

The politicization of discontent: Some notes from León Rozitchner and Santiago López Petit *

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Abstract

This article intends to reclaim the theorization of philosophers León Rozitchner and Santiago López Petit around the issues of discontent and ailments generated by the capitalist mode of production among the subjects constituted under its logic. Grounded on the work of these authors, I will analyze some characteristic elements of what the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman called “the passage from a solid to a liquid modernity,” paying special attention to the effects of said passage in contemporary modes of subjectivation. The purpose of the work is set within the search for some elements that stimulate the political imagination when facing and dealing with current ailments. In this sense, both the Argentinian and the Catalan philosopher will be theoretical inputs, not only for the description of the discomfort produced by the logic of capital, but also for the reverse of a possible praxis, that is, the politicization of discontent.

Keywords

Capitalism, subjectivity, Marxism, discontent, politicization.

Introduction

In 1930, one of the most significant texts of the twentieth century was published: *Civilization and Its Discontents* (2013). In this work, Freud posited as his main hypothesis the existence of a structural discomfort in lives organized within society, a discomfort resulting from the renunciation of drives (both sexual and aggressive) demanded by community organization. This transaction involved inhibiting doses of pleasure in exchange for a certain degree of security. Nearly a century later, following significant changes in the forms of social organization and control, Argentine historian Pablo Hupert published (with both a nod and an ironic gesture) a book that challenges Freud’s hypothesis: *Well-being in Culture* (2012). In this work, Hupert describes how contemporary social and cultural organization no longer rests on the renunciation of individual drives, but rather on their satisfaction at all costs. Such satisfaction, framed within a context of commodification and widespread precariousness, no longer guarantees any security in exchange for renunciations, but offers a flow of images that promise narcissistic satisfaction through unlimited enjoyment:

“It’s not that human socialization has ceased to be traumatic, but rather that in our culture, socialization and narcissism are not mutually exclusive—quite the opposite. [...] The old problem of ‘individual versus society,’ a liberal problem (the problem of the culture of discomfort), seems to be surpassed by neoliberal economics and the culture of egoic enjoyment” (Hupert, 2012, pp. 20–21).

* Research article funded by CONICET - Argentina. This English version is a translation generated through AI and human revision.

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How to cite:

Alfieri, J. (2023). The politicization of discontent: Notes from León Rozitchner and Santiago López Petit. *Civilizar*, 23(44), e20230101. <https://doi.org/10.22518/jour.ccs/20230101>

Received: March 21, 2021

Revised: September 29, 2022

Approved: October 6, 2022



The shift from a culture of discomfort to one of well-being does not imply that the latter ceases to produce suffering and hardships in individuals. On the contrary, the social demand for enjoyment, with its prescribed models of happiness, becomes highly oppressive for individuals (Ahmed, 2019). In this sense, if there is one element that characterizes our current era, it is the multiplication of pathologies related to this organizational model. Catalan philosopher Santiago López Petit groups these under the term “diseases of emptiness” (2009, p. 96), such as depression, panic attacks, anorexia, fibromyalgia, anxiety, etc., which define a social condition marked by the uncertainty of our existential circumstances.

At the same time, this generalization of suffering has prompted a series of interventions in the field of social critical theory. The philosopher Emiliano Exposto and psychoanalyst Gabriel Rodríguez Varela have termed this a “discomfortist turn” in political theories and practices, wherein “there is a progressive democratization in the ways of questioning, politicizing, and theorizing this ‘expanded psychic suffering’” (2020, p. 122). Authors such as Mark Fisher (2017), Franco Berardi (2003), Byung-Chul Han (2017), Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik (2006), Anselm Jappe (2019), among others, have presented the problem of discomfort not only as a daily reality but also as an index of the politicization of our existence.

It is within this framework that the aspirations of this paper are situated. Its objective is to recover the theories of philosophers León Rozitchner and Santiago López Petit on the issue of discomfort and the suffering generated by the capitalist mode of production in subjects shaped by its logic. This paper seeks to identify elements that can stimulate political imagination when facing and coping with current sufferings. In this sense, the works of both the Argentine philosopher and the Catalan philosopher will provide theoretical input not only for describing the discomfort produced by the logic of capital, but also for the reverse of a possible praxis—namely, the politicization of discomfort. Recovering these philosophical perspectives on the widespread suffering produced by the capitalist production system allows us to envision an alternative way to rethink and address this problem. In both cases, the problem of discomfort is critically challenged through a theory that renews the coordinates in which suffering is typically framed—both in terms of compulsive pathologization and individualistic privatization.

The philosophical approach proposed by the two thinkers to be analyzed enables a connection between capitalist modes of sociability and the social praxis of individual agents, through a dual movement in their argumentation: on one hand, a critical challenge to the system in relation to the everyday production of suffering; on the other, the postulation of an existential element to continue projecting a political imagination with an emancipatory perspective. In other words, Rozitchner’s and López Petit’s theoretical perspectives are pertinent for three main reasons: first, because they allow us to theorize about a fundamental issue present in our contemporary sociability; second, because their respective arguments provide decisive theoretical resources for rethinking the problem of the privatization and pathologization of discomfort; and finally, because both authors offer a novel understanding for rethinking spaces of resistance against the logic of capital.

In the case of León Rozitchner, I will focus my research on the psychoanalytic period of his work (1970–1985), as I believe that during this period, the author develops in depth the link between discomfort and capitalism, based on a particular reading of Freud’s work. In this sense, the book *Freud and the Limits of Bourgeois Individualism* (2013), as well as the lectures gathered under the title *Freud and the Problem of Power* (2003), will be the key texts for my interpretation of the Argentine philosopher’s work.

As for Santiago López Petit, my textual focus will be on two specific books: *Global Mobilization: A Brief Treatise to Attack Reality* (2009) and *Sons of the Night* (2015).

The proposed path has two stages. In the first, I will recover the central elements of both authors' theorization of discomfort and its possible politicization. In a third stage, I will critically contrast both proposals to not only observe the strengths of each, but also the areas of dialogue and potential bridges that can be built between them.

Rozitchner: Normality as the Pathology of Reality

The 1970s marked a period in the work of León Rozitchner characterized by the integration of Freudian psychoanalysis into his philosophy. Confronted with the Lacanian interpretation of Freud's legacy (which he critiques as bourgeois and individualistic), the Argentine philosopher adopted a unique interpretation of psychoanalysis, filtered through the Marxist categories of his own conceptual framework. His primary objective was to expand both the practice of psychoanalysis and its field of analysis beyond the confines of the family unit, to observe how the historical horizon shapes and defines the main features of the psychic apparatus, as well as the psychoanalytic conceptual apparatus itself.

This engagement with Freud's work allowed Rozitchner to delve deeper into a series of concerns and analyses that had been present since the beginning of his theoretical production. These concerns centered on the articulation of the link between social domination and the subjective constitution of individuals. It is from this articulation that his work introduces an interest in the pathologies and discomforts afflicting subjects shaped by the logic of capital. Indeed, the appeal of Freudian analysis for Rozitchner lies in its starting point: the symptom as a way of reading reality. Or, to put it more precisely: illness appears as an index that reveals a misalignment between the subject and reality, which simultaneously translates into a form of resistance on the part of the individual.

Of course, this "resistance" is sterile, as it is channeled individually and serves as a compensation for the discomfort caused by the principle of reality. According to Rozitchner, this situation is the inevitable result of the mechanisms and modes of capitalist subjectivation, where subjectivity is seen as the outcome of a symptomatic transaction that leads each individual to internalize a series of affective and rational dispositions that align with the prevailing system of domination. From here emerges the statement that gives the title to this section: "The 'normal' is a person sick from reality" (Rozitchner, 2013, p. 35).

This symptomatic transaction, this authorization each subject receives to be considered a compatible element with the social order, produces an existential modality that is intimately capitalist. In other words, the transaction results in ways of feeling, fantasizing, and thinking that are in tune with the surrounding reality in which the individuals' lives unfold. However, this convergence or compatibility of each individual with the system of production operates unconsciously and anonymously, a circumstance that leads Rozitchner to describe capitalist subjectivity as a "nest of vipers" (2013, p. 26), to capture the mechanisms that act clandestinely within the psyche of individuals.

This form of impersonal domination leads to a series of positions, automatism, and existential modalities that are unaware of their origins and deny their imprint from the categories of the total social system. Therefore, when discomfort arises, it takes on an enigmatic character. The suffering individual is taken by surprise by an ailment whose cause and origin they cannot identify; it appears as an irrational element in their bodily organization, as a flaw or deficiency that emerges from a place unknown to the ego (and that speaks a language incomprehensible to official rationality).

As previously mentioned, the enigmatic nature of discomfort is related to the impersonal and unconscious forms of domination within the capitalist system of production. The individual,

in forgetting and suppressing their origin (via repression), is unable to establish a connection between their suffering and the totality of society. They cannot relate the social models and ideals that govern their actions to their pain. In this way, the social totality is absolutized, and the discomfort is privatized; thus, the individual is relegated to incoherence and mystery, repressing the signs of alterity present in their very subjective constitution:

Hence the dilemma: either the appearance of collective "normality," "social" normality, which repression and absolute subjugation provide us, or falling into neurosis and madness when the issue remains within the individual solution and cannot open [...] to another form of collectivity, which is the revolutionary task. Thus, the opposition between collective neurosis and individual neurosis has no other way out, and the forms analyzed earlier are inscribed as variants of the same obscuration: the lack of discrimination of the system that produces both individuals and the categories of totality in which they appear, determining the framework of meaning in their relationship with the world. (Rozitchner, 2013, pp. 166-167)

Perhaps one of the weak points of Rozitchner's theorization emerges when questioning the causes of individual suffering. Indeed, Rozitchner, guided by a repressive view of the exercise of power, posits the prevention of the expression of "desire" in reality as the cause of discomfort. Illness, therefore, appears for the Argentine philosopher as the result of the incapacity to extend a bodily foundation (the "id" in psychoanalytic terminology) repressed by the social field. In this way, discomfort presents itself as a radical, untamable, unsublimable difference that simultaneously denounces an oppressive social order and constitutes a foundation or residue that allows imagining a radical transformation of the social order. As Omar Acha points out:

Rozitchner's analysis is repressive, meaning that it assumes a certain amount of satisfaction in the child/mother unit that is interrupted by patriarchal power within the family and a potential gendered capacity thwarted by the bourgeoisie in the social realm. (2015, p. 74)

However, despite the aforementioned issue, there are also significant parts of Rozitchner's work that allow for an alternative reading, offering a plural conception of the exercise of power. Whatever interpretative path is chosen, what is important to highlight is that illness (as an expression of social discomfort) appears in Rozitchner's thought as a fundamental element for the creation of an alternative social logic. In this sense, discomfort presents itself as a politicizable element that enables diverse ways of life, outside the limits of a social order perceived as absolute. The politicization of discomfort (Rozitchner does not use this exact phrase, but his theorization can certainly be interpreted in this way) raises the question: How can we expand reality beyond what it currently is? Politicizing discomfort (i.e., de-privatizing it and turning it into a social and collective issue) allows dismantling the subject-form (narcissistic and individualistic) in which each individual has been constituted.

Systemic solutions to discomfort are sterile from Rozitchner's perspective. By keeping discomfort in a private and guilty sphere, techniques are offered to avoid suffering (intoxication, sublimation, the annihilation of drives through religion, etc.) that constitute a reality marked by a double movement: on the one hand, the establishment of a principle of reality without pleasure; on the other, the reverse, a principle of pleasure without reality (condemned to the reactivation of past, compensatory modes in the realm of fantasy). That is to say, the system forces satisfaction in the conformity of "normality" (which Rozitchner calls "collective neurosis"), or a condemned exit into illness, confined to a private and individual space.

Thus, the emergence of social discomfort in the individualized figure of madness leads to the formation of a collective subject. Perhaps the question that runs through the entirety of Rozitchner's work is the following: How can we create a political practice that breaks with the indices that have constituted us? How can we undo the rationality in which each one of us has been forged in order to generate a collective emancipatory practice? Rozitchner's wager in this regard is to extend the materiality of the senses in order to break with the privatization and fragmentation of the

capitalist experience: “Thus, the cure would necessarily have to open up to the field of political action, which is the one that determines the field of the ‘social cure’ at the mass level” (Rozitchner, 2013, p. 318).

Politicizing discomfort for Rozitchner means redirecting the violence that the individual inflicts on themselves in the guilty movement of their suffering and giving a new direction to this violence (directed towards the foundations of social organization and its oppressive imaginaries). This movement entails articulating individual discomfort against the backdrop of a historical and collective problem that removes illness from its status as an anomaly and places it in dialogue with “normality” (since both would be two sides of the same social process):

It is then seen that the “discomfort” of culture is an illness—a contradiction—of certain cultures. We cannot think about the real cause of discomfort, because we cannot even understand its motivations. Discomfort locates them in the subjectivity of the subject. It’s not that they aren’t there, but they are poorly located. Discomfort is subjective, narcissistic, individual. We cannot feel or know the meaning of discomfort, despite it being present in each of us. But the problem is not, as we saw, not being able to think. The problem is that we feel guilty if we dare to think and act outside of the molds that have been set for us, to think and do only what this historical system of production has allowed. (Rozitchner, 2013, p. 329)

Therefore, if malaise arises as the result of the functioning of a contradictory social totality, then the solution or the dispute of the conflict requires action beyond the individualistic and narcissistic limits of capitalist culture. In this sense, it is no coincidence that Rozitchner refers to the revolutionary subject as a “doctor of culture” (2013, p. 349) or that he addresses the problem of malaise in terms of a “social cure.” The politicization of malaise thus implies a collective praxis as a space for the suspension of imposed rationality, as an instance in which a subjective decentralization occurs, opening up the projection of new social logics. And this shift is only possible through collective organization, which the Argentine author calls the “revolutionary mass.”

The militant organization proposed by Rozitchner consists of a representative, vanguardist mediation, where the revolutionary subject is constituted as a human model, an exemplary figure for the rest of the collective, enabling the projection of a subjective modality beyond systemic indexes. Such a rupture is only possible by linking the materiality of one’s own sensitivity with the rational meaning of the system, considering anguish and malaise not only as a collective problem but also as a warning sign of the lack of coherence between lived reality and desired goals. For Rozitchner, politicizing malaise and existence is, ultimately, the restitution of the body as an index of subjective truth, offering new intelligibility to political praxis.

López Petit: The Difference Between “Living” and “Having a Life”

Santiago López Petit is a Catalan philosopher, founder of Espai en Blanc collective (2002). His main philosophical influences stem from Romanticism, the works of Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, as well as authors from Italian Marxism, such as Antonio Negri and Mario Tronti. In his case, the understanding of malaise will be closely related to a general characterization of the capitalist production system. According to López Petit, in line with Mark Fisher’s theorization in *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2017), the singularity of the current phase of capitalism lies in the fact that it has become an absolute reality (without an outside and without alternative social projects that dispute its hegemony).

This tautological process of identification between reality and capitalism found its conditions of possibility in two specific historical events: on one hand, the “political, economic, and social defeat of the working class” (López Petit, 2009, p. 17) at the end of the 20th century; and on the other, the emergence of a new accumulation cycle that the author of *Hijos de la noche* defines as the “unbridling of capital.” The latter refers to a paradoxical double movement of the social system

in which, on one hand, a founding repetition is established that equates everyday life, normalcy, and capitalism, and on the other, a persistent situation of exceptionality and uncertainty is generated. That is, contemporary capitalist reality presents itself as a universe where “nothing happens and anything can happen” (López Petit, 2009, p. 30). The unbridling, paradigmatically expressed in the “forward flight” of financial capital, closes off novelty by establishing an unstable reality.

This process of identification between capitalism and reality, which produces a generalized uncertainty, turns the existence of individuals into the mode of their subjugation and privileged domination. That is, the life of each individual is constituted as the minimal unit (as motor and maker) enabling the global mobilization unleashed by the unbridling of capital. For López Petit, the fundamental characteristic of contemporary capitalism is that its reproduction occurs through the total mobilization of our lives (and not exclusively through the antagonism between the working class and capital). Global mobilization implies a total phenomenon (which exceeds the economic plane) in which life is constituted as a social, cultural, and individual space that fulfills the regulatory and reproductive functions of the market:

This mobilism that traverses us and constructs reality is what we have called global mobilization. Global mobilization is the self-reproduction of this reality that coincides with capitalism. This means two things. 1) Global mobilization as such consists of a genuine mobilization of our lives. We mobilize when we work, and when we do not work, when we want to be ourselves, and when we flee from ourselves... when we search for ourselves. 2) The result of global mobilization is the (re)production of this unique reality, which presents itself as both obvious and shattered. (López Petit, 2009, p. 70)

The mobilization of our lives does not eliminate the form of domination based on labor exploitation; rather, it radicalizes it and includes it in increasingly significant spaces of individuals' existence. Therefore, it can be observed that the functioning of the contemporary phase of capitalism triggers a specific mode of subjectivation, which will simultaneously resonate with the emergence of social malaise. Among the most important traits of this form of subjectivation, at least three can be highlighted:

1. On one hand, the subject is constituted as an entrepreneur of themselves. The ego appears as a “marked being,” a commercial brand before others, responding to a continuous and suffocating imperative of valorization: “living today means constituting oneself as a unit of mobilization” (López Petit, 2015, p. 101). An aspect that expresses the movement of self-valorization can be observed in the idea that our life projects are trapped under the idea of developing a “career”; a career in a double sense: as a path taken (where failure must be disguised), but also as a competition against others.
2. The second trait of contemporary subjectivation consists in the “imposition of the ‘precarious being’” (López Petit, 2009, p. 65). This generalized precariousness (which far exceeds labor precarization) is sustained by a vulnerability developed through mechanisms of fragilization and internalized fear. Mechanisms such as debt or the threat of unemployment homogenize (across class, gender, and race hierarchies) the social field. This idea recalls Herbert Marcuse's (1993) notion of unidimensionality, but no longer from the opulent character of society, but from the generalization of precariousness.
3. Finally, the third trait responds to the duality of subjugation/abandonment of the individual by the social field. The existence of “free subjects subjected” (López Petit, 2009, p. 84) complicates the web of forms of domination, through a series of technologies aimed at managing lives. The constant bombardment of “slogans and images promoting a permanent (self) mobilization” defines the contemporary subject as an isolated individual “bearing a project” (López Petit, 2009, p. 87). This paradoxical instance of being both bound to reality and simultaneously freed from it produces a neutralization of the political character of the public space. This is what Pablo Hupert (2012), revisiting the Catalan author's theorization, calls the “flow of obviousness”:

[...] the form of what we can call, with López Petit, the “flow of obviousness,” a dominant practice that, on the one hand, does not tell you “do what I say,” but rather “do whatever you want,” and that, on the other hand, is not based on a ‘distortion of reality in favor of the interests of the dominant class’ as in an Althusserian ideology, but in the self-evidence of reality, a product of an imaginal dynamic that we still need to think through. (p. 96)

These features in the capitalist mode of individuation, tied to the constant flow of the global mobilization of lives, produce a profound and renewed malaise in the bodies governed by this logic:

The effects that global mobilization generates on its subjects – on the subjects subjected to it – are numerous and new. It is enough to observe the change in the types of diseases linked to work. Today, the most common illnesses are related to some form of psychological malaise. Not surprisingly, 70% of long-term sick leave is due to mental disorders. The imposition of the ‘precarious being’ manifests itself in so-called diseases of emptiness: depression, insomnia, anxiety... These are the new diseases of a society in which the norm is no longer based on guilt, but on responsibility. A society that has buried worker autonomy and replaced it with the autonomy of the Self. (López Petit, 2009, p. 97)

The appearance of this new set of pathologies is closely linked to a form of systemic organization that, however, by being confused with everyday reality, hides its naturalization. Therefore, malaise is redirected to a private domain of individual responsibility. As observed in the quoted passage, López Petit repeatedly insists on the philosophical distinction between responsibility and guilt. It seems in this sense that capitalist subjectivity is immersed in an arsenal of imperatives that generate the continuous feeling of being at fault. Exhortations of all kinds, linked to productivity, happiness, valorization, or individual desires, renew modes of oppression and subjugation.

It is no longer a matter of inhibiting certain actions through rigid mandates, but rather of combining an apparent zone of freedom, which translates into the constant uncertainty about one’s own conditions of subsistence. The flow of global mobilization generates an image of the individual where autonomy turns inward, where each person’s fate is detached from their social horizon, and their misfortune becomes the exclusive responsibility of their own deficiencies.

For systemic indices of perception, the formulation “social malaise” appears as an oxymoron: discomfort is personal and private, while the social is an impersonal instance camouflaged by the empire of the obvious. Contemporary malaise refers to a state of being unwell, an impoverished experience that seems to place a better life elsewhere, which paradoxically does not exist. In this movement of self-valorization and global mobilization of lives, which demands managing our existence as an (individualistic) project and a brand tied to success or failure, emerges the division between “living” and “having a life.” And, therefore, the political desire of a “wanting to live” appears in contrast to a reality that constantly closes off that possibility: “Just as being is spoken of in many ways, social malaise is expressed in many ways, though all of them have the same essential reference: *wanting to live and not being able to*” (López Petit, 2015, p. 77).

At the same time, there is an element that grants a certain uniqueness or novelty to the pathologies mentioned by the Catalan author. In his critique, and at the same time appreciation, of the Foucauldian perspective, López Petit observes a subtle shift from “anomaly” to “anomalousness.” Indeed, the politicization of illness in the French thinker is linked to the romantic triad of illness-madness-genius and does not allow for recognizing the everyday and vulgar nature of contemporary diseases. While madness was presented as an otherness that generated both admiration and contempt, everyday pathologies are more in tune with “normality” than with exceptionality. The shift from “anomaly” to “anomalousness” implies an advantage over mere social dysfunctionality, as it is both a product of everyday logic and an element of denunciation and critical challenge to the reality that produces it.

Global mobilization finds various mechanisms that enable its continuity and sustainment. It is about the co-belonging of capital and power, which take different forms for the reproduction of their social logic. One of these forms, which is of particular interest for the purpose of this paper, is that of "therapeutic power," since it allows us to understand the ways in which the system neutralizes and renders invisible the negative effects it produces on individuals.

In this sense, therapeutic power becomes a decisive element for visualizing the systemic coordinates (already mentioned in the introduction) in which malaise is inscribed: the pathologization and privatization of suffering. Therapeutic power functions as an insurer, reducing the negative effects of existential precariousness and channeling the expression of malaise into a depoliticized space. It is important to note that when López Petit refers to therapeutic power, he is not exclusively referring to the field of mental health or pharmacology. Other instances, such as entertainment flows or the propagation of images and meanings that bind us to reality, are also part of the repertoire he unfolds:

But this mode of individuation required a change in the exercise of power. Power had to become therapeutic power. This form of power aims to impose the persistence of the 'precarious being.' The precarious being must persist because it involves a type of vulnerability that produces maximum profit for capital. From this perspective, therapeutic power will act to adapt the desire to live to reality and, at the same time, to politically neutralize any type of social malaise that may arise. (López Petit, 2009, p. 91)

The everyday pathologies of anomalousness are politically neutralized through invisibility; they inhabit a "legal and health limbo" (López Petit, 2015, p. 80) that hinders their politicization. In a global era considered by the Catalan author as "post-political," where social struggles have a defensive or identity-based character, and reality seems to confront individuals with the inevitability of what happens, politicizing malaise becomes an inescapable task, and at the same time, the privileged political tool for constructing a critical and radical challenge to the social order. This is the ambivalent character of life, which constitutes itself simultaneously as an oppressive place and as a battleground to dispute the political meanings of malaise. Therefore, politicizing malaise is synonymous with politicizing existence, a type of apolitical politicization that does not have a defined project or a pre-established image of the future but implies withdrawing from and sabotaging the capitalist principle of reality. In other words, it is about freeing oneself from the mode of capitalist individuation in order to become the author of one's own life. The suffering of a subject in an objectified position (Exposto and Rodríguez Varela, 2020) demands the radicalization of their impotence to rewrite and invent ways of life alternative to the logic of the "I-brand":

Previously, politicization consisted of opposing another life (more intense, more authentic...) to the everyday life that was synonymous with death and passivity. Now politicization—the politicization of existence—is more about subtraction. To politicize is to subtract oneself from the destiny imposed by global mobilization, to vacate the 'precarious being' imposed upon us. This can also be said in another way: politicizing existence is maintaining an affirmative relationship with one's own malaise. (López Petit, 2009, p. 107)

This subtraction from reality through malaise enables the interruption of global mobilization through what López Petit calls the "force of anonymity." Recovering the thought of poet Antonin Artaud, the Catalan philosopher argues that suffering (if not fetishized or exorcised) allows one to assert oneself in an anomalous existential position against the global mobilization of lives. The "force of pain" (López Petit, 2015, p. 114), linked to the power of nothingness and the radicalization of nihilism, erodes reality by interrogating it. It is here that "wanting to live" ceases to be an impossibility to transform into a challenge. The politicization of existence implies that understanding reality also means sabotaging it.

Malaise, as the first moment of the process, enables an *epoche* toward reality, but then requires: 1) the liberation of hatred, directed toward the life each person leads (via phenomenology);

2) developing a unilateralizing gaze that punctures reality, interrupting "the relations of domination that sustain hypostatizations" (López Petit, 2009, p. 56) (via epistemology); 3) and finally, the constitution of a collective subject through the establishment of a nocturnal politics, centered on the figure of the "children of the night." As Diego Sztulwark (2020) notes:

The subject of a politics of malaise is no longer the revolutionary, but the one we could call symptomatic. The children of the night are those who do not fit into this world. [...] A nocturnal politics implies a change of visual register; it implies seeing beyond the obvious and the promises that structure reality. To see is to read symptomatically, to politicize malaise. Or, as *Children of the Night* ends, to read Marx with Artaud." (p. 47)

To conclude this section, I would like to reiterate the three transformations each subject must undergo to constitute "wanting to live" as a challenge. At the end of *Children of the Night*, and with a clear reference to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), the Catalan philosopher proposes three figures that make the politicization of existence possible: 1) First, the subject must transform into a "dry tree," a moment that involves the internalization of death in the form of experiencing suffering and loneliness. These are the "strange ways of resisting reality imposed upon us" (López Petit, 2015, p. 231) that lead to the prototypical diseases of global mobilization; 2) The second stage is that of "the puppet," associated with the invention of an alternative movement, which neither responds to the whirlwind of global mobilization nor to the quietism of rejection; this figure lacks the motive or the reason for action, which is granted by the final transformation; 3) The partisan: the figure of the infiltrator and saboteur, the one who combines the devastating effects of inaction with absolute mobility to prevent the tautological repetition of reality.

The partisan is a supporter of wanting to live, rising up and fighting against a reality that prevents living. This radical insubordination gives it a political character that is not the usual one. It is rather a post-political and post-heroic figure that opens holes in reality, that lights fires in the night. The partisan is the one who does not fit in this world and acts accordingly. This is their true political dimension. Their life is a permanent act of sabotage, but there is nothing heroic about it.

The partisan is the one who seriously asks, *What is your night?* And because they do, they can liberate life against life. (López Petit, 2015, p. 235)

Conclusions

In this section, I will provide a critical overview of the trajectory outlined in the article. The primary objective is to evaluate both theoretical-political proposals regarding discontent, from a critical and comparative perspective that highlights strengths, weaknesses, and debates within each approach.

Regarding the similarities between both theoretical proposals, the following points stand out. The politicization of discontent primarily means despecializing it, removing its exceptional character. Concerning the first point, both philosophers establish a structural link between the sociocultural organization of reality and the emergence of various ailments that become part of daily life. In León Rozitchner's case, the analysis posits an inseparable relationship between "normality" and illness, while López Petit understands discontent in terms of "anomaly," vulgarity, and everydayness. Furthermore, both authors argue for the necessity of a collective subject to channel the politicization of this discontent. This need is grounded in another identified commonality: the inability of individuals to address the total social structure that causes their discontent. Both authors maintain that capitalist forms of domination imply a subjective modality that is coherent with the social order—whether through a symptomatic transaction that enables existence, as in Rozitchner's case, or through the identification of reality with capitalism, as in López Petit's

analysis. Finally, in both thinkers, discontent appears as a sign of resistance, a shift that enables a critical and radical disposition toward the social order.

The differences between the two theorists align with a shift in the ways theory and political practice are developed. Without delving into the historical details that influenced the different periods of production of the Argentine philosopher and the Catalan thinker, it can be asserted, revisiting a distinction I made in the introduction, that Rozitchner's theorization is tied to forms of domination characteristic of twentieth-century capitalism, while López Petit's framework addresses modes of subjugation tied to contemporary practices. That is, Rozitchner's analysis unfolds during the transition from Fordist capitalism to emerging neoliberalism (which entails the repressive emphasis in the exercise of power), while López Petit's context of production belongs to a decisively neoliberal accumulation cycle.

Such a shift brings us to the two main differences that stand out in each of the proposals: on the one hand, in Rozitchner, discontent carries a guilty element, arising from "solid" domination structures, while in López Petit, discontent emerges from individual responsibility as the prototypical form of neoliberal subjectivity; on the other hand, the political and militant organizational modes of both authors differ significantly and align with the aforementioned change of era: while the Argentine author proposes a vanguardist organization responding to a well-defined image of a future society, the Catalan philosopher develops an approach based on autonomism and the apolitical politicization of militant praxis (but this does not mean that autonomism is a recent experience or that traditional party organization is a thing of the past; I simply wish to highlight the changes of era that privilege one or the other form of organization, without negating the coexistence of both modalities).

I would like to emphasize a similarity that I have not yet analyzed and that raises a series of questions in the form of discussions about both philosophers' approaches. Specifically, I refer to the proposal of an original and positive foundation for thinking about political resistance to the forces of capital. In Rozitchner's case, this foundation is called "desire" and arises from the symbiotic unity of the infant with the mother (interrupted by the dominance of patriarchal culture); in López Petit's case, the foundation is termed "the will to live," as an existential disposition made impossible by the global mobilization of lives. In this sense, a viable discussion emerges regarding the contradictory nature of capitalism: why postulate an original foundation to enable a dissident political praxis if, precisely within the contradictory movement of capital, there appears the possibility of an emancipatory path? That is, capitalism, in its contradictory movement, obstructs the development of a series of emancipatory possibilities inherent to its own logic, but compulsively fixes them within its imperatives of valorization and the commodity form. It is not only about technological development, but also about various forms of social organization and a series of institutions that represented a transformation compared to other production systems. I ask, then: is it not possible to find elements to project a critical challenge to the social totality based on the emancipatory potential of modernity? (Martín, 2019).

In León Rozitchner's case, "desire" as the original foundation of political praxis aligns with his unique reading of the Freudian legacy; however, both in his youth and his mature work, there are elements for constructing an alternative interpretation of this issue. Regarding López Petit, it remains unclear whether "the will to live" appears as an immanent positivity of existence or whether, on the contrary, it is the result of the contradictory movement of capital and finds its conditions of possibility in the historical formation from which it emerges.

Finally, I would like to highlight an additional issue present in both theorists' frameworks. In the proposal of a generalized discontent within the functioning of capitalism, it may be necessary to deepen and explore a series of mediations that complicate the emergence of contemporary ailments. Specifically, neither of the thinkers distinguishes geopolitical, gender, and racial factors in the forms of suffering and affliction. By exclusively considering the classist nature of social

inequalities, a gap emerges regarding other forms of positions and hierarchies that imply a divergence or alteration in the ways discontent is experienced and politicized. I believe that future research should delve into this absence to understand how “discontent” becomes “discontents,” without losing the organizational and collective potential inherent in shared suffering.

Notes

1. For further development of this issue, please refer to a previous work (Alfieri, 2020).

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