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Perform Strikes. A Case Study

Abstract

In this paper we show the results of an analysis of the production of individual class subjectivities in the context of strikes among both those in favour and those against. Among the several processes going on in the production of subjectivities of class, we consider strikes because we want to emphasise the active role that the subjects keep up within the class relationships of domination and exploitation. We start from a conception of the subjectivity understood as fragmentary and contingent that we apply to our analysis of class, but in this paper we limit production of individual subjectivities to context of strikes. Our analysis focuses on a case study from the beginning of the 1970s to the end of the 1990s, which was led by the workers of a company in the motor industry, situated in Catalonia. The main devices used to work on the empirical material are biographical interviews and informative interviews. We start the analysis by showing the various directions taken by that the subjectivities of workers and of the company in strike interactions, in individual terms. Then we look into the role of gender in the provisional configuration of these subjectivities in the context of a strike when these subjectivities became collective subjectivities. In this respect, we focus on the company's workers.

Keywords

Social classes; Gender; Subjectivity; Conflict.

This paper analyses¹ the production of subjectivities in the context of labour strikes. This context is related to a wider interest in the analysis of social classes. The last few years (Mora 2003; 2005; 2007; 2008) have seen the development of an

¹ This paper is the result of an investigation, in the form of a doctoral thesis, titled *Las clases sociales como forma de interacción social. Una estrategia de aproximación* supervised by María Jesús Izquierdo and defended before the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. This investigation was undertaken as part of the UAB *Grup d'Estudis sobre Sentiments, Emocions i Societat* (GESES), which is coordinated by M.J. Izquierdo, and specifically followed the research lines defined by *Relaciones de producción, subjetividad, sentimientos y acción*, which aims to analyse the relation between the creation of subjectivity and its objectification. In other words, it is concerned with the relation between the conditions that produce subjectivity and the conditions under which it is expressed and acts. The notion of relations of production is a key concept for dealing with this concern, in its capitalist and patriarchal dimensions.

approach to class analysis that seeks to study social classes on the basis of patriarchal capitalist relations of production. In this paper we take the position that the production of our life is not just capitalistic, but also patriarchal. Both are characterised by exploitation —the appropriation of other’s work. We define the relations of production as practices instituted and institutive in social interaction between subjects. The social classes consist of relations of dependency between individual and collective fragmentary subjectivities in a process of formation, which are analysed within the scope of relations of production. These interactions define the relations of dependency under circumstances that are not of one’s choosing and operate as disciplinary contexts that reiterate or undermine the subjects in the interaction. These relations are characterised by antagonism, conflict and struggle, as well as instability. All this because the social agents that bring them about are endowed with intentions, desires and needs. Their form of interaction, as social beings that produce significances, is discursive interaction (Antaki 1994; Atkinson and Heritage 1984; Billig 1991; Edwards 1997; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Fairclough 1992; Heritage 1997; Potter 1996; Sacks 2000; Silverman 2001; Van Dijk 2000).

The basic premise of this approach is that the classes are formed in the interaction and not prior to it (we follow M. Burawoy, K. Mark, and E.P. Thompson). This paper will concentrate on one specific factor: the production, during strikes, of individual subjectivities² and the role of gender relationships in the provisional shaping of these subjectivities when they form into collective subjectivities. Strikes are a specific aspect that characterises the relations of production under patriarchal capitalism. The importance given to the study of strikes arises because in the processes of institutionalising patriarchal capitalist relations of production, there is a deployment of strategies with foreseen and unforeseen effects, not to mention resistance, that attempt to consolidate the extraction of the surplus. Concentrating on strikes is to concentrate on an explicit, visible component of the process of production of social classes. In this process, workers were not driven to participate in strikes because they have well developed class consciousness; rather, consciousness emerges in a messy, dynamic way from participating in labor actions (Fantasia 1988).

Special attention is given to those interactions that help us reveal the undermining nature of the instituted dimension of patriarchal capitalist relations of production: labour disputes that arise from disagreements, or even opposition, and lead to strikes. These point to the presence of certain rules of the game that are older than the subjects in interaction, they demonstrate that the essence of what is instituted is the reiteration of actions, but also that its fragility lies in the undermined dimension of what is instituted. The study of strikes enables us to specify the precarious as well as constant nature of the construction of subjectivities.

The theoretical references on which this analysis is based start off by attempting to understand the formation of subjectivity in terms of what Butler (1990a, 1990b [1987], 1993, 1997a, 1997b, 1998[1990]) calls *performative* acts and applying them to gender analysis. This means that subjectivity is only so when it is acted out. But this is an action that always implies punitive results. In fact, Butler considers that gender is a “performance” that brings sanctions in its wake to those who are not able to draw their gender distinctions well enough. And this is so because there is no

² We use the expression “the production of individual subjectivities” to indicate that subjectivity is not an innate attribute of the individual, but a result of the social interactions in which one takes part. We talk about the *production* because the subjectivity needs a daily working routine to adapt it into the context. The subjectivities can be individual or collective.

essence that gender can express or exteriorise, nor an ideal objective it may aspire to. Gender is not an event, the various gender acts create the idea of gender, and without these there would be no gender at all. Such a formulation points to a series of fundamental factors regarding subjectivity. It tells us of constant processes that are never fixed on something distant from our own interactions. The subject is not a unified, homogeneous entity, but rather a plurality dependant on various performative acts through which it is constituted within different discursive formations, acts that may also be fetishistic, without a necessary prior relationship between the discourses that construct the various subjectivities of the subject. But this plurality does not so much imply a coexistence of distinct subjectivities that are isolated from one another or relations that have no effect on their constitution, but instead are in a relation of constant subversion of one by the others (Goffman 1959; 1967; Hall 1997; Mouffe 1993).

All this points to the criticism of all manner of fixed subjectivity *per se*, as a single and founding act, to the assertion of the incomplete, open and politically negotiable nature of subjectivity. However, this does not mean to say that subjectivity is indefinable for each historical moment. On the contrary, it is, but at the same time this subjectivity does not manage to completely consolidate itself as a social process. And this is due to one basic reason: the presence of the *other*. From the point of view of discursive interaction, subjectivities are precariously fixed, in the sense that each one contains the presence of the other subjectivities, the *other* that modifies them, that subverts them, achieving a provisional meaning at each historical moment. But this does not mean to say that they are arbitrary. Their production lies in our social dealings. Therefore, our social dealings only produce our subjectivities within us. One example of this is the question of the *subjectivity of women*. As Benhabib (1990 [1987]) point out, women in the third world have brought into question the supposition that there is a generalised, identifiable and collectively shared experience of being a woman. Being black and being a woman is being a black woman, it is being a woman whose subjectivity is constituted differently from that of a white woman. At the same time, this example demonstrates the problem of the constitution of subjectivity in terms of political operation, and the possibility of articulating collective subjectivities. We should not forget, as Izquierdo (1998) says, that diversity can block the constitution of a historical subject individual. Creating and enhancing differences is a well-known tactic when it comes to breaking up collectives involved in a struggle and to prevent individual needs from being recognised as common to others. This demonstrates the problems associated with the constitution of collective subjectivities. However, the needs of some may be subsumed by others for the sake of unity. Therefore, ignoring these considerations could imply returning to those methods of analysis that, for example, defining women as part of the working class (given the relationship of women with capitalism and not necessarily with men) subsumes the relation of women with men in the relation of the worker with capital, as Hartmann cautions us (1980 [1979]). The result of this is that the interests of workers are common to those of women, whose political consequences are to agglomerate women's movements with those of workers, but on the basis of converting the former into the latter (women and in particular housewives would form part of the working class, given that their situation would be considered an effect of the capitalist relations of production). As we shall see in the analysis, this type of conception is one of the cards that come into play in the process of producing collective gender subjectivities.

From the interactionist view of the formation and sustaining processes of subjectivity, or which in any case contemplates the presence of the *other*, it is possible to avoid the leap from essentialism to nihilism in our conception of subjectivity. We defend a conception of subjectivity as a social process as do Atkinson and Housely (2003), Blumer (1982[1969]), Garfinkel (1976, 1986), and Goffman (1959, 1967). Subjectivity depends on relations with others, which introduces the impossibility of closure, of its firm and final consolidation. Subjectivity is not something given and immutable (Benhabib 1990[1987], 1996, 1999; Hall 1997; Goffman 1959, 1967; Mouffe 1993). It is precarious, no matter how hard we try to sustain it as if it were otherwise. The presence of the other within ourselves, in a *dialogical* relationship, whose replies produce doubts and the blindest of certainties, not only highlights this precariousness but also the process of change. We cannot alter our form of participating in the production of life, in a solipsistic act; we need the other. The impossibility of closure is also the possibility of change. And this breach is an abyss of social indeterminacy (not attributable to any structural moment, but rather to political operation), of suffering, but also of hope. In this sense the elaboration of the *other* together with *others* to create, construct an *us* before a *them* plays an essential role, precarious as it may be. All of this is to question any essentialist and unitary conception of subjectivity. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985) say:

(...) the meaning of all identity is overdetermined to the measure in which all literality appears to be constitutively subverted and overwhelmed; in other words, to the measure in which, far from producing an essentialist *totalisation* or a no less essentialist *separation* between objects, there is a presence of certain objects in others that prevent their identity from being fixed." (p. 116)

Production of Data

Given our interest in analysing the production of subjectivity in the context of labour strikes, it was important that the empirical data referred to situations of sustained interaction over time, between subject who knew one another to some degree and had interacted, whether individually or collectively, at some moment. Also, the importance we gave in our approach to patriarchal capitalist relations of production implied concentrating on a company and on the families. The impossibility of accessing the family home meant that the nucleus of the case study would revolve around a company we have called MSA over a period of time running from the early seventies to the end of the nineties. This was a company in the auxiliary motor industry sector located in Catalonia (Spain). The company was founded with Spanish capital, and sold off to various foreign capital transnationals in successive phases. From the beginnings of the company as a small workshop (end of the sixties) to its high point, an increasing number of workers were hired. In the mid-seventies it had almost 1000 workers, but the late seventies and, above all, the early eighties saw the consolidation of a trend to reduce workplaces. By the end of the nineties there were less than 200 workers. The history of the company workers is characterised by a long and intense tradition of strikes. Table A1 in the appendix shows the most important strikes from the early 70s to the late 90s.

The empirical approach we would have preferred to have employed was the participant observation method. However, this route was outside our material possibilities. We then decided to use other techniques: a) biographical interviews with

people who knew and had interacted with one another at some moment during the period under consideration, a total of 21 interviews; b) informative interviews with members of the Works Committee and the Company Management, a total of 3 interviews. Table A2 in the appendix lists the profiles of the interviewees.

The Individual and Strikes

As we have seen in the introduction, the subject is not a unified, homogenous entity, but a fragmented plurality. However, this plurality does not consist of the coexistence of distinct dimensions of subjectivity that remain isolated from one another or of relations that are not affected in their constitution, but in a relation of constant subversion between one another. This does not mean to say that subjectivity is indefinable for any given moment. On the contrary, it is, but at the same time, as a social process, it does not manage to completely consolidate itself. And this occurs for a basic reason: the presence of the *other*. The subjectivities as precariously fixed, in the sense that each one contains the others, the *other* that modifies them, that subverts them, producing provisionality and instability.

In terms of who intervenes in strikes, with greater or lesser intensity and involvement, subjectivity tends to acquire a double nature. We can speak of two fundamental concepts of subjectivity regarding strikes. The first is the one that relinquishes its own individuality to join a collective *solidary*³ subjectivity where the personal dissolves into the general. The other is the one that refuses to give up its own individuality, distancing itself from the solidary subjectivity that unites the strikers. Nevertheless, we should not confuse subjectivity with the subjects, empirically considered, that beget it. There may be subjects who systematically participate in the solidary subjectivity that produces each strike, others who systematically shy away from or refuse to participate in said subjectivity, and others who, at some given moment, join a specific solidary subjectivity and at other times not. In any event, the process seems clear. In each strike, from what we can deduce from the case under study, it is necessary to produce solidary subjectivity, and thereby foster the transition from the individual to the collective, of the personal to the general, where the role of the leader is fundamental. As we shall see, this transition is precisely one of the objects under implicit dispute in strikes. Company management places special importance in frustrating this first factor in the formation of collective subjectivity that could threaten its interests. However, it is not enough to simply construct a solidary subjectivity to define the subjectivity produced by a strike. Some form of antagonistic subjectivity is also required.

During strike action, various ways of presenting oneself can be observed: there are those who accept them as long as they have been collectively decided on in assemblies, irrespective of whether they are more or less in agreement on a personal level (*Strikers*); those who organise the strikes and have a strategic vision of where they want to go (*Leaders*); those who rely on their own individuality to decide, for whom participating in a strike is understood as a personal and not a collective decision, without necessarily being against the strike; those who, relying on their own individuality, are always against strikes (*Blacklegs*); those in positions of

³ The use of *solidary* as an adjective is taken from *solidarity*. In the Anglo-Saxon context this is not really common, but in the Latin context it is. Perhaps the nearest English equivalent is *socially conscious*, but the meaning is broader and is more closely related to the term *solidarity*.

management and their associates; and those who pay the consequences without having taken part in the decision process (*Housewives*).

Finally, I would like to close this paper by pointing out the gender configuration of these subjectivities produced in the context of strikes, for company workers and the confrontations it can lead to.

The Strikers

The solidary subjectivity expressed by the interviewees is constructed when they put their own individuality to one side. One becomes active in a strike by participating in a shared subjectivity, one with the others. Out of personal subjectivities, linked to a variety of contexts, a unifying collective action is articulated for a period of time and space that constitutes a collective subjectivity which modifies individual subjectivities. It unites into action. And a strike is the supreme example of this process. But the starting off point is personal individuality (created from other shared subjectivities) and one's circumstances:

RhA (Skilled worker, masculine, workers' representative)⁴: When there is a strike each one sees it in his own individual way, there're those who say 'Hey, I don't mind being on strike for fifteen days" and those who say "I couldn't hold out for two days'
[Said in the general context of strikes in general]⁵

In the action, differences yield to equivalence, affecting the subjectivity of every individual. It is a case of the desire to be like others. In principle, opinions come in all colours, and one has to relinquish personal opinions. Individual subjectivity is annulled to form a collective strength, and strength, and collective desire, is expressed by guiding action to a common end. This leap from the individual to the collective is especially visible when the interviewees tell of their participation in strikes against lay offs or the practice of wage discrimination against women employed on production lines, two struggles that have had a special impact on their lives:

RmE (Specialist worker, infrafeminine): Yes, I've never gone to work when there was a strike, I go along with the majority.

[Said in the context of the strikes against women's wage discrimination and lay offs of '97]

RmF (Specialist worker, neutral): Me, if I had to down tools, I downed tools, (...) I've never gone to work when there's been a stoppage, I'd be the first one to down tools, but not the others.

[Said in the context of the strikes against women's wage discrimination]

RhG (Specialist worker, inframasculine, workers' representative): Some willingly and others grudgingly, we managed to create a sense of solidarity, we made a common block and from there we organised ourselves into groups, workers' groups and a strike committee was created (...).

[Said in the context of the strikes against lay offs of '97]

⁴ The profile of the interviewee is listed for each quote. Table 2 in the Annex describes these profiles. The interviews were recorded and literally transcribed in Spanish. The paper shows a version with grammatical corrections to make reading and translation easier, while attempting to affect the rhetoric of the text as little as possible.

⁵ For each quote we point to the context in which it is made. We define the context in terms of the strike to which it refers. There are two basic types: the context refers to one or various specific strikes which we will mention; or it refers to a generic discussion on *the strike* or *strikes*.

The strength of solidary subjectivity is even more clearly evident when, despite not sharing the opinion of the majority, one does not hesitate in participating and being involved in the strike, because you want to participate in the solidary subjectivity being created collectively. This collective subjectivity we hope to build consists precisely of joining a strike, despite not sharing its reasons and aims, simply because it has been democratically decided on in a meeting. What comes into play in the strike actions according to the interviewees are not just common interests, but also one's relationship with the rest. Not the rest one by one, but rather as "the majority", aggregations of masses, aggregations that justify the relinquishment of oneself:

RhI (Team leader, masculine): I've not been the kind of guy (...) well, what I liked, I liked, what I didn't like, I didn't like, if a majority voted for something, I always went along with it, and if we had to go on strike, I went on strike and that's all. You went on strike and that's it. There were always people in strikes who didn't want to go on strike and people who, though they weren't one hundred percent behind the strike, at least were there, it wasn't a case of people saying, "I'm going to work and that's it".

[Said in the context of strikes in general]

RhG (Specialist worker, inframasculine, workers' representative): So under the criteria that I wasn't much in agreement with the way it was set up, I respected it. Perhaps people were sold out, or people thought that it had to be the workers themselves who had to control the strike committee, because you know it's the strike committee that directs, and the works committee is relegated to second place.

[Said in the context of the strikes against lay offs of '97]

If the reasons and aims of a strike play an important role but are not the *sine qua non* condition, then we could come to the conclusion that it is the emotional ties established in the creation of a solidary subjectivity that plays a fundamental role. And these established ties sometimes create long-lasting relationships that are expressed in a need for the other, for their help, to feel taken care of:

RmU (Specialist female worker, workers' representative): Well, as far as I'm concerned, on one level the party takes care of me, on another my mother looks after me—who adores me—, on another my husband and my son, and on another level friends of many years' acquaintance, friendships of some twenty odd years I continue to have, from the other factory where I was laid off I still have two friends who were also fired when they went on strike because I was laid off, I even have co-workers from that plant who are now working in my factory and remember me from then.

[Said in the context of a strike not related to this case]

A strike also implies the separation of other shared subjectivities. When we join something like a strike, our subjectivity is transformed and it is possible that we distance ourselves from shared subjectivities of past times. We distance ourselves, and even come into conflict with those who do not go on strike, even though we may have emotional ties with them, like a friend from an assembly line, the husband or father. We drift apart from those who do not share that form of social struggle, perhaps because we begin to doubt the emotional ties that unite us. At that point a strike becomes a test of our relationships, not just at work, but in other areas, creating and dismantling individual and collective subjectivities. This implies reconsidering our relations with others outside what is, strictly speaking, the working context. This becomes particularly clear when the interviewees refer to strikes that

repeatedly stand out, like the strike of 1973, which for many was the first strike they experienced, or strikes to defend the application of legal judgements against women's wage discrimination from 1986 to 1989, or the strikes of 1997 organised to combat lay offs:

RmJ (Specialist worker, infrafeminine): (...) I don't know, when I had to go on strike in the company or had problems to defend my workplace or my salary, he [the husband] gave me no support (...).

[Said in the context of the strikes against women's wage discrimination]

RmJ (Specialist worker, infrafeminine): He [the father] didn't support me (...) he said that people who went on strike were lazy.

[Said in the context of strikes for collective agreements and policies in the 70s]

RmR (Specialist worker, infrafeminine): (...) with a strike [for it to be understood] in your home, you need someone who is going through the same thing, to know what it's like.

[Said in the context of strikes in general]

The individual joins the group; he does not form a class by joining the members of the group, but rather the individual joins the group as a whole, and the trigger to the union is the affection for a leader that perhaps arouses admiration and respect:

RmJ (Specialist worker, infrafeminine): After that, there were other strikes, the metal workers here in S.[referring to a specific town] (...) and I got to meet people, beginning to approach people that I thought were fighters, helping them.

[Said in the context of strikes in general and the supportive strikes of '76]

RmR (Specialist worker, infrafeminine): And at that moment, as she had to stay and say, "gentlemen, this is the strike committee, the strike has just been called off, here's the Guardia Civil lieutenant and he's a witness that the strike has been called off, and everyone back to work", and we pushed the managers aside and all went inside, strong, no? All in a matter of seconds, seconds, you better believe it, that's strong, eh.

[Said in the context of the strike for a collective agreement, against women's wage discrimination and the voluntary bonus of 8'7]

The Leaders

In the case of leaders the question is presented in another way. They present themselves as someone who proposes strategies, who aids decision making, who analyses and evaluates the development of the strike and its scope. This is an individual who anticipates the movements of collective subjectivity but does so in relation to others who support the leader. The leader modulates people's desires, channels them and ensures that they continue to be subjects, even when they lose. Calling off a strike, as told in the following quote, means asserting oneself as a collective subject before the company's intentions of turning the strikers into objects, had the company succeeded in breaking the strike:

RmU (Specialist female worker, workers' representative): [Tells of the final outcome of the strike of 1987, when the company manages to get some of the staff to agree to return to work, thereby preventing the strike from being broken by the company] The company had arranged it so that the manager would come in first, followed by the management and the company lawyer, and then everybody else. Let's say that the company would break the

siege, enter by force and, seeing as we were about to stop this from happening, there was going to be a confrontation between us. We agreed to meet one hour before and saw that the factory was completely occupied. But with video cameras and such like, police, rather than security guards on the roofs, in the windows, all the streets taken, a horrendous deployment for a confrontation. The company had provoked things so that there would even be a certain amount of repression, if anything happened the works committee would get it in the neck and be fired. So there we were and let the head of personnel through, we let the manager in and all the managers, and then we cordoned the place off and let nobody else in. Only one worker went through. Nobody else went in, we prevented it, we'd already organised that, that nobody would go in. And then we looked at the letter [the company promised a series of improvements in wages to break the strike] and we decided to return to work all together, because the only condition that the company didn't set was signing any form of collective agreement, we didn't have to give anything up [the strike was for the collective agreement and against women's wage discrimination, subjects on which no agreement was ever reached]
[Said in the context of the strike for the collective agreement, against women's wage discrimination and for the volunteer bonus of '87]

For the interviewed workers, a leader must be incorruptible, in the context of a strike. Otherwise he becomes the worst of all possible traitors. This is because those who project onto him have relinquished the most valuable thing they have, their individual subjectivity, to make the leader what he is. The leader is prized (and therefore corruptible by the opposing side) because of the strength or power obtained by the group. The strength of the leader comes from the workers. On his own he is nothing. If the leader's treason was not experienced as the worse possible thing that could happen, it would mean that the others had not give up anything to form part of the group, that they had no subjectivity or personal aspirations to relinquish for the strike:

RhA (Qualified worker, masculine, workers' representative): That person was someone who entered the company as a labourer, but had a lot of ambition (...).

P-E (interviewer): A social climber (...).

RhA (Qualified worker, masculine, workers' representative): Ambition to climb on whatever basis. We had a strike around 1970 and he was the ringleader, the initiator of the strike, the one who drew in the people, the one who gave people the messages to follow the strike. On one occasion he even climbed a platform in the factory and began to shout, "We have to set the company on fire, we have to burn the company down". When someone sets himself up as a ringleader, the company tries to see if they can come to some kind of agreement with them, to get them on their side. If that person doesn't have what it takes, then they change. They offered him a slightly better post, and he soon forgot of the whole fuss.

[Said in the context of the strike for the collective agreement of 7'0]

In short, for those interviewed who participated in solidary subjectivities linked to strikes, these can become somewhat common, normal in their lives, contributing to the formation of their own individual subjectivity:

RhI (Team leader, masculine): I've experienced many strikes at MSA and it's normal, logical.

[Said in the context of strikes in general]

And, at the same time as the strikes, some even define a time in the personal biographies with a strong emotional component:

RmJ (Specialised worker, infrafeminine): for me at least, up to now, apart from having my children, I would point to my experiences with the women's strike at MSA, in other words, the years of struggle, that for us was a goal we had to achieve and, for me, those years were very intense.

[Said in the context of the strikes against women's wage discrimination]

RhS (Specialised worker, inframasculine): Shortly after joining the company, that's what impressed me the most (...) I'd never before been in a strike, and shortly after being employed, I joined in October of seventy-two and in March of seventy-three there was a strike (...) in the company (...), a total strike.

[Said in the context of the strikes for collective agreements of 7'3]

RhI (Team leader, masculine): For example, when I joined the company they had the first strike, and I'd been working there for six months (...) I was employed in November and by February or March they set up the first strike. I was eighteen. The strike was for five hundred pesetas more. And nobody talked of "they're going to give us a raise of five percent and we want eight", no, "we want five hundred pesetas more, and that's it". And that strike lasted one month, and that strike is very present in my mind. "We want five hundred pesetas more and that's it", and everyone out on the street, a big mess, firings on the spot and all, and in the end we went back with five hundred pesetas more. It was the first time I found myself in a strike (...) that I took one in (...) as I was only eighteen years old and I hadn't lived and it was my first strike, (...) but afterwards, as I've been through so many in the thirty years I've been there, I have no idea how many we've had.

[Said in the context of the strikes for collective agreements of 7'3]

The Blacklegs

Together with this form of subjectivity expressed by the interviewees when they talk of themselves with regards to the strikes, there is another that consists of not going along with this solidary subjectivity. Here the individual is someone whose decision to participate in a strike does not depend on a majority position discussed in an assembly, but rather on his exclusive viewpoint. It is his personal decision. This behaviour, where one's personal criteria prevail over the majority position, leads to not joining a strike even when a majority has voted for it. The result is to not participate in the reiterated processes to constitute a shared subjectivity. Those who decide to not take part in a strike, despite it being approved in an assembly, assert their own individuality and decision before the constitution of a solidary subjectivity. They claim that the reasons are not convincing, that the aims are not appropriate, that the procedures are mistaken, that the majority is not legitimate. But in the end, what is not being shared is something much deeper, the emotional link, or the emotional link is not sufficiently strong to relinquish one's own subjectivity. They do not join the strike, they reject it, they oppose it, they do not recognise it as their own, perhaps because they do not wish to pay the price of being less vulnerable (the group makes you less vulnerable). This assertion of one's individuality is not an easy choice, because it is made from the stance of *me who does not join the strike before them who go on strike*. Going on strike involves individual difficulties, and not doing so also. This is not a case of oppositions between *us who are for the strike* and *them*

who are against the strike, but rather *mes* against *thems*, of *mes* who do not participate in a solidary subjectivity. This is the kind of relationship the company wants to establish among the workers: an aggregation of individualities:

RhM (Clerk, neutral): And if I don't want to stop I won't stop [working] and, if not, I'll go in through the sewers or another door. It's all the same to me if the place is full of banners. If I decide to go in, I go in. They can say what they like about me, but I would never deceive people. And I won't be a blackleg. I come in and go to my workplace, I've never gone down to the factory floor to make a piece. Never. Something that many who call themselves trade unionists, and not, have done. But not me, I've gone to my workplace and done my job. If they need pieces let them go down to the shop floor and make them, but I've not gone down there. And if I had work to do I did it and if I had no work I didn't do anything, and that's it. I've never deceived people. I've had fights and rows with people and all that. And I've even told them one or two things in their faces in front of everyone, I don't hide, there's no reason to hide. Did the majority decide on the strike?, no, they're like sheep (...) it's not my problem. I don't give a damn if thirty have decided in an assembly.

[Said in the context of strikes in general]

RhT (Team leader, inframasculine): Yes, because when I don't agree with a strike I'll clearly say, "I won't do it because of this, this and this", I have my own ideas and respect those of others.

[Said in the context of strikes in general]

This unshared subjectivity, however, can have two sides. The most obvious one is insisting on maintaining one's independence despite the tensions with workmates caused by the decision not to join the strike because one does not believe in them, in general, or for some specific reasons. But there is another possibility: the worker though not necessarily being against strikes or class actions in general, he or she is unwilling to get involved in those strike actions when they believe an inappropriate strategy is being used to defend workers' interests.

Management and Their Associates

In the game of establishing subjectivities in the context of strikes, appealing to one's individuality, to one's freedom to choose, implies the paradox of sidling up (whether actively or passively) to the subjectivity of management, to their way of seeing things. Perhaps the emotional ties are stronger in this other direction, ties that are obviously not between equals, in contrast to the ties between the workers who take part in assemblies, which, despite any differences or discrepancies, are ties between equals. If we accept that there are leaders among *us the workers* and what is followed is the leader, what would be produced in this case is a change of leader. Therefore, the relationship established with the bosses in moments of rest and relaxation, to give one example, can influence in the creation of some emotional tie with the visible personalities of the company. More so if they become your friends. This route, though it may not necessarily be intentional, is useful for the company. Informal ties between bosses and workers can help prevent some workers from entering into the solidary subjectivity and, by extension, antagonistic. There is an example in the following statement:

P-E (interviewer): Returning to the subject of conflicts, in which other conflicts have you had a very clear impression that you should form part of the strike?

RhT (Team leader, inframasculine): (...) To start off with, they tell you things that after a while you realise are not true (...) they've told you something so you get involved, and then time passes and you see that what you've been told is not true, for political reasons or whatever.

P-E (interviewer): For example?

RhT (Team leader, inframasculine): Whenever we used to go on strike it was political. You couldn't have a fifteen day-long strike for half a point [wage increase], when you'd never recover that half a percentage point in what remained of the year. But you'd look at it and think, "I'm staying out". I'd stay out very convinced, sitting there, or I'd even say, "I'm not going to the factory, why go? To stand at the door, I won't go", and would stay home. Or I've even gone to work somewhere else while I was on strike there, it's true, you have to be realistic. But when you realise that what you've been told is not true, you say, "I'm being a fool" and I'd go back to work. Weighing one thing against another, with what was really so (...) I had a friend here who was a life-long friend, and he would give me such a scolding (...), but not outside, we were friends, and he would explain things and you think, "shit, why don't they explain these things on the shop floor?", "look at it" and I was out. He'd say to me, "I'm not saying you should go in, that's your choice, but think about it".

P-E (interviewer): Can you give me an example of one of these situations, that was very well known, where on one hand they told you white and on the other black?

RhT (Team leader, inframasculine): What I said about percentage points, "we give you three points" [wage increase] "and we want five", and the company says, "not five, we'll give you three, but we'll put on buses to come to work, we'll give you these breaks (...)" and you add it all up and see you make more with buses included. If you add the money you save with the bus, with three points you come out winning. It's things you weigh up and you go back to work. Things like that.

[Said in the context of strikes in general]

Regarding those who take part wholeheartedly in the company subjectivity, the management, who do not give their opinions on strikes. It is not a case of whether one decides to join the strike or not. For the management it is not appropriate to consider going on strike, because they are the direct or indirect object of strike actions.

Those Affected by Strikes

Finally, those who stay home are directly or indirectly involved in the struggle, especially housewives who are related to the strikers. They may not seem in favour of going on strike, if the decision depended on them, but they must also suffer the consequences if it involves the people they live with, they pay the consequences of actions without having any say, only indirectly. This is not openly discussed, but one can sense that strikes are experienced as a source of troubles, given the financial dependency between the housewife and the breadwinner. It is as if the gender division of labour established the following deal: "You bring in the money, and I'll make sure we make it to pay day":

RmP (Housewife exclusively): Me, with money coming in, without a strike and that, then no (...) I can handle our finances well.
[Said in the context of strikes in general]

The Gender Configuration of Collective Subjectivity in the Context of Strikes

Subjectivity is subverted by the presence of *others*. If the other is understood as plural, and in terms of social life he is, as well as not being equal, we can perceive class subjectivity as a possible yet precarious and ephemeral subjectivity. This is because it is threatened by the configuration of new collective subjectivities that could supplant it, or because we build other subjectivities around it in a constant, historical and contingent meshing of subjectivities.

The innovating strength of the *me* does not reside so much in its isolated potentiality, as an individual subject facing a specific situation, but in its potentiality as a *me* that is able to interact, to relate to other *mes* to create a common innovative project, to transform social relationships or further perpetuate them. From our point of view, social change, whether it is organised or not, moves more through the “*us*” than through the “*me*”. Here the formulation of the *other* together with *others* plays a fundamental role in the construction of an “*us*” before a “*them*”. When speaking of the other, participating in relations of production implies speaking of differentiated others, as “*them*”, as “*us*”, not equal, exploited or exploiters, dominated or dominators. It is the presence of the *other*, which in this case is “*them*”, that prevents us from being totally ourselves, a totally impossible objective because there is no original *ourselves* to compare oneself to. The relation does not arise from fully-fledged subjectivities, but from the impossibility of constituting them.

To speak of the gender configuration of subjectivities in the case of labour strikes we need to analyse the formation of “*us*” in relation to the role played in the family. In this paper we limit the analysis to the case of male and female company workers. We can distinguish an internal fracture which in terms of capitalist patriarchy would point to “*we*” being made up of two classes and in terms of patriarchal capitalism would indicate that the working class suffers an internal fracture. The two segments that the “*us*” divides into are,

1. “Us the men, who are responsible for supporting the family” (bread winners)
2. “Us the women, who are responsible for looking after the family and contribute a complementary wage” (working housewives).

When they speak of strikes the workers basically define women and men by mentioning the fight against women’s wage discrimination. This struggle saw the construction of two subjectivities, “*us the working women fighting against wage discrimination*”, and “*us the working men who morally support women in their fight*”. An important fracture opens up in the solidary subjectivity that had characterised the workers of both genders at the MSA plant over many years, precisely because the struggle against discrimination is not taken as a personal struggle by all:

RmJ (Specialist worker, infrafeminine): Last week I didn’t get round to insisting on the subject of the women’s strike a bit more, because for me, more than a feminist issue, and there were those who saw it that way, there was a part of the committee that saw it as one worker’s struggle, of a young person (...)It shouldn’t seem like something feminist.
[Said in the context of the strikes against women’s wage discrimination, in general]

But of only one collective, women workers on the plant,
RhB (Clerk, Inframasculine): The women set up the strike, asking for equal wages for men and women.
[Said in the context of the strike against women's wage discrimination of '89]

This is because of the non-participation of male workers in the indefinite strike staged by women in 1989. It would be legitimate to speak of them as blacklegs however much the women's strategy may have been to define them as "*us the working men who morally support women in their fight*".

"Us the Working Women Fighting Against Wage Discrimination"

The case of fighting wage discrimination against women on the production line at MSA is the context in which the antagonistic subjectivity of "*us the women fighting against wage discrimination*" is formulated before an explicit "*them*"; "*them the company and their representative*", "*the management who discriminate against women in terms of wages*". As well as another more ambiguous one, which according to the interviewees that participated in this antagonistic subjectivity swings between a "*them who partially support*", who partially participate in this subjectivity, and a "*them the working men who do not go on an indefinite strike*". This struggle saw the construction of a politically orientated antagonistic subjectivity that was clearly aimed at containing the construction of a "*them the working men who do not go on an indefinite strike*" as an enemy (in that not being behind the women only reinforced their explicit opponent, "*them the company*") to turn them into a "*them the working men who morally support us*", thereby creating a "*them*" who to some measure is also an "*us*". In this endeavour the role of the leader, a woman leader in this case, is of fundamental importance when it comes to directing the creation of a solidary and antagonistic subjectivity, which only goes to show the inventive dimension of the construction of subjectivities:

P-E (interviewer): In other words you would be in a weak situation if the stoppage were not total.

RmU (Specialist worker, workers' representative): Exactly, that was the other argument and the battles were to ensure that the strike in the company was total and that it made considerable financial damage to the company. Whether we won in the political or economic fields, these were the two major and valuable considerations. And with what methods? The method was to achieve total unity, because you can't win without total unity and the other methods included that everyone who was with us and with what we said, then good, and if they weren't we'd go for them. The proposal was to behave like guerrillas and preventing in the mornings (...)

P-E (interviewer): Setting up pickets and not letting the men in?

RmU (Specialist worker, workers' representative): Seeing as the assembly wouldn't resolve the problem, it's true that when you saw the men go in, the tension in the air, the women would get really angry. So my message was that the men were behind us morally, at least lets pretend (...).

[Said in the context of the strike against women's wage discrimination of '89]

Nevertheless this can be a difficult situation, especially during the indefinite strike of 1989 to combat wage discrimination. If both the subjectivity of "*us the women fighting against wage discrimination*" and "*us the men who morally support*

them” form part of the solidary subjectivity of “*us the workers*”, the contradiction becomes clearly evident the moment the men decide to not participate in the indefinite strike. If they form part of the shared subjectivity, then they are all blacklegs. But they are not defined in this mode, on the contrary, there is an attempt to present them as supportive, even if only morally. We then see the appearance of a sort of class faction or even another class with which some form of alliance or non-interference agreement is established. However, this staying on the sidelines at the most decisive moments has the practical effect of supporting management. Also, the faction itself is proof of the implicit concepts that sustain the “*us the workers*” itself; a patriarchal capitalist “*us the workers*”. This solidary subjectivity is configured by the interests of the workers who consider themselves to be chiefly responsible for supporting the family, which means that when strikes that articulate these subjectivities are called, what is being defended or pursued are precisely family interests, or defending the role of heads of family. In this subjectivity the defence of women’s wages is not thought of as an issue of solidarity and therefore common to a generic collective of “*us the female/male workers*”, because women are not conceived as being co-responsible for supporting the family.

Another good example of this fragmentation of the subjectivity of “*us the workers*” is evident in negotiating collective agreements regarding questions that can only be considered from the viewpoint of gender. When measures to combat absenteeism were being discussed during the negotiations for the collective agreement of 1990, the company proposed setting up a bonus to stimulate its reduction, while the Works Committee, which was chaired by a woman at the time, proposed that the company grant two days for personal business. The company opposed this measure, as they saw it as the institutionalisation of absenteeism. It would imply recognising the right of workers to attend to personal problems when they arose. Its practical effect would be a re-internalisation of the costs of production involved in day-to-day life back to the company itself, in the proportion of two-days’ pay for workers to attend to family needs. The major part of female absenteeism is related to these responsibilities of looking after the family that are commonly attributed to women. And when workers request this they are saying that absenteeism serves to resolve problems, that people need to have extra time outside the context of holidays and time off due to illness, so that they can resolve *their* business, which tends to be related to family problems. This is a fracture because it is a demand that never comes to term. In part because, as company management understands, it is institutive of labour relations, but also because it is not a demand shared by other workers. We have to assume that male workers do not find themselves subject to these kinds of needs and, in the end, therefore, they are given a secondary importance in processes of struggle and negotiation.

“*Us the Men Who Support Women in Their Fight*”

The interviewees who expressed the “*us the working men who morally support the women*” do so showing only a partial solidarity with the women, which comes out as intermittent, labour partial stoppages, demonstrations, etc.

RhA (Skilled worker, masculine, workers’ representative): It’s that at that moment, after the women demanded this subject of equality, when it was won, the company refused to apply it. Then there was a series of actions, but they weren’t indefinite-type actions, rather that a partial strike would be called, we stopped, we went on strike, we downed tools, and when we had

a partial strike everyone took part, except in the offices, but the majority took part and gave support.

[Said in the context of the strikes against women's wage discrimination, in general]

RhI (Team leader, masculine): We even had a three, four day strike and we were all out in the street, men and women.

[Said in the context of the strikes against women's wage discrimination, in general]

The limit to this partial solidarity was the indefinite strike,

RhI (Team leader, masculine): Then we the men said, "alright, very good, you're fighting for this. Do you want to go on strike? [referring to an indefinite strike]. We'll be with you, no matter what, so long as it doesn't involve going on strike, but in a strike you'll be on your own".

[Said in the context of the strike against women's wage discrimination of '89]

The fracture that became clearly evident in the indefinite strike was closely tied to subjectivities and the ways of participating in the production of life in the home. For the workers the typical female worker is a person who is married with a man that works and for that she can go on strike for a long time:

RhT (Team leader, inframasculine): A woman whose husband works elsewhere can give herself the luxury of a month on strike or off work, but someone who has nobody else bringing home a wage, how are they going to last a month? The person who gets paid later, gets paid.

[Said in the context of the strike against women's wage discrimination of '89]

The position of the male gender is clearly expressed in follow quotation: is the position of the male bread winner:

RhG (Specialist worker, inframasculine, workers' representative): Because the judge told us the sentence would be out in a month, and I said we could call a few intermittent stoppages, so the press would pick it up and that. But I didn't think it was a good idea getting involved in an indefinite strike under those conditions because there was an important collective to be considered which was the men. To this they'd say "but you're already earning that", how does a man explain to his family that he's getting involved in an indefinite strike lasting one month without being paid a penny when he's not about to get anything in return. I was already earning that, all right, but family finances are like that.

[Said in the context of the strike against women's wage discrimination of '89]

In the context of the indefinite strike of 1989, to apply the sentences that agreed with the women's position, partial solidarity, showed the limits to the equivalence between a female plant worker who is married to a worker and a male plant worker married to a working housewife or to a simple housewife. The equivalence is realised in terms of wages. A woman's wages are understood as being complementary to a man's wages, whereas a man's wages are understood to be the main contribution. And this equivalence, as a product of an antagonistic subjectivity shared by men and women, had its limits in the strike of 1989 against women's wage discrimination: all the desired support except an indefinite strike by men. In other words, wage demands that, as a minimum, affect men are *worth* an indefinite strike for all workers and all the uncertainties it may involve, but not in the case of women. The men claim

that a family cannot withstand an indefinite strike without earnings. True enough. But the same is true when other things are demanded that affect male plant workers. The sexist circumstances in which we live and define any possibility of action by MSA workers, whether a breadwinner or a working housewife or a simple housewife, are actively reinforced and appropriated by male workers. When they support the women in their specific demands, they bring their role as a breadwinner to a crisis point, also in their actions and their arguments, but when they do not wish to support the women in the indefinite strike, they reinforce what it means to be a breadwinner, in their actions and their arguments. The subject appears fragmented, contradictory and unstable, and the paradox is that this fragmentation operates in the arguments of those who do not support the women in the indefinite strike, appealing, precisely, to the fragmentation between the men who are responsible for the family (which means to support it) and the women who are conceived of as co-responsible for the family (and can therefore get involved in a strike of this kind),

RhG (Skilled worker, inframasculine, workers' representative): We said that we did not agree with an indefinite strike, that the men would not support an indefinite strike as that meant a month-long total stoppage and you weren't going to get paid a penny, which would lead to serious family problems. (...) well, the women came back with factious replies saying, "listen, you don't lose", because it's what the male workers were saying, "you women are going to win, because after this you're going to get back all the back pay, which could come close to one million pesetas, but we're not going to pick up a penny", and they took on a response that was logical but factious, they'd say "you've already earned it", I'd been paid the raise but had already spent it and now I had a problem before me, which was that I had to feed my family, and I no longer had the cash, so how could I justify it (...) Women are very solidary, but also very egotistic.

[Said in the context of the strike against women's wage discrimination of '89]

Conclusion

In this paper I have shown that subjectivity can be subverted by the presence of *others*. A discursive presence, that is to say, that the presence of the other is a presence in action, in interaction, and not in contemplation. The relation of interaction is found in the pragmatic context. In this sense, as Glasersfeld (2000[1981]) points out, we need to mesh with *others*, pragmatically in some way. We somehow *run into* the others in the interaction. If we understand the other to be plural, therefore social life is plural, as well as being unequal, then we can perceive the collective subjectivity of class as a possible subjectivity but precarious and ephemeral when it is constantly threatened by the configuration of new subjectivities that supplant it, or when other subjectivities are articulated around it in a constant, historical and contingent meshing of subjectivities.

The idea of analysing social classes in their discursive interaction arises from a concern with understanding the process of social transformation carried out by human beings. We have placed the social interactions that sustain and enable us as subjects in the centre of our analysis, in what helps us contribute, in a more decisive manner, to the closure, the repetition and negation of the subject. It is a question of the context, which is the result, in turn, of historical processes in which we lead our lives. We have focused on contradictions, conflicts and confrontations, not just ones

of inter-subjectivity (especially gender-related ones), but in the core of subjectivity itself. For it is these conflicts that help us understand the movements, recompositions, dissolutions and fragmentations that assign our concept of class its unstable, contradictory and changing nature. The subjectivities we have identified in this analysis are those listed in the following table:

TABLE 1: KIND OF SUBJECTIVITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF STRIKES	
Individual subjectivity	Gender collective subjectivity
"The strikers"	"Us the women, who are responsible for looking after the family and contribute a complementary wage" (working housewives)
"The leaders"	
"The blacklegs"	
"Management and their associates"	"Us the men, who are responsible for supporting the family" (bread winners)
"Those affected by strikes"	

For both workers and the company, confrontation passes through the mutually undermined production of subjectivities. Every day, workers sustain the production of subjectivities based on democratic procedures and ties of affection, where affection for a democratic leader is the catalysing agent. They create common interests and strategies for its achievement. As we have seen, this very act involves defining the workers' subjectivities against the "others". The "others" are those the workers attribute opposing interests, strategies and emotions. *Being with us is being against them*. Workers produce these supportive subjectivities when confronted with company bosses, turning them into antagonists. By appealing to the individuality of each subject, the bosses construct shared subjectivities aimed at the dispersion and disintegration of workers among themselves, and to their agglutination within the company. The latter is taken as a leader for those who take part in a shared subjectivity with the company, through emotional ties. This is an authoritarian leader, under conditions of an economic dictatorship. The production process for these changing subjectivities is created during discursive interaction. Our analysis allows us to show that classes *are not born* but *are made*, in this case, during strikes. And they are made through difficulties, confrontations and struggles where, perhaps, the agglutination of subjectivities may be the ultimate objective in question in the everyday constitution of classes. In defining classes, what we stress is not the *being*, but rather the *making* of the subjects. We are therefore moving in the field of the inter-subjective, and we can see the daily flow involved in the making of the social classes.

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Appendix

TABLE A1: THE MOST IMPORTANT STRIKES BY MSA WORKERS

Year	Main motives	Type
1973	Collective agreement (wage increase, reduction in the working day, stability in contracts)	Indefinite
1974	Collective agreement	Labour partial stoppages
1973-1974	Improved working conditions	Labour partial stoppages
1976	Solidarity with county metal workers Solidarity with union organisations and policies	Indefinite
1976	Improved educational conditions and the release of political prisoners	General strike
1978	Collective agreement (wage increase)	Labour partial stoppages
1981	Support for democratic institutions. Against the attempted coup d'état	Strike in support of parliamentarians held hostage
1984	Collective agreement (wage increases, fifteen minute break)	Labour partial stoppages and indefinite strike
1985	Against pension cuts	General strike
1986	Collective agreement (wage increases and wage parity for men and women on the production line)	Indefinite strikes
1987	Collective agreement (wage parity for men and women, end of voluntary company remuneration bonus)	Indefinite strike
1988	Against government youth employment programme	General strike
1989	Wage parity for men and women on the production line	Indefinite strike
1992	Against the labour market reform	General strike
1994	Against the labour market reform. Creation of temporary employment companies	General strike
1997	Maintenance of workplaces. Negotiation of company viability plan (first presentation of job termination dossier)	Indefinite strike
1997	Maintenance of workplaces. Negotiation of company viability plan (second presentation of job termination dossier)	Labour partial stoppages and indefinite strike

TABLE A2: LIST OF PROFILES

The profile refers to a position in the company (work and union) and in the home. The series of profiles employed is listed below:

▪ Specialist female worker	Infracollegial	
▪ Specialist female worker	Neutral	
▪ Specialist female worker	-	Workers' representative
▪ Specialist male worker	Infracollegial	
▪ Specialist male worker	Infracollegial	Workers' representative
▪ Skilled female worker	Infracollegial	
▪ Skilled male worker	Collegial	Workers' representative
▪ Skilled male worker	Infracollegial	
▪ Team leader	Infracollegial	
▪ Team leader	Collegial	
▪ Team leader	Infracollegial	
▪ Clerk	Infracollegial	
▪ Clerk	Neutral	
▪ Technician	Collegial	
▪ Management	Collegial	
▪ Housewife (exclusively)	Feminine	

We list the profiles of the interviewees that we have been able to reach effectively.

Insofar as the terminology employed, we need only comment on that which refers to gender. To refer to the plurality of situations that emerge from the simultaneous definition of a profile in patriarchal capitalism we have made an attempt to simplify the terminology by employing (with some modifications and trimming) the gender typology developed by Izquierdo (1998b: 44). Therefore, instead of saying, for example, "skilled worker, breadwinner married to a housewife who works in the home exclusively", we use "skilled worker, masculine". Below we describe each term used to identify gender, from the viewpoint of the conceptual pairing "breadwinner" and "housewife":

Feminine: Someone whose relationship with the *head of the family* is that of *wife/husband* and defines themselves as a housewife (exclusively) when asked about their job. Housewife who works in the home exclusively and is married to a breadwinner.

Infraclassic: Someone whose relationship with the *head of the family* is that of *wife/husband* and defines themselves as active in the labour force (working or unemployed) or retired and as a housewife when asked about their job and who consider their income as complementary. The term *infraclassic* is not employed by Izquierdo (she speaks of *superfeminine*) and is due to Francisco José León. A female worker and housewife married to a breadwinner.

Masculine: Someone who is the *head of the family*, who lives in a home containing more than one person, and who defines themselves as active in the labour force (working or unemployed) or retired and who considers their income as for the family. Breadwinner married to a housewife who works in the home exclusively.

Inframasculine: Someone who is the *head of the family*, who lives in a home containing more than one person, and who defines themselves as active in the labour force (working or unemployed) or retired and who considers their income as for the family and who are *husband/wife* with someone of the *infraclassic* gender. The term *inframasculine* is not employed by Izquierdo (she speaks of *supermasculine*) and is due to Francisco José León. Bread winner married to a worker and housewife

Neutra: Someone who lives alone and who defines themselves as active in the labour force (working or unemployed) when asked about their job.

Finally, we do not indicate gender when this typology is not applicable.
