. The notion of antagonism can capture the subjective deployment,
real or potential, that is realized in struggle, as well as the corresponding formation of
power-against. And the notion of autonomy can capture the weight or the influence of
experiences of self-determination in the configuration of subjectivities, as well as their
unfolding in the form of power-to.

This triple approach is justified insofar as political subjectivities are recognized as
uneven combinations of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy. In other words, the
configuration of sociopolitical subjects arises from the combination and conflict among
three fundamental components. The combinations are thus the result of diverse
contributions from each component, and in a historically determined configuration, each
carries a specific weight.

Before I develop the arguments here, I should clarify that the conceptual exercise I
am proposing can be characterized as a construction of Weberian ideal types in dialectical
tension. This eliminates the temptation to a typological pigeonholing that cannot accept
putting the intersections and superpositions ahead of the typical definitions. It is the degree
of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy that characterizes a concrete subjective formation at a specific time.

Assuming the unevenness of the combination, determining its composition implies a weighting that establishes the value of each dimension relative to the others. This operation can be guided by three considerations or general ordering principles:

a. The permanent coexistence of the three dimensions: that is, even though the dimensions are ordered and articulated in different ways, each plays a role at all times that may be minimal but is never irrelevant. In this way we exclude the possibility of the absolute absence of an element.

b. The possibility that one dimension will color the others: that is, that it will become a factor that is overdetermining, structuring, and ordering in relation to the others.

c. Conversely, the possibility of uneven combinations where no ordering factor stands out, or at least where none is recognizable, but also the impossibility of a perfect equivalence of the three dimensions.

The first point is obvious insofar as it can be deduced from the argument against essentialism that I have maintained from the beginning. However, it should be noted that this point implies a permanence of the elements: even in the moments of greatest strength and visibility of one dimension, the rest do not disappear. Subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy all have at least a minimal degree of permanence.

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28 I refer here to a decisive determination in the context of a concurrence of determining or codetermining factors, in a sense that is similar, but simpler and more limited, than that proposed by Louis Althusser in "Contradiction et surdétermination. Notes pour une recherche," and in Section 5 of "Sur la dialéctique matérialiste," in Pour Marx (1965).
Indeed, in the second point it is already possible to recognize that the uneven combinations that characterize the process of political subjectivation arise from an element built on a factor that is overdetermining, structuring, and ordering. This can be visualized in three combinations, where the order of the factors determines a form of subjective configuration:

a. Subalternity/Antagonism/Autonomy. Subalternity operates as an overdetermining factor by ordering a combination in which political subjectivation is constructed and fundamentally structured by the experience of subordination. This experience frames both antagonism, which continues to be seen as a possibility through the lengthening and broadening of resistance in struggle, and autonomy, which is glimpsed as an embryonic experience in the formation of the subject and as a horizon or utopia that stimulates the process of subjective formation.

b. Antagonism/Subalternity/Autonomy. Antagonism operates as an overdetermining factor by ordering a combination where political subjectivation is constructed and fundamentally structured by the experience of insubordination. This experience frames subalternity, which is maintained as inertia, related to the genesis of subjective formation, and in the permanent environment of the relations of domination at the margins of the field and experience both of conflict and of autonomy. It is glimpsed, as in the previous case, as an embryonic experience in the very formation of the subject and as a horizon or utopia that stimulates the struggle as well as the process of subjective formation.

c. Autonomy/Antagonism/Subalternity. Autonomy operates as an overdetermining factor by ordering a combination in which political subjectivation is constructed and fundamentally structured in the experience of self-determination. This
experience frames antagonism, which is maintained as a defensive resource or one that enables moving forward with autonomous conquests, and subalternity, which is maintained as inertia insofar as all experience of self-determination is constructed against a still-existing matrix. With respect to process, autonomy implies a gradual overcoming of the relations of domination, which means that to some extent they continue to exist.

The ordering of the overdetermining factor frames the other factors and colors the process of subjectivation.29 The persistence of the secondary factors is mediated by their centrality, around which and from which they each acquire specific meaning, weight, and character. The central factor shapes the specific form of subjectivity and gives it its distinctive features.

With respect to the third point, it is necessary to consider that the first two imply the possibility of deciphering the processes of subjectivation, even when we know that historical reality presents clashing or hybrid formations that do not lend themselves to deconstruction with preconceived keys. However, this same consideration implies ruling out the laboratory hypothesis of a perfect equivalency of the three dimensions. Such a hypothesis does not correspond to the logic of a combination of elements whose contribution is qualitative and thus does not lend itself to a quantitatively measured equivalency.

The weighting operation goes hand in hand with another fundamental methodological resource: analysis of the linkages, superpositions, and connections of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy. I think of these relationships as tensions to highlight the idea that they configure inflection points in the construction of political

29 This coloring can produce the optical illusion that lies behind essentialist proposals.
subjectivities. The tensions of subalternity/antagonism and antagonism/autonomy constitute the greatest explanatory challenge, as they define the perspectives of subjective activation and subjective generation. The linking of the elements and their relational logic are the focal points of political subjectivation and, thus, the knots that must be untangled to arrive at an explanation.

There are thus two significant tensions:

a. Subalternity/Antagonism. The tension between the experiences of subordination and insubordination presents itself as the point where the process of subjectivation is located either within the relationship of domination or at the boundary between domination and its possible crystallization as power-against or the reestablishment of a power-over.

b. Antagonism/Autonomy: The tension between the experiences of insubordination and self-determination presents itself as the point where the process of subjectivation is located either at the boundaries of the relationship of domination and/or outside it, crystallizing as power-against and/or power-to.

These two lines of tension are crossed by the antinomic polarity of an affirmative or positive order between domination-emancipation and power-over or power-to.

This first interpretative level is synchronic, and allows us to show the simultaneity and superposition of elements that are only apparently isolated, each converted into an exclusive perspective in the approaches we have reviewed. At the same time, it must have a certain flexibility in order to describe the process-based nature of subjective configurations and avoid an ahistorical analysis with little relation to the concrete dynamics of political subjectivation.
The hypothesis of synchronic articulation is thus only the first level of the interpretative reconstruction of the analytical decomposition implied by the differentiation between the concepts of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy. A complementary passage is situated at the level of its diachronic articulation, which takes the observation of the uneven combinations we have located from a photographic to a cinematographic perspective: from a representation of and key to a specific moment of subjective formation, to recognizing how a specific configuration transforms and reconfigures itself over time.

At this level, the hypothesis is that, once the configurations have been established in a moment of their existence, the process-based relationship defines possible sequences among the elements that describe the process of subjective configuration. In this case, I will call the subjective configurations, in which these dimensions appear as overdetermining and ordering, subaltern, antagonist, and autonomous, just as I have already argued. This implies recognizing their uneven combinations behind the nominal synthesis.

We can, at the abstract level, first establish sequential lines and hypothetical movements within the processes of political subjectivation. In a sequence corresponding to a formulation of an emancipatory project or teleology that is consistent with Marxist thought and the imagination of concrete subjects in search of emancipation, we pass from subalternity (the state to overcome), to antagonism (a necessary step of conflict and combat), to autonomy (as a solidification, goal, or end point). Depending on the temporal reading established, past, present, and future can be interchangeable relative to each step or structural subjective condition; that is, they can correspond either to subalternity, antagonism, or autonomy. However, their interchangeability is logically limited by the descriptive scope of the concepts. Subalternity can correspond to the past or the present, but not, if we assume the point of view of the emancipatory project, to the future. Antagonism
and autonomy can correspond to the present or the future but not to the past, unless they are understood as myths or mobilizing utopias, that is, as devices that evoke and structure the imagination to project and guide the struggle.

This same sequential order corresponds to a genealogical observation of the subject, to the extent that it can only originate in the condition of subalternity and later move on to antagonism and autonomy. If, on the other hand, we assume the perspective of the imaginaries that emerge in the process of political subjectivation, we can establish a sequence in which autonomy is situated in the end as well as the beginning, as a utopia that operates as a device that activates the process and gives a glimpse of its end point. However, once the process of subjectivation is underway, the variety of sequences or possible scenarios it can choose or experience over the course of its existence is widened or ramified into three other potential movements.

First, we must consider the possibility of stagnation in subalternity, antagonism, or autonomy. The first scenario is historically the most common, and can extend over a long period of time. The other two turn out to be unsustainable: struggle and insubordination cannot be permanent, just as emancipation cannot be stable, to the extent that we understand them as processes and not fixed states. Second, there is the possibility that autonomy or antagonism will retreat to subalternity, just as autonomy can return to antagonism. These scenarios are historically common as a counterpart to the upstream processes that characterize the emergence of political subjectivity. Third, we must consider the hypothesis of an oscillation between subalternity and antagonism, without the materialization of autonomy, that ends as longing, projection, or utopia, or an alternation between antagonism and autonomy in the unstable process of consolidation of a new order. In addition to the linear sequence, the possibility of these three non-linear process-based
sequences, which do not presume to be exhaustive, suggests the relevance of exercises in periodization that allow for deciphering and disaggregating the processes of subjective construction.

Having established the synchronic and diachronic articulations that allow for the identification of combinations and sequences, we now face the challenge of connecting the levels of analysis. The analytical matrix, from its two fundamental dimensions, should be able to describe the dia-synchrony of the real processes of political subjectivation. A key to this dia-synchronous reading can be found at the center of the matrix: in antagonism. The next chapter will problematize and develop this idea.
III. Antagonism as Principle

Descartes needs a correction: "I fight, therefore I am."

José Carlos Mariátegui

Separate individuals form a class only insofar as they have to carry on a common battle against another class.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

In this chapter I will consider certain characteristics of the concept of antagonism, which situate it as a central element in the triad formed with subalternity and autonomy. In genealogical as well as strictly logical terms, antagonism is one of the principles behind a Marxist understanding of subjectivities and political action. It is not only the origin and cause, but also the foundation, criterion, perspective, and key to these subjectivities.

Antagonisms

Unlike subalternity, antagonism appears frequently in the work of Karl Marx (in the German synonyms *Gegensatz* or *Klassengegensatz*). It is first used according to a general, abstract definition and another particular, more concrete one. The first is the broad, extended sense as a synonym for contradiction, contrast, or opposition; it can thus refer to very different situations and objects. The second, whose greater precision makes it more

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30 Italian translations commonly use the words *contraposición* and *contraste*, whereas in Spanish they almost always use *antagonismo*. It is important to note that the word *antagonismo* appears much more often in both languages as a translation of *antagonismus*, a Latinism that Marx used many times in German, though he used *Gegensatz* or *Klassengegensatz* much more often. Apart from the need to determine the extent to which "antagonism" is an adequate translation of *Gegensatz* or *Klassengegensatz*, a thorough comparative study could show how a more extended and flexible use of the word *antagonismo* in various translations (at least to Italian and Spanish) has favored its use in contemporary Marxism more than in its actual presence and use in Marx's works.
important on a conceptual level, is used in the context of the confrontation between capital and labor and the conflict between social classes; this definition implies a split between one level that is more structural and another that is more subjective. This split raises a number of conceptually delicate questions, as we can see in a definition outlined by Zygmunt Bauman:

The term antagonism is used to indicate the positions of the members of a class, or groups with class characteristics, that reflect the nature of reciprocal relations in conflict. When it is possible, through theoretical analysis, to verify the absence or presence of conflict, whose nature must be investigated in the structure of the relations of production, it is also then possible to measure the degree of antagonism, to establish it empirically or express it directly with statistical data. But if the statistical index of antagonism is missing or has no value, that does not mean there is no conflict, because the subject might not be aware of the conflict, and thus the conflict might not be reflected in the behavior of the individual (1975: 64).

This is a view of antagonism as expression indicating the "positions" and the conscious or unconscious behavior of the subject, but also as a reflection that can be measured in an analysis of the relations of production.

From the more sociopolitical perspective of Marxism and class struggle as a field of subjectivation and political action, we can describe the concept of antagonism in a less slippery and ambiguous way. As I described in Chapter 2, the specificity of this notion refers to the subjective configuration of the conflict and struggle as lived, to the incorporation of experiences of insubordination characterized by the contestation of domination and by the establishment and exercise of a counter-power.
Linking the notion of antagonism clearly and unequivocally with the subjective dimension, particularly with the processes of political subjectivation that develop out of class struggle and its associated conflicts, specifies its scope and meaning. It avoids an overly flexible use, allowing it to serve as a theoretical foundation instead of a crutch of Marxist jargon that encompasses both the conflict between labor and capital and the subjective formation that arises from that conflict.

In spite of the fact that antagonism remains a vague term in the grammar and lexicon of Marxism, and in spite of its analytical potential, it has not been the object of conceptualization or theorization that takes it as fundamental or gives it the centrality it deserves, in particular from the perspective of the subject and political action. Of the four authors who can be considered theorists of antagonism, two vacillate between anti-Marxism and post-Marxism: Alberto Melucci and Ernesto Laclau. Only two can be located within the archipelago of Marxisms (and not without the avalanche of criticism that accompanies them): Antonio Negri and John Holloway.

As I have already argued, Negri was the first author to develop a definition of antagonism as a subjective concept, in the 1970s, in spite of the fact that in the next decade his definition became blurry and was subordinated to the notion of autonomy, the central idea in his thinking (Modonesi, 2014: 54-80). The sociologist Alberto Melucci took up the concept in his theory of identity and new social movements. Paradoxically, in spite of theorizing about the interior horizon of these movements—what he calls the "how"—Melucci continued using the definition of antagonism in a structural sense, in order to describe the placement and virtual anti-systemic impact of social movements. Of the three elements that make up his definition of a social movement—solidarity, conflict, and rupture of the limits of the system (Melucci, 1999: 46)—antagonism belongs with the latter two,
but not with solidarity, which refers to the most internal and experiential dimension of subjectivity. Moreover, from a perspective that is very distant from the Marxist concerns we are recovering, Melucci sees antagonistic movements in postindustrial societies as post-political, that is to say, as fundamentally cultural.\(^{31}\)

Ernesto Laclau is one of the most well-known political theorists today, and his definition of antagonism thus has much more circulation and influence than those of Melucci or even Negri.\(^{32}\) His formulation of the concept, like Negri's and Melucci's, has the virtue of maintaining its centrality to the theory of conflict, and of applying it to the analysis of relationships of domination, the formation of political subjects, and the understanding of political action.\(^{33}\) However, its use and analytic meaning in this formulation is structural—antagonism describes the broken form of a society that cannot realize its potential—and it is centered fundamentally on defining the boundaries and rules of the political game, understood as a potential field of formation of a multiplicity of subjects and a variety of discursive devices. Based on what we can call antagonistic polarization, hegemonic and populist discursive strategies can unfold in a contingent way.

Although Laclau clearly distinguishes the concept of antagonism from the contradiction between capital and labor and the class struggle, he maintains it merely as a synonym for conflict. In subjective terms, its scope is limited, merely negative and external to the subject, since it expresses the impossibility of complete subjectivity, contemplating it merely as the possibility of a discursive articulation, entirely dependent on its contrast with the "other." It is left as the irreducible form of the social that enables the discursive

\(^{31}\) “The antagonism of the movements has an eminently communicative character: they offer the rest of society alternative symbolic codes that subvert the logic of the dominant ones” (Melucci, 1999: 126).

\(^{32}\) Indeed, Martín Retamozo and Soledad Stoessel assume that Laclau's definition is the only one used in contemporary political theory (Retamoza and Stoessel, 2014).

\(^{33}\) This is also true in more recent theorization that struggles to find consensus on the irreducibility of antagonistic conflict. See Mouffe (2014).
articulation based on "contingencies," "empty signifiers," "chains of equivalence," and "hegemonic articulations" around "polarities" of different types (Laclau and Mouffe, 2004). In this use antagonism refers to the form of any process of political subjectivation originating discursively in the framework of a conflictual logic of the system. It does not represent a specific form or an experiential dimension of that process that anchors subjectivity in the material existence of the subject or in struggle as practice and as lived experience, as an interiorization of the conflict.

John Holloway is the only author currently working on Marxist theory of the notion of antagonism. From the perspective of what is called "open Marxism," which explicitly avoids definitions and classifications, Holloway uses the concept often and flexibly to describe various contradictions in a way that is similar to that of other Marxist authors, particularly Negri. At the same time, insofar as he maintains that social contradictions are all relations of struggle, and that the subject is constituted through struggle, antagonism becomes, in his thinking, the fundamental field in which every process of political subjectivation is born. Holloway uses this notion to define the fundamental pattern of the capitalist social dynamic, and antagonism is thus the framework, field, or context where

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34 "At the centre of the new melodies stands contradiction: not the contradiction between labour and capital but the deeper (logically and existentially prior) conflict between doing and labour. This contradiction is a live, throbbing social antagonism, the constant and unavoidable struggle that is life itself. Contradiction is struggle: concepts are inevitably conceptualisations of the social antagonism in which we live and think. That is why all concepts must be understood as open concepts, conceptualisations of an open, unresolved process of struggle. Non-identity is the revolt of doing against abstract labour, is class struggle" (Holloway, 2010: 200).

35 With a logic very similar to Thompson's, he maintains, for example, that "the polar nature of the antagonism is thus reflected in a polarisation of the two classes, but the antagonism is prior to, not subsequent to, the classes: classes are constituted through the antagonism" (Holloway, 2002). It is striking that although he was in close contact with the 1960s British debate about Thompson's work on the concept of class, Holloway never mentions or cites him. This may be due to a theoretical distance or rejection; Holloway is more closely connected to the German derivationist debate and has a theoretical perspective that is quite far from Thompson's "historicism."

36 "If, however, we say that the antagonism between labour and capital is simply the superficial expression of a deeper conflict, that between concrete doing and abstract labour, it becomes clear immediately that the
the subject located "within, against, and beyond capital" is formed. This subject is formed more by the anti-capitalist struggle than—as I argue here—as a form or dimension of a combined and unequal process of subjectivation, as a quality of a subject who acquires an attitude of confrontation, a spontaneous and conscious physical and mental posture of struggle. Holloway's perspective and mine are not theoretically mutually exclusive, but they do represent two distinct uses of the concept, whose emphases imply projections that are different, though not divergent. Holloway also emphasizes the negation present in common daily practices of resistance, where I have insisted on an attitude increasingly conscious of rupture that manifests itself in a frank and open conflict led by specific groups or sectors in conspicuous moments of struggle, moments of particularly intense and politicized social conflict. While Holloway insists on negation and de-identification, I emphasize positive development in terms of the accumulation of experience in a political subjectivity that affirms itself and makes itself visible and tangible through conflict, acts of rebellion, and practices of insubordination.

I understand antagonism as the expression of an experiential process derived from a subjective polarization, from a polar position in a relationship of conflict, of social and political struggle: with position and social polarity relatively or even ultimately determined by concrete elements of the economic, political, and cultural order. It is an experience that social antagonism runs through each of us.... The argument is rather that in a society based on class antagonism, we are all permeated by this antagonism, we are all self-contradictory, torn internally by the struggle between the reproduction of capitalist relations and the impulse to refuse-and-create. Class struggle involves taking sides in this conflict that exists both within and outwith [sic] all of us" (Holloway, 2010: 221-2).

37 "It is a refusal, a negation of subordination. It is the scream of insubordination, the mumble of non-subordination. Insubordination is a central part of everyday experience, from the disobedience of children, to the cursing of the alarm clock which tells us to get up and go to work, to all sorts of absenteeism, sabotage and malingering at work, to open rebellion, as in the open and organised cry of ‘¡Ya basta!’ Even in the apparently most disciplined and subordinated societies, insubordination is never absent: it is always there, always present as a hidden culture of resistance" (Holloway, 2002).
accumulates in sedimentary layers of political subjectivation, that emerges and feeds back upon itself from a possibility and a "disposition to act" antagonistically that, at the meeting point between spontaneity and consciousness, positions itself at the center of the processes of political subjectivation and of a Marxist approach to studying and analyzing them.

At the same time, as I argued in the previous chapter, antagonism is a concept that is most meaningful when it is defined and framed by its correlates, subalternity and autonomy. Relationships of conflict or, subjectively, the experience and interiorization of conflict, have a specific impact on the formation of political subjectivity in their generation of an antagonistic configuration in which the experience of insubordination is central and defining, even if it is combined with the experience of subordination and self-determination specific to the situations and conditions of subalternity and autonomy. In sum, even in various combinations that highlight the dimensions or subalternity or autonomy, antagonism occupies a central and strategic place in theory and practice.

The Dynamic Centrality of Antagonism

The theoretical and strategic centrality of antagonism arises from its dynamic role at the heart of the processes of political subjectivation. This idea can be found in simple outline form in the final two pages of my 2010 book *Subalternity, Antagonism, Autonomy*. I will review here those arguments, with the addition of some complementary considerations.

I argued there that the concept and principle of antagonism could operate as a link between synchronic and diachronic approaches, as a "dia-synchronous key" that would allow a combination of the two types of analysis, the recognition of combinations as specific expressions or phenomena and of sequences of these as processes (Modonesi, 2014: 150-152). This property of antagonism results not only from its semantic location at the center
of the tripartite matrix, but also from its logical place as an indispensible passage or bridge between subalternity and autonomy. On the synchronic level it functions as a passage, and on the diachronic level as a bridge, through which the processes of political subjectivation pass. Antagonism, understood as experience of insubordination, operates as a synchronizing element between subalternity and autonomy, and on the diachronic level it renders visible the high points, the antagonistic combinations that mark the pattern and the rhythm of the formation of political subjects.

As we have already seen, the specific definition of antagonism refers to the field of insubordination and struggle, to the political subjectivation of conflict, and to the construction of counter-power. At the same time, we saw that struggle and the construction of counter-power can be found in embryonic form in subalternity—in the experience of resistance—and in expanded form in autonomy—in the conflict inherent in the experience of self-determination. It could be added that its liminality and the tension it produces at the limits of domination between interiority and exteriority give it a character that is ubiquitous and cross-sectional. In this sense, antagonism operates as a synchronic connection; it can be considered the critical dynamic factor, the engine behind the processes of political subjectivation.

These considerations of the dynamic centrality of antagonism do not contradict its homology with subalternity and autonomy. Nor does it deny that this equivalence is translated into multiple unequal combinations in which one of the three factors tends to become ordering and overdetermining. It is, rather, an attempt to advance to another analytical level and recognize or attribute properties. In particular, antagonism stands out for being the dynamic element that gives mobility to the triad, and for fine-tuning the synchronic and diachronic approaches. Finally, "by passing from the analytical-descriptive
field to the explanatory-interpretative, antagonism becomes a privileged key for interpretation" (Modonesi, 2014: 151). Sociopolitical subjects constitute themselves based not only on the combination of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy, but above all on the basis of the tensions generated among these three elements, which implies deciphering what is coded.

On another level, we also saw that antagonism, as the expression of the synchronic dynamic of the processes of political subjectivation, has the virtue of dissolving all essentialist pretension by installing a continuous temporality, in keeping with the proposal of E.P. Thompson: it is not that the political subject is; the political subject is being, and it is being because it is struggling. And finally, the principle of antagonism is still the characteristic feature of the Marxist approach: the principle of conflict and struggle. This assertion, made in the last line of my previous book, is the starting point for my reflection in these pages.

If the question is struggle, we are faced not only with a theoretical centrality, but also a strategic one. Indeed, beyond the immediate question—the concern with conflict and its structural as well as subjective implications for the problem of struggle, the formation of the subject and the extent to which it is conscious of itself and its interests—it has been not only a constant in communist and revolutionary thought, but also its true touchstone. Antagonism, as the formula that allows us to name and characterize the experience of class struggle, constitutes the core of Marxism as sociopolitical thought that is original, polemical, and disruptive. Antagonism is its characteristic feature, the unifying thread that ties theory to political strategy.

By this logic, and paraphrasing Lenin's statement that without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement (Lenin, 1975), we can say that there is no
antagonistic practice without a theory of antagonism, and vice versa. Indeed, Marxism is a theory of antagonism, in spite of its lack of a clear definition of the concept, and in spite of the fact that antagonism does not always appear nominally or systematically at the center of its theorization of political action as correlate and political translation of the theory of class struggle, from the perspective of the subject. In this sense, just as we can recognize that Marxism presents the logic of capital and the logic of class struggle as keys to capitalist social relations, we can also take note of a logic and dynamic of antagonism as experience and practice of the insubordination that intervenes decisively in the configuration of subjectivities, whether of classes, class fractions, or subjects emerging at the heart of classes or from a field of classes. Antagonism, which is ubiquitous and universal, becomes the fundamental conceptual hinge point for all Marxist theory about subjectivation, politicization, mobilization, and political action.

Between Resistance and Rebellion

For analytical purposes, we can take the qualitative difference between the experiences of subordination and insubordination, or, to make a more common distinction, between the practices of resistance and rebellion, as the most typical or characteristic criteria for distinguishing between manifestations of subalternity and antagonism (Modonesi, 2014: 142-143). Along with this distinction there are important questions relating to the temporal dimension of subjectivation and struggle, as well as to their intensity, duration, frequency, and recurrence.

By resistance I refer here to the constituent political action of subaltern subjectivity, the act of subjective emergence, movement from passivity to action, from subjection to subjectivation. Hardt and Negri (2012: 41) maintain that "the process of subjectivation
begins with rejection." Holloway would say that it begins with a cry of "no," without clarifying the level or scope of the rejection, whether the "no" is uttered publicly, whether it is shouted or murmured, whether it is followed by other gestures or practices of insubordination, or how these are articulated in a sequence of political subjectivation.

Resistance is a political action; it is a foundation of political subjectivity, yet it nonetheless expresses the condition/situation of subalternity inasmuch as it cannot, and generally does not, attempt to breach the real and regulatory limits of the relations of domination, the rules of the game that establish its concrete boundaries. Subalternity is consubstantial with resistance, and ultimately resistance, where it is not simply a reaction, merely aims on a proactive level to modify its modality or form, to renegotiate the terms or the way in which the relationship of authority-obedience is exercised. Resistance does not reject the existing domination: it faces domination as a defensive measure, as a subjective affirmation; it establishes a balance that allows for permanent renegotiation within which subaltern classes forge a specific, defined political subjectivity.

This description is in fact close to a classical, conventional definition of the concept of resistance, despite the fact that after the defeat of the revolutionary wave of the 1960s and 1970s and the fall of the Soviet bloc, and in the midst of the disorder that followed the neoliberal restoration, the difficult conditions of social and political struggle led to the elevation of resistance not only as an everyday, limited expression of struggle, but also as an idea that passed from tactical to strategic, that became a project. Or it simply came to express a retreat from any broadly-defined project or strategy, to synthesize all the expressions of struggle, which in fact tended to be defensive. In various currents of
poststructuralist and postcolonial critical thinking, and in the field of subaltern studies, this exaltation of resistance became an apology.³⁸

Rebellion can also be understood as a typical or characteristic expression of antagonism, to the extent that it questions and breaks or suspends the rules of the game; it applies force to the edges of the structures of domination with the intention of breaching their limits. Rebellion is a transitory refusal that tries to provoke a crisis in domination. It is, by definition, more intense but less frequent and of less duration than resistance. The thread that separates the concrete manifestations of resistance and rebellion is tenuous, and the superpositions and intersections are constant. Establishing the distinguishing criteria requires an effort to decipher the movements, the lines of continuity, and the connections between them. To put it extremely concisely, every rebellion is rooted in previous experiences of resistance, and vice versa: it leaves a trace that can provide feedback to subsequent practices of resistance.

At the same time, these considerations turn out to be tautological if we assume, as an influential perspective does, that resistance is a permanent practice that runs through each and every moment and process of political subjectivation of classes and subaltern groups. Resistance, as the typical expression of subalternity, never disappears, but can pass to a second level, either in a scenario where passivity predominates or in the opposite case, where rebellion is the characteristic form of antagonistic action. In this respect, it is relevant and worthwhile to recognize and characterize the qualitative leap that marks the difference

³⁸ At the same time there are also distinctions like the one, to take an influential example, that can be seen between the lines in the discourse of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), a discourse that distinguishes between the indigenous resistance of the past 500 years and the rebellion of the Zapatista uprising of 1994. In fact, Subcomandante Marcos proposed a distinction between the rebel and the revolutionary based on the metaphor of a chair, which reveals the differences in their attitude toward power. The rebel is superior to the revolutionary because he or she has no intention of sitting in the chair; their aim is to eliminate it, along with the power it represents (EZLN, 2002).
between resistance and rebellion, a qualitative leap that is summed up in the great question surrounding studies of collective action that can be formulated as follows: if everyone resists, why do some rebel but not others?\textsuperscript{39}

It is common sense, or at least there is a certain consensus around the idea, that in the history of subaltern classes, resistance is a permanent expression and rebellion is only sporadic, though recurrent (Nieto, 2008). If we take resistance to be constant and rebellion as variable, we could even suggest that the condition of subalternity refers to daily life, to the ordinary reproduction of the relationships and structures of domination and of the subjectivities that live and inhabit them. The antagonistic situation then refers to an extraordinary event, to the crisis of domination as a episode, as a contingency, perhaps recurring but never permanent.\textsuperscript{40} Even if it is valid, this perspective runs the risk of putting these phenomena on two separate levels, though, as we showed in Chapter 2, they can be considered different but equivalent practices, not necessarily mutually exclusive, but that tend to be alternating and consecutive, that develop on the same level, and that come together in a combined and unequal form in the processes of political subjectivation.

For Gramsci, the subaltern represents the tense relationship between the internalization of the relations of oppression, which inhibits the ability to antagonize the dominant classes, and the resistance and potential for rebellion that indicate "characteristics

\textsuperscript{39} This question is found in studies ranging from the classic and polemical work of Ted R. Gurr (1970) to those that explicitly explore the persistence of obedience and the limits in which riots break out, such as the equally classic work of Barrington Moore, Jr. (1978).

\textsuperscript{40} We should not forget that there is a structural and not exclusively subjective antagonism that is immanent and permanent in capitalist societies. However, as I have already argued, we should take advantage of a more specific sense of the concept of antagonism, one that is reserved exclusively to designate subjective processes, that is, to the subjective dimension that arises from the political struggle of political subjectivities emerging from fields of class, and not as a synonym for the contradiction between capital and labor.
of autonomous initiative” (Gramsci, 2000, vol. 6, C 25: 178). In this sense, subalternity is more important quantitatively, while antagonism is more important qualitatively.

Continuing with the temporal analysis of the phenomena of political subjectivation, we can trace permanent, or at least frequent and persistent forms of resistance and recurrent episodes of open rebellion, through real, concrete observation. Amidst these processes, the form of subjective emergence can acquire an antagonistic or autonomous character, but the real existence of subjectivation develops primarily in the subsoil of subalternity: less visible, with fewer public resources, less representation, and so forth. But it is not a matter of idealizing this subsoil, as does, for example, James Scott (2000) and a large number of authors in the field of subaltern studies. The line that separates the subaltern subsoil from the open air of antagonism is not, as in Scott's account, made from the infrapolitical characteristics of that subsoil, or from making the discourse of antagonism public, but from different degrees of the political relative to various forms of subjectivation and political action at the intersection between the experiences of subordination and insubordination.

While I do not share Scott's general perspective, several of his points are nonetheless suggestive and converge with the approach I am proposing: for example, his location of the concept of insubordination between resistance and rebellion, and his problematization of the passage between these two points:

In fact, the term insubordination is quite appropriate here because any particular refusal to comply is not merely a tiny breach in a symbolic wall; it necessarily calls into question all the other acts that this form of subordination entails. Why should a

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41 As is well known, Gramsci never used the noun subalternity, but only the adjective subaltern. Without going into the antinomy between subalternity and autonomy, his famous note on the different manifestations of subalterns establishes "integral autonomy" as their antithesis, preceding a passage on partial or relative autonomy (although he does not use these adjectives).
A serf who refuses to bow before his lord continue to deliver grain and labor services? A single lapse in conformity can be repaired or excused with negligible consequences for the system of domination. A single act of successful public insubordination, however, pierces the smooth surface of apparent consent, which itself is a visible reminder of underlying power relations. (Scott, 1990: 205)

Although Michel Foucault, another theorist of resistance, rejects the political densifications of power, he does not fail to recognize in passing the possibility of a qualitative passage toward revolution by means of what he calls the "strategic codification" of "points of resistance":

Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities. And it is doubtless the strategic codification of these points of resistance that makes a revolution possible, somewhat similar to the way in which the state relies on the institutional integration of power relationships. (Foucault, 1978: 96)

A specific form of this strategic codification—a form of antagonistic radicalization that is broadly recognized both historically and theoretically—is the subversive act of insurrection, a magic word in revolutionary discourse since the storming of the Bastille and the attack on the Winter Palace. The notion of insurrection refers to a generalized rebellion with political meaning and direction, aimed at the overthrow of a state order or regime, meaning that in the Marxist tradition it implies a qualitatively different form than that of rebellion, which is spontaneous, disordered, and without a definite direction. Much has been written about this "superior" version of the idea of rebellion, more in political/strategic terms than strictly theoretical ones, in the heat of debate at the heart of the international
communist movement. In fact it is a prescriptive concept aimed at designing an operative form for the revolution, understood as the overthrow of the existing political order. There is a certain discredit to the notion of rebellion, given its roots and dissemination through a revolutionary Marxist narrative that is generally associated with political primitivism, though it is not always seen in entirely negative terms.\footnote{The classic 1959 book by Eric Hobsbawm problematizes the adjectives \textit{primitive} and \textit{archaic}, as applied to certain forms of rebellion (Hobsbawm, 2000: 11-26).}

In an article about the notion of counter-power, written with an eye toward the events in Seattle and the appearance of the anti-globalization movement, Antonio Negri makes an explicit distinction between resistance and insurrection:

For us, insurrection is the form assumed by a resisting mass movement when it becomes active in a short time, that is, when it focuses on specific, defining objectives: the innovation of the masses in a common political discourse. Insurrection brings together the distinct forms of resistance in a single form, it arranges them like an arrow that pierces the boundary of the established social order, the constituted power, in an original way. It is an event. (Negri, 2001: 84)

For Negri, resistance implies a micropolitical labor of undermining, as a condition for the later rising of insurrection and installation of constituent power. For him, there is no distinction between a defensive action and an offensive one. As was shown in another work, he rejects the idea of any subjective quality to subalternity: the subject exists to the extent that he exercises his autonomy, without possibility of return, of slackening, of retreat, or of contradictions. At the same time, he distinguishes and clearly elevates the antagonistic characteristic of insurrection and, in a later book written with Michael Hardt, emphasizes the "genealogy of rebellion" and the "anthropology of resistance" (Hardt and
Negri, 2010: 238-243), offering some suggestive ideas but without arriving at a clean terminological distinction.

Returning to our main line of argument, antagonism plays a central role at the qualitative level in the configuration of the processes of political subjectivation, inasmuch as it has a decisive impact at the experiential level, installing the dynamic of the conflict as event, as an extraordinary moment, as the present time, as an instant, as an overflowing, as rebellion or insurrection. At the same time, on the quantitative level, the level of frequency and duration in time and space, subalternity is the constant in the ordinary and persistent reproduction of societal dynamics. These are not separate situations, but rather aspects of the flow of social struggle, interconnected and braided into real processes, passing from resistance to rebellion and vice versa, hand in hand with changes in the interrelationship of forces that are produced for the duration of a conflict. Persistent subalternity and recurrent antagonism are real universes where the processes of political subjectivation are manifested, and concrete fields where they are observed.

It should be noted that although the indefinite permanence of antagonism can be ruled out, since it manifests itself through a simple recurrent episodic emergence, the related experiential accumulation is usually more long-lasting than its formal presence in the scenario would indicate. This is true not only because antagonism feeds off of the constant polarized contraposition distinctive to relations of capitalist domination and

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43 Raquel Gutiérrez raises a question along these same lines about the temporality of forms of struggle, about "the permanence of the impermanent" in the interest of "persisting in the transformation of domination beyond the explicit moment of rebellion," a persistence that is "rhythmic and intermittent" (Gutiérrez, 2013: 141).

44 This question also deserves to be problematized with respect to the notion of autonomy. We assume that autonomy includes the process of subjective independence in two connected movements: as separation (excision) and negation of domination, and as affirmation by means of practices of self-determination. There is a question surrounding the characterization of autonomy understood as part of the process of political subjectivation: to what extent can we assume it is a relatively stable and progressively expansive experience and practice, or is it just sporadic and episodic?
exploitation, but because the echo and the consequences of antagonistic moments and episodes, of experiences and practices of insubordination, resonate on the experiential level and illuminate the formation of political subjectivities.

This general idea needs a fuller explanation. Resistance and rebellion are forms of struggle, and struggle is a general process that, although it is manifested in different ways, is tied to a single logic and thus to various modalities of a single type of social practice. The boundaries that separate resistance from rebellion are therefore shifting and porous. The movement from one to the other, from a defensive to an offensive posture, is frequent, and forms a part of the ability and the tactical and strategic intelligence of sociopolitical subjects. Although the repertoires of struggle can be read to distinguish forms of resistance from forms of rebellion, in practice many concrete actions are not only the expression of a fluctuation between one and the other, but combine both dimensions, rather than marking a clear discontinuity: they are included, they are fused in a single action, gesture, or, as is often said, form of struggle.

A graphic and illustrative example of this fusion is the barricade. The barricade is a clearly defensive act of struggle, the defense of a territory, just as a trench is at the same time the metaphor for antagonism, for the passage from resistance to rebellion, insofar as it interrupts the circulation and suspends the flow of daily life, breaking the regular rhythm of domination.45 A sociology of the barricade would put into evidence the elements of antagonism that are generated in the tracing of a dividing line, a line that marks the separation between inside and outside, between us and them. As they said in Paris in 1968, "a barricade closes the street but opens a path."

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45 At the same time it is a metaphor for the experiences of self-determination, of autonomy, as it implies a series of organized practices and becomes, in many cases, the site of collective dynamics of assembly, as occurred in the Oaxaca Commune in Mexico in 2006.
Antagonistic Movements

Rebellion as an act and gesture is a typical, characteristic form of antagonism, a metaphor useful for distinguishing it, but it is not the only form of expression of the practices and experiences of insubordination. Just as antagonism is, in the abstract, the movement, the dynamic factor, the motor of the process of subjectivation, it can be said that concrete sociopolitical movements, even though they are the product of unequal combinations of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy, are fundamentally constructed, projected, and consolidated by means of antagonism, insofar as they erupt and feed upon the practices and experiences of insubordination specific to mobilization and an open and frank attitude of conflict.

This antagonistic appearance and reproduction is related to the elements that usually characterize the emergence of a systemic social movement: a scenario of open conflict, polarized positioning, a confrontational attitude. This is because although political subjectivity is born in subalternity and exists through the exercise of resistance, the sociopolitical movement, that is, an organized, sustained form of struggle, develops as such to the extent that it is projected by antagonism and given a specific characteristic. At the same time, although they may ignite from an antagonistic spark, not all movements are projected and sustained based on this type of combustion over time, nor can they be defined as such, and not just because they eventually pass from a "nascent state" to "institutionalization" (Alberoni, 2014), but because they can progress toward forms in which the ordering element that characterizes them can be subalternity or autonomy.

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46 In the same way, there can be antagonistic political subjectivities that do not adopt the form of a movement, although the tendency is for antagonistic forms to reach the movement level, that is, to be more stable, structured, and organized.
Here is where it becomes important to distinguish the movements we call sociopolitical, and in particular the subset that is antagonistic, from those that are strictly social or called social, a distinction linked to the political, to the degrees and levels of politicization of the processes and dynamics of mobilization, organization and anti-systemic radicalization. The French-Greek sociologist Michel Vakaloulis proposes a definition of "social movement" within this antagonistic distinction:

The notion of a social movement indicates the persistence of a prolonged antagonistic interaction that goes beyond the critical moment of isolated conflicts. It makes reference to effects of expansion and contagion, of repercussions within and between sectors, of displacement of scale, of disordered diffusion of the arrangements of protest. . . . The social movement is neither a phenomenon devoid of control that arbitrarily gives form to disparate, non-totalizable protest mechanisms, nor a homogeneous actor unified by means of a common conscience that guides its intervention in the field of politics. Rather, the concept of a social movement refers to a changing set of social relations of protest that emerge at the heart of contemporary capitalism. These relations are developed in a way that they are unequal in their rhythms, the existence of their demands, their persistence and projection into the future, and finally, their political and ideological importance. Their common origin, if there is one, is in the fact that certain social groups under domination enter into direct or indirect conflict with the materiality of the relations of power and domination, but also with the social imaginary marked by the dynamic of valuation/devaluation. However, the "project" embodied by these mobilizations is not always explicit. Their formalization is incomplete, they are insufficiently mature, and their symbolic power is weak. (Vakaloulis, 2000)
In another part of his work, Vakaloulis compares a paradigm of antagonism with the dominant paradigm of exclusion. The conceptual elements that make it up refer to the notions of wage work, exploitation/domination, polarization and class conflict, emancipation, collectivization, movement, politicization, and anti-capitalism. Although only the latter three fall under the heading of subjective (the reference to class is on a structural level), the others are indispensable corollaries of a Marxist perspective.

Anticapitalism is usually a recognizable characteristic of the movements we can call antagonistic, but it is not a different type of defining characteristic. Such movements can be or tend to be anticapitalist, sometimes just in their practical blocking of capitalist accumulation rather than because of a clear ideology or project. Ultimately, the characteristic condition or criterion could be their anti-systemic features, counterposed to a specific systemic configuration of domination, which is indeed a capitalist one. These movements are abstractly anti-systemic, concretely anti-neoliberal, and specifically anti-extractivist, anti-particracy, and so forth. The motion of anti-systemic movements, although it comes from the world-systemic and macro-historic definition of Wallerstein (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein, 1999; Wallerstein, 2003), is grounded more in the commonsense usage in the political/intellectual debate among scholars of movements and movementists like Zibechi, Aguirre Rojas, and others. Although these were originally inspired by Wallerstein's formulation, they locate it in the short and medium term of the anti-neoliberal and anti-globalization conflict, and tend to give it a more elemental meaning.

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47 The term is used here to indicate the common features of social movements (socialist) and national ones (nationalist) in their anti-systemic sense, apart from their distinct projects, which are ideologically separated by their anticapitalist or, pardon the neologism, alter-capitalist nature. In the same way, Wallerstein unites ecology, gender, human rights, and anti-globalization movements under the same heading in the transition marked by the "revolution of 1968."
that is also reflected in the activist debate over forms of struggle against the capitalist system.\footnote{Carlos Aguirre Rojas, a Wallerstein expert, recognizes that he is giving a new, anticapitalist meaning to the term (Aguirre, 2010: 46).}

Returning to the terms of our argument, the antagonistic dynamic and moment shape the sociopolitical movement, turning it into an antagonistic movement, while subalternity and autonomy cut across the process of mobilization. In the transcendence of the antagonistic, subalternity is the base, the prior condition, the indispensable antecedent that does not melt in the heat of insubordination, but simply suspends itself and fades into the background. Autonomy as independence and experience of self-determination is exercised in the midst of conflict and struggle, just as it was exercised in the partially self-determined cases emerging from resistance, and is practiced as the immediate result and the direct projection of antagonism, as the capacity for self-determination that in turn feeds back to struggle. In the dynamic of the antagonistic movement, politicization becomes denser, mobilization accelerates, organization acquires greater structure and the process of subjectivation is radicalized. The subversion of the existing order begins on the path that originates in subaltern resistance and is projected by the vector of antagonism, but is achieved through the generalization of autonomy and the capacity for self-determination of subjects who are no longer subalterns.

**Militancy**

Turning to the concrete mediations that objectify antagonism as a concrete experience of struggle, it is necessary to highlight how militancy provides the impulse to antagonistic action. Militancy is the collective body at whose heart the militant is the
subjective unit, the atom of antagonistic movements. The sociopolitical figure of the militant has been the focus of the "sociology of militantism" (Mothé, 1973; Fillieule and Pudal, 2010; Pudal, 2011: 17-35). This academic perspective has the virtue of emphasizing a central social and political figure with suggestive theoretical and methodological inquiries and revealing empirical exercises that seek to understand commitment (engagement) and demobilization (désengagement); it analyzes individual paths, seen as vocations and as life paths, granting importance to the "biographical consequences of militancy" (Fillieule and Pudal, 2009: 163-184). However, the emphasis on individual experience in this approach neglects the collective aspect of the phenomenon; it tends to ignore the antagonistic specificity of the political figure of the militant, confusing it, in its eagerness to generalize, with the activist. Indeed, it is a perspective that centers the question of identity in the associative and community dimension without distinguishing or highlighting the place and role of conflict, antagonistic experience, insubordination, and struggle.\(^{49}\)

Militancy can and must be conceived of as a subspecies of activism, an antagonistic subspecies characterized by its specific forms of politicization, organization, and mobilization, and moved to action by an antagonistic culture that struggle helps to produce and reproduce. It is thus a notion that cannot be dissociated from its etymology, from its tenacious, combative nature. The militant is by definition antagonistic, standing out not only as a unit of combat, collective organizer, and intellectual, but also generally as the active principle of the movement, as a condensation point of its experience, memory, and

\(^{49}\) The typology of forms of militancy proposed by the French sociologist Bernard Pudal can be illustrative and useful, but his periodization is questionable, particularly his relegation of the classical figure of the total, heroic militant worker (a stereotyped one-dimensional figure lacking nuance, which fails to consider, for example, the subtype of the student militant) to the period before 1975. He then assumes not only the appearance, but also the absolute reign of other figures, like the "rewarded" militant (based on the rational cost-benefit calculation and the theory of resource mobilization) and the "distanced" militant (whose commitment is only partial), after 1995 (Pudal, 2011).
political culture, as a messenger and reproducer of emotions (Jasper, 2012) or of structures of feeling (Williams, 1988: 150). The militant contains the memory of struggles, victories, and defeats, of the conditions of subordination, of eruptions of insubordination, and of practices of self-determination. But beyond this retrospective and introspective level is a prospective one, where militancy can be thought of as the vector that orients the movement, that gives it a political orientation (what was once called the vanguard), but also in relation with that subjective solidification that that has commonly been defined through the concept of consciousness.

Subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy are not only observable analytical dimensions; they are also, from the Marxist perspective of praxis, the points of view of the subject, points of activation and of the development of consciousness. In this sense, if the whole process of subjectivation is a process of acquiring consciousness that does not exclude the factor of spontaneity, as Gramsci and Thompson, among others, emphasize, the consciousness of antagonism—the auto-recognition of antagonistic subjectivity—refers to the consciousness that emerges from the experience of conflict, of insubordination, and of struggle.

If, as Gramsci notes, contradictions continue to appear in the process of acquiring consciousness, antagonism can operate as a catharsis in the tension between subalternity and autonomy. Catharsis, according to Gramsci, is the moment when consciousness is raised to the ethical-political level, which surpasses the strictly economic moment: it is the passing from the particular to the universal, from the "objective to the subjective," and from the "need for freedom," from the structure to the superstructure, from passivity to activity,
to political praxis. Antagonistic catharsis is not only the adrenaline of political action; it also gives substance to its most structured and organized expression: to the movement and in particular to its militant centers.

**Counter-Power, Counter-Hegemony, Antagonism**

Another central feature of antagonism is its projection in the creation, construction, and consolidation of fields of power, or rather, of counter-power. This notion, which still has anarchist roots and resonances, has been reclaimed and developed in recent years by Negri and other authors with autonomist tendencies (Colectivo Situaciones et al., 2001; Benasayag and Sztulwark, 2002). According to Negri:

> When counter-power is spoken of in general, three things are actually being talked about: resistance against the old power, insurrection, and the constituent force of a new power. Resistance, insurrection, and constituent power represent the trinitarian figure of a unique essence of counter-power (2001: 83).

Negri rejects more common definitions linked to the resistance and organization of what he calls the "traditional Left" and disparages the Marxist formulations of Marx, Lenin, and Rosa Luxemburg that upheld it, forgetting to mention Gramsci and the question of the so-called duality of powers that, even when linked to revolutionary circumstances, continues to refer to a Marxist theorization of the interrelationship of forces and the formation of counter-power (Negri, 2001: 84, 89-90).

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50 Carlos Coutinho notes that for Gramsci, the factor of revolutionary catharsis is the "modern prince," that is, the party. See Carlos Nelson Coutinho, "Catharsis" (Liguori and Voza, 2009: 105-107), and Peter Thomas (2009a: 294-297).
To differentiate the notion of counter-power from the anarchist definition, Negri underscores the constructive aspect of constituent power, while, to avoid falling into a reformist institutionalism, he maintains the following:

To say it in even clearer terms: it is necessary for the activity of counter-power not to have as an objective substituting itself for existing power. On the contrary, this activity must propose different forms and expressions of the freedom of the masses. If we wish to define counter-power, within and against the current postmodern forms of power, we must strongly and continually insist on the fact that we do not want to use counter-power to conquer the old power and make ourselves out of it, but develop a new power: of life, of organization, and of production. (Negri, 2001: 88)

Here we enter into the border zone between antagonism and autonomy, between the counter-power that has emerged and is oriented toward conflict and the power (or power-to) of self-determination oriented toward emancipation. The distinction I maintain might be seen as pointless, a taxonomic distinction that is analytically irrelevant, unless we are clear that there are synchronic dimensions and diachronic sequences, that resistance and rebellion require a prior accumulation of power and produce a new configuration of that same power, one that we can call social or political.

In the case of antagonism, the increase at one pole of the power relationship implies a modification of the whole, as it is a zero-sum equation. The link between antagonism and autonomy is visualized and materializes in terms of power, accumulation of experience of

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51 This is in contrast to the notion of anti-power in Holloway, which is not clearly distinguished from anarchist thinking (Holloway, 2010).
52 This is different than Negri, who includes constituent power in counter-power just as, in Chile, he subsumes antagonism under autonomy.
insubordination and self-determination, and capacities and practices of struggle and emancipation. This construction of power is antithetical, an alternative to the dominant power. However, there is a common, valid, question: can antagonism insert itself in the existing order, in its state and state-related institutions, and subvert them?

This question has provoked a classic debate, what I would call a constitutive debate, in Marxism, with considerable expressions in Latin America, such as the one that accompanied and followed the experience of Unidad Popular, or the most recent debates on post-neoliberalism in Bolivia and other countries, between those who defend the hegemonic exercise of "progressive" forces in the government and others who defend the autonomy of struggles and social movements. This epic battle in present-day Latin America describes the conflict between the principles of hegemony and autonomy and between hegemonist and autonomist postures. The conflict polarizes a debate that, from the Marxist perspective and tradition, appears much more nuanced and complex, although there have always been extreme formulations.

A masterful summary of the underlying question can be found in an article by Lelio Basso, where he uses the concepts of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy to support the idea of a possible participation that is not subaltern, but that is antagonistic and autonomous, in various representative, parliamentary, and trade union contexts. His analysis has an anticapitalist orientation, and takes the perspective of a working-class conquest of hegemony (Basso, 1969).\footnote{I will mention here in passing that Basso's article is to my knowledge the only Marxist text that brings together and coherently compares the concepts of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy. Although he did not develop a theory of the relationship among these concepts in this or any other work, his use of them together, in a coherent way and along with the notion of hegemony, is possibly a result of his being a heterodox revolutionary socialist at the boundaries between different currents of communism and revolutionary socialism, influenced by different theorists, principally Rosa Luxemburg but also Gramsci, and being in contact with the first operaismo that emerged at the heart of the Italian Socialist party, of which he was a member.}
In connection with this wide-ranging and critical debate, Franklin Ramírez argues that the logic underlying the conceptual triad I propose tends to autonomism, to the extent that it excludes the logic of hegemony and the state.\(^5\) It should be stressed that my proposal does not pretend to be a general theory of the political process, and it thus does not exclude or stand in the way of the possibility and the necessity to rethink the question of hegemony. At the same time, among the many possible internal connections it invokes among "antagonistic configurations and hegemonic dispositions" in order to avoid a dualist impasse, it is necessary to specify which of the possible combinations would be desirable in particular historical and political moments, especially the one we are living in. In principle, one cannot ignore the relative autonomy of the process of political subjectivation, which, although it occurs in the shadow of constituted power (as shown by the persistence of subalternity), is not resolved according to its logic alone, especially when the antagonistic dimension erupts with practices of self-determination, even partial ones. It is correct that not every mediation can be classified under the heading of naked domination, since, as Ramírez notes, there are different "institutional environments," but at the same time the risk of institutions devouring the political subjectivities emerging from below cannot be avoided.

The vicissitudes in the notion of hegemony are symptomatic of the institutionalist turn of the last few decades in thinking about political action. Beginning with the Gramscian definition, but more fundamentally through the later turn of Laclau, the thinking around this concept ended up with an almost exclusive concern with the dimensions of state

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\(^5\) To paraphrase Ramírez, it tends to a normative sheltering of "the place for the deployment of the subject in terms of its own logic of political action, without considering the return of the dimension of the state over movements through a series of mediations and the possibility for subjects to participate in the game of democratic institutions" (Ramírez, 2015).
and society, in the area of structures and relations of domination. Yet without denying the value of Gramsci's extension of these ideas, its origin and deeper meaning focused on the broadening of political subjectivity—of a movement, alliance, or bloc of social forces—out of a strategy and a capacity for making connections that emerge and unfold in political conflict and face an interrelationship of forces in movement. The idea moved in the direction of institutionalization and away from subjectivation; it concerned itself more with a new exercise of political power than with a subjective potential or counter-power. In this sense, as Raymond Williams has suggested, it is necessary to "add to the concept of hegemony the concepts of counter-hegemony and alternative hegemony, which are real and persistent elements of practice" (Williams, 1977: 112-113).

As Prestipino reminds us (2013: 55), this idea about hegemony does not appear in the *Notebooks*, but it can be deduced from the following note:

Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political 'hegemonies' and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality. Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one.

(gramsci, 1971: 333)

The logic of hegemony cannot devour or make invisible the role and place of a process of counter-hegemonic construction closely linked to the development of the political subject. The perspectives can be appropriately combined to the extent that they do not negate the individual logic underlying each of them. It is only with the full unfolding and assertion of the counter-hegemonic negation that the possibility of an alternative hegemony can be
generated. Although the process is not strictly evolutionary or sequential, the popular saying applies: one cannot put the cart before the horse. In other words, it is not possible, as Gramsci suggests, to avoid the necessity of a successful war of position, by assuming that the trenches are dug not only in civil society, but also in political society—that is, in the institutions and apparatus of the state—in order to install class struggle where possible and appropriate, as Poulantzas and other theorists of the state have proposed.

With respect to the scope and outcome of transformations beyond the subjective, that is, on a systemic level, the necessary but not sufficient condition is that subjectivities emerge with anti-systemic sentiment. Their mere emergence does not guarantee generalized self-determination, which can only come about by means of a societal break that implies a profound reconfiguration of institutions and political relationships. A theory of political subjectivation centered on the principle of antagonism is thus not a complete theory of political change and transformation, as theories centered on hegemony aspire to be. Unlike Ramírez, I am not theorizing here from the autonomist premise of the "full exteriority of the subject," but thinking of autonomy as a subjective placement that tends to cross the outer limits of domination, which implies subversion based on a logical sequence that in turn implies a concrete overlap of antagonism and autonomy, which from the perspective of emancipation must articulate a new equilibrium.

Even if it is problematic, in effect I am maintaining that there is a horizon of social transformation in the idea of autonomization as a necessary but not sufficient condition for structural transformation. In other words, autonomization is necessary for transformation,

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55 This is an exteriority that alludes to the hypothesis of exodus or flight, to the idea of exit and fully autonomous survival, whether in conflict or not, outside the system of domination. Among the many objections to this thesis that could be raised from a Marxist perspective, there are the classic responses of Marx and Engels to the idea of cooperativism as an anticapitalist alternative that would not require a revolutionary break—or, in the terms of the present argument, autonomy without antagonism.
as a means with instrumental value, but at the same time it is an end, a value in itself, even if it does not succeed in bringing about this transformation while it consolidates itself as counter-power within the logic of resistance, and does not fully overcome the condition of subalternity. From another perspective, it can also be maintained that the development and establishment of counter-power involve not only a subjective transformation, but also a structural one, even if it is, to use Gramsci's expression, a molecular one. In this sense, returning to the question of counter-hegemony in spite of its problematic nature, I agree with what Ramírez attributes to me:

The constitutive antagonism of revolutionary politics thus determines the subject's specific political point of view and allows for a distancing from whatever articulating logic that situates its instituting capacity solely around the force and practice of the state machinery. Seen in this manner, antagonism attempts to maintain the subject's self-determination over time and avoid its dilution outside the sphere of the social. The subject is drawn neither into specific political forms nor into disputes over the ideological orientation of the state apparatus. It resists these, it de-constructs them, it breaks their hegemony without trying to become hegemonic. In sum, it asserts in a permanent way the underlying layer of non-domination. Therein lies the fundamental sign of the meaning of political change through autonomous antagonism: to reserve a place for the unfolding of the subject in terms of its own logic of political action. (Ramírez, 2015: 42-43)

It remains only to add that what I have previously argued about the labor, potential, and scope of counter-hegemony seen in the process of subjectivation also applies, where there is sufficient force, to the construction and affirmation of an alternative hegemony.
IV. Subalternization and Passive Revolution

Does the conception of the "passive revolution" have a "present" significance? Are we in a period of "restoration-revolution" to be permanently consolidated, to be organised ideologically, to be exalted lyrically?

Antonio Gramsci

In this chapter I will sketch out a line of analysis focused on the Gramscian concept of "passive revolution" and the related concepts of Caesarism and transformism. My purpose is to sharpen the theoretical tools for identifying and characterizing a series of processes and projects of demobilization that are frequently deployed and implemented from above, in antithesis to the antagonistic and autonomous dynamics that are activated and fed by the processes of political subjectivation. Although these processes and projects are not strictly de-subjectivizing, since the subject persists, anchored in resistance, they drive a (re)subalternization and tend to deactivate, demobilize, and passivize, reducing the spaces for antagonism and autonomy. As we shall see, these are reactive, reactionary processes that respond, as counter-tendency and antithesis, to the emergence of antagonistic movements at the heart of the subaltern classes. Faced with the emergence of the antagonistic principle, the counter-tendency towards subalternity inevitably arises because, as Antonio Gramsci notes, "subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up" (Gramsci, 1971: 55).56

The genealogical primacy of the antagonistic principle is key to an understanding of the forms and logic of passive revolution: its origins, objectives, and development;

56 The converse is also true, in the vein of Mario Tronti's insight about the inverted sign between capitalist development and workers' struggles, taking the latter as a starting point for any capitalist response or adjustment (Tronti, 2001: 93).
conversely, passive revolution allows us to appreciate the limits of antagonism and its possible diversion into the labyrinths of subalternity. The potential of passive revolution as a concept for historical analysis has been confirmed by the numerous and diverse applications for which it has been utilized. More problematic is its use as a key for the interpretation of phenomena in progress or taking place in the open scenarios of the present. However, assuming that a passive revolution is simultaneously a process and a project, it is possible and pertinent to locate this analysis not only retrospectively in the past, but also in the present. A passive revolution, and the tense combination of progressive and regressive elements that characterize it, can be recognized in the moment, in a specific evaluation that allows us to identify and characterize political projects in process, and not only under the retrospective lens of historical analysis.57

The utility of fine-tuning the Gramscian conceptual arsenal thus centers not so much on the need to restore its philological clarity, but on sharpening its analytical edge for understanding a series of phenomena and political processes of the past and present. Beginning with Gramsci's ideas and taking them further, we can move from the textuality of the origin and development of the concept of passive revolution towards a categorical construction with a broader scope, in a meta-theoretical exercise that strengthens the use of the category as well as its application in the analysis of contemporary processes.

To this end, I will elaborate two closely related theses. The first argues that in the analysis and interpretation of the concept of passive revolution, the dimension—more specifically, the criterion—of passivity is crucial, since it expresses Gramsci's concern with subalternity, though this idea has not received sufficient attention. The second thesis asserts

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57 Luisa Mangoni argues that Gramsci gestures in this direction: "Passive revolution is no longer solely a model for historical interpretation, or a general criterion of political science, but an instrument for the understanding of processes in action" (Mangoni, 1987:579).
that if we assume Gramsci's concept of progress to have a political and subjective aspect, it is possible and relevant to apply to it the duality "progressive/regressive," which he uses to differentiate types of Caesarism, with a view to distinguishing passive revolutions with distinct orientations. In other words, I maintain a subjectivist reading of the concept of passive revolution, in which passivity, understood as an element and factor of subalternity, acquires weight and centrality in the configuration and scope of the concept. This reading serves at the same time as a key to understanding the connection between passive revolution and the related concepts of transformism and Caesarism, opening the door to a possible distinction between progressive and regressive passive revolutions.

Coordinates of the Concept of Passive Revolution

The concept of passive revolution, coined by Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*, has been the object of several specific studies that consider and emphasize its value and scope within the Gramscian conceptual framework and its application to the history of the Italian Risorgimento (Voza, 2004, Mena, 2011, De Felice, 1988, Thomas, 2009b). With these studies as a starting point, my interest is in examining the possibility of synthesizing the constituent elements of Gramsci's concept, beginning with his commentaries in the *Notebooks*, with a view to outlining a general operative concept that is precise and flexible enough to be applied to historical processes from different periods, including the present.

The possibility of applying this concept to our period is supported by the progressively broader use of the notion that Gramsci himself employed in the *Notebooks*. Gramsci's idea, which he borrowed from the historian Vincenzo Cuoco, is initially sketched out and used to formulate a critical reading of a fundamental period in Italian history: the Risorgimento (Gramsci, 1981-1999, vol. 2, C 4, §57: 216-217). He then used it as a key to
the era of "reaction-overcoming" of the French Revolution, meaning the conservative anti-Jacobin and anti-Napoleonic reaction (Gramsci, 1981-1999, vol. 1, C 1, §150: 189).

Nineteenth-century European history seemed to him to be an era of passive revolution (Gramsci, 1981-1999, vol. 4, C 10, vol 1: 114). Finally—and not by chance, as the analogy is obvious—Gramsci extended the concept to his own period, applying it both to Italian fascism and to the New Deal in the U.S., which he identifies as reactions and responses to the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution. Two places, so far apart and with such dissimilar political regimes, share similar modernizing impulses, one through fascist corporativism and the other through Fordist industrialism, both employing state planning to rationalize the economy and society (Gramsci, 1981-1999, vol. 3, C 8, §236: 344).

With this application to another historical period, Gramsci claims, the concept reaches the level of an interpretive criterion "of every epoch characterised by complex historical upheavals" (Gramsci, 1971: 114). Following Gramsci, we can proceed from the generalizing potential of the concept, the possible theoretical extension that Gramsci has already begun. After assessing its analytical and interpretive elasticity, we shall see its constitutive coordinates, just as they appear in the *Notebooks*.

"Passive revolution" first appears as a synonym for "revolution without a revolution" (Gramsci, 1971: 59), which from the start clearly defines the ambiguity and contradiction at the heart of the concept and its descriptive/analytical scope. The concept seeks to provide an account of an unequal and dialectical combination of two tensions, tendencies, or moments: restoration and renovation, preservation and transformation, or as Gramsci himself puts it, "conservation-innovation" (1981-1999, vol. 3, C 8, §39: 238). It is

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58 In C 1, §44, Gramsci writes of "revolution without revolution"; only later does he add "or passive revolution." Not until C 4, §57 does the concept appear, in an explicit reference to Cuoco.
important to recognize two levels of interpretation here: the first recognizes the coexistence or simultaneity of both tendencies, which does not preclude the possibility that on a second level one tendency may become determining and characteristic of the process or cycle. Indeed, Gramsci explicitly characterizes passive revolution in dialectical terms.\(^59\) It refers to a historical phenomenon that was relatively frequent and characteristic in the nineteenth century, and that lends itself to the interpretation of other periods with a similar combination of factors: the 1920s and 1930s. Gramsci formulates its fundamental elements in a crucial passage in the *Notebooks*:

One would say that both Quinet's "revolution-restoration" and Cuoco's "passive revolution" express the historical fact that popular initiative is missing from the development of Italian history, as well as the fact that "progress" occurs as the reaction of the dominant classes to the sporadic and incoherent rebelliousness of the popular masses—a reaction consisting of "restorations" that agree to some part of the popular demands and are therefore "progressive restorations," or "revolution-restorations," or even "passive revolutions." (Gramsci, 2007: 3:252)\(^60\)

The equivalences can be read less as synonyms than as vital nuances of distinction, insofar as they introduce another antithetical concept, restoration, to that of revolution, and

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\(^{59}\) "The retort will be made that this was not understood by Gioberti or the theoreticians of the passive revolution or 'revolution-restoration' either, but in fact their case is a different one. Their theoretical 'incomprehension' expressed in practice the necessity for the 'thesis' to achieve its full development, up to the point where it would even succeed in incorporating a part of the antithesis itself—in order, that is, not to allow itself to be 'transcended' in the dialectical opposition. The thesis alone in fact develops to the full its potential for struggle, up to the point where it absorbs even the so-called representatives of the antithesis: it is precisely in this that the passive revolution or revolution-restoration consists" (Gramsci, 1971: 109-110).

\(^{60}\) The second draft (Gerrantana's Text C) reads as follows: "It remains to be seen if Quinet's formulations can be brought together with Cuoco's passive revolution; both assuredly express the historical fact of the absence of a united popular initiative in the development of Italian history and also that this development was verifiably a reaction of the ruling classes to the sporadic, elemental, inorganic subversiveness of the popular masses, with 'restorations' that incorporated certain elements of the demands from below. Thus, 'progressive restorations' or 'revolution-restorations' or even 'passive revolutions' " (Gramsci, 1981-1999, vol. 4, C 10, §41, C: 205).
another differentiating criterion, progressiveness (which we shall return to), in a much more obvious and determining way when Gramsci attempts to define the idea of Caesarism. Moving beyond this approximation through synonyms and equivalences, Gramsci ultimately settles on "passive revolution," as this expression expresses most clearly the sense he wishes to stress. He chooses the word "revolution," with all the polemical baggage it carries, in a broad, descriptive, non-political, and non-ideological sense, and the adjective "passive," to clearly distinguish this specific modality of revolution, characterized not by an effective, subversive (antagonistic) movement of the subaltern classes, but by a ruling-class counter-movement. This counter-movement drives a set of objective transformations marking a significant discontinuity and important but limited changes, strategically oriented toward guaranteeing the stability of the fundamental relations of domination.

Conservative Modernization

The understanding of the noun "revolution" refers mainly to the content and extent of the transformation, as can be inferred from the term "revolution without revolution," which Gramsci adopts as equivalent to "passive revolution": revolutionary transformation without revolutionary upheaval, social revolution, the protagonism of the subaltern classes, or antagonism. The essence of the revolutionary and/or restorative content of passive revolutions refers to the combined dose of renewal and conservation, and gives an account of the most structural aspect of the formulation and characterization of historical phenomena: the class content of political action undertaken by the dominant classes. To what extent do these revolutions reproduce or restore the already existing order, or otherwise modify it in order to preserve it? How far do they "incorporate parts of popular
demands”? How many, and which parts? Finally, anticipating a question that I will develop below: how progressive or regressive are these actions?

The possible variations are multiple, but confined by two limits: the passive revolution is not a radical revolution in the style of the Jacobin or Bolshevik revolutions, and the restoration is not a total restoration or complete re-establishment of the status quo. Gramsci writes: "The problem is to see whether in the dialectic 'revolution-restoration' it is revolution or restoration which predominates; for it is certain that in the movement of history there is never any turning back, and that restorations in toto do not exist" (Gramsci, 1971: 219-220).

Although the concept of passive revolution refers to the analysis of a political resolution in the superstructure, in the cases of fascism and Fordism it refers explicitly to a capitalist consolidation by means of anti-cyclical state intervention into economic life. The double sense in Gramsci's description of statism in a period of passive revolution as "forms of governing the masses and governing the economy" is apt: it is an expanded state that includes civil society and seeks to control the relations of production and the planned development of productive forces (which, I would add, could also apply to the Soviet Union of those years). In fact, state intervention is undertaken as a progressive element, oriented toward planning "in a comprehensive sense," with an emphasis on "cooperation and socialization of production without impinging on individual and group appropriation of profits (or being limited merely to regulation and control)."

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61 I mean this in a positive sense, where the principle of "planning" refers to rationality. Whether Gramsci might have thought of the Soviet Union as an example of passive revolution is a matter of controversy and interpretation, since he does not directly address the question.

62 "The ideological hypothesis could be presented in the following terms: that there is a passive revolution involved in the fact that—through the legislative intervention of the State, and by means of the corporative organisation—relatively far-reaching modifications are being introduced into the country's economic structure in order to accentuate the 'plan of production' element; in other words, that socialisation and co-operation in
Passive revolution would be verified in the "reformist" conversion of an individualistic economic structure into a planned (directed) economy, and the advent of a "intermediate economy" between the pure individualist and comprehensively planned types, permitting a step towards more advanced political and cultural forms without radical and destructive cataclysms with an exterminating model (Gramsci, vol. 3, C 8, §236: 344).

On the structural level, the revolutionary is associated with state-directed modernization; it is measured in terms of the process of reforms and reformist projects, and limited by the "dialectic between conservation and innovation" (vol. 4, C 10, §41: 205) that achieves transformations only through a process of "reformist corrosion" (vol. 4, C 10, §9: 129).

With respect to its dynamic and political form, Gramsci argues that the conservative modernization implicit in all passive revolutions is directed from above. "Above" refers here as much to the subjective level of the dominant class initiative as to the instrumental exercise of that initiative through state institutions; the position or moment of the state appears, on a tactical level, to be crucial to compensate for the relative weakness of the dominant classes, which resort to a series of "defensive" measures that combine coercion and consent. Employing the distinction between regressive and progressive passive revolutions that I will develop below, it could be argued that there is more coercion than consent, more dictatorship than hegemony in the case of fascism, and vice versa in the case of the New Deal. The fact that Gramsci creates an original concept using the terms "revolution" and "passivity" suggests that he did not intend to highlight dictatorial or coercive characteristics, even given his tendency to recognize and highlight the legitimation

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the sphere of production are being increased, without however touching (or at least not going beyond the regulation and control of) individual and group appropriation of profit" (Gramsci, 1971: 119-120).
of the process and its hegemonic characteristics. This is true even when he questions the hegemonic scope of fascism and the New Deal, calling into question the "epoch-making" capacity of these political projects. He appears to point to a form of domination based on the ability to promote conservative reforms disguised as "revolutionary" transformations—conservative modernization—and to maintain the passive consensus of the subaltern classes. The question of progressiveness is first outlined in structural terms related to the understanding of the noun "revolution," but at the same time it is rooted directly in political struggle, in the correlation of forces and in the initiative of the dominant classes since, as Gramsci writes, "progress takes place as a reaction of the dominant classes to the sporadic and inorganic subversiveness of the popular masses" (1981-1999, vol. 3, C 8, §25: 231).

Passivity and Subalternity

Once the ambiguous and contradictory content of the process has been located on the structural level, and the state identified as the superstructure through which this process is driven, we should note that Gramsci's concept is focused clearly and principally on the form of the revolutionary, which has direct implications for the questions of subjectivity, of subversion as an act, and of the historical tension between subordination and insubordination in the processes of subjectivization, mobilization, and political action of the subaltern classes. The notion of passivity aims at this focal point, in its allusion both to the subordination of the subaltern classes and to its counterpart: the initiative and ability of the dominant classes to reinforce the continuity of a hierarchical order through reform of the structures and relations of domination. It is a concept that not only leaves behind the revolution-conservation dichotomy, but also introduces the anti-economistic and anti-
catastrophist idea that the dominant classes can resolve situations of crisis, that they have room for political action that enables them to reconfigure their lost hegemony.

In Notebook 15, Gramsci links the concept of passive revolution with that of a war of position, even suggesting a possible "identification" between the two, which leads to the idea of such a revolution as a specific form of constructing hegemony. He notes:

One may apply to the concept of passive revolution (documenting it from the Italian Risorgimento) the interpretative criterion of molecular changes which in fact progressively modify the pre-existing composition of forces, and hence become the matrix of new changes. (Gramsci, 1971: 109)

In this sense, passive revolution is the historical expression of specific relationships of forces and, at the same time, a factor which modifies them. Passive revolution is always a reactive movement from above, a "counter-coup," which implies, subordinates, and subsumes the existence of prior action from below, without necessarily leading to the dichotomous simplification of revolution-counterrevolution. The two poles suggested by Gramsci are much more nuanced; they have a dialectical relationship.

The dialectical tension between the passive and active is quite clear, as Gramsci considered passive revolution in light of the paradigm of active revolution, or an "anti-passive revolution" (Buci, 1979: 228), and thought of the war of position in opposition to the paradigms of the war of maneuver and of permanent revolution. 63 Thus, we must not lose sight of the idea that, according to Gramsci, the concept

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63 And even when he pointed to the key era of the relationship between the war of maneuver and passive revolution, he did not rule out the possibility of a return to a period in which the paradigm would again be a war of maneuver: "Or at least does there exist, or can there be conceived, an entire historical period in which the two concepts must be considered identical—until the point at which the war of position once again becomes a war of manoeuvre?" (Gramsci, 1971: 108).
continues to be dialectical; in other words it presupposes, or rather, postulates as necessary, a vigorous antithesis [in order to avoid] the dangers of historical defeatism, of indifferentism, because the general approach can lead to fatalism.


The adjective "passive" is descriptive with respect to the form the process acquires, but it is also prescriptive, consistent with the conservative aim behind passive revolutions—the absence of action and the project of passivization—and as a sine qua non condition for avoiding an active revolution, a revolution with revolution. This accords with Gramsci's interest in the relative passivity of the subaltern classes in the period of mobilization and politicization after the First World War, particularly with the attention he pays to the contradiction between the antagonistic activation of the masses and their subsequent return to the passivity and subalternity of the 1930s. Gramsci does not explicitly define the notion of passivity in the Notebooks, but he does reflect, in a general and unfocused way, on the tension/contradiction between the active and passive within the framework of subalternity. Indeed, Gramsci recognizes the sporadic and inorganic action of subalterns, and he points to their lack of autonomous action in passive revolution.

Passive revolution can thus be understood, in Gramscian terms, as a subaltern revolution, or rather, a subalternizing one, leading back to the condition of subalternity: a revolution of re-subalternization. Even if the terms do not refer to identical situations, we should keep in mind that subalternity includes a passive dimension, of acceptance of the condition of subordination, and an active dimension, connected to the action of resistance. There is a tendency to passivity that coexists with tendencies towards action, antagonism, and autonomy (Modonesi, 2014: 20-23). In this sense, the evocation of passivity refers to the passive aspect of the notion of subalternity, which is, by the way, linked to the
etymological origin of the concept, which expresses subordination and subjection.

Subalternty from Gramsci onwards has been enriched with active, subjective properties, to the point of being transformed, for the current I call subalternist (Modonesi 2014: 23), into meaning a subject in action, a resisting subject.

It is clear that Gramsci refers to passivity as a relative or possibly predominant phenomenon, since absolute passivity, we can surely agree, does not exist; there are always elements that swim against the current, and passive revolutions seek out and obtain certain levels and grades of "active," not only passive, consent. Indeed, there is subaltern activity that is distinct from resistance, fostered from above to generate an "active consent," or, to use non-Gramscian terms, a controlled mobilization with the corresponding experiential impact on subjectivization, which is limited but not irrelevant, as it involves levels and degrees of subaltern activation.

With all these caveats, reading the adjective "passive" in light of Gramsci's characterization of the subaltern lends weight to the concept of passive revolution. Indeed, in spite of "passive" not receiving as much attention as "revolution" from Gramsci, or even in later Gramscian studies, I consider that the adjective holds as much importance, and is deserving of as much attention, as the noun.

With respect to the origin of passive revolution, Gramsci notes, as we have already seen, that it is a reaction of the dominant classes to the "sporadic and incoherent rebelliousness of the popular masses," a reaction that "agree[s] to some part of the popular demands." At the start of the process, then, is action from below, although it may be limited and disunited: the defeat of a revolutionary uprising or, in a more precise sense, a failed attempt, the inability of the subaltern classes to sustain a revolutionary project (whether Jacobin or from below, according to the emphases found in different passages of the
Notebooks). But it is action that is capable of hinting at a movement that is threatening or that calls into question the hierarchical order. Indeed, even though the impulse from below is not sufficient for a revolutionary rupture, it is enough to provoke or oblige a reaction from above that imposes certain substantial changes, in addition to apparent ones, and satisfies and incorporates some of the demands.

In a recent book, Alberto Burgio asks why Gramsci defined as revolutions what should by his own logic be considered merely reactionary processes of stabilization, given that only the passive revolutions of the nineteenth century, and not those of the twentieth, were "true" revolutions that realized a historical transition (Burgio, 2014: 259, 266). His response is that Gramsci associated these processes based on their shared passivity rather than on their differences. I would agree, were it not for Burgio arguing, immediately afterwards, that the question of the different macrohistorical effects of similar processes is "much more important" (Burgio, 2014: 261). In this sense, Burgio points out a contradiction in Gramsci's thinking, that he sees passivity as a general criterion connecting divergent phenomena and confuses them, thus obscuring the central problem of the concept of revolution, which for Burgio lies on the other side of the equation. I would argue that the glass is half empty: the potentially more solid, stable, and convincing aspect of the definition is, in fact, the element of passivity. However, Gramsci leaves this element insufficiently developed, causing the definition of the concept and its interpretations to become one-sided.

A careful examination of the definition of passive revolution bears out Burgio's observation that the adjective "passive" denotes a revolution that is "endured by subjects

64 These are characterized by a number of elements that the author derives from Gramsci’s reflections on Caesarism: balance of forces, irreducible conflict between capital and labor, reciprocal obstruction, totalitarian and catastrophic confrontation, and an attempt to contain the organic crisis.
that in principle should protagonize it, and directed by those who should oppose it"
(Burgio, 2014: 248). For Burgio, passivity in Gramsci is synonymous with "backwardness and weakness," which implies ineffectiveness on the macrohistorical level (Burgio, 2014: 254). However, as we have seen, for Gramsci passivity clearly cannot be reduced to a strategic/political question of the revolutionary path, although it does include that question. It refers ultimately, to the profundity of the political/cultural roots of the authority/obedience relationship, to hegemony in all its complexity, to the relationship of forces expressed as class struggle, as an intersubjective dynamic of societal implications. Even though Gramsci did not explicitly define the principle of passivity, it is associated, is interwoven with, and is logically derived from the concept of the subaltern, which he developed in parallel, without explicitly linking the two.

And indeed, Burgio quite rightly adds, "the determining fact is the lack of conflictivity" (2014: 251). Not the simple tactical and strategic conflictivity of game theory, but that which is experienced subjectively: conflictivity as an active pole, as an indicator of activation, of processes of political subjectivization, even if these are relegated to subalternity and the narrow margins for resistance under subordination. This subjective dimension is related to the analysis of particular circumstances, but it acquires the status of a historical/political construction in the longer term, where the phenomena of passive revolutions are included.

Burgio's analysis, however, is trapped in the short and medium term when he notes that "the feature that interests [Gramsci] most is the responsibility of the opposing forces" (Burgio, 2014: 261), particularly the political leadership and that of socialist-reformist trade unions, and the weakness that permits the dominant classes to continue directing these processes. Certainly, Gramsci does refer to the "immaturity of the progressive forces"
(1971: 211), and he does offer criticism of the leading groups, but at the same time his idea of weakness, being macrohistorical, is fundamentally linked to subalternity and to the broadest strokes of the historical processes through which socio-political subjectivities are forged and confront one another.

Burgio's argument notwithstanding, the question of the passivity of the masses must be problematized. Is it only the cause or also a consequence of passive revolutions? As mentioned above, Gramsci dedicates more ink to reflections about the scope and limits of revolutionary character than to the forms of passivization that accompany, produce, and reproduce subalternity, given their functionality in the reconfiguration of hegemony. Thus, in a literal reading, the idea of passivity as a result, as a specific historical product of passive revolution, does not stand out. At the same time, in Gramsci's political logic and reasoning it is clear that passive revolutions seek to prevent the masses from becoming or continuing to be active, or that they become protagonists. Concessions serve to produce passivity: the conservative result is achieved thanks to passivity as a condition that accompanies the process and sanctions its political success. This, in effect, is the objective at the origin of passive revolutions, understood as processes but also as projects of passivization and subalternization.65 The project/program of the passive revolution is accomplished as a process when it succeeds at deactivation, passivization, and subalternization.

While the activity of the masses or the threat of such66 is always the factor that impels passive revolution, a certain level of passivity (subalternity) is also necessary to

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65 Gramsci clarifies that the concept of passive revolution is, for Marxism, "a criterion or canon of interpretation," and not a program, as it would be for the bourgeoisie (and for their intellectuals, Benedetto Croce above all). In this sense he explicitly recognizes its dimension as a project.

66 Given that an organic crisis can also take place at the heart of bourgeois domination.
impede an active revolution and clear the path for a passive one, which is presented as a project and process of passivization, always relative but predominant, even if it ultimately incorporates forms of controlled mobilization. Passivity/passivization is thus the fundamental objective of the project; it is both cause and condition of the realization of the process, its most important consequence, in terms of shifting the balance of forces in favor of the dominant classes. It is, in a word, the desired result achieved by means of the projects and processes of passive revolution.

Devices of Passivization: Caesarism and Transformism

We can reinforce this initial conceptualization of passivity as a defining criterion of passive revolutions by means of by understanding the categories of transformism and Caesarism as devices that make them viable, that is, as mechanisms that make viable the processes of passivization that accompany and characterize all passive revolutions. These two concepts have received much less attention than that of passive revolution itself (Liguori and Voza, 2009: 123-125, 860-862; Burgio, 2014). They appear less often in the Notebooks, as they have less theoretical and interpretive weight, and Gramsci does not grant them the status of "interpretive canon." As I shall argue below, they are subsidiary to the concept of passive revolution.

Indeed, the category of passive revolution seems to be of a general order in relation to more specific or particular mechanisms such as transformism and Caesarism (Burgio, 2007: 82). Both devices are, in my view, subsidiaries of the general process of passive revolution, as they operationalize, that is to say they make operative, both its revolutionary dimension and its passive counterpart. There is a broad consensus around the idea that the concept of transformism complements the theoretical framework of passive revolution,
insofar as both concepts arise and are used by Gramsci to understand the Italian Risorgimento. With the neologism "transformism," Gramsci denotes a process of "molecular" drift that strengthens the dominant classes through a gradual seepage (absorption), a co-optation or voluntary transfer of strength from the subaltern classes. Put another way, a weakening of the subaltern sphere can occur through abandonment or betrayal by sectors that opportunistically transform their political convictions and change sides. Transformism appears then as a form, a device linked to passive revolution to the extent that it modifies the relationship of forces in the form of molecular seepage of forces and power toward a project for domination in the interest of guaranteeing passivity and promoting the demobilization of subaltern classes. All passive revolutions are supported by transformist processes, although not all transformism corresponds to a passive revolution.

More problematic, and therefore more fertile, is the association between the concept of passive revolution and Caesarism. Without separating it from Bonapartism, Gramsci

67 The following passage from the Notebooks is the most significant in this regard: "Indeed one might say that the entire State life of Italy from 1848 onwards has been characterised by transformism—in other words by the formation of an ever more extensive ruling class, within the framework established by the Moderates after 1848 and the collapse of the neo-Guelph and federalist utopias. The formation of this class involved the gradual but continuous absorption, achieved by methods which varied in their effectiveness, of the active elements produced by allied groups—and even of those which came from antagonistic groups and seemed irreconcilably hostile. In this sense political leadership became merely an aspect of the function of domination—in as much as the absorption of the enemies' élites means their decapitation, and annihilation often for a very long time. It seems clear from the policies of the Moderates that there can, and indeed must, be hegemonic activity even before the rise to power, and that one should not count only on the material force which power gives in order to exercise an effective leadership. It was precisely the brilliant solution of these problems which made the Risorgimento possible, in the form in which it was achieved (and with its limitations)—as 'revolution' without a 'revolution,' or as 'passive revolution' to use an expression of Cuoco's in a slightly different sense from that which Cuoco intended" (Gramsci, 1971: 58-59)


69 He thus accepts and incorporates all its theoretical implications. Indeed, in various passages in the Notebooks the concepts Bonapartism and Caesarism appear to be used synonymously. On the evolution of the concept of Bonapartism, see, in addition to Marx and Engels’ classic texts, Volpi (1985). I would point out here that Trotsky, setting aside the differences in their perspectives, has a concern similar to Gramsci’s, though he does not develop it: he recognizes a progressive variant of Bonapartism and questions the criterion of activity/passivity of the masses. In a text written in 1939 (but published in 1946), Trotsky described the regime of Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico as "Bonapartism sui generis." See “Nationalised industry and Workers’
broadens the ordinary meaning of the concept of Caesarism to introduce a significant
nuance, through an explicit distinction between progressive and regressive modalities.
Following the intuitions of Marx, Gramsci assumes that in the face of a "catastrophic
equilibrium," Caesarism offers an "arbitration" bound up with a "great personality," but
suggests that this transitory escape route "does not always have the same historical
significance." Caesarism is progressive when its intervention helps the progressive force to
triumph, even if victory comes with certain accommodations and compromises; it is
regressive when its intervention helps the regressive force to win (Gramsci, 1971: 219).
The distinction becomes more complex and finely-grained when Gramsci introduces the
criteria "qualitative" and "quantitative," assuming that in some cases, like that of Napoleon
I, "a passage from one type of state to another" is taken, "a passage in which the
innovations were so numerous, and of such a nature, that they represented a complete
revolution"; while in the case of Napoleon III there was only an "'evolution' of the same
type along unbroken lines" (Gramsci, 1971: 222). It is also worth noting that in a
comment on the Dreyfusard movement, Gramsci speaks of "reactionary" Caesarism and
distinguishes between absolutely progressive Caesarism and relatively progressive
Caesarism (Gramsci, 1971: 223).
The connection between the concepts of passive revolution and Caesarism is visible at various points of contact. They are concepts in which the same variables intersect, variables which speak to the heart of Gramsci’s political and theoretical concerns as a reflection of his critical Marxism, in which structure and action are two intersecting fields of reflection, each cultivating analytic perspectives that weave together in different moments of his thinking and finally converge, flow together, and culminate in a strategic observation on the subject and political action. Even though Gramsci moves between historical, political, and political-strategic levels of conceptualization, the formal distinctions between these concepts should not distract us from the totalizing character of the intention, which is to say that it articulates or, to use a Gramscian notion, that it is susceptible to translation. Although the concept of passive revolution is conceived in historical terms, Caesarism seems to be of a political-strategic order, on the level of political science and the war of position. The question of hegemony is the connecting thread that unites them: an interpretive connection regarding the historical and political past and present, which Gramsci adopts as a horizon of visibility and reflection in terms of the philosophy of praxis. It is true that Gramsci explicitly notes that Caesarism is a more theoretical ("formal," "geometric") concept, applicable to various periods, linked to the theorization of the relationship between forces and the hypothesis of a catastrophic equilibrium, but this concept, unlike those of passive revolution and transformism, does not appear to require the existence of hegemony, or a specific form of hegemony. Although the

between the conflicting forces—both incapable in their respective camps of giving autonomous expression to a will for reconstruction" (Gramsci, 1971: 223).

72 Burgio maintains that they are "twin" categories whose fundamental difference is that the latter does not include a characterization of the processes of modernization and the former is not based on the relationship between leader and masses (Burgio, 2014: 267).

73 “Besides, Caesarism is a polemical-ideological formulation and not a canon of historical interpretation," (Gramsci, 1971: 220).
Historicism of the concept of passive revolution seems to distance it from the theoreticism of Caesarism, as it is generalized in the *Notebooks* it becomes more abstract and theoretical, and is no longer so distinct. Finally, even conceding the necessity and utility of maintaining a distinction for the purposes of a subtle Gramscian reading, from a more flexible perspective, their points of connection provide a means to connect historical interpretation and political theory as analytical instruments suitable for concrete processes.⁷⁴

Returning to our focus on the criterion of passivity and the principle of subalternity, Gramsci directly invokes a characteristic element of Caesarism when he remarks that "catastrophic equilibrium" could be the result of insurmountable organic limits at the heart of the ruling class, or momentary political expediencies, that produce a crisis of domination and not a maturation or strengthening of the subaltern classes (Gramsci, 1981-1999, vol. 5, C 13, §27: 67); this idea has a logical connection with the "sporadic and inorganic" nature of popular struggles as a fundamental element in the emergence of a passive revolution.

In addition, the concept of Caesarism alludes indirectly to passivity, since the emergence and centrality of Gramsci's "great heroic personality" fulfills a specific political function in a context of catastrophic impasse. In particular, this charismatic figure is able to make viable and drive a passive revolution operating as an equilibrating factor between classes, between conservative and reformist tendencies, and as a factor of passivization, especially in channeling popular demands and demagogically assuming the delegated role of representing the interests of the subaltern classes.⁷⁵ Caesarism thus operates by filling a

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⁷⁴ At a formal level, there is a difference that should be pointed out: if in the definition of passive revolution the two terms dialectically configure a contradiction, Gramsci opts for another definition of Caesarism, in which the dialectical tension between the tendencies is located in the adjective when there is a disjunction between two possibilities.

⁷⁵ Even though Caesarism is a concept that Gramsci utilizes as a synonym for Bonapartism, it is necessary to clarify the extent to which his interest in the question of charisma was inspired by his reading of Weber and Michels. However, it is evident that Gramsci's definition distances itself from a meaning of the concept based
void and replacing forces or classes capable of propelling a hybrid process of modernization that ends up coinciding with the ambiguity of the conservation-transformation content (conservative modernization) of the passive revolution and, in terms of form, passivizes and subalternizes by means of the delegation of power and distorted representation of the charismatic phenomenon itself.  

In sum, the criterion of passivity expressed in the formula of passive revolution appears to be implicitly contained within the Caesarist logic of delegation to a charismatic figure. The connection between the two concepts is evident on the other side of the formula when Gramsci, attempting to clarify the progressive/regressive distinction, recalls the criterion of the "revolution-restoration' dialectic," the same criterion that characterizes the ambiguity typical of passive revolutions. In this sense, "progressive" would be to "revolution" what "regressive" is to "restoration." The reference to the dialectic alludes to the analytical procedure implied by the recognition of uneven combinations of progressive and regressive elements—combinations within which it is possible to distinguish proportions and measures and to conclude by finding one element to be determining or dominant. All Caesarism would therefore be simultaneously progressive and regressive—

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strictly on personality when he maintains that in the era of mass organizations (parties and unions) there could be a "Caesarist solution without Caesar," without a heroic personality, through these organizations, by parliamentary means, or through coalitions, and that Caesarism tends to operate through policing rather than militarism, through social and political control mechanisms more than repression (Gramsci, 1981-1999, vol 4, C 9, §133: 102-103; vol 5, C 13, §27: 65-68).

76 This is true even though we have to take into account the positive value that charisma often provides in terms of organizing and results, as Hernán Ovüña remarks in a comment on this passage. Here I share his explanation, since it contains a suggestive working hypothesis: "On certain occasions it means that the Modern Prince is not embodied in instances of collective organization, but rather in 'charismatic' personas. In some Latin American processes, for better or worse, as a reality and not as a political position or desire, I believe, contrary to what Gramsci argues in his notes, that this Prince unifying the subaltern classes has been embodied in concrete subjects, rather than in collectives, but as a synthesis of collective projects. This is one of the most problematic points, least investigated by Gramsci, which I feel to be important to explore from a neo-Gramscian perspective."
indeed, Gramsci mentions in passing the possibility of "intermediate forms"—although a single element tends to predominate and give a name to the phenomenon.

Even if all passive revolutions are winnowed in the progressive/regressive tension, not all lead to the Caesarist form, which, we should recognize, is a device, a possible resource, that is so recurrent as to constantly be imposing itself. Technically, however, not all passive revolutions emerge from the typical Caesarist "catastrophic equilibrium," even if it is evident that they are an attempt to resolve an impasse in the relationship of domination, to avoid its disruption, to contain the action of the subaltern classes, even when they are present in inorganic and sporadic form and are thus an attempt to break a deadlock, to avoid or prevent a situation of evenly-matched class forces. We can find this nuance of distinction expressed with great clarity in the following passage:

And the content is the crisis of the ruling class's hegemony, which occurs either because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses (war, for example), or because huge masses (especially of peasants and petit-bourgeois intellectuals) have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution. . . . The traditional ruling class, which has numerous trained cadres, changes men and programmes and, with greater speed than is achieved by the subordinate classes, reabsorbs the control that was slipping from its grasp. Perhaps it may make sacrifices, and expose itself to an uncertain future by demagogic promises; but it retains power, reinforces it for the time being, and uses it to crush its adversary and disperse his leading cadres, who cannot be very numerous or highly trained. . . . When the crisis does not find this organic
solution, but that of the charismatic leader, it means that a static equilibrium exists (whose factors may be disparate, but in which the decisive one is the immaturity of the progressive forces); it means that no group, neither the conservatives nor the progressives, has the strength for victory, and that even the conservative group needs a master.77 (Gramsci, 1971: 210-211)

Passive revolution breaks the deadlock and offers an organic solution out of the impasse, while Bonapartism-Caesarism, when it is not a device of passive revolution, can be merely an apparent and transitory solution that arises from the impasse, which it briefly prolongs in a precarious equilibrium. In this sense, because they are instrumental (like transformisms), although Caesarisms usually accompany and operationalize passive revolutions, they can take place without them, for example when they cross over into the regressive version: counter-reformist Caesarism.78

Another issue to note, in light of the possibility of extending the use of the concept to characterize contemporary phenomena and processes, is that Gramsci differentiates between the Caesarisms of the past and those of the twentieth century when he claims that the latter are "completely" different because of the impossibility of fusing or unifying forces which are already unavoidably opposed and whose antagonism, he stresses, would be exacerbated with the appearance of Caesarist forms. But he goes on to suggest that there is always scope for the manifestation of the Caesarist form, particularly while there is a

77 See Marx (1963).
78 On this point, another of Burgio's claims is debatable: his conclusion that the concept of Caesarism, unlike Bonapartism, is not always negative, since in Gramsci's thinking it is connected with the emancipatory idea of the modern prince, understood as Caesarism without Caesar: collective, democratic, and progressive (Burgio, 2014: 282). Actually, Caesarism seen as a coalition is another clue that confirms both the conceptual connection with passive revolution and the fact that it is a formal correlate, since a coalition or alliance expresses the intersections between the progressive and the regressive (revolution/conservation, etc.), in which one prevails and stamps its character on the whole. The coalition synthesizes the contradiction and provides an apparent and temporary resolution in the form of a "compromise." Gramsci's examples show that a charismatic figure or one that fulfills the role of negotiator tends to appear.
"relative weakness of the rival progressive force as a result of its specific character and way of life. It is necessary for the dominant social form to preserve this weakness: this is why it has been asserted that modern Caesarism is more a police than a military system" (Gramsci, 1971: 222). The subjective dimension appears once again, hand in hand with the logic of the balance of forces, for which the need to preserve the weakness involves passivizing, subalternizing, and draining antagonistic force from the subaltern classes.

**Progressive and/or Regressive Passive Revolutions**

There is a widespread idea, among students of Gramsci and Gramscians alike, that the breadth of the concept of passive revolution lends itself to excessive flexibility, that it extends to highly dissimilar phenomena, generating confusion and calling into question the analytical and explanatory value of the concept itself. However, there are more or less well-trodden paths that allow us to define its borders and specify the sociopolitical terrain it covers.

First, the concept of passive revolution does not describe all the reconfiguration processes of bourgeois domination, but only those that introduce progressive elements with the aim of transforming the terms of the authority/obedience relationship between the ruling and subaltern classes, in order to conserve the hierarchical essence and capitalist content of that relationship. Moreover, in Gramsci's terminology there are two limits: the left limit of active revolution, and the right limit of restoration or, as Coutinho (2007) terms it, of counter-reform, a concept occasionally employed by Gramsci, in which the form and content of the process-project are unequivocally regressive or reactionary (terms that Gramsci frequently uses interchangeably). Counter-reform and restoration are thus found at the extreme right of passive revolution, and active revolution at its extreme left. Passive
revolution, in a typology of hypotheses and historico-political scenarios, appears as a progressive alternative to the reactionary path and a conservative antidote to the path of revolution from below, in the face of an insufficient but significant pressure from the subaltern classes.

This description, however, leaves a spectrum of gray areas that might be considered excessive. A Gramscian solution to this difficulty would be to introduce a distinction between progressive and regressive as a criterion that distinguishes two types of passive revolution. Alberto Burgio points in this direction when he argues that Caesarism "can be progressive or regressive, just like a passive revolution" and refers to a possible "comparison between progressive and regressive passive revolutions" (2014: 264, 276). Unfortunately Burgio does not develop or support this delicate point in relation to Gramsci's reasoning, although it is especially fertile ground for application. Perhaps he does not develop it because he believes, in line with Gramsci's note mentioned above, that passive revolutions could not have taken place after 1870, that after this date they will, like Caesarisms, be inexorably reactionary and defensive (in both the political and the macro-historical sense), as a result of the organic character of crisis and conflict (Burgio, 2014: 279-280). In this sense the distinction would cease to hold any interest in relation to contemporary phenomena.

We can, however, take up Burgio's abandoned line of reasoning and discuss the terms on which this distinction can be formulated and supported as a criterion for the analysis of contemporary phenomena. For Gramsci, as we have seen, the extent of progressiveness can only be fully evaluated in hindsight, when historical perspective allows us to observe whether advances have been made in the general direction of progress, that is to say, toward a definitive victory for the subaltern classes. This implies a sociopolitical,
subjective version of progressiveness, far removed from the paradigm of the development of productive forces. In contrast with his analysis of the nineteenth century, Gramsci has doubts about the historical scope and character of passive revolution applied to fascism and Americanism; given its retrospective quality, it cannot provide a conclusive assessment of the period and thus cannot decide if it is progressive or regressive. Indeed, Gramsci wonders if Americanism will manage to define an epoch, in other words, whether it will achieve a "passive revolutionary" type of development (1981-1999, vol. 6, C 22, §1: 6). He also wonders whether fascism will be the twentieth-century form of passive revolution, as liberalism was its nineteenth-century form.

If, as we have seen, it is a question of assessing the direction, the orientation, the "historical sense"—whether a Caesarism stimulates or inhibits, favors or disfavors one outcome over another, one sociopolitical force over another, a step toward the construction of hegemony is not, from the standpoint of the subaltern classes, the same as an immediate victory, the definitive break that translates into state power, but should include more or less molecular accumulations in the medium to long term. A demobilizing reformism in the form of passive revolution seeks to neutralize the active revolutionary potential; it seeks a re-subalternization which implies a reverse, a regression. However, to the extent that reforms incorporate demands from below and, as Gramsci argues, antagonism became irrepressible after 1870, the process moves conflict in a forward direction. This is an objectively progressive process to the extent that it implies new historical scenarios in which not only does antagonism not dissipate, but new political subjectivities are shaped that rise to the challenges of the epoch.

Consistent with the logic of the war of position—and not with the desire to establish definitions but only to extend my argument—we can simplify the proposal in the following
manner: Any social reformist process or project has a progressive character if it increases the accumulation of political strength by the subaltern classes and does not include profoundly reactionary measures on the level of political liberties. And those projects or processes are regressive that combine reforms with high levels of repression, or that seek to use reforms to disrupt the process toward complete autonomy of the subalterns or, to use a more modern term, that seek to demobilize them.\footnote{Here we cannot avoid wondering whether, if all the social reforms are won, they can be accounted as a positive result of the class struggle, as concessions that amount to a renegotiation of subordination and demobilization, or merely readjustments to the patterns and models of accumulation. Although the answer is likely a combination of these possibilities, its precise composition will correspond to the predominance of one element and will determine the orientation of the process.}

As we can see, in the end the question of the shaping of political subjectivity and the protagonism of the subaltern classes becomes a central and discriminatory variable, relegating to the background the question of socioeconomic reforms, which appear more as a constant: one that encompasses experiences as sociopolitically diverse as the New Deal and Italian fascism.

As I am consciously focusing here on the subjective and ignoring the structural aspect of the meaning of progress for Gramsci, I should acknowledge that for Gramsci, progress is related to political victory and not only, or not so much, to the development of productive forces, to the narrowing of the gap between the subaltern classes and power, a gap that can be bridged only with the construction of subjectivities, the activation of the masses, the building of consciousness, that pulls itself out of subalternity, through antagonism and autonomy, and ends in hegemony. The measure is therefore ultimately subjective, related to political action, and antithetical to passivity and subalternity. A constant characteristic of passive revolution that encompasses all of Gramsci's work should thus be a measure of its scope and use.
The counterpart to the antagonistic principle is thus constituted by the subaltern inertia that resides in the configuration of political subjectivities, and by the initiatives from above which tend to reproduce and expand that inertia in the interest of perpetuating order and hierarchy through changing strategies, with greater or lesser hegemonic aspirations. Among these, faced with a threatening emergence of the antagonistic principle, the modality of passive revolution, with its adaptable combination of progressive and regressive features, its subtlety and hegemonic scope, comes to be a particularly effective means for subalternization.
V. Appendix: Methodological Questions

Conceptualization and Operationalization

Although the conceptual triad of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy is conceived abstractly on an eminently theoretical level, it seeks at the same time to have sufficient openness and flexibility to adjust and calibrate itself to an apt investigation of the concrete. In the pages that follow, I will develop methodologically the analytical potential of these concepts by means of an exercise in operationalization that can serve as a platform for carrying out concrete studies of political processes, in particular those of mobilization and social and political struggle.\(^{80}\)

Concepts and Indicators

In the midst of the postmodern flourishing of so-called "narratives," which tend to question the role and weight of concepts as tools of scientific thinking, we can reclaim their strategic place in the construction of social knowledge. Concepts are words—signs or symbols—and linguistic conventions that allow us to identify, recognize, name, and classify social phenomena. Without them no theoretical construction or body of theory can be sustained, no debate can take place between different perspectives or approaches.

Together with methodological approaches, concepts are the raw material of social thought and, considered as a lexicon, they are the keys to articulation of any disciplinary or

\(^{80}\) The text presented here served as framework for a series of case studies that were carried out in the research project, "Subalternity, Antagonism, and Autonomy in Sociopolitical Movements in Mexico and Latin America." Some of these studies were published in the collectively-written 2015 book, *Subaltern, Antagonistic, and Autonomous Movements in Mexico and Latin America* (Modonesi, 2015). The studies in this anthology were based on relatively free adaptations of the conceptual triad, respecting the diversity of the subjects of each study, which allowed for the trial and observation of different uses of the theoretical proposition.
thematic field, and they may be the cross-sectional and convergent terrain of the various social sciences. Concepts are the building blocks of abstract thought and the gears of theoretical reflection; they serve as necessary analytic instruments for the organization of ideas and act as a guide in empirical observation. They are the bridges between abstract and concrete thought that Marx suggested as the fundamental basis of his method.

In Marxism, the role and place of concepts have gone beyond the intuitions of its founder, giving rise to theoretical drifts and even a nominalist fetishism that has contributed to solidification of a vulgar, mechanical, and crudely positivist version of historical and dialectical materialism. Against this tendency, the major Marxist critiques of the twentieth century maintained the possibility and necessity of open concepts that could describe diverse and changing historical processes, without abandoning the search for general, integrative, and totalizing criteria to make them intelligible: criteria such as the logic of capital and of class struggle, the two major pillars of contemporary Marxist thought.

Along these lines, the metatheoretical exercise I carried out several years ago (Modonesi, 2010), described in Chapter 1, was an attempt to show the richness and vitality of a few categories, with a particular interest in contributing to a reconfiguration of the Marxist conceptual framework in the sociology of politics and collective action. It showed that although concepts have a certain elasticity and plasticity that allows them to move among historical periods and social realities, it is necessary that they be clear and precise if they are to carry out their purpose of distinguishing, defining, and characterizing specific phenomena and processes, even in a general way that respects the originality and the historicity of those phenomena. The place and role of concepts in social thought is played out in the polarity and tension between openness and precision.
Indeed, in the investigation of abstract models and real processes there is no need for a simplistic dichotomy between proposing rigid, prefabricated frameworks and denying the value and utility of theory and methodology. Every student of the social sciences learns, with varying results, about the basic process that locates the choice of a topic in the framework of a field of phenomena and knowledge: the formulation of a problem that references a theoretical framework with an eye toward elaborating a strategic and methodological design, an approach that serves to connect concepts, hypotheses, and data regarding empirically observable phenomena. One of the most delicate points in the process emerges in this latter step, since it invokes and interpellates the operative efficacy of the concepts. Just as the construction of the concept, from the concrete to the abstract, implies a process of decomposition and recomposition followed by a synthesis, the next step passes through a new decomposition and returns to the concrete.

Operationalization, precisely as it is commonly understood in the methodological manuals of the social sciences, points to a characteristic of concepts insofar as they can or should serve to classify and measure the phenomena observed, in order to "extract" a series of characteristics of the phenomenon from the empirical data. This step, a legacy of the epistemological hegemony of the natural sciences, is problematic, and it deserves further scrutiny. The transition to the operationalization of concepts is particularly delicate insofar as a move to action materializes out of empirical investigation that goes beyond the formal logic of the formulation of the problem. Operationalization is a more wide-ranging procedure than the construction of indicators, although it may include that or lead to it. Operationalization requires, first, an exercise in manipulation that allows for the translation of concepts from the abstract to the concrete, by means of a deductive process that goes from the general to the particular, breaking them down into referents that allow for the
recognition of empirically observable elements or dimensions. Second, operationalization includes the need, when necessary, to think of dimensions, like the construction of indicators, as variables. That is, they should be thought of as empirical correlates that give material form to the properties or characteristics of the variables guiding the collection and processing of data by means of diverse instruments and techniques.81

Beyond the question of instruments and techniques, the questions we ask define the content of operationalization, and it is here that the main heuristic value of this intellectual exercise is found. Operationalization implies, first, an exercise in breaking down the dimensions of the concept, of those elements the concept has synthesized or put together. Before landing in the area of empirical "verification," the descriptive and interpretive value of the concept must appear in its semantic opening, displaying the scope of its meaning. The exercise of operationalization implies recognizing and making explicit the universe or field covered by the concept and distinguishing its dimensions. Here there appear a series of subconcepts that, in the dimension that is most procedural and oriented toward measurement, are usually called variables.

The recognition, selection, and definition of the subconcepts is a qualitative question that only sometimes translates into the quantitative. This subconceptual differentiation implies a qualitative assessment, the establishment of relationships that account for the internal organization of the concept, an organization from which it is possible to recognize and refer to aspects, attributes, characteristics, or dimensions of an object of study. At this point an operational definition of the concept can be deduced, which should of course be consistent with the strictly theoretical or abstract definition.

81 This process can lead to the elaboration of an index or a scale. In order to maintain an open exercise in the construction of indicators, nominal scales and variables can be used, without defining order, hierarchy, or relationship, and, where possible, also ordinal variables that allow the establishment of a range of values.
With these general considerations in mind we can now proceed to the operationalization of the concepts of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy. To do so we will be moving through two universes: the fields of investigation focused on the observation of sociopolitical movements and on the processes of political subjectivation, with the analytical horizon provided by the operationalized concepts.

Areas of Observation of the Processes of Political Subjectivation

By areas of observation of the processes of political subjectivation, I mean the methodologically differentiated dimensions or fields in which the characteristics of phenomena—in this case, the phenomena of politicization, organization, mobilization, and realization—are grouped. A fundamental methodological distinction here is that between practices and discourses. This distinction is strictly a matter of classification, given that a discourse is also a practice, and every practice is accompanied or sustained by a discourse. Here I will assume an elemental sequence in keeping with a Marxist principle: I will put practices before discourses, assuming that the latter ultimately correspond to the former, even if they have a certain relative autonomy and a certain echo effect.

Practices are collective actions, but also routines: the former are relatively conscious and voluntary, what Marxist jargon calls praxis; the latter are fundamentally unconscious, mechanical, and involuntary. Leaving aside the habitual unconscious practices that belong to basic social reproduction, the codes linked to everyday life, sociability, and culture in general, although these practices continue to be important, we will take them as suppositions or bases of voluntary practices.
non-explicit tendencies that move in an opposite or contradictory direction than the voluntary or conscious one. We can then organize the field of study in the following way:

a. Voluntary or conscious practices: forms and dynamics of aggregation, participation, deliberation, manifestation, diffusion, negotiation, and autonomization.

b. Involuntary or unconscious practices: the appearance of inertia, corruption, contradictions, routine, reflections of traditions, etc., in the above categories.

Insofar as voluntary practices make up the principal content and guide the investigation, we can disaggregate the forms and dynamics.

In a synthetic sense we can distinguish between four fundamental levels:

a. Politicization: forms of aggregation and enunciation.

b. Organization: forms of participation and deliberation.


d. Realization: forms of articulation, negotiation, and autonomization.

Each of these fields of practices has corresponding discourses, that is, ways of naming, of making sense, of legitimating and guiding the practices. The discourses may be official or extra-official. The former are a consensual expression or product of an act of authority; the latter include all those forms of individual or group communication that have no official sanction and therefore do not officially "represent" the movement or collective actor.

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83 This distinction does not correspond to that of consciousness and spontaneity, since the spontaneous can in fact be voluntary.

84 Aggregation: construction of identities and political cultures.
Enunciation: elaboration of discourses, projects, frameworks.
Participation: forms and types of militancy, roles/tasks, tendencies to hierarchy and to equality.
Deliberation: decision-making, democratic dynamics, format of assemblies, construction of and relationship between majorities and minorities.
Manifestation: repertoire of action, dynamic of each action.
Diffusion: media strategy, distribution of newspapers and propaganda, distribution of flyers, etc.
By way of example we can consider the following areas or concrete foundations that are generally available for analysis:

a. Official discourses: documents, flyers, media declarations or interviews with leaders, participation of leaders in assemblies or committees, slogans.

b. Extra-official discourses: interviews with activists or leaders, individual participation in assemblies or committees.

The decisive step for purposes of interpretation will be the evaluation of the internal congruence or incongruence in each category (voluntary/involuntary and official/extra-official), and between them (discourses and practices). This field of study, defined in relatively conventional terms and amenable to improvement and adaptation to different research topics, can serve as a basis for the application of the operationalized conceptual framework.

Operationalization of Concepts

In this section I will begin with the definitions of the concepts of subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy, just as they were presented in Chapter 2. These three concepts make up a first level of indicators: they are homologous, specific, and complementary, and allow us to distinguish the subaltern, antagonistic, or autonomous characteristics of a phenomenon. At the same time, it is necessary to make these characteristics explicit and explore other levels of conceptual analysis, in order to construct tools that are more refined and closer to the concrete situations they seek to study.

Several articulated levels of description of the three concepts appear in the formulation of definitions, based on their homology, specificity, and complementarity. Here, for purposes of an operationalization oriented toward empirical investigation, we are
interested particularly in the definition of the specificity of each one, given that this specificity establishes a differentiation that allows us to observe the elements separately, as a condition for subsequently noting the superpositions or connections that arise from their use as a group.\footnote{See Chapter 2.}

If we synthesize the three definitions based on their major components, we obtain the schema shown in Table 1. From this synthetic visualization we can proceed to a final breakdown, displaying in greater detail the spectrum each dimension seeks to include and encompass with a qualitative step that disaggregates and projects the elements of the definitions toward an initial exercise in operationalization. It needs to be stressed that this exercise is general and indicative, given that a fine-grained, specific operationalization would need to be concretely guided according to an empirical investigation with a concrete object; there would thus be as many exercises in operationalization as there are projects investigating sociopolitical movements and processes of political subjectivation (see Tables 2, 3, and 4).

Based on the establishment of these general indicators, the next step toward the operationalization and setting in motion of the variables involves combining the criteria of differentiation with the previously defined fields in order to explain how and where the characteristics of the concepts are presented in different observable environments. Obviously, not all points of intersection that appear in Table 5 are present or relevant in all cases. At the same time, their identification in a general framework allows for the identification of a route that considers not only the usual points of analytical focus, but also those that do not appear in the general context of possibilities of observation of the phenomenon.
Sequences

Once the characteristics of the indicators are established in relation to the fields of study, we can proceed with the articulations suggested in Chapter 2, which emerge from the complementarity of the concepts and their articulated use. Though we can imagine and develop other possibilities, let us review the ones described there.

A first synchronic approach allows us to show the existing tension and the unequal combinations between subalternity, antagonism, and autonomy, as characteristics of different processes of political subjectivation. Deciphering the inequality of the combination means establishing the value or weight of each dimension with respect to the others. The three concepts operate as indicators, first as three separate indices, and then as interrelated ones.

A second synchronic approach allows us to show how an element can operate as an overdetermining, structuring, and ordering factor. In this case the combinations are structured according to the recognition of the central factor as well as the identification of the subordinate elements that continue to be active, as routines or as glimpses or stimuli, as the case may be.86 Here the challenge is to generate indicators of what is significant and stands out, but also of elements that appear in the background or are simply latent.

It is worth recalling that in the tensions subalternity-antagonism and antagonism-autonomy superpositions are shaped that constitute hypotheses from which lines of empirical investigation emerge. In other words, the points or passages in which, for example, subalternity gives way to antagonism, or where resistance is transformed into rebellion, can be seen on a theoretical level as ruptures, but in many real-world cases they

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86 See Chapter 2.
appear as a continuum that must be thoroughly investigated to understand how the passage or transformation occurred, even where it is gradual or only barely perceptible. Asking how and when they passed from fundamentally subaltern forms to antagonistic ones, or from antagonistic to autonomous ones, is the problem at the heart of empirical research on the processes of political subjectivation.

Here we find the possibility of carrying out a diachronic analysis by means of exercises in periodization that allow us to recognize sequences and identify moments based on the distinctive feature found in the procedure describe above. Assuming a limited number of combinations but an infinity of concrete configurations that can be translated into non-classifiable sequences accounting for diverse periodizations, hypothetical sequences can be seen from a diachronic view of the processes of political subjectivation.

The most basic and typical of these sequences is the progressive (or, alternatively, evolutionary, genealogical, or teleological) sequence Subalternity-Antagonism-Autonomy, which is shown graphically in Figure 1.

![Figure 1](image)

The top part of the triangle orders and overdetermines, acquires visibility and allows the naming of a specific moment or passage from the unequal combination of the three dimensions or elements. However, as we have already seen, the visibility of this "tip of the
iceberg" does not rule out the need to describe the forms, dimensions, and proportions of the whole, with an eye toward describing the tensions and internal contradictions.

By the same progressive logic, but assuming the project or ideology as a subjective activation point, the idea of emancipation would appear from the beginning, with the sequence as follows:

Autonomy-Subalternity-Antagonism-Autonomy Realized

A second hypothesis is that of a retreat that generally ends in subalternity, but that can occasionally testify to a return to conflict in relation to a loss of autonomy.

Subalternity-Antagonism-Subalternity
Subalternity-Antagonism-Autonomy-Subalternity
Antagonism-Autonomy-Antagonism

In addition, we can see three hypotheses of standoff in each of the moments, as a situation of relative stability in a short-, medium-, or long-term process, but always in relation to various arrival or departure points, that is, points of movement.

Subalternity-Antagonism-Autonomy
Subalternity-Antagonism-Autonomy
Subalternity-Antagonism-Autonomy

By the same logic it is possible to imagine scenarios of oscillation.

Subalternity-Antagonism-Subalternity-Antagonism
Antagonism-Autonomy-Antagonism-Autonomy

In the first case, autonomy does not disappear; it simply does not become concrete. It remains a desire, projection, or utopia incorporated as a secondary element in the combinations of antagonism and subalternity. In the second case, the oscillation between antagonism and autonomy corresponds to the unstable process of consolidation of a new
order, leaving subalternity as inertia, assimilated and subsumed in the forms of antagonism and autonomy.

Each of these typical situations can be exemplified in concrete experiences. However, it is preferable to avoid confusing them with classifications, leaving open the diachronic dimension and the exercise of operationalization more generally, with a double intention: to respect the broad features of the concepts, and to facilitate free appropriations of the conceptual triad. In this way they can be applied to a variety of perspectives and different concrete case studies. Through a series of methodological mediations, this back-and-forth between the abstract and concrete strengthens the conceptual triad subalternity-antagonism-autonomy as a theoretical tool, demonstrates its analytical potential, and confirms the vitality and scope of Marxist approaches to the processes and phenomena of subjectivation and political action.