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GRAMSCI'S REVOLUTIONS: PASSIVE AND PERMANENT*

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Antonio Gramsci's notion of "passive revolution" has often been understood as a distinctive historical narrative, political concept, or theory of state formation. This article proposes to consider it instead as a "heuristic formula" within the "lexical architecture" of the Prison Notebooks. *Based upon a diachronic and contextualist analysis of the usage of the formula, I argue that Gramsci's research on passive revolution emerged as a critical element within the development of his own distinctive conception of the "sublation" and "actualization" of the slogan of "the revolution in permanence." Attending to this dialectical relationship allows the political and strategic dimensions of passive revolution to be highlighted, and suggests new paths of research for the debate about its analytic fertility and contemporary relevance.*

Antonio Gramsci's distinctive notion of "passive revolution" has received increasing attention in recent years, both in terms of theoretical studies of its internal coherence, and in terms of empirical studies using it to analyze contemporary political processes. This notion was first hesitatingly sketched out in twenty-seven notes intermittently written between late 1930 and early 1935, in the texts that later became known as the *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci's focus on the role of intellectuals in the organization of culture was the subject of debate immediately following the publication of a thematic edition of his carceral writings in the late 1940s, while the concept of "hegemony"—surprisingly, given its subsequent fortunes—only rose to prominence after 1956.[1] It was not until

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1 On the history of the reception of hegemony in the early 1950s see Francesca Chiarotto, "I primi dieci anni (1948–1958). Note sulla ricezione del Gramsci teorico politico: la fortuna

the 1970s, however, and increasingly following the publication of Valentino Gerratana's landmark critical edition of the *Prison Notebooks* in 1975, that more attention began to be dedicated to passive revolution.[2] There has since been a proliferation of readings of its significance, its distinctiveness in comparison to other theories of revolution, and its "actuality" in different political conjunctures. From obscurity at the time of its formulation and relative neglect during the first twenty-five years of Gramsci's postwar fame, passive revolution has progressively become one of the most important red threads used in philological studies that seek to navigate their way through the labyrinth of the *Prison Notebooks*.[3]

Passive revolution, however, has not only become significant for studies of Gramsci or the history of Marxism. It is also now one of the most influential of concepts derived from the various Marxist traditions in wider historical and contemporary scholarship. It has been productively employed to analyze

dell'egemonia," in Angelo D'Orsi, ed., *Egemonie* (Naples, 2008), 65–76; and Chiarotto, *Operazione Gramsci: alla conquista degli intellettuali nell'Italia del dopoguerra* (Milan, 2011). On the different seasons of Gramsci studies see Guido Liguori, *Gramsci conteso: Interpretazioni, dibattiti e polemiche 1922–2012* (Rome, 2012).

[2] On the focus on passive revolution in the debates of the 1970s see Fabio Frosini, "Beyond the Crisis of Marxism: Thirty Years Contesting Gramsci's Legacy," in Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis, eds., *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism* (Leiden, 2007), 663–78. Seminal early contributions included Franco De Felice, "Una chiave di lettura in 'Americanismo e fordismo'," *Rinascita-Il Contemporaneo* 29/42 (1972), 33–5; and Franco De Felice, "Rivoluzione passiva, fascismo, americanismo in Gramsci," in Franco Ferri, ed., *Politica e storia in Gramsci*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1977), 161–220. For a critical contextualization of these essays see Franco De Felice, *Il presente come storia*, ed. Gregorio Sorgonà and Ermanno Taviani (Rome, 2017). Perhaps under the influence of the debate on the Risorgimento as a "failed agrarian revolution" (*rivoluzione agraria mancata*) initiated by Rosario Romeo in the 1950s, discussions prior to De Felice's interventions did not tend to emphasize the specificity of passive revolution, when it was noted at all. See Rosario Romeo, *Risorgimento e capitalismo* (Bari, 1959); and compare to Renato Zangheri, "La mancata rivoluzione agraria nel risorgimento e i problemi economici dell'unità," *Studi gramsciani: Atti del convegno tenuto a Roma nei giorni 11–13 genaio 1958* (Rome, 1958), 369–83. On the influence of the concept of a *rivoluzione mancata* on Risorgimento studies see A. William Salomone, "The Risorgimento between Ideology and History: The Political Myth of *Rivoluzione Mancata*," *American Historical Review* 68/1 (1962), 38–56.

[3] See, for example, Dora Kanoussi, *Una introducción a los Cuadernos de la cárcel de Antonio Gramsci* (México D.F., 2000); Pasquale Voza, "Rivoluzione passive," in Fabio Frosini and Guido Liguori, eds., *Le parole di Gramsci: per un lessico dei "Quaderni del carcere"* (Rome, 2004), 187–207; Alvaro Bianchi, *O laboratório de Gramsci Filosofia, História e Política* (São Paulo, 2008); Peter D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (Leiden, 2009); Fabio Frosini, "Reformation, Renaissance and the State: The Hegemonic Fabric of Modern Sovereignty," *Journal of Romance Studies* 12/3 (2012), 63–77; Antonio di Meo, "La 'rivoluzione passiva' da Cuoco a Gramsci: Appunti per un'interpretazione'," *Filosofia italiana* (2014), 1–32.

instances of state formation and popular rebellion in such diverse cases as the contradictions of modernization in Wilhelmine Germany, the (post)colonial Indian state, revolutionary Mexico and its aftermaths, the "pink tide" in Latin America and its antecedents (particularly in Brazil), the rise of Islamism in Turkey, postapartheid South Africa, the Egyptian Revolution, and the Arab Spring.[4] At least four different understandings of the meaning of passive revolution can be identified in recent scholarship. First, it has been thought to represent a reformulation of the more established concept of "(bourgeois) revolution from above," understood as a process in which existing political elites instigate and manage periods of social upheaval and transformation.[5] Second, passive revolution has been understood as a rival or complement to other macro-historical sociological theories of state formation, modernization, or decolonization.[6] Third, particularly when viewed through the lens of the Italian tradition of *trasformismo*, it has been conceptualized as a specific political strategy and technique of statecraft, and sometimes related to theories of governmentality.[7] Fourth, passive revolution has been argued to constitute

4 Jan Rehmann, *Max Weber: Modernisierung als passive Revolution* (Hamburg and Berlin, 1998); Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London, 1986); Adam Morton, *Revolution and State in Modern Mexico: The Political Economy of Uneven Development* (Lanham, MD, 2011); Massimo Modonesi, "Revoluciones pasivas en América Latina: Una approximación gramsciana a la caracterización de los gobiernos progresistas de inicio de siglo," in Modonesi, ed., *Horizontes gramscianos: Estudios en torno al pensammiento de Antonio Gramsci* (Mexico City, 2013), 209–36; Marcos Del Roio, "Translating Passive Revolution in Brazil," *Capital and Class* 36/2 (2010), 215–34; Carlos Nelson Coutinho, *Gramsci's Political Thought* (Leiden, 2012); Cihan Tuğal, *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism* (Stanford, 2009); Gillian Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony* (Atlanta, 2014); Brecht De Smet, *Gramsci on Tahrir: Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Egypt* (London, 2016).

5 See Neil Davidson, "Scotland: Birthplace of Passive Revolution," *Capital and Class* 34/3 (2010), 343–59.

6 See Chris Hesketh, "Passive Revolution: A Universal Concept with Geographical Seats," *Review of International Studies* 43/4 (2017), 389–408. For an attempt to articulate passive revolution with the theory of uneven and combined development see Jamie C. Allinson and Alex Anievas, "The Uneven and Combined Development of the Meiji Restoration: A Passive Revolutionary Road to Capitalist Modernity," *Capital and Class* 34/3 (2010), 469–90. For the claim that passive revolution represents the "general form of the transition from colonial to postcolonial national states in the 20th century" see Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 50.

7 Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, trans. David Fernbach (London, 1981; first published 1975), emphasized the significance of *trasformismo* in a now classic study. Rehmann, *Max Weber*, develops this theme in relation to a (broadly Weberian) notion of rationalization.

a useful lens for analyzing the nature and transformation of contemporary capitalism, whether understood as "neoliberalism" or in other terms.[8]

In the course of its politically overdetermined history of reception, passive revolution has effectively become what Adam Morton has called a "portmanteau concept," or, in an alternative formulation, a "continuum" of different interpretations: in effect, a series of concepts with sometimes only the faintest of family resemblances.[9] Each of these concepts has been (re)constructed by emphasizing one or more of the themes that Gramsci develops under this rubric in one or more of his notes, in order to propose an overarching interpretation of what passive revolution "really" means, or to locate its "conceptual core."[10] Despite their differences in approach or conclusions, the vast majority of these readings share, to a greater or lesser extent, three implicit interpretive presuppositions, each of which can be related to significant methodological tendencies in contemporary intellectual history.

First, they posit that the most coherent way to comprehend passive revolution is "to narrativize" it; that is, to compose the chronologically sequential narrative of the "long nineteenth century" that seems to be dispersed throughout various notes in the *Prison Notebooks* in a nonlinear form.[11] This presupposition corresponds to what Hayden White has characterized as the tendency to regard narrative as a type of "meta-code" for the production of meaning and coherence, the form in which a rational order is imposed on otherwise discrete phenomena.[12]

Second, they assume that this narrative is a vehicle for revealing Gramsci's "intended meaning," which it is the purpose of their readings either to reconstruct

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8 For attempts to think passive revolution in terms of such "contemporaneity" see Tuğal, *Passive Revolution*; the articles included in the special issue of *Capital & Class* 34/3 (2010); and Partha Chatterjee, "Democracy and Economic Transformation in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 43/16 (2008), 53–62.

9 Adam Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci: Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Political Economy* (London, 2007), 68; Morton, "The Continuum of Passive Revolution," *Capital & Class* 34/3 (2010), 315–42.

10 The notion of a "conceptual core" is explicitly theorized by Roberto Roccu, "Passive Revolution Revisited: From the *Prison Notebooks* to Our 'Great and Terrible World'," *Capital and Class* 41/3 (2017), 537–59, at 544.

11 I have previously proposed one such narrativization in Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*, 133–58. See also the accounts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provided under the rubric of passive revolution in Bianchi, *O laboratório de Gramsci*; Alberto Burgio, *Gramsci storico: Una lettura dei "Quaderni del carcere"* (Rome and Bari, 2002); Burgio, *Gramsci: Il sistema in movimento* (Rome, 2014); Giuseppe Vacca, *Modernità alternative: Il novecento di Antonio Gramsci* (Turin, 2017).

12 Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987), 1–25, at 1, 24.

(in the case of philological studies) or, on the basis of a prior or assumed reconstruction, to deploy analytically (in the case of empirical studies).[13] This presupposition can be related to Quentin Skinner's reflections regarding the importance of taking into account both (internal) authorial intention and the "illocutionary force" of its (external, "conventional") expression in order to reconstruct the "meaning" of any given statement in its historical context.[14]

Third, they suppose that passive revolution is a "concept" that is expressive of this narrative and intended meaning because it either precedes or completes them. It precedes them in the sense of the concept representing a logic of the generic that governs each particular appearance of the term, understood as realization of an intention; it completes them in the sense of the concept providing a unifying "summary" of the variety of potentially discordant meanings articulated in the course of the narrative.[15] This presupposition can be comprehended in terms of Reinhart Koselleck's emphasis on the multivalent unity that distinguishes the "genuine" concept from the mere word.[16]

Taken together, these three interpretive presuppositions establish clear protocols for the reading of the role of passive revolution in the famously fragmentary and nonsystematic *Prison Notebooks* as a process of "reconstruction": reconstruction of the implied but not chronologically presented narrative, reconstruction of the intended but not explicitly stated meaning, and reconstruction of the informing but nowhere clearly defined concept. Thus reconstructed, the significance of passive revolution has often been thought to consist primarily in its delineation of a distinctive concept of the process of modern state formation and (attempted or frustrated) transformation, either in

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13 Fabio Frosini's work is the most developed example of a "reconstructive-intentional" philological approach of this type; see, most recently, Fabio Frosini, "Rivoluzione passiva e laboratorio politico: appunti sull'analisi del fascismo nei *Quaderni del carcere*," *Studi storici* 58/2 (2017), 297–328. Adam Morton's reflections on methodologies in the history of ideas and the "unravelling" of Gramsci's thought in the process of comprehending the present provide a representative example of an analytical deployment based on such a presupposition. See Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci*, 15–38.

14 Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas" (1969), in Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1, *Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002), 57–102, at 45–8.

15 Callinicos's notion of an "implicit" concept of passive revolution existing in a gestational state prior to its explicit nomination can be taken as an example of the former approach. See Alex Callinicos, "The Limits of Passive Revolution," *Capital and Class* 34/3 (2010), 491–507. De Smet's reconstruction of passive revolution as a synthetic concept capable of comprehending organically the "constitution of the capitalist mode of production and bourgeois society" represents an example of the latter approach. See De Smet, *Gramsci on Tahrir*, 6, 37–71.

16 Reinhart Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte," in Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main, 1979), 107–29, at 119–20.

Italy or more generally.[17] Strategic or political consequences can be derived from this perspective, and have been by both Gramsci and his later readers; but it is this historical narrative and concept of state formation that is understood to be his primary and "intended meaning."

In this article, I offer an alternative understanding of the significance of passive revolution, based upon an alternative approach to the reading of the *Prison Notebooks*. Rather than assuming a unity of meaning of passive revolution throughout Gramsci's different texts written between 1929 and 1935, I instead follow recent tendencies in Gramscian philological scholarship in insisting upon a diachronic and contextualist analysis of the use of passive revolution at particular moments in the drafting of the *Prison Notebooks*.[18] However, unlike readings that posit a developmental history of a more or less unitary "concept" (according to a model of the actualization of a potential, the becoming explicit of the implicit, or the "maturation" of the previously only "embryonic"), I argue for a reading that attends more closely to the specificity and timing of each instance of usage, without presupposing their originary or eventual unification in a concept.

Rather than attempting to reconstruct passive revolution as a distinctive historical narrative, political concept, or theory of state formation, therefore, I propose to consider it instead as a "heuristic formula." With this notion, I aim to emphasize the way in which the formula of passive revolution functions as an organizing perspective—in different ways at different times—in Gramsci's ongoing research process, rather than the extent to which it represents a novel narrative, concept, or theory. This article is therefore less concerned to analyze what passive revolution might be plausibly interpreted to "mean," or the events that it was "intended" to signify, and more with the role played by the formula

[17] John A. Davis, "Introduction: Antonio Gramsci and Italy's Passive Revolution," in Davis, ed., *Gramsci and Italy's Passive Revolution* (London, 1979), 11–30, at 14: passive revolution "is in essence both a description of the nature of the [Italian] liberal state and an assessment of the shortcomings of that state."

[18] References to Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* are given to the Italian critical edition: Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin, 1975). I follow the internationally established standard of notebook number (*Q*), number of note (§) and page reference. "A texts" refers to Gramsci's first drafts, and "C texts" to revised notes, while "B texts" exist in a single version. Dates of individual notes are given according to the chronology established in Gianni Francioni, *L'officina gramsciana: Ipotesi sulla struttura dei "Quaderni del carcere"* (Naples, 1984); and the revisions contained in Giuseppe Cospito, "Verso l'edizione critica e integrale dei '*Quaderni del carcere*'," *Studi storici* 52/4 (2011), 896–904. For a discussion of diachronic and contextual readings of the *Prison Notebooks*, informed by the tradition of *Filologia d'autore*, see Gianni Francioni, "Un labirinto di carta (Introduzione alla filologia gramsciana)," *International Gramsci Journal* 2/1 (2016), 7–48.

within what I propose to call the "lexical architecture" of the *Prison Notebooks*.[19] My aim is to offer a reading of what the "narrative" of the *Prison Notebooks*—that is, the distinctive literary form and compositional process of Gramsci's carceral writings—"does" to and with the formula of passive revolution.

On the basis of this diachronic reading, I argue that the formula of passive revolution plays an important role in directing Gramsci's research at certain decisive moments between 1930 and 1935, but that this function needs to be comprehended in the context of Gramsci's larger carceral project. This larger project did not consist in the first instance in the development of a novel theory of modern state formation. Rather, Gramsci's more fundamental project in the *Prison Notebooks* consisted in the search for a political strategy that could be the "actual" form of "the revolution in permanence." To a much greater extent than is generally recognized, Gramsci's research on passive revolution emerged during the elaboration of his own distinctive contribution to the debate in the international communist movement in the 1920s over the meaning of the notion of "permanent revolution."[20] As a "criterion" of historical research into the development of the modern state throughout the long nineteenth century, passive revolution is effectively a by-product of this more fundamental project; in its turn, the "punctual" elaboration of passive revolution helps to clarify Gramsci's specific understanding of the "permanence" of the revolutionary movement required for the struggle against fascism. It is in this perspective that the heuristic nature of passive revolution can be understood, as a characterization of the challenges confronting attempts to renew the slogan of "the revolution in permanence" in the changed political conditions of the interwar years.

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[19] I derive the notion of a "lexical architecture" from Peter de Bolla's reflections on an "architecture of concepts"; see Peter de Bolla, *The Architecture of Concepts: The Historical Formation of Human Rights* (New York, 2013). However, whereas de Bolla's project assumes a distinction between "words" and "concepts," and focuses upon the organization of the latter, my conception of a "lexical architecture" aims instead to investigate the role played by words or discrete formulations in the economy and structure of a text, without presupposing the existence of concepts as their first, formal or final cause. In a Wittgensteinian sense, I aim to explore the way in which words can be conceived as "deeds" in the material act of their inscription, without reference to a prefigurative or summational instance, whether conceived as "intention" or as "concept."

[20] Important exceptions in the existing scholarship include the different readings offered by Fabio Frosini, *Da Gramsci a Marx* (Rome, 2009); De Smet, *Gramsci on Tahrir*; Juan dal Maso, *El marxismo de Gramsci: Notas de lectura sobre los Cuadernos de la cárcel* (Buenos Aires, 2016). While these studies register the theoretical importance of the relationship between passive and permanent revolution for Gramsci's thought, they do not undertake the specification of the times and significance of their different uses that is attempted in this article.

In the first section, I analyze the emergence of the formula of passive revolution in late 1930 as a reorganization of Gramsci's prior researches, which had been dedicated to a distinctive assessment of the historical significance of Jacobinism, or what I characterize as a conception of "Metajacobinism." I then trace Gramsci's usage of passive revolution in relation to his reflections on permanent revolution between 1930 and 1933 in three related phases, focused on the figures of Croce, Machiavelli and Marx. I highlight in particular the importance of Gramsci's conjugation of his research on passive revolution with his changing assessment of Marx's 1859 "Preface."

In the second section, I analyze the development of Gramsci's distinctive understanding of permanent revolution, demonstrating the way in which it accompanies and overdetermines his research on passive revolution in each of its phases. I suggest that Gramsci's conception of "the revolution in permanence" should be distinguished from Trotsky's more famous formulation, and be understood in relation to an alternative tradition of interpretation of Marx and Engels's thought. In particular, I seek to explicate the implicit historical reference behind Gramsci's repeated claim that Lenin's theorization and practice of hegemony constitute the "actual" and "sublated" form of the notion of "the revolution in permanence" derived from the experience of 1848.

I finally suggest, in conclusion, that this reading opens new paths of research for the contemporary discussion of passive revolution. While the formula's fertility for historical studies of state transformation or for the analysis of current political dynamics is now well established, more attention should be given to the nature of Gramsci's use of passive revolution as a form of political and strategic reflection. According to the reading of the dialectic between passive and permanent revolution developed in this article, the significance of passive revolution considered in its historical context consisted not only, or even primarily, in its status as a narrative, concept or theory of modern state development. More significant than these dimensions was its role in clarifying Gramsci's understanding of "the revolution in permanence," and thus its novel contribution to the central strategic debates and political theory of the Marxist tradition of his time. It is in this perspective that passive revolution's historical meaning and potential contemporary significance should be assessed today.

PASSIVE REVOLUTION IN THE *PRISON NOTEBOOKS*

The *Prison Notebooks* have become influential as a fundamental theoretical reference work in a wide range of academic disciplines across the social sciences and humanities. At the moment of their original composition, however, they were the "semiprivate" documents of the imprisoned leader of a clandestine communist party, produced under complicated conditions of surveillance, with

limited access to basic scholarly resources and texts, and in the midst of fundamental transformations in the international communist movement. The multifaceted nature of Gramsci's project in the *Prison Notebooks* was determined by two significant political perspectives: on the one hand, he attempted to analyze the nature of the Fascist regime's consolidating strength, in terms of both its historical foundations and its contemporary functioning; and on the other hand, he sought to elaborate his already critical position in the international communist movement in the context of deepening disagreements with the Communist International's official strategy and tactics in the antifascist struggle in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This is the context in which Gramsci begins to explore the potential utility of the formula of passive revolution.[21]

Many readings of passive revolution, encouraged by Gramsci's habitual method of "narrating" his theoretical reflections, have focused on reconstructing the historical narrative of the long nineteenth century that seems to be presented in fragmentary and sometimes contradictory forms in a number of different notes.[22] As a historical narrative, passive revolution has been understood as involving a progressive dilation of perspective, as Gramsci extends his analysis from Italy during the Risorgimento, to Europe in the epoch of high imperialism, to his contemporary global conditions defined by Fascism and "Americanism." The reading offered here instead focuses on the discrete moments of passive revolution's deployment as a heuristic formula within the *Prison Notebooks*. Rather than an "overextension" or "stretching" of an originally national paradigm, these usages are defined by the consistent, "punctual" presentation of a fundamentally internationalist orientation already discernible at the outset of Gramsci's research.

The first note in which passive revolution seems to appear was written in February or March 1930.[23] As Gramsci briefly notes, he is appropriating the concept from Vincenzo Cuoco, the historian of the failed Neapolitan revolution of 1799. Gramsci's innovation seems to consist in the projection of passive revolution beyond the Napoleonic period in order to provide an analysis of the distinctive features of the later Italian Risorgimento.[24] Passive revolution thus appears both to originate in reflections on the Italian national context,

[21] For a reconstruction of these dual perspectives and context see Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*, 197–242.

[22] Valentino Gerratana, *Gramsci: Problemi di metodo* (Rome, 1997), 132.

[23] *Q*1, §44, 40–54, at 41.

[24] For Cuoco's original usage of the term see Vincenzo Cuoco, *Saggio storico sulla rivoluzione di Napoli*, ed. A. De Francesco (Manduria, 1998; first published 1801), particularly 325–6. For a detailed study of the different emphases of Cuoco and Gramsci's formulations, see di Meo, "La 'rivoluzione passiva' da Cuoco a Gramsci."

and to organize them; indeed, given that the term occurs in the first sections of this long note dedicated to the Risorgimento, passive revolution can plausibly be understood as the foundational thesis of this particular note. In actual fact, however, this "first" appearance of passive revolution in the *Prison Notebooks* is a later, retrospective addition.[25] Rather than a "passive revolution," the Risorgimento was characterized at the moment of this note's initial drafting as simply a "revolution without revolution," or, slightly later in the same note, a "royal conquest."

The chronologically first note in which Gramsci refers to passive revolution, from November 1930, already deploys it in an expansive and global sense.[26] Rather than beginning with Cuoco's definition, from which he would subsequently depart, Gramsci signals from the outset that, although he is appropriating the formulation from Cuoco, he intends to give it a distinct meaning: "The concept of passive revolution seems to me to be precise not only for Italy, but also for other countries that modernize the state by means of a series of reforms or national wars, without going through a political revolution of the radical-Jacobin type. Examine how Cuoco develops the concept with regards to Italy."[27] Passive revolution is thus used here to describe the not-so-exceptional *Sonderweg* to modernity taken not only by Italy, but also by other European nation-states that lacked a "Jacobin moment." The Italian case is from the outset seen as a specific instance of this more general historical experience.

Gramsci's later usages of the formula of passive revolution represent a Janus-faced specification and elaboration of this initial perspective. On the one hand,

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[25] A similar retrospective addition is made to *Q*1, §150, 133, originally written in late May 1930. Both Gerratana and Francioni note that "passive revolution" is inserted in the margins of these notes at a later date, after the term is first used (in a chronological sense) in *Q*4 §57, 504, in November 1930. See Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, ed. Gerratana, 2479; and Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere: Edizione anastatica dei manoscritti*, vol. 1, ed. Gianni Francioni (Rome and Cagliari, 2009), 4. A more precise dating of these marginalia does not seem possible on the basis of external references or the manuscript itself. Gramsci may have inserted them immediately in November 1930, at some stage during 1931, or even in early 1932. It is significant to note that after November 1930 "passive revolution" is not used again in other notes until early 1932, in *Q*8, §25, 957, when Gramsci relates Cuoco's formula to Quinet (and Gioberti).

[26] It is not coincidental that Gramsci begins to explore the significance of passive revolution in the same period in which he is engaged in intense political discussions (and disagreements) with fellow communist inmates in the Turi Prison. See Athos Lisa, *Memorie: In carcere con Gramsci* (Milan, 1973); and, for a critical contextualization, Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, 237–90.

[27] *Q*4, §57, 504. For readings that emphasize the centrality of this note for all of Gramsci's research on passive revolution see Voza, "Rivoluzione passiva," 195; De Felice, "Rivoluzione passiva, fascismo, americanismo in Gramsci," 163.

he returns to the beginning of his research on the Italian Risorgimento, in *Q*1, §44, and revises it with a singular, seemingly marginal, addition that will fundamentally shape the way in which this note is approached by later readers. On the other hand, passive revolution is used thematically throughout the *Prison Notebooks* with a "punctual" rhythm, in which forms of historical narrative and strategic reflection jostle alongside each other for theoretical preeminence.

"Jacobinism (of content)" (February–March 1930)

Looking backwards, the insertion of the formula of passive revolution at the outset of the discussion of the Risorgimento in *Q*1, §44, had a decisive impact on how passive revolution, this particular note, and the *Prison Notebooks* themselves were interpreted and reconstructed in later debates. Gramsci's retrospective addition not only seems to make plausible those readings that have posited a projection of passive revolution from the national to the international level, in terms of an "extension" or "stretching" of what is only seemingly his initial perspective.[28] It also involves what amounts to an effective rewriting of *Q*1, §44, which in turn appears to license a reading of the significance of this note as primarily being the "genesis" of passive revolution, rather than a condensation of Gramsci's distinctive understanding of Jacobinism.

In the initial composition of *Q*1, §44, in February or March 1930, it was Jacobinism, rather than passive revolution, that was used as the primary lens to read the Risorgimento. The focus of the original draft of this note (that is, before the marginal additions after November 1930) builds coherently upon a current of thought that Gramsci had been developing throughout Notebook 1, namely the nature of city–country relations in Italian history. These notes could thus be characterized as a recasting of Gramsci's pre-carceral project in *Some Aspects of the Southern Question*, though now viewed through the "Jacobin" lens that colors all of Notebook 1.[29] *Q*1, §44, begins by discussing the Risorgimento in a

[28] Alex Callinicos, "The Limits of Passive Revolution," argues that a tendency to "over-extension" (or, following Lakatos, "concept-stretching") of passive revolution, both in Gramsci's own writings and in those of later scholars, leads it to lose analytic precision. While he notes Gramsci's retrospective insertion of "passive revolution" in his first Notebook (493), he nevertheless insists that "Gramsci uses the expression 'passive revolution' initially as a means of interpreting the Risorgimento" (492) (a claim justified by recourse to the notion of an "implicit" (or "practical") presence of the "concept" of passive revolution in notes before *Q*4, §57, even if the formula itself is absent: see 493). Callinicos's genealogy of "passive revolution" thus depends on ignoring the textual evidence that Gramsci used "passive revolution" in an "expanded" sense from the outset.

[29] On the presence of Jacobinism throughout Notebook 1 see Leonardo Paggi, "Giacobinismo e società di massa in Gramsci," in Massimo L. Salvadori and Nicola Tranfaglia, eds., *Il modello politico giacobino e le rivoluzioni* (Florence, 1984), 223–39.

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comparative internationalist perspective, focusing on the lack of "Jacobinism" in the Risorgimento; the failure of an adequate Jacobin force to emerge is a continuous refrain throughout the note; it concludes with enigmatic reflections on the "Jacobin" slogan of "the revolution in permanence."

The "Jacobinism" that Gramsci valorizes is not, however, the Jacobinism so often caricatured as an elitism or anathematized as an undemocratic putschism. The young Gramsci himself had not been immune to the influence of these readings, stridently declaring in 1917 that "the Russian revolutionaries are not Jacobins."[30] He soon abandoned this perspective, under the influence of Mathiez, whose *Le bolchévisme et le jacobinisme* Gramsci had translated for *L'Ordine Nuovo* in 1921.[31] Equally important seems to have been Gramsci's deepening appreciation of a Russian tradition of Jacobinism, above all in Lenin's thought,[32] and, increasingly throughout the *Prison Notebooks*, the novel suggestion of Machiavelli's "precocious Jacobinism."[33] The result of this effective self-critique is a novel reading of the historical significance and "actuality" of Jacobinism.[34]

The Jacobinism that interests Gramsci, and whose absence in the Italian Risorgimento he bemoans, is neither an "energetic fanaticism" of revolutionary virtue,[35] nor a forerunner of twentieth-century totalitarianisms, which have constituted the focus of so much critical reflection.[36] Rather, in a reading that clearly bears the marks of both the Bolshevik theorization of hegemony in terms of political relations between the city and countryside, and Machiavelli's insistence upon the necessity of a "patriotic" militia, he focuses in the first instance on

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30 Antonio Gramsci, *Scritti (1910–1926)*, vol. 2, *1917*, ed. Leonardo Rapone (Rome, 2015), 255.

31 On the significance of Gramsci's encounter with Mathiez see Sabrina Areco, "Antonio Gramsci e Albert Mathiez: jacobinos e jacobinosmo nos anos de Guerra," *Revista Outubro* 24 (2015), 37–60.

32 Rita Medici, *Giobbe e Prometeo: filosfia e politica nel pensiero di Gramsci* (Florence, 2000), 153. For Lenin's invocation of a "plebeian Jacobinism" see Massimo L. Salvadori, "Il giacobinismo nel pensiero marxista," in Salvadori and Tranfaglia, *Il modello politico giacobino e le rivoluzioni*, 240–53; and Norman Levine, "Jacobinism and the European Revolutionary Tradition," *History of European Ideas* 11 (1989), 157–80.

33 See *Q*8, §21, 951–3; *Q*13, §1, 1558–60.

34 On Gramsci's changing assessment of Jacobinism see Marco Gervasoni, *Antonio Gramsci e la Francia: Dal mito della modernità alla "scienza della politica"* (Milan, 1998); Medici, *Giobbe e Prometeo*; Leandro de Oliveira Galastri, "Revolução passiva e jacobinismo: Uma bifucação da historia," *Filosofia e Educação* 2/1 (2010), 101–26.

35 *Q*1, §44, 44.

36 See, for example, Clarence Crane Brinton, *The Jacobins: An Essay in the New History* (New York, 1930); François Furet, "Jacobinism," in François Furet and Mona Ozouf, eds., *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 704–15; Patrice Higonnet, *Goodness beyond Virtue. Jacobins during the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

the Jacobins as those who "strenuously fought to ensure the link between the city and the countryside."[37] The Jacobin's main achievement is thus depicted, with an emphasis that is rare in the historical scholarship,[38] not simply in terms of the creation of national unity, but in terms of the specific mechanism of its realization, namely in the mobilization of the peasantry under the leadership of a predominantly urban political movement.[39]

Yet Gramsci also highlights the historical limits of Jacobinism. Already in early 1930 he argues,

> The development of Jacobinism (of content) [in France in the early nineteenth century] found its formal perfection in the parliamentary regime, which, in the period of the greatest abundance of "private" energies in society, realized the hegemony of the urban class over the whole population in the Hegelian form of government with permanently organized consent ... The "limit" encountered by the Jacobins with the Chapelier law [or the maximum] is sublated [*superato*] and extended [*allargato*] by means of a complex, theoretico-practical (juridico-political = economic) process due to which political consent is regained (hegemony is maintained), extending and strengthening the economic base through industrial and commercial development up to the epoch of imperialism and the world war.[40]

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37 Q1 §44, 42. This was the reason for Gramsci's affiliation of Machiavelli to a Jacobin tradition *avant la lettre*. "Any formation of a national popular collective will is impossible without the masses of peasant farmers entering simultaneously into political life. This is what Machiavelli wanted with the reform of the militia, this is what the Jacobins did in the French Revolution, in this consists Machiavelli's [precocious] Jacobinism, the fertile germ of his conception of national revolution" (Q8, §21, 951–2). While much Machiavelli scholarship, particularly in the twentieth century, has focused on the *Prince* or the *Discourses* to the neglect of *The Art of War*, Gramsci effectively "Jacobinizes" his reading of the former texts by means of a focus on the political implications of the latter. For a consideration of the centrality of *The Art of War* in Machiavelli's "political philosophy" see Filippo Del Lucchese, *The Political Philosophy of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Edinburgh, 2015), 105–13, 120–22.

38 Exceptions in the scholarship on Jacobinism that stress the importance of their rural policies include Anatoli Ado, *Paysans en révolution: Terre, pouvoir et jacquerie, 1789–1794* (Paris, 1996); Jill Maciak, "Learning to Love the Republic: Jacobin Propaganda and the Peasantry of the Haute-Garonne," *European Review of History/ Revue européenne d'histoire* 6/2 (1999), 165–79; Henry Heller, *The Bourgeois Revolution in France* (New York, 2006).

39 On the importance of peasant mobilization for Gramsci's understanding of Jacobinism see Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory* (Berkeley and London, 1980), 184. Gramsci may have drawn inspiration for this reading from Mathiez, who briefly valorizes this dimension of Jacobin politics. See Albert Mathiez, *Le bolchévisme et le jacobinisme* (Paris, 1920), 5.

40 Q1, §48, 58; see also Q1, §44, 51–2. *Superare*, here rendered as "to sublate," is the standard Italian translation of Hegel's *aufheben*, or the dialectical unity of cancellation and preservation. Previous translations of this passage have tended to reduce the Hegelian resonance. Hoare and Nowell Smith, translating the corresponding formulation in the

Gramsci thus characterizes what could be described as "actually existing"—or, in his words, "historical"—Jacobinism as a contradictory phenomenon.[41] On the one hand, the limited class nature of the Jacobin movement had already become apparent in the course of the French Revolution, as the Chapelier law of 1791 (under the influence once again of Mathiez, Gramsci later adds in the margins: "or the maximum") saw the bourgeois Jacobins turn on their former allies among the popular classes by attempting to limit their forms of autonomous political organization and activity. On the other hand, the contradictory and hesitant development from the early nineteenth century onwards of bourgeois parliamentary regimes and their complementary civil societies sublated (*superato*) and "formally perfected" Jacobinism's claims to secure national–popular unity.

Gramsci's argument here appears to distinguish between "historical" Jacobinism and what André Tosel has efficaciously called a "Metajacobinism."[42] While the *Prison Notebooks* analyzes the contradictory transformation of historical Jacobinism from radical challenge to the status quo to one of its prime supports, "Metajacobinism" refers to Gramsci's attempt to identify the ways in which a certain "spirit" of Jacobinism was "sublated"—that is, both canceled and preserved—by subsequent political history. Thus *Q*1, §44, goes on to note that the Jacobins' "limits" reappeared in 1848 as an already menacing "spectre": "In Germany, 1848 fails because of the lack of bourgeois concentration (the Jacobin type of slogan was provided by Marx during the German 1848: 'the revolution in permanence')."[43] This Metajacobinism makes a further appearance in the conclusion to this note. The Bolsheviks, Gramsci argues, though not using Marx's Jacobin slogan, nevertheless "employed it in its historical, concrete, living

C text (*Q*13, §37, 1636: *superato e respinto più lontano progressivamente*), opt for "transcended and pushed progressively back"; see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York, 1971). Buttigieg and Callari instead render *superato e allargato* as "overcome and slackened"; see Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg, trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and A. Callari (New York, 1992). Both translations seem to me to be misleading. Gramsci's argument in this note is not that the "class limit" of the Jacobins was "transcended" or "overcome" by the parliamentary regime, in the sense of being negated, or no longer being operative. On the contrary, this limit not only remained in force during the early nineteenth century, but was even strengthened in unprecedented and highly mediated forms, thereby increasing the capacity of the bourgeois class to integrate antagonistic social classes within its own political project, within and according to its own class limits and interests.

41 See *Q*8, §35, 961; see also *Q*11, §66, 1498.

42 André Tosel, "Gramsci et la Révolution française," in Tosel, ed., *Modernité de Gramsci?* (Paris, 1992), 97–42, at 99.

43 *Q*1, §44, 53.

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form adapted to the time and place as something that sprang from all the pores of the society which had to be transformed, as the alliance of two classes with the hegemony of the urban class."[44]

Gramsci's first notebook and the extensive *Q*1, §44, were thus originally dedicated to the exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of the Jacobin tradition, setting the former against the latter in the form of an immanent critique. When passive revolution is intermittently deployed in subsequent notebooks, it will effectively be conceived in terms of a generalization of this "limit" and "formal perfection" of historical Jacobinism, constituting a spectral presence that signals the absence of "Metajacobinism."

Croce's speculative dialectic and the "absence of popular initiative" (January–May 1932)

Looking forwards, passive revolution is used in later notebooks with a "punctual" rhythm, with periods of intense reflection on its possible significance followed by moments of relative or complete neglect. Yet it is a punctual rhythm also in the sense that Gramsci's reflections on the possible significance of passive revolution are continually "punctuated" by returns to the theme of permanent revolution, conceived as passive revolution's dialectical counterpoint. Three phases of this development can be distinguished, each overdetermined by the terms of Gramsci's engagement with one of his major agonists in the *Prison Notebooks*.

Before this development begins, however, the formula of passive revolution effectively disappears from Gramsci's vocabulary for over a year after its first occurrence. Throughout 1931, Gramsci's energies are dedicated to the elaboration of the philosophical perspectives that will later lead to the novel formulation of Marxism as a "philosophy of praxis." It is only in early 1932 that these philosophical researches are translated into the historiographical register in which the implications of passive revolution are initially explored. The first phase of this development occurs under the aegis of Gramsci's critique of Croce, and in particular of Croce's relation to the legacy of the Risorgimento. It is in this phase that Gramsci outlines many of the themes, analogies and formulations that are now widely regarded as the "core component elements" of the concept of passive revolution.[45] Thus, in January and February 1932, in Notebook 8, he explicates passive revolution in terms of the formula of "revolution–restauration," appropriated from Quinet, and the notion of "progressive restaurations." In the

44 *Q*1 §44, 54.

45 See, for instance, the synthetic definitions offered in Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, 310–17; Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci*, 63–73; De Smet, *Gramsci on Tahrir*, 37–71; Roccu, "Passive Revolution Revisited," 544–6.

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same note, he provides the famous characterization of passive revolution as "the absence of popular initiative" and as founded upon the partial fulfillment and consequent deformation of popular demands.[46] Another note in this period compares passive revolution to traditions of "transformism" in the post-Risorgimento Italian state, while soon after Gramsci explores the formula of "conservation-innovation," in a pointed critique of the limits of Croce's historicism.[47] Significantly, in the same period Gramsci continues his interest in the tradition of "permanent revolution," defining its "sublation" as "hegemony," which in turn is equated with the "war of position."[48]

Passive revolution remains prominent throughout April and May 1932, though Gramsci's attention now turns more forcefully to contemporary themes. Different styles in the formula's usage can be noted at this point; while before it was used interpretively in historical analysis, it now appears to be used as a description of a political strategy or technique. He asks whether Fascism might be "the form of 'passive revolution' specific to the twentieth century, just as liberalism was the form of 'passive revolution' specific to the nineteenth century."[49] He specifies that the interrogative could be affirmed in the following terms:

> Passive revolution would consist in the fact of transforming the economic structure "reformistically," from an individualistic economy to a planned economy (administered economy) [*economia secondo un piano (economia diretta)*] and the emergence of an "intermediate economy," one between a purely individualistic one and a planned one in the strict sense, allowing the transition to more advanced political and cultural forms without radical and annihilating destructive cataclysms. "Corporativism" could be or could become, as it develops, this intermediate economy of a "passive" character.[50]

This conception (that is, passive revolution considered as corporativism, rather than passive revolution as such), Gramsci continues to argue, "could be related to that which in politics is called the 'war of position,' as opposed to the war of movement."

The center of the research in April and May 1932, however, is found in Gramsci's introductory summary to the first part of Notebook 10. This summary outlines in a synthetic way the themes that he will unfold in the following months and into

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46 *Q*8, §25, 957.

47 *Q*8, §36, 962; *Q*8, §39, 966.

48 *Q*8, §52, 973, Feb. 1932.

49 *Q*8, §236, 1089.

50 *Q*8, §236, 1089; see also, from the same period, *Q*10I, §9, 1226–9, in which these themes are specified in terms of the intersection of colonialism, imperialist rivalries and domestic class struggle in recent Italian history, with a particular focus on the role played by Fascism in stabilizing relations between the traditional ruling class and the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie.

the next year. He notes the process by means of which Cuoco's formula passed from historical reflection to a "formula for 'action'," a "'speculative' dialectic of history" comparable to Proudhon, a "dialectic of the 'intellectuals' who conceive of themselves as embodying the thesis and antithesis and thus as elaborators of the synthesis."[51] Just as significantly, he questions whether Italy might have the same relation to the USSR that Kant and Hegel's Germany had to Robespierre and Napoleon's France.[52] Passive revolution in this phase takes on the features of a speculative reflection on and above history, an active form of neutralization that Gramsci argues to be at work in Croce's historiographical strategy of commencing his histories of Europe and Italy *post festum*.[53]

At the same time, Gramsci continues during these months his exploration of permanent revolution, once again argued to be actualized in the notion of hegemony.[54] It is a theme that he explores in greater historical depth in a series of five dense notes transcribed and revised throughout the second half of 1932 and 1933, in the "special" Notebook 13 dedicated to Machiavelli and the modern Prince.[55] It is significant that during this period (late 1932–early 1933) Gramsci's research on passive revolution is effectively put on hold, as permanent revolution, viewed through the lens of Machiavelli, becomes the focus of his energies.

From Machiavelli to Marx: the "necessary critical corollary" of the 1859 "Preface" (March–July 1933)

It is therefore perhaps not coincidental that it is in a series of notes all entitled "Machiavelli," written between March and May in 1933, that Gramsci returns to explore the "limits" of passive revolution, as both historical process and theoretical perspective.[56] The rubric of "Machiavelli" in this sense functions both as a point of condensation of the lines of research on passive and permanent revolution, and as the moment of transition between them. In March and April 1933, Gramsci revisits the previously delineated notion of a war of position. Might there be, he asks, "an absolute identity between war of position and passive revolution? Or at least does there exist or can there be an entire historical period in which the two concepts have to be identified, until war of position becomes

[51] *Q*10I, "Summary," 6°, 1208, April–May 1932; see *Q*10I, §6, 1219–22, April–May 1932; *Q*9, §97, 1160–61, May 1932; *Q*10II, §41xiv, 1324–7, Aug.–Dec. 1932.

[52] *Q*10I,'Summary', 9°, 1209; see also *Q*10II, §61, 1358–62, Feb.–May 1933.

[53] *Q*8, §240, 1091, May 1932.

[54] *Q*10I, §12, 1234–5, April–May 1932.

[55] For an analysis of these notes, see subsection "Machiavelli and the expansion of the political (May 1932–November 1933)" below.

[56] *Q*15, §11, 1766, March–April 1933; *Q*15, §15, 1772, April–May 1933; *Q*15, §17, 1774, April–May 1933; *Q*15, §25, 1781, May 1933.

again war of movement?"[57] Gramsci here explores this hypothesis in relation to the development of the Italian Risorgimento, in which "molecular modifications . . . progressively modify the previous composition of forces and thus become the matrix of new modifications."[58] Very soon after, however, in April and May 1933, the conjugation of Machiavelli, passive revolution and a novel reflection on Marx's 1859 "Preface" leads to a new approach to the problem. Passive revolution is no longer considered primarily in historiographical terms, but instead as a way of thinking the forms in which political action is possible (or not) in Gramsci's contemporary condition.

Gramsci had translated passages from Marx's 1859 "Preface" perhaps as early as May 1930.[59] He repeatedly recalled some of its most pregnant formulations throughout the development of the *Prison Notebooks*, treating them almost as axioms for research into both the political history of the nineteenth century and the internal coherence of the materialist conception of history.[60] Both of these lines of research are continued in the spring and summer of 1933, but with a decisive difference: now, Gramsci is less interested in the axiomatic status of the "Preface" than in the conclusion that could be drawn from it. He argues that "the concept of passive revolution must be deduced rigorously from two fundamental principles of political science," namely "1) that no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for their further progressive movement; 2) that society does not set itself tasks for whose solution the necessary conditions have not already been incubated [*covate*] etc."[61]

As he immediately specifies in the same note, the concept of passive revolution can be "deduced" from these principles only if they are first "cleansed of every trace of mechanicism and fatalism." Cuoco's formulation is thereby "completely modified and enriched," not as a "programme," as Gramsci clarifies later in a note from June or July 1933, but as a "criterion of interpretation" in the absence of other active elements. Passive revolution in this usage can have a concrete political

57 *Q*15, §11, 1766–7. This line of research is continued between April and July 1933 in *Q*15, §15, 1772; *Q*15, §25, 1781; *Q*15, §56, 1818–19; *Q*15, §59, 1822–4 (the "Piedmont function": "dictatorship without hegemony"), culminating in *Q*15, §62, 1827.

58 *Q*15, §11, 1767.

59 On the dating of this translation see Gianni Francioni, "Nota al testo," in Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere, I, Quaderni di traduzione (1929–1932)*, ed. Giuseppe Cospito and Gianni Francioni (Rome, 2007), 870–90.

60 See, for example, *Q*4, §38, 455–65, Oct. 1930; *Q*7, §4, 855, Nov. 1930; *Q*7, §20, 869, Nov. 1930–Feb. 1931; *Q*8, §195, 1057–8, Feb. 1932; *Q*10II, §6, 1244–5, May 1932; *Q*11, §22, 1422–6, July–Aug. 1932; *Q*13, §17, 1578–89, May 1932–Nov. 1933; *Q*13, §18, 1589–97, May 1932–Nov. 1933.

61 *Q*15, §17, 1774, April–May 1933.

sense only if it "assumes, or postulates as necessary, a vigorous antithesis," which autonomously and intransigently sets all its forces in motion.[62]

It can thus appear that in the spring and summer of 1933 Gramsci's reflections on passive revolution culminate in a decidedly voluntarist turn. Against a tendency towards objective determinism that seems to be embodied in the 1859 "Preface," the potentially equally "fatalist" notion of passive revolution appears to be called upon, paradoxically, to affirm the primacy of subjective force. This reading, however, would neglect an additional crucial development that Gramsci undertakes in the summer of 1933, in the conclusion to *Q*15, §62. Here, he no longer "deduces" passive revolution from the axioms of the 1859 "Preface," but instead redefines passive revolution as its "necessary critical corollary," or as a conclusion that retroacts upon its premises in the form of a critical modification.[63] This focus, in its turn, refers back to what Gramsci had earlier characterized in October 1930, before his research on passive revolution began, as the "dialectical mediation" of the two fundamental principles of the text of 1859: namely the concept of "permanent revolution."[64]

PERMANENT REVOLUTION IN THE *PRISON NOTEBOOKS*

The notion of permanent revolution is today almost invariably identified with the positions developed by Trotsky from 1905 onwards, their transformation in the debates in the 1920s in opposition to the theory of "socialism in one country," and their extension throughout the 1930s in relation to Trotsky's theory of uneven and combined development.[65] For this tradition, permanent revolution primarily signifies the continuity of the revolutionary process, and a profound critique of the notion of temporal stagism. In the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci (in)famously criticizes both this conception of permanent revolution and Trotsky himself. Yet at the same time, Gramsci also valorizes permanent revolution as the foundation of the theory of hegemony in a series of notes that have seemed to many readers to be contradictory or enigmatic, when not simply perplexing or mistaken.[66]

Critical discussion of this seeming paradox has frequently focused on explaining how Gramsci's general assessment of Trotsky was compromised by a

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62 *Q*15, §62, 1827, June–July 1933.

63 *Q*15, §62, 1827.

64 *Q*4, §38, 456–7.

65 For a classic account of this development see Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution* (London, 1981).

66 See, for instance, Neil Davidson, *How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?* (Chicago, 2012), 279; Emanuele Saccarelli, *Gramsci and Trotsky in the Shadow of Stalinism: The Political Theory and Practice of Opposition* (New York, 2007).

series of misattributions and conflations.[67] It is undoubtable that Gramsci's often dismissive engagement with Trotsky in the *Prison Notebooks* stands in significant discontinuity with his previously critical appreciation of Trotsky's strengths and weaknesses, particularly in the immediate aftermath of his sojourn in Russia in 1922–3.[68] Gramsci seems to have been strongly influenced by the general terms of debate established during the so-called "literary discussion" that began in late 1924 (following the publication of Trotsky's *Lessons of October*), and possibly by Bukharin's distinctive contributions to it in particular.[69] Similarly, it appears that on more than one occasion throughout the 1920s Gramsci risked ascribing to Trotsky the positions and orientations of Bordiga.[70] By analyzing these contextual and polemical overdeterminations, such an approach attempts to open the way to a more substantial reconsideration of potential affinities between Gramsci's and Trotsky's thought, including in terms of their theories of permanent revolution.[71]

What this approach tends to occlude, however, is the extent to which Gramsci's criticisms of Trotsky's version of permanent revolution, whether legitimate or

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67 A comprehensive assessment of these limitations is provided by Frank Rosengarten, "The Gramsci–Trotsky Question (1922–1932)," *Social Text* 11 (1984–5), 65–95.

68 For a study of the terms of the transformation of Gramsci's judgment of Trotsky's positions in the Russian party and in the Communist International see Irina V. Grigoreva, "Gramsci e le lotte all'interno del PCUS (1923–1926)," in *Gramsci e il Novecento*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1999), 87–92.

69 On Gramsci's relation to Bukharin's positions throughout the early and mid-1920s see Leonardo Paggi, *Le strategie del potere in Gramsci: Tra fascismo e socialismo in un solo paese 1923–26* (Rome, 1984). Bukharin's contributions to the literary discussion are available in Frederick C. Corney, ed., *Trotsky's Challenge: The "Literary Discussion" of 1924 and the Fight for the Bolshevik Revolution* (Leiden, 2016), 147–62, 514–54, 555–69. "The Theory of Permanent Revolution" (28 Dec. 1924) in particular was an influential text, widely translated and discussed in the international communist movement. Echoes of this text's understanding of permanent revolution's meaning in 1848 arguably can be found in Gramsci's later reflections.

70 The notion of an affinity between, if not the equation of, Trotsky and Bordiga effectively constituted the lens through which Gramsci read the emerging factional struggle in the Russian party throughout 1924 and 1925. See, for instance, Antonio Gramsci, *La costruzione del Partito comunista 1923–1926* (Turin, 1971), 459–62. For analyses of this conjuncture see Giovanni Somai, "Sul rapporto tra Trockij, Gramsci e Bordiga (1922–1926)," *Storia contemporanea* 1 (1982), 73–98; Silvio Pons, "Il gruppo dirigente del PCI e la 'questione russa' (1924–26)," in Francesco Giasi, ed., *Gramsci nel suo tempo*, vol. 1 (Rome, 2008), 403–29.

71 Different readings in this sense are offered by Bianchi, *O laboratório de Gramsci*, 199–252; De Smet, *Gramsci on Tahrir*; Dal Maso, *El marxismo de Gramsci*. I have previously explored the Gramsci–Trotsky relationship in related terms in Peter D. Thomas, "Uneven Developments, Combined: The First World War and Marxist Theories of Revolution," in Alex Anievas, ed., *Cataclysm 1914: The First World War in the Making of Modern World Politics* (Leiden, 2015), 280–301.

polemically distorted, were accompanied by a distinct understanding of the meaning of permanent revolution in its formulation by Marx and Engels in the late 1840s. Clarifying this meaning was in fact Gramsci's primary concern, and his critique of Trotsky was largely subordinate to it. Rather than defending Trotsky against Gramsci's criticisms, or focusing on the possible reasons for their polemical distortions, it is thus more significant for the purpose of the current study to consider the nature of Gramsci's distinct understanding of permanent revolution, the plausibility of its claimed inheritance of Marx and Engels's slogan, and its dialectical relation to the use of passive revolution throughout the *Prison Notebooks*.

"The alliance of two classes with the hegemony of the urban class" (February–March 1930)

As previously highlighted, the first note in which Gramsci discusses the concept of hegemony in the *Prison Notebooks*, and to which he only later adds the concept of passive revolution, concludes with a discussion of permanent revolution and a critique of what Gramsci took to be Trotsky's ("Bronstein's") version of it. In February or March 1930 he argues,

> As regards the "Jacobin" slogan which Marx directed at the Germany of 1848–9, its complex fortunes should be examined. Revived, systematized, elaborated, intellectualized by the Parvus–Bronstein group, it proved inert and ineffective in 1905, and afterward: it was an abstract thing that belonged to the scientific laboratory. The tendency which opposed it in this intellectualized form, however, without using it "intentionally," in fact employed it in its historical, concrete, living form adapted to the time and place as something that sprang from all the pores of the society which had to be transformed, as the alliance of two classes with the hegemony of the urban class.
>
> In the one case, a Jacobin temperament without the adequate political content, typified by Crispi; in the second case, a Jacobin temperament and content in keeping with the new historical relations, rather than adhering to an intellectualistic label.[72]

In this passage, Gramsci questions Trotsky's understanding of Marx and Engels's references to permanent revolution in their historical context in the 1840s, suggesting that only if this were adequately grasped would it be possible to undertake a coherent "actualization" of their slogan. Even more significantly, Gramsci provides an interpretation of this slogan that cannot easily be reconciled with the temporal metaphors by means of which permanent revolution has usually been conceptualized. Gramsci suggests that the "permanence" of the revolutionary movement, rather than being synonymous with the temporal metaphors of "uninterrupted," "compressed," "telescoped" or "continuous"

[72] *Q*1, §44, 54.

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development,[73] should instead be understood in quite different theoretical vocabularies: either in terms of emergence, or the realization of a previously latent dimension ("something that sprang from all the pores of the society that had to be transformed"), or in terms of (re)articulation, or the relational transformation of previously given elements (an "alliance of two classes with the hegemony of the urban class"). Most intriguingly, Gramsci asserts that these are the dimensions that constitute the "historical, concrete, living form" of permanent revolution, almost as if this were a self-evident interpretation of Marx's "Jacobin" slogan in the late 1840s.

Excursus: "the revolution in permanence" in Marx and Engels (1848–1850)

Gramsci here appears to be drawing upon a tradition of understanding of the role of permanent revolution in Marx and Engels's thought that is distinct from the temporal emphasis that emerged during the debates of Russian social democracy in the early twentieth century, and has since constituted the dominant paradigm of interpretation.[74] In the case of Marx and Engels's specific usage of the formula (and its variant forms), this approach has also tended to assume a uniformity of meaning in terms of a continuous or uninterrupted revolutionary process, both before and after 1848.[75] What this perspective downplays is the polyvalence of the formula in Marx and Engels's texts throughout the 1840s, and particularly

[73] Both Knei-Paz and Day and Gaido emphasize that the terms "permanent revolution" (*permanentnaya revolyutsiya*) and "uninterrupted revolution" (*niepreryvnaya revolyutsiya*) were used synonymously in the debates in Russian social democracy in the early twentieth century, from which Trotsky's formulation derives. See Baruch Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky* (Oxford, 1979), 152; Richard Day and Daniel Gaido, eds., *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record* (Leiden, 2009), 449–50, editorial note. Larsson argues that the term implies a conception of "compressed" development: Reidar Larsson, *Theories of Revolution: From Marx to the First Russian Revolution* (Stockholm, 1970), 31; while Draper uses the term "telescoping" in relation to Engels's assessment of Germany in the *Vormärz*: Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, vol. 2, *The Politics of Social Classes* (New York, 1978), 175. Löwy concedes that the text of Marx and Engels contains both "stagist" and "permanentist" concepts of permanent revolution, but argues that it is ultimately a conception of continuous, "uninterrupted and combined revolution" that constitutes their decisive innovation. Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development*, 3, 9.

[74] See Day and Gaido, *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution*; Lars Lih, "Democratic Revolution *in Permanenz*," *Science & Society* 76/4 (2012), 433–62.

[75] See, for example, Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development*; Stathis Kouvelakis, "Marx's Critique of the Political: From the Revolutions of 1848 to the Paris Commune," *Situations* 2/2 (2007), 81–93, at 81; Fabio Frosini, *Da Gramsci a Marx* (Rome, 2009), 32; Erik van Ree, "Marxism as Permanent Revolution," *History of Political Thought* 34/3 (2013), 540–63.

following the defeats of the revolutionary forces in 1848–9. In the early 1840s, "permanent revolution" is most often invoked in their writings in a negative sense, as a critique of the limitations of the temporality of bourgeois "politicism."[76]

In 1850, however, in their March "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League," Marx and Engels elaborate a perspective that is more strongly institutional in its focus.[77] Rather than an extension of the theme of the continual revolutionizing of the capitalist mode of production from *The Communist Manifesto*, as has often been thought,[78] their use of "the revolution in permanence" (*die Revolution in Permanenz*) in this context was effectively an act of self-critique by means of the appropriation of the slogan (and arguably also programme) of an erstwhile rival. For it was Andreas Gottschalk, Marx's antagonist in the Cologne workers' movement, who had earlier proposed this slogan—ironically, in a text in which Gottschalk denounced Marx for a lack of genuinely revolutionary commitment and an insufficiently radical critique of bourgeois democracy.[79] "The revolution in permanence" in this sense invokes the notion of "permanence" as "self-determination," a sense that was notably

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[76] See, for instance, Marx's critique of the Jacobins in *On the Jewish Question*, or his related critique of Napoleon in *The Holy Family*: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (London, 1975–2005), 3: 155–6, 4: 123.

[77] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, 10: 281–7. For a similar usage in the same period, in *The Class Struggle in France*, see ibid., 127: "Communism ... is the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions generally."

[78] For the classical formulation of this argument see Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development*. For an argument that a distinct notion of permanent revolution only emerged retrospectively and interpretively, "in the gap between the historical and the political registers of the *Manifesto*" that opened up after 1848, see Emanuele Saccarelli, "The Permanent Revolution in and around the *Manifesto*," in Terrell Carver and James Farr, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to The Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge, 2015), 105–21, at 110.

[79] "An Herrn Karl Marx, Redakteur der Neuen Rheinischen Zeitung," *Freiheit, Arbeit* (Cologne), 25 Feb. 1849, reprinted in *Freiheit, Arbeit: Organ des Kölner Arbeitervereins* (Glashüttem im Taunus, 1972). For two opposing views of the implications of Marx and Engels's conjunctural appropriation (already in 1849) of Gottschalk's slogan and programme of independent working-class political representation see Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* (New York, 2013), 251–2, and Lars Lih, "What did Marx mean by 'Revolution in Permanenz'?", *Historical Materialism*, forthcoming. Stedman Jones neglects these contextualist determinations, and consequently reproposes an older notion (now discredited, because lacking in textual evidence) that the March 1850 Address represented a "Blanquist" aberration before Marx definitively returned to the conception of "stages" that had supposedly marked *The Communist Manifesto*. See Gareth Stedman Jones, "The Young Hegelians, Marx and Engels," in Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys, eds., *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge,

present in the French revolutionary process in the 1790s and remains operative in technical constitutional–juridical vocabularies of at least some Western European languages, if not in English.[80] In the French revolutionary process, from the Tennis Court Oath of 1789 refusing to disperse the assembled Third Estate, to the combative declarations of the Parisian sectional assemblies, particularly in 1793, that they would remain sitting "in permanence" (*en permanence*), the phrase was used to signify the intention to remain constituted as a politically active public body, rather than reduced to a condition of "passive" citizenship.[81] Read in the light of this tradition, and in the context of the sectarian debates of the defeated revolutionary forces after 1848, Marx and Engels's invocation of the "permanence" of the revolution in March 1850 does not refer to a temporally uninterrupted process, but rather to the potential organizational autonomy and self-constitution of the working-class movement as an explicitly political (rather than merely social) force. This usage of "the revolution in permanence" could thus be glossed as "the working class movement's political and institutional autonomy."

It was in these terms that Lenin later, in 1905, understood the March 1850 "Address." Responding to Plekhanov's explicit invocation of a stagist schema, Lenin did not argue, surprisingly, in similarly temporal terms. Rather, he asserted that "Marx's idea [in the "Address"] consists in the following": "We, the German Social-Democrats of 1850, are unorganized, we were defeated in the first period of the revolution and were taken completely in tow by

2011), 556–600, at 581; Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* (London, 2016), 301.

80 On the difficulties of translating the formulation "die Revolution in Permanenz" into English see Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, 169–263, 591–5, 599–612. In Marx and Engels's (and Gottschalk's) usage, *in Permanenz* is a simple German calque of the French *en permanence*. In constitutional–juridical terms, it refers not to a temporally continuous session of an assembly (that is, permanence in the sense of temporal endurance), but rather to an assembly's constitutional power to determine the duration and modality of its own sessions, without exterior (in particular, executive) interference. Regarding the meaning of the term in French constitutional law see Léon Duguit, *Traité de droit constitutionnel*, tome 4 (Paris, 1924), 234–5.

81 On declarations of "permanence" in the early 1790s, particularly by the sectional assemblies, see Albert Soboul, *The French Revolution 1787–1799*, trans. Alan Forrest and Colin Jones (London, 1974), 382–3; Soboul , *The Sans-Culottes*, trans. Rémy Inglis Hall (Princeton, 1980), 118–27; Micah Alpaug, *Non-violence and the French Revolution: Political Demonstrations in Paris 1787–1795* (Cambridge, 2015), 83. On resistance to the imposition of passive citizenship see William Sewell, "Le Citoyen/la Citoyenne: Activity, Passivity, and the Revolutionary Concept of Citizenship," in Colin Lucas, ed., *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. 2, *The Political Culture of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1988), 105–25.

the bourgeoisie; we must organize independently—absolutely and under all circumstances independently."[82] It is, finally, this emphasis upon the autonomous political organization that Gramsci will later argue was "sublated," following 1848 and in even more intense forms after 1870, in the theory and practice of hegemony. For the capacity of the working-class movement to provide leadership (that is, hegemony) to other social strata (above all the peasantry) presupposed the prior achievement of its political and organizational independence. It was in this precise sense that Gramsci argued that the hegemonic politics pursued by the Bolsheviks before but above all after the 1917 Revolution could be conceived as an "actualization" of the slogan of "the revolution in permanence."

"Dialectical Mediation" (October 1930)

After its first appearance in early 1930, Gramsci's conception of the "actualization" of permanent revolution traverses the entirety of the *Prison Notebooks*, "punctuating" or interrupting his reflections on passive revolution. An important initial moment in this development occurs in Gramsci's first series of notes on philosophy from late 1930, in Notebook 4, where he posits permanent revolution as the "dialectical mediation" of the two fundamental principles of Marx's 1859 "Preface."[83] This note is written in October 1930—that is, a month before he first refers to Cuoco's formula of passive revolution (in November 1930),[84] and almost three years before he characterizes passive revolution as the "critical corollary" of Marx's text (in June or July 1933).[85] Entitled "Relations of Structure and Superstructures," this lengthy note constitutes a first sketch of central themes that will later be developed more extensively throughout the *Prison Notebooks*, including the fundamental analysis of the three moments of relations of force and the "gnoseological" value of Marx's affirmation of the superstructures.

The note departs from observations regarding the "canons of historical methodology" that can be derived from the "two principles" of the "Preface," namely that "no society poses itself tasks for whose solution there do not already exist the necessary and sufficient conditions," and that a "society does not fall if it has not first developed all the forms of life that are implicit in its relations."[86]

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82 Lenin, "Plekhanov's Reference to History," in *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 8 (Moscow, 1962), 463–73, at 470.

83 *Q*4, §38, 456–7, Oct. 1930.

84 *Q*4, §57, 504, Nov. 1930.

85 *Q*15, §62, 1827, June–July 1933.

86 As Gramsci here inverts the order of propositions in Marx's "Preface," emphasizing the need to check the "exact formulation" of these principles, this note was most likely written before he had finalized his translation of Marx's text. See the the order and wording of propositions in the C Text: *Q*13, §17, 1579, May 1932–Nov. 1933.

Gramsci distinguishes between what is "permanent" and "occasional" in any given social structure; while the "permanent" establishes the general conditions of possibility of social transformation (or conservation), it is the "occasional" that interests Gramsci in particular, as the attempt by different social groups to demonstrate that there already exist the "necessary conditions" for resolving historically determined problems. The legacy of the French Revolution is invoked as a concrete case study; it is by studying the oscillating waves of political development between 1789 and 1870, Gramsci suggests, that it would be possible to determine more accurately the relations between structure and superstructure, as well as permanent and occasional elements of the structure. Mediating between the necessary and sufficient conditions of transformation (occasional) and the implicit forms of life of the existing social organization (permanent) is the "concept of permanent revolution."[87] This note registers the theoretical importance of permanent revolution, but Gramsci does not, at this stage, outline in greater detail the historical perspective that informs this valorization.

"Sublation" and "actualization" (February–May 1932)

Just as passive revolution does not appear to have been among Gramsci's primary concerns during 1931, so permanent revolution also does not return until early 1932, as a parallel track running alongside (in temporal terms) the notes in which many of the now "classical" features of passive revolution are elaborated. In this new season of studies, Gramsci continues to define the temporal dimensions of permanent revolution not in terms of an uninterrupted process, but in terms of a historical "discontinuous continuity." In a first moment in February 1932, he seems to consign permanent revolution to a previous epoch, emphasizing the very different political conditions that marked the slogan's deployment in the 1840s in comparison to those obtaining in the early twentieth century. Permanent revolution is characterized as "scientific expression of Jacobinism in a period in which large political parties and economic trade unions had not yet been constituted."[88] While permanent revolution is here equated with "war of movement," hegemony is identified with the "war of position," as a response to the constitution of the "'trenches' and permanent fortifications" represented by the large popular organizations of modern politics.[89] Yet Gramsci also argues in this same note that the "political concept" of permanent revolution from 1848 was not simply replaced by that of hegemony, just as little as war of position represents a simple antinomic negation of war of movement. Rather, after 1848,

[87] *Q*4, §38, 456–7.
[88] *Q*8, §52, 972–3, Feb. 1932.
[89] *Q*8, §52, 973.

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permanent revolution was "formulated and sublated" (*composto e superato*) in the concept of "civil hegemony."[90]

The notion of hegemony as a "sublation" of permanent revolution becomes increasingly important while Gramsci is undertaking his first steps towards a theoretical generalization and contemporary application of passive revolution in April and May 1932, the months in which he begins to consider the latter formula's utility for the analysis of Fascism. In particular, this dialectical movement takes the form of the notion of a sublating actualization of permanent revolution, its simultaneous transformation and preservation, or rather its preservation by means of transformation. "The greatest modern theoretician of the philosophy of praxis" (i.e. Lenin), he argues, "on the terrain of political struggle and organization and with a political terminology—in opposition to the various 'economistic' tendencies—revalued the front of cultural struggle and constructed the doctrine of hegemony as a complement to the theory of the State-as-force, and as the actual form of the Forty-Eightist doctrine of 'permanent revolution'."[91]

Machiavelli and the expansion of the political (May 1932–November 1933)

Throughout the rest of 1932 and 1933, Gramsci transcribes into a new notebook five older notes in which the reference to permanent revolution plays an important role.[92] They are all more or less extensive revisions of notes written just a few months before, as Gramsci sets about reorganizing his researches in the new optic opened up by the figure of the "modern Prince."[93] Interestingly, these notes emphasize the importance of the concept of permanent revolution for understanding what is usually taken to be the "classic" terrain of passive revolution: the "long nineteenth century" from 1789 to 1870, conceived as a reaction to the propulsive force of the French Revolution.[94] If Gramsci's notes

[90] *Q*8, §52, 973. Once again, previous translations of *superato* do not seem to me to emphasize adequately the Hegelian and dialectical dimensions of Gramsci's argument. See Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 243: "transcended"; Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, ed. Buttigieg, 267: "superseded."

[91] *Q*10I, §12, 1235, mid-April–mid-May 1932; see *Q*13, §18, 1595–6, May 1932–Nov. 1933.

[92] *Q*13, §7, 1565–7; *Q*13, §17, 1578–89; *Q*13, §18, 1589–97; *Q*13, §27, 1619–22; *Q*13, §37, 1635–50; all May 1932–Nov. 1933.

[93] On the emergence of the figure of the modern Prince as a decisive reorganization of Gramsci's research in 1932 see Fabio Frosini, "Luigi Russo e Georges Sorel: sulla genesi del 'moderno Principe' nei *Quaderni del carcere* di Antonio Gramsci," *Studi storici* 54/3 (2013), 545–89; and Peter D. Thomas, "The Modern Prince: Gramsci's Reading of Machiavelli," *History of Political Thought* 38/3 (2017), 523–44.

[94] Similarly, while often associated with passive revolution, Gramsci's analysis of "Caesarism" is in fact elaborated in notes that focus upon permanent revolution. See *Q*9, §133, 1194–5, Nov. 1932; *Q*13, §27, 1619–22, May 1932–Nov. 1933.

highlighting passive revolution in the spring of 1932 had depicted the nineteenth century as an epoch of the progressive reduction of the space for political activity by the subaltern classes (the "perfection" of the parliamentary regime and consolidation of a "permanently organized consent" of Hegelian dimensions), then these notes on permanent revolution only a few months later instead conceive the same historical period, particularly following 1848, as an expansion of the political field, now more complex and institutionally mediated. It was this process, Gramsci argues, that gave rise to the elaboration and sublation of the Jacobin slogan in the new formula of hegemony: "in the period after 1870, with the colonial expansion of Europe, all these elements change. The internal and international organizational relations of the State become more complex and massive, and the Forty-Eightist formula of the 'permanent revolution' is elaborated and sublated [*elaborata e superata*] in political science in the formula of 'civil hegemony.'"[95] These developments also feed into other significant revisions and specifications in Notebook 13, in the same period in which Gramsci is articulating passive revolution with his reflections on the 1859 "Preface" (from April to July 1933, in Notebook 15). Perhaps the most notable of these is *Q*13, §37, in which there is a maturation of the contraposition of "historical Jacobinism" and what I have characterized as "Metajacobinism" from early 1930. By late 1932 or 1933, Gramsci is further able to specify his assessment of historical Jacobinism. The formula of permanent revolution "realized [*attuata*] in the active phase of the French revolution" in the 1790s is clearly distinguished from the "sublated" form of permanent revolution that constitutes the tradition of "Metajacobinism" after 1848, and which issues in the new formula of hegemony.[96]

A dialectic without synthesis (1934–1935)

Passive revolution returns to prominence in the final years of Gramsci's active composition of the *Prison Notebooks* (terminated in 1935 due to declining health). This includes a hesitant extension of the formula to the analysis of the contemporary phenomena of "Americanism and Fordism" in one single note from the second half of 1934.[97] This usage is formally similar, in both its analogical method and tentativeness, to Gramsci's earlier suggestion in the spring of 1932 that passive revolution may constitute a useful perspective for the analysis of

[95] *Q*13, §7, 1566, May 1932–Nov. 1933. See the A text: *Q*8, §52, 973, Feb. 1932. The increasing complexity of Gramsci's historical analysis of the nineteenth century in notes drafted in late 1932 can also be observed in *Q*9, §133, 1195, Nov. 1932.

[96] *Q*13, §37, 1636. This distinction is not noted by Bull, who thus ends up collapsing the narratives of two distinct historical periods into one generic concept. See Malcolm Bull, "Levelling Out," *New Left Review* 2/70 (2011), 5–24, at 21.

[97] *Q*22, §1, 2140.

Fascism.[98] In late 1934 or early 1935, in Notebook 19, however, Gramsci turns to the transcription and revision of the "foundational" *Q*1, §44, the note in which he has first developed his reflections on permanent revolution and, later, also passive revolution.[99] The journey through the *Prison Notebooks* has witnessed a specification of the historical references and narratives associated with each formulation. Just as crucially, however, the variation in their usage has also produced a theoretical clarification of their necessarily dialectical relation, with each formulation constituting the lens through which the strategic import of the other can be comprehended. If passive revolution seems by early 1935 to be used more precisely to characterize the historical origins of the challenges confronting the antifascist movement in the early 1930s, permanent revolution is conceived in even clearer terms as its direct antithesis: the "historical, concrete, living form" of that which "sprang from all the pores of the society which had to be transformed," namely "hegemony."[100]

CONCLUSION

Contrary to an influential interpretive tradition, I have argued that passive revolution should not be understood only or even primarily as a foundational concept for a historical narrative of state development and transformation. Rather, in the first instance, it should be comprehended in terms of its heuristic role in the lexical architecture of the *Prison Notebooks*. Focusing on this heuristic role enables us to see more clearly the fundamentally strategic concerns that informed Gramsci's different uses of the formula. Passive revolution is deployed as an element in Gramsci's search for an adequate political strategy for the international communist movement in the 1930s, in close relation to his fundamental project of reflecting on the possible actualization of permanent revolution. Throughout the *Prison Notebooks*, passive revolution remains overdetermined by and functional to this larger project.

In one of its most significant usages, the formula of passive revolution provides Gramsci with a way of distinguishing between the historical experience of Jacobinism in the French revolutionary process and "Metajacobinism," as a critical inheritance of its strengths in the changed circumstances of 1848 and its aftermath. It also enables him to explain the conditions under which the "Metajacobin" slogan of "the revolution in permanence" from 1848 was transformed—"sublated"—into the theory and practice of hegemony. Similarly,

98 *Q*8, §236, 1089.

99 *Q*19, §24, 2010–34, July–Aug. 1934–Feb. 1935.

100 Compare the consistency of this metaphor over the five or more years that separate *Q*1, §44, 54 and *Q*19, §24, 2034.

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the primacy of Gramsci's contemporaneous exploration of permanent revolution allows him to specify the utility of passive revolution, not as a theoretical end in itself, but as a diagnosis of the challenges confronting the attempt to renew the revolution in permanence in the changed political conditions of the struggle against Fascism.

The contemporary discussion of passive revolution in terms of concepts of "revolution from above," theories of state formation and modernization, techniques of statecraft and governmentality, and the analysis of current political dynamics has considerably extended the formula's fields of relevance beyond its original uses in the *Prison Notebooks*. Giving more attention to the heuristic role that passive revolution plays within Gramsci's original project, and the dialectic with permanent revolution that defines his use of it, not only offers to recover a fuller range of the meanings generative of and associated with it, in its historical context. It also enables us to recognize passive revolution as primarily a contribution to the central strategic debates of the Marxist tradition of Gramsci's time, and thus to consider the role that uses of passive revolution might play in a similar attempted "sublation" of the revolution in permanence in contemporary conditions. The meaning and significance of passive revolution for us today is certainly not exhausted by acknowledging the conditions and modality of its original formulation, but such an assessment is the necessary precondition for a meaningful form of its contemporary "actualization"; that is, its transformative inheritance.