Hegemony & Socialist Strategy

Towards a Radical Democratic Politics

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Beyond The
Positivity of The Social:
Antagonism and
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ic. In short, Gramsci was an original theoretician and a political strategist of 'uneven development', but his concepts are scarcely relevant to the conditions of advanced capitalism. A second, divergent reading presents him as a theoretician of revolution in the West,[10] whose strategic conception was based upon the complexity of advanced industrial civilizations and the density of their social and political relations. One of his interpreters goes so far as to see him as the theoretician of the capitalist restructuring which followed the 1929 world crisis, and of the complexity acquired by mass struggle within the context of a growing intertwining of politics and economics.[11] In fact, Gramsci's theoretical innovation is located at a more general level, so that both of these readings are possible — and partially valid. More than any other theoretician of his time, Gramsci broadened the terrain of political recomposition and hegemony, while offering a theorization of the hegemonic link which clearly went beyond the Leninist category of 'class alliance'. As, in both the advanced industrial countries and the capitalist periphery, the conditions of political struggle moved further and further away from the ones imagined by orthodox stagism, the Gramscian categories applied equally to both cases. Their relevance should therefore be situated at the level of the general theory of Marxism, and cannot be referred to specific geographical contexts.

The starting point was, however, a strictly Leninist approach. In *Notes on the Southern Question* (1926), the first Gramscian text in which the concept of hegemony is used, he states: 'The proletariat can become the leading and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State. In Italy, in the real class relations which exist there, this means to the extent that it succeeds in gaining the consent of the broad peasant masses.'[12] The precondition of this leading role is that the working class should not remain confined to the narrow defence of its corporative interests, but should take up those of other sectors. However, the logic is still only one of preconstituted sectoral interests, which is perfectly compatible with the notion of a class alliance. As in Lenin, leadership is merely political and not 'moral and intellectual'.

It is in this movement, from the 'political' to the 'intellectual and moral' plane, that the decisive transition takes place toward a concept of hegemony beyond 'class alliances'. For, whereas political leadership can be grounded upon a conjunctural coincidence of interests in which the participating sectors retain their separate identity, moral and intellectual leadership requires that an ensemble

of 'ideas' and 'values' be shared by a number of sectors — or, to use our own terminology, that certain subject positions traverse a number of class sectors. Intellectual and moral leadership constitutes, according to Gramsci, a higher synthesis, a 'collective will', which, through ideology, becomes the organic cement unifying a 'historical bloc'. All these are new concepts having an effect of displacement with regard to the Leninist perspective: the relational specificity of the hegemonic link is no longer concealed, but on the contrary becomes entirely visible and theorized. The analysis conceptually defines a new series of relations among groups which baffles their structural location within the revolutionary and relational schema of economism. At the same time, ideology is signalled as the precise terrain on which these relations are constituted.

Thus, everything depends on how ideology is conceived.[13] Here Gramsci brings about two new and fundamental displacements with regard to the classical problematic. The first is his conception of the materiality of ideology. Ideology is not identified with a 'system of ideas' or with the 'false consciousness' of social agents; it is instead an organic and relational whole, embodied in institutions and apparatuses, which welds together a historical bloc around a number of basic articulatory principles. This precludes the possibility of a 'superstructuralist' reading of the ideological. In fact, through the concepts of historical bloc and of ideology as organic cement, a new totalizing category takes us beyond the old base/superstructure distinction. This is not sufficient, however, because moral and intellectual leadership could still be understood as the ideological inculcation by a hegemonic class of a whole range of subordinate sectors. In that case, there would be no subject positions traversing classes, for any that seemed to do so would in fact be appurtenances of the dominant class, and their presence in other sectors could be understood only as a phenomenon of false consciousness. It is at this crucial point that Gramsci introduces his third and most important displacement: the break with the reductionist problematic of ideology. For Gramsci, political subjects are not — strictly speaking — classes, but complex 'collective wills'; similarly, the ideological elements articulated by a hegemonic class do not have a necessary class belonging. Concerning the first point, Gramsci's position is clear: the collective will is a result of the politico-ideological articulation of dispersed and fragmented historical forces. 'From this one can deduce the importance of the "cultural aspect", even in practical (collective) activity. An historical act can only be performed by "collective man", and this presupposes the attainment of a "cultural-social" unity through which a multiplicity

of dispersed wills with heterogenous aims, are welded together with a single aim, on the basis of an equal and common conception of the world.'[14] Nothing more distant from this 'collective man', 'welded together with a single aim', than the Leninist notion of class alliance. With regard to the second point, it is equally evident that for Gramsci the organic ideology does not represent a purely classist and closed view of the world; it is formed instead through the articulation of elements which, considered in themselves, do not have any necessary class belonging. Let us examine, in this connection, the following critical passages: 'What matters is the criticism to which such an ideological complex is subjected by the first representation of a new historical phase. This criticism makes possible a process of differentiation and change in the relative weight that the elements of the old ideologies used to possess. What was previously secondary and subordinate, or even incidental, is now taken to be primary — becomes the nucleus of a new ideological and theoretical complex. The old collective will dissolves into its contradictory elements since the subordinate ones develop socially.'[15] 'How, on the other hand, should this theoretical consciousness, proposed as autonomous consciousness, be formed? How should everyone choose and combine the elements for the constitution of such an autonomous consciousness? Will each element imposed have to be repudiated a priori? It will have to be repudiated inasmuch as it is imposed, but not in itself; that is to say that it will be necessary to give a new form which is specific to the given group.'[16]

We can thus see the central point which demarcates Grasmci from other anti-economistic positions formulated within the communist movement of that period. Both Lukács and Korsch, for instance, also reproportioned the terrain classically attributed to the superstructures; but they did this within the parameters of a class-reductionist perspective which identified the revolutionary subject with the working class, such that hegemony in the sense of articulation was strictly unthinkable. It was precisely Gramsci's introduction of this latter concept which radically subverted the original conditions for the emergence of Second International dualism, and its reproduction on an extended scale in the discourse of the Third. On the one hand, the field of historical contingency has penetrated social relations more thoroughly than in any of the previous discourses: the social segments have lost those essential connections which turned them into moments of the stagist paradigm; and their own *meaning* depended upon hegemonic articulations whose success was not guaranteed by any law of history. In terms of our earlier analysis, we might say that the diverse 'elements' or 'tasks' no longer

had any identity apart from their relation with the force hegemonizing them. On the other hand, these forms of precarious articulation began to receive names, to be theoretically thought, and were incorporated into the very identity of the social agents. This explains the importance attributed by Gramsci to the 'national-popular' and to the formulation of a concept such as 'integral State', in which the dominant sector modifies its very nature and identity through the practice of hegemony. For Gramsci a class does not *take State power*, it *becomes* State.

All the conditions would seem to be present here for what we have called the democratic practice of hegemony. Nonetheless, the entire construction rests upon an ultimately incoherent conception, which is unable fully to overcome the dualism of classical Marxism. For Gramsci, even though the diverse social elements have a merely relational identity — achieved through articulatory practices — there must always be a *single* unifying principle in every hegemonic formation, and this can only be a fundamental class. Thus two principles of the social order — the unicity of the unifying principle, and its necessary class character — are not the contingent result of hegemonic struggle, but the necessary structural framework within which every struggle occurs. Class hegemony is not a wholly practical result of struggle, but has an ultimate ontological foundation. The economic base may not assure the ultimate victory of the working class, since this depends upon its capacity for hegemonic leadership. However, a failure in the hegemony of the working class can only be followed by a reconstitution of bourgeois hegemony, so that in the end, political struggle is still a zero-sum game among classes. This is the inner essentialist core which continues to be present in Gramsci's thought, setting a limit to the deconstructive logic of hegemony. To assert, however, that hegemony must always correspond to a fundamental economic class is not merely to reaffirm determination in the last instance by the economy; it is also to predicate that, insofar as the economy constitutes an insurmountable limit to society's potential for hegemonic recomposition, the constitutive logic of the economic space is not itself hegemonic. Here the naturalist prejudice, which sees the economy as a homogeneous space unified by necessary laws, appears once again with all its force.

This fundamental ambiguity can clearly be seen in the Gramscian concept of 'war of position'. We have already noted the function of military metaphors in classical Marxist discourse, and it would be no exaggeration to say that, from Kautsky to Lenin, the Marxist conception of politics rested upon an imaginary owing a great deal to

Clausewitz.[17] The chief consequence was what might be called a *segregation* effect — for, if one understands relations with other social forces as military relations, then one will always keep one's own separate identity. From Kautsky's 'war of attrition' to the extreme militarism of the Bolshevization drive and 'class against class', the establishment of a strict dividing line was considered the very condition of politics — 'politics' being conceived simply as one of the terrains of *class* struggle. For Gramsci, by contrast, 'war of position' involves the progressive disaggregation of a civilization and the construction of another around a new class core. Thus, the identity of the opponents, far from being fixed from the beginning, constantly changes in the process. It is clear that this has little to do with 'war of position' in the strict military sense, where enemy forces are not continually passing to one's own side. Indeed, the military metaphor is here metaphorized in the opposite direction: if in Leninism there was a militarization of politics, in Gramsci there is a demilitarization of war.[18] Nevertheless, this transition to a non-military conception of politics reaches a limit precisely at the point where it is argued that the *class* core of the new hegemony — and, of course, also of the old — remains constant throughout the entire process. In this sense, *there is* an element of continuity in the confrontation, and the metaphor of the two armies in struggle can retain part of its productivity.

Thus, Gramsci's thought appears suspended around a basic ambiguity concerning the status of the working class which finally leads it to a contradictory position. On the one hand, the political centrality of the working class has a historical, contingent character: it requires the class to come out of itself, to transform its own identity by articulating to it a plurality of struggles and democratic demands. On the other hand, it would seem that this articulatory role is assigned to it by the economic base — hence, that the centrality has a necessary character. One cannot avoid the feeling that the transition from a morphological and essentialist conception à la Labriola, to a radical historicist one,[19] has not been coherently accomplished.

At any event, if we compare Gramsci's thought with the various classical tendencies of Second International Marxism, the radical novelty of his concept of hegemony is quite evident. After the war, Kautsky[20] formulated a democratic conception of the transition to socialism which used the Bolshevik experience as a counter-model, responsible — in his view — for dictatorial practices that were inevitable if an attempt was made to bring about a transition to socialism in Russian-like conditions of backwardness. However, the

alternative he proposed was to wait until the mythical laws of capitalist development simplified social antagonisms: the conditions would then exist for the dislocation between 'masses' and 'classes' to disappear, and with it any possible split between leaders and led. The Gramscian theory of hegemony, on the contrary, accepts social complexity as the very condition of political struggle and — through its threefold displacement of the Leninist theory of 'class alliances' — sets the basis for a democratic practice of politics, compatible with a plurality of historical subjects.[21]

As to Bernstein, Gramsci shares his affirmation of the primacy of politics, and his acceptance of a plurality of struggles and democratic demands irreducible to class belonging. But unlike Bernstein, for whom these separate struggles and demands are united only at an epochal level, through the intervention of a general law of progress, Gramsci has no room for a principle of *Entwicklung*. Struggles derive their meaning from their hegemonic articulation, and their progressive character — from a socialist point of view — is not assured in advance. History, therefore, is regarded not as an ascendant *continuum* of democratic reforms, but as a discontinuous series of hegemonic formations or historical blocs. In the terms of a distinction we drew earlier, Gramsci might share with Bernstein his 'revisionism', but certainly not his 'gradualism'.

With regard to Sorel, the situation is more complicated. Undoubtedly, in his concepts of 'bloc' and 'myth', Sorel breaks more radically than Gramsci with the essentialist vision of an underlying morphology of history. In this respect, and this alone, Gramsci's concept of historical bloc represents a step backwards. At the same time, however, Gramsci's perspective marks a clear advance on Sorel, for his theory of hegemony as articulation entails the idea of *democratic plurality*, while the Sorelian myth was simply destined to recreate the unity *of the class*. Successive versions of this myth sought to secure a radical line of partition within society, and never to construct, through a process of hegemonic reaggregation, a new integral State. The idea of a 'war of position' would have been radically alien to Sorel's perspective.

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Beyond the Positivity of the Social: Antagonisms and Hegemony

From everything said so far, it follows that the concept of hegemony supposes a theoretical field dominated by the category of *articulation*; and hence that the articulated elements can be separately identified. (Later, we will examine how it is possible to specify 'elements' independently of the articulated totalities.) In any case, if articulation is a practice, and not the name of a *given* relational complex, it must imply some form of separate presence of the elements which that practice articulates or recomposes. In the type of theorization we wish to analyse, the elements on which articulatory practices operate were originally specified as fragments of a lost structural or organic totality. In the eighteenth century, the German Romantic generation took the experience of fragmentation and division as the starting-point of its theoretical reflection. Since the seven-

teenth century the collapse of the view of the cosmos as a meaningful order within which man occupied a precise and determined place — and the replacement of this view by a self-defining conception of the subject, as an entity maintaining relations of exteriority with the rest of the universe (the Weberian disenchantment of the world) — led the Romantic generation of the *Sturm und Drang* to an eager search for that lost unity, for a new synthesis that would permit the division to be overcome. The notion of man as the expression of an integral totality attempts to break with all dualisms — body/soul, reason/feeling, thought/senses — established by rationalism since the seventeenth century.[1] It is well known that the Romantics conceived this experience of dissociation as strictly linked to functional differentiation and the division of society into classes, to the growing complexity of a bureaucratic State establishing relations of exteriority with the other spheres of social life.

Given that the elements to be rearticulated were specified as *fragments* of a lost unity, it was clear that any recomposition would have an *artificial* character, as opposed to the *natural* organic unity peculiar to Greek culture. Hölderlin stated: 'There are two ideals of our existence: one is the condition of the greatest simplicity, where our needs accord with each other, with our powers and with everything we are related to, *just through the organization of nature*, without any action on our part. The other is a condition of the highest cultivation, where this accord would come about between infinitely diversified and strengthened needs and powers, through the organization which we are able to give to ourselves.'[2] Now, everything depends on how we conceive this 'organization which we are able to give to ourselves' and which gives the elements a new form of unity: either that organization is contingent and, therefore, external to the fragments themselves; or else, both the fragments and the organization are necessary moments of a totality which transcends them. It is clear that only the first type of 'organization' can be conceived as an *articulation*; the second is, strictly speaking, a *mediation*. But it is also evident that, in philosophical discourses, the distances between the one and the other have been presented more as a nebulous area of ambiguities than as a clear watershed.

In order to place ourselves firmly within the field of articulation, we must begin by renouncing the conception of society as founding totality of its partial processes. We must, therefore, consider the openness of the social as the constitutive ground or 'negative essence' of the existing,

and the diverse 'social orders' as precarious and ultimately failed attempts to domesticate the field of differences. Accordingly, the multiformity of the social cannot be apprehended through a system of mediations, nor the 'social order' understood as an underlying principle. There is no sutured space peculiar to 'society', since the social itself has no essence. Three remarks are important here. First, the two conceptions imply different logics of the social: in the case of 'mediations', we are dealing with a system of logical transitions in which relations between objects are conceived as following a relation between concepts; in the second sense, we are dealing with contingent relations whose nature we have to determine. Secondly, in criticizing the conception of society as an ensemble united by necessary laws, we cannot simply bring out the non-necessary character of the *relations* among elements, for we would then retain the necessary character of the *identity* of the elements themselves. A conception which denies any essentialist approach to social relations, must also state the precarious character of every identity and the impossibility of fixing the sense of the 'elements' in any ultimate literality. Thirdly, it is only in contrast to a discourse postulating their unity, that an ensemble of elements appears as fragmented or dispersed. Outside any discursive structure, it is obviously not possible to speak of fragmentation, nor even to specify elements. Yet, a discursive structure is not a merely 'cognitive' or 'contemplative' entity; it is an *articulatory practice* which constitutes and organizes social relations. We can thus talk of a growing complexity and fragmentation of advanced industrial societies -

We must, therefore, begin by analysing the category of *articulation*, which will give us our starting-point for the elaboration of the concept of hegemony. The theoretical construction of this category requires us to take two steps: to establish the possibility of specifying the elements which enter into the articulatory relation; and to determine the specificity of the relational moment comprising this articulation

Articulation and Discourse

In the context of this discussion, we will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call *moments*. By contrast, we will call *element* any difference that is not discursively articulated. In

Now, in an articulated discursive totality, where every element occupies a differential position — in our terminology, where every *element* has been reduced to a *moment* of that totality — all identity is relational and all relations have a necessary character. Benveniste, for example, states with reference to Saussure's principle of value: 'To say that the values are "relative" means that they are relative *to each other*. Now, is that not precisely the proof of their *necessity?* . . . Whoever says system says arrangement or conformity of parts in a structure which transcends and explains its elements. Everything is so *necessary* in it that modifications of the whole and of the details reciprocally condition one another. The relativity of values is the best proof that they depend closely upon one another in the synchrony of a system which is always being threatened, always being restored. The point is that all values are values of opposition and are defined only by their difference . . . If language is something other than a fortuitous conglomeration of erratic notions and sounds uttered at random, it is because necessity is inherent in its structure as in all structure.'[12] Necessity derives, therefore, not from an underlying intelligible principle but from the regularity of a system of structural positions. In this sense, no relation can be contingent or external, since the identity of its elements would then be specified outside the relation itself. But this is no more than to affirm that in a discursive-structural formation constituted in this way, the practice of articulation would be impossible: the latter involves working on *elements*, while here we would be confronted only with *moments* of a closed and fully constituted totality where every moment is subsumed from the beginning under the principle of repetition. As we shall see, if contingency and articulation are possible, this is because no discursive formation is a sutured totality

and the transformation of the elements into moments is never complete.

2. Our analysis rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices. It affirms: a) that every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence; and b) that any distinction between what are usually called the linguistic and behaviourial aspects of a social practice, is either an incorrect distinction or ought to find its place as a differentiation within the social production of meaning, which is structured under the form of discursive totalitites. Foucault, for example, who has maintained a distinction — in our opinion inconsistent — between discursive and non-discursive practices,[13] attempts to determine the relational totality that founds the regularity of the dispersions of a discursive formation. But he is only capable of doing this in terms of a discursive practice: '[Clinical medicine must be regarded] as the establishment of a relation, in medical discourse, between a number of distinct elements, some of which concerned the status of doctors, others the institutional and technical site from which they spoke, others their position as subjects perceiving, observing, describing, teaching, etc. It can be said that this relation between different elements (some of which are new, while others were already in existence) is effected by clinical discourse: it is this, as a practice, that establishes between them all a system of relations that is not "really" given or constituted *a priori*; and if there is a unity, if the modalities of enunciation that it uses, or to which it gives place, are not simply juxtaposed by a series of historical contingencies, it is because it makes constant use of this group of relations.'[14] Two points have to be emphasized here. Firstly, if the so-called non-discursive complexes — institutions, techniques, productive organization, and so on — are analysed, we will only find more or less complex forms of differential positions among objects, which do not arise from a necessity external to the system structuring them and which can only therefore be conceived as discursive articulations. Secondly, the very logic of Foucault's argument concerning the articulatory nature of clinical discourse implies that the identity of the articulated elements must be at least partially modified by that articulation: that is, the category of dispersion only partially permits us to think the specificity of the regularities. The status of the dispersed entities is constituted in some intermediate region between the elements and the moments.[15]

We cannot enter here into all the complexities of a theory of discourse as we understand it, but we should at least indicate the

following basic points in order to obviate the more common misunderstandings.

(a) The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has *nothing to do* with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God', depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence.

(b) At the root of the previous prejudice lies an assumption of the *mental* character of discourse. Against this, we will affirm the *material* character of every discursive structure. To argue the opposite is to accept the very classical dichotomy between an objective field constituted outside of any discursive intervention, and a discourse consisting of the pure expression of thought. This is, precisely, the dichotomy which several currents of contemporary thought have tried to break.[16] The theory of speech acts has, for example, underlined their performative character. Language games, in Wittgenstein, include within an indissoluble totality both language and the actions interconnected with it: 'A is building with building-stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs, and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block", "pillar", "slab", "beam". A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such and such a call.'[17] The conclusion is inevitable: 'I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the "language-game".'[18] It is evident that the very material properties of objects are part of what Wittgenstein calls language game, which is an example of what we have called discourse. What constitutes a differential position and therefore a relational identity with certain linguistic elements, is not the idea of building-stone or slab, but the building-stone or the slab as such. (The connection with the idea of 'building-stone' has not, as far as we know, been sufficient to construct any building.) The linguistic and non-linguistic elements are not merely juxtaposed, but constitute a differential and structured system of positions — that is, a discourse. The differential positions include, therefore, a dispersion of very diverse material elements.[19]

(c) Finally, we must consider the meaning and productivity of the centrality we have assigned to the category of discourse. Through this centrality, we obtain a considerable enlargement of the field of objectivity, and the conditions are created which permit us to think numerous relations placed before us by the analysis of the preceding chapters. Let us suppose that we attempted to analyse social relations on the basis of the type of objectivity constructed by the discourse of natural sciences. This immediately sets strict limits both on the objects that it is possible to construct within that discourse, and on the relations that can be established among them. Certain relations and certain objects are excluded in advance. Metaphor, for example,

is impossible as an objective relation between two entities. But this excludes the possibility of conceptually specifying a wide range of relations among objects in the social and political field. What we characterized as 'communist enumeration', for example, is based on a relation of *equivalence* among different class sectors within a social space divided into two antagonistic camps. But this equivalence supposes the operation of the principle of analogy among literally diverse contents — and what is this but a metaphorical transposition? It is important to observe that the equivalence constituted through communist enumeration is not the discursive *expression* of a real movement constituted outside discourse; on the contrary, this enumerative discourse *is* a real force which contributes to the moulding and constitution of social relations. Something similar occurs with a notion such as 'contradiction' — to which we will return below. If we consider social relations from the perspective of a naturalist paradigm, contradiction is excluded. But if we consider social relations as discursively constructed, contradiction becomes possible. For, whereas the classical notion of 'real object' excludes contradiction, a relation of contradiction can exist between two objects of discourse. The main consequence of a break with the discursive/extra-discursive dichotomy is the abandonment of the thought/reality opposition, and hence a major enlargement of the field of those categories which can account for social relations. Synonymy, metonymy, metaphor are not forms of thought that add a second sense to a primary, constitutive literality of social relations; instead, they are part of the primary terrain itself in which the social is constituted. Rejection of the thought/reality dichotomy must go together with a rethinking and interpenetration of the categories which have until now been considered exclusive of one or the other.

3. Now, the transition to the relational totality that we have called 'discourse', would hardly be able to solve our initial problems if the relational and differential logic of the discursive totality prevailed without any limitation. In that case, we would be faced with pure relations of necessity, and, as we earlier pointed out, any articulation would be impossible given that every 'element' would *ex definitione* be 'moment'. This conclusion can impose itself, however, only if we allow that the relational logic of discourse be carried through to its ultimate consequences, without limitation by any exterior.[20] If we accept, on the contrary, that a discursive totality never exists in the form of a simply *given and delimited* positivity, the relational logic will be incomplete and pierced by contingency. The transition from the 'elements' to the 'moments' is never entirely fulfilled. A no-

man's-land thus emerges, making the articulatory practice possible. In this case, there is no social identity fully protected from a discursive exterior that deforms it and prevents it becoming fully sutured. Both the identities and the relations lose their necessary character. As a systematic structural ensemble, the relations are unable to absorb the identities; but as the identities are purely relational, this is but another way of saying that there is no identity which can be fully constituted.

This being so, all discourse of fixation becomes metaphorical: literality is, in actual fact, the first of metaphors.

Here we arrive at a decisive point in our argument. The incomplete character of every totality necessarily leads us to abandon, as a terrain of analysis, the premise of *'society'* as a sutured and self-defined totality. 'Society' is not a valid object of discourse. There is no single underlying principle fixing — and hence constituting — the whole field of differences. The irresoluble interiority/exteriority tension is the condition of any social practice: necessity only exists as a partial limitation of the field of contingency. It is in this terrain, where neither a total interiority nor a total exteriority is possible, that the social is constituted. For the same reason that the social cannot be reduced to the interiority of a fixed system of differences, pure exteriority is also impossible. In order to be *totally* external to each other, the entities would have to be totally internal with regard to themselves: that is, to have a fully constituted identity which is not subverted by any exterior. But this is precisely what we have just rejected. *This field of identities which never manage to be fully fixed, is the field of overdetermination.*

We now have all the necessary analytical elements to specify the concept of articulation. Since all identity is relational — even if the system of relations does not reach the point of being fixed as a stable system of differences — since, too, all discourse is subverted by a field of discursivity which overflows it, the transition from 'elements' to 'moments' can never be complete. The status of the 'elements' is that of floating signifiers, incapable of being wholly articulated to a discursive chain. And this floating character finally penetrates every discursive (i.e. social) identity. But if we accept the non-complete character of all discursive fixation and, at the same time, affirm the relational character of every identity, the ambiguous character of the signifier, its non-fixation to any signified, can only exist insofar as there is a proliferation of signifieds. It is not the poverty of signifieds but, on the contrary, polysemy that disarticulates a discursive structure. That is what establishes the overdetermined, symbolic dimension of every social identity. Society never manages to be identical to itself, as every nodal point is constituted within an intertextuality that overflows it. *The practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity.*

Every social practice is therefore — in one of its dimensions — articulatory. As it is not the internal moment of a self-defined totality, it cannot simply be the expression of something already

acquired, it cannot be *wholly* subsumed under the principle of repetition; rather, it always consists in the construction of new differences. The social *is* articulation insofar as 'society' is impossible. Earlier we said that, for the social, necessity only exists as a partial effort to limit contingency. This implies that the relations between 'necessity' and 'contingency' cannot be conceived as relations between two areas that are delimited and external to each other — as, for example, in Labriola's morphological prediction — because the contingent only exists within the necessary. This presence of the contingent in the necessary is what we earlier called *subversion*, and it manifests itself as symbolization, metaphorization, paradox, which deform and question the literal character of every necessity. Necessity, therefore, exists not under the form of an underlying principle, of a ground, but as an effort of literalization which fixes the differences of a relational system. The necessity of the social is the necessity proper to purely relational identities — as in the linguistic principle of value[23] — not natural 'necessity' or the necessity of an analytical judgement. 'Necessity', in this sense, is simply equivalent to a 'system of differential positions in a sutured space'.

This way of approaching the problem of articulation would seem to contain all the necessary elements to resolve the apparent antinomies with which the logic of hegemony confronted us: on the one hand, the open and incomplete character of every social identity permits its articulation to different historico-discursive formations — that is, to 'blocs' in the sense of Sorel and Gramsci; on the other hand, the very identity of the articulatory force is constituted in the general field of discursivity — this eliminates any reference to a transcendental or originative subject. However, before formulating our concept of hegemony, we need to tackle two further questions. The first concerns the precise status in our analysis of the category of 'subject'; the second concerns the concept of *antagonism*, whose importance stems from the fact that, in one of its key dimensions, the specificity of a *hegemonic* articulatory practice is given by its confrontation with other articulatory practices of an antagonistic character.

Let us now move on to consider the different forms which the determination of social and political subjects has adopted within the Marxist tradition. The starting-point and constant leitmotiv is clear: the subjects are social classes, whose unity is constituted around interests determined by their position in the relations of production. More important than insisting on this common theme, however, is to study the precise ways in which Marxism has politically and theoretically responded to the diversification and dispersion of subject positions with regard to the paradigmatic forms of their unity. A first type of response — the most elementary — consists of an illegitimate passage through the referent. It involves, for example, the assertion that the workers' political struggle and economic struggle are unified by the concrete social agent — the working class — which conducts them both. This type of reasoning — common not only in Marxism but also in the social sciences as a whole — is based on a fallacy: the expression 'working class' is used in two different ways, to define a specific subject position in the relations of production, and to *name* the agents who occupy that subject position. The resulting ambiguity allows the logically illegitimate conclusion to slip through that the other positions occupied by these agents are also 'working-class positions'. (They are obviously 'working-class' in the second sense, but not necessarily in the first.) The implicit assumption of the unity and transparency of the consciousness of every social agent serves to consolidate the ambiguity — and hence the confusion.

This subterfuge, however, can only operate when one tries to affirm the unity among *empirically given* positions; not when one tries to explain — as has been most frequently the case in the Marxist tradition — the essential heterogeneity of some positions with regard to the others (that is, the characteristic splits of 'false consciousness'). In this case, as we have seen, the unity of the class is conceived as a future unity; the way in which that unity manifests itself is through the category of representation, the split between real workers and their objective interests requiring that the latter be represented by the vanguard party. Now, every relation of representation is founded on a fiction: that of the presence at a certain level of something which, strictly speaking, is absent from it. But because it is *at the same time* a fiction and a principle organizing actual social relations, representation is the terrain of a game whose result is not predetermined from the beginning. At one end of the spectrum of possibilities we would have a dissolution of the fictitious character of representation, so that the means and the field of representation would be totally transparent vis-à-vis what is represented; at the other end, we would have total opaqueness between representative and represented: the fiction would become a fiction in a strictly literal sense. It is important to note that neither of these extremes constitutes an impossible situation, as both have well-defined conditions of possibility: a representative can be subjected to such conditions of control that what becomes a fiction is the very fictitiousness of the representation; and, on the contrary, a total absence of control can make the representation literally fictitious. The Marxist conception of the vanguard party shows this peculiarity: that the party represents not a concrete agent but its historical interests, and that there is no fiction since representative and represented are constituted by the same discourse and on the same plane. This tautological relation, however, exists in its extreme form only in tiny sects which proclaim themselves to be the vanguard of the proletariat, without the proletariat ever realizing, of course, that it has a vanguard. In every political struggle of a certain significance, there is on the contrary a very clear effort to win the allegiance of concrete social agents to their supposed 'historical interests'. If the tautology of a

single discourse constituting both represented and representative is abandoned, it is necessary to conclude that represented and representative are constituted at different levels. A first temptation would then be to make total that separation of planes, and to derive the impossibility of the relation of representation from its fictitious character. Thus, it has been stated: 'To deny economism is to reject the classical conception of the economic-political-ideological unity of classes. It is to maintain that political and ideological struggles cannot be conceived as the struggles of economic classes. There is no middle way . . . Class "interests" are not given to politics and ideology by the economy. They arise within the political practice, and they are determined as an effect of definite modes of political practice. Political practice does not recognize class interests and then represent them: it constitutes the interests which it represents.'[33]

...ay. The 'winning over of agents to their historical interests' is, quite simply, an articulatory practice which constructs a discourse wherein the concrete demands of a group — the industrial workers — are conceived as steps towards a total liberation involving the overcoming of capitalism. Undoubtedly, there is no essential necessity for these demands to be articulated in this way. But nor is there an essential necessity for them to be articulated in any other way, given that, as we have seen, the relation of articulation is not a relation of necessity. What the discourse of 'historical interests' does is to *hegemonize* certain demands. On this point, Cutler et al. are absolutely right: political practice constructs the interests it represents. But if we observe closely, we will note that, far from being consolidated, the separation between the economic and the political is hereby *eliminated*. For, a reading in socialist terms of immediate economic struggles discursively articulates the political and the economic, and thus does away with the exteriority existing between the two. The alternative is clear: either

Equivalence and Difference

How does this subversion occur? As we have seen, the condition for a full presence is the existence of a closed space where each differential position is fixed as a specific and irreplaceable moment. So, the first condition for the subversion of that space, for the prevention of closure, is that the specificity of each position should be dissolved. It is at this point that our earlier remarks about the relation of equivalence acquire all their relevance. Let us give an example. In a colonized country, the presence of the dominant power is every day made evident through a variety of contents: differences of dress, of language, of skin colour, of customs. Since each of these contents is equivalent to the others in terms of their common differentiation from the colonized people, it loses its condition of differential *moment*, and acquires the floating character of an *element*. Thus, equivalence creates a second meaning which, though parasitic on the first, subverts it: the differences cancel one other out insofar as they are used to express something identical underlying them all. The problem is to determine the content of that 'identical something' present in the various terms of the equivalence. If, through the chain of equivalence, *all* the differential objective determinations of its terms have been lost, then identity can only be given either by a positive determination underlying them all, or by their common reference to something external. The first of these possibilities is excluded: a common positive determination is expressed in a direct way, without requiring a relation of equivalence. But the common external reference cannot be to something positive, for in that case the relation between the two poles could also be constructed in a direct and positive way, and this would make impossible the complete cancellation of differences implied by a relation of total equivalence. This is the case, for example, in Marx's analysis of the relation of equivalence. The *non-materiality* of labour as substance of

value is expressed through the equivalence among *materially* diverse commodities. However, the materiality of commodities and the non-materiality of value are not equivalent to each other. It is because of this that the use-value/exchange-value distinction can be conceived in terms of differential and, hence, positive positions. But if *all* the differential features of an object have become equivalent, it is impossible to express anything *positive* concerning that object; this can only imply that through the equivalence something is expressed which the object *is not*. Thus, a relation of equivalence absorbing *all* the positive determinations of the colonizer in opposition to the colonized, does not create a system of positive differential positions between the two, simply because it dissolves all positivity: the colonizer is discursively constructed as the anti-colonized. In other words, the identity has come to be purely negative. It is because a negative identity cannot be represented in a direct manner — i.e., positively — that it can only be represented indirectly, through an equivalence between its differential moments. Hence the ambiguity penetrating every relation of equivalence: two terms, to be equivalent, must be different — otherwise, there would be a simple identity. On the other hand, the equivalence exists only through the act of subverting the differential character of those terms. This is exactly the point where, as we said earlier, the contingent subverts the necessary by preventing it from fully constituting itself. This non-constitutivity — or contingency — of the system of differences is *revealed* in the unfixity which equivalences introduce. The *ultimate* character of this unfixity, the *ultimate* precariousness of all difference, will thus show itself in a relation of total equivalence, where the differential positivity of all its terms is dissolved. This is precisely the formula of antagonism, which thus establishes itself as the limit of the social. We should note that in this formula it is not the case that a pole defined as positivity confronts a negative pole: as *all* the differential determinations of a pole have dissolved through their negative-equivalential reference to the other pole, each one of them shows exclusively what it is not.

Let us insist once again: to be something is always not to be something else (to be A implies not to be B). This banality is not what we are asserting, as it is situated in a *logical* terrain entirely dominated by the principle of contradiction: *not being* something is simply the logical consequence of being something different; the positivity of being dominates the totality of the discourse. What we affirm is something different: *that certain discursive forms, through equivalence, annul all positivity of the object and give a real existence to*

negativity as such. This impossibility of the real — negativity — has attained a form of presence. As the social is penetrated by negativity — that is, by antagonism — it does not attain the status of transparency, of full presence, and the objectivity of its identities is permanently subverted. From here onward, the impossible relation between objectivity and negativity has become constitutive of the social. Yet the impossibility of the relation remains: it is for this reason that the coexistence of its terms must be conceived not as an objective relation of frontiers, but as reciprocal subversion of their contents.

This last point is important: if negativity and objectivity exist only through their reciprocal subversion, this means that neither the conditions of total equivalence nor those of total differential objectivity are ever fully achieved. The condition of total equivalence is that the discursive space should strictly divide into two camps. Antagonism does not admit *tertium quid*. And it is easy to see why. For if we could differentiate the chain of equivalences with regard to something other than that which it opposes, its terms could not be exclusively defined in a negative manner. We would have adjudicated to it a specific position in a system of relations: that is, we would have endowed it with a new objectivity. The logic of the subversion of differences would here have found a limit. But, just as the logic of difference never manages to constitute a fully sutured space, neither does the logic of equivalence ever achieve this. The dissolution of the differential character of the social agent's positions through the equivalential condensation, is never complete. If society is not totally possible, neither is it totally impossible. This allows us to formulate the following conclusion: if society is never transparent to itself because it is unable to constitute itself as an objective field, neither is antagonism entirely transparent, as it does not manage totally to dissolve the objectivity of the social.

At this point, we must move on to consider the structuring of political spaces, from the points of view of the opposed logics of equivalence and difference. Let us take certain polar examples of situations in which one or the other predominates. An extreme example of the logic of equivalence can be found in millennarian movements. Here the world divides, through a system of paratactical equivalences, into two camps: peasant culture representing the identity of the movement, and urban culture incarnating evil. The second is the negative reverse of the first. A maximum separation has been reached: no element in the system of equivalences enters into relations other than those of opposition to the elements of the other

system. There are not one but two societies. And when the millennarian rebellion takes place, the assault on the city is fierce, total and indiscriminate: there exist no discourses capable of establishing differences within an equivalential chain in which each and every one of its elements symbolizes evil. (The only alternative is massive emigration towards another region in order to set up the City of God, totally isolated from the corruption of the world.)

Now let us consider an opposite example: the politics of Disraeli in the nineteenth century. Disraeli as a novelist had started from his conception of the two nations, that is, of a clear-cut division of society into the two extremes of poverty and wealth. To this we must add the equally clear-cut division of European political space between the '*anciens régimes*' and the 'people'. (The first half of the nineteenth century, under the combined effects of the industrial revolution and the democratic revolution, was the era of the frontal chains of equivalence.) This was the situation Disraeli wanted to change, and his first objective was to overcome the paratactical division of social space — that is, the impossibility of constituting society. His formula was clear: 'one nation'. For this it was necessary to break the system of equivalences which made up the popular revolutionary subjectivity, stretching from republicanism to a varied ensemble of social and political demands. The method of this rupture: the differential absorption of demands, which segregated them from their chains of equivalence in the popular chain and transformed them into objective differences within the system — that is, transformed them into 'positivities' and thus displaced the frontier of antagonism to the periphery of the social. This constitution of a pure space of differences would be a tendential line, which was later expanded and affirmed with the development of the Welfare State. This is the moment of the positivist illusion that the ensemble of the social can be absorbed in the intelligible and ordered framework of a society.

We, thus, see that the logic of equivalence is a logic of the simplification of political space, while the logic of difference is a logic of its expansion and increasing complexity. Taking a comparative example from linguistics, we could say that the logic of difference tends to expand the syntagmatic pole of language, the number of positions that can enter into a relation of combination and hence of continuity with one another; while the logic of equivalence expands the paradigmatic pole — that is, the elements that can be substituted for one another — thereby reducing the number of positions which can possibly be combined.

Until now, when we have spoken of antagonism, we have kept it in the singular in order to simplify our argument. But it is clear that antagonism does not necessarily emerge at a single point: any position in a system of differences, insofar as it is negated, can become the locus of an antagonism. Hence, there are a variety of possible antagonisms in the social, many of them in opposition to each other. The important problem is that the chains of equivalence will vary radically according to which antagonism is involved; and that they may affect and penetrate, in a contradictory way, the identity of the subject itself. This gives rise to the following conclusion: the more unstable the social relations, the less successful will be any definite system of differences and the more the points of antagonism will proliferate. This proliferation will make more difficult the construction of any centrality and, consequently, the establishment of unified chains of equivalence. (This is, approximately, the situation described by Gramsci under the term 'organic crisis'.)

It would thus seem that our problem may be reduced, in the analysis of the political spaces which are the foundation of antagonisms, to one of determining the points of rupture and their possible modes of articulation. But here we enter a dangerous terrain in which slight displacements in our reasoning can lead to radically mistaken conclusions. We shall therefore start from an impressionistic description and then attempt to determine the conditions of validity of that descriptive picture. It would appear that an important differential characteristic may be established between advanced industrial societies and the periphery of the capitalist world: in the former, the proliferation of points of antagonism permits the multiplication of democratic struggles, but these struggles, given their diversity, do not tend to constitute a 'people', that is, to enter into equivalence with one another and to divide the political space into two antagonistic fields. On the contrary, in the countries of the Third World, imperialist exploitation and the predominance of brutal and centralized forms of domination tend from the beginning to endow the popular struggle with a centre, with a single and clearly defined enemy. Here the division of the political space into two fields is present from the outset, but the diversity of democratic struggles is more reduced. We shall use the term *popular subject position* to refer to the position that is constituted on the basis of dividing the political space into two antagonistic camps; and *democratic subject position* to refer to the locus of a clearly delimited antagonism which does not divide society in that way.

Now, this descriptive distinction confronts us with a serious difficulty. For if a democratic struggle *does not divide* the political space into two camps, into two paratactical series of equivalences, it follows that the democratic antagonism occupies a precise location in a system of relations with other elements; that a system of positive relations is established among them; and that there is a lessening of the charge of negativity attaching to the antagonism. From here it is but one step to affirm that democratic struggles — feminism, anti-racism, the gay movement, etc. — are secondary struggles and that the struggle for the 'seizure of power' in the classical sense is the only truly radical one, as it supposes just such a division of the political space into two camps. The difficulty arises, however, from the fact that the notion of 'political space' has not been given a precise definition in our analysis, so that it has surreptitiously been made to coincide with the empirically given social formation. This is, of course, an illegitimate identification. Any democratic struggle emerges within an ensemble of positions, within a *relatively* sutured political space formed by a multiplicity of practices that do not exhaust the referential and empirical reality of the agents forming part of them. The relative closure of that space is necessary for the discursive construction of the antagonism, given that the delimitation of a certain interiority is required to construct a totality permitting the division of this space into two camps. In this sense, the autonomy of social movements is something more than a requirement for certain struggles to develop without interference: it is a requirement for the antagonism as such to emerge. The political space of the feminist struggle is constituted within the ensemble of practices and discourses which create the different forms of the subordination of women; the space of the anti-racist struggle, within the overdetermined ensemble of practices constituting racial discrimination. But the antagonisms within each of these relatively autonomized spaces divide them into two camps. This explains the fact that, when social struggles are directed not against objects constituted within their own space but against simple empirical referents — for example, men or white people as biological referents — they find themselves in difficulties. For, such struggles ignore the specificity of the political spaces in which the other democratic antagonisms emerge. Take, for example, a discourse which presents men, qua biological reality, as the enemy. What will happen to a discourse of this kind when it is necessary to develop antagonisms like the struggle for the freedom of expression or the struggle against the monopolization of economic power, both of

which affect men and women? As to the terrain where those spaces become autonomous from one another, in part it is constituted by the discursive formations which have institutionalized the various forms of subordination, and in part it is the result of the struggles themselves.

Once we have constructed the theoretical terrain which permits the radical antagonistic character of democratic struggles to be explained, what remains of the specificity of the 'popular' camp? Does not the non-correspondence between 'political space' and 'society' as an empirical referent annul the sole differential criterion between 'the popular' and 'the democratic'? The answer is that the political space of the popular emerges in those situations where, through a chain of democratic equivalences, a political logic *tends* to bridge the gap between political space and society as an empirical referent. Conceived in this manner, popular struggles only occur in the case of relations of extreme exteriority between the dominant groups and the rest of the community. In the case of millenarianism, to which we previously referred, the point is evident: between the peasant community and the dominant urban community there are practically no elements in common; and, in this sense, *all* the features of urban culture can be symbols of the anti-community. If we turn to the cycle of expansion and constitution of popular spaces in Western Europe, we notice that all such cases have coincided with the phenomenon of externality or externalization of power. The beginnings of populist patriotism in France appeared during the Hundred Years War, that is, in the midst of a division of the political space resulting from something so external as the presence of a foreign power. The symbolic construction of a *national* space through the action of a plebeian figure like Joan of Arc is, in Western Europe, one of the first moments of emergence of the 'people' as a historical agent. In the case of the *ancien régime* and the French Revolution, the frontier of the popular has become an internal frontier, and its condition is the separation and parasitism of the nobility and the monarchy vis-à-vis the rest of the nation. But, through the process we have pointed out, in the countries of advanced capitalism since the middle of the nineteenth century, the multiplication and 'uneven development' of democratic positions have increasingly diluted their simple and automatic unity around a popular pole. Partly because of their very success, democratic struggles tend less and less to be unified as 'popular struggles'. The conditions of political struggle in mature capitalism are increasingly distant from the nineteenth-century model of a clear-cut 'politics of frontiers' and tend to adopt a

new pattern which we will attempt to analyse in the next chapter. The production of 'frontier effects' — which are the condition of expansion of the negativity pertaining to antagonisms — ceases thus to be grounded upon an *evident and given* separation, in a referential framework acquired once and for all. The production of this framework, the constitution of the very identities which will have to confront one another antagonistically, becomes now *the first of political problems*. This widens immensely the field of articulatory practices, and transforms any frontier into something essentially ambiguous and unstable, subject to constant displacements. Having reached this point, we have all the necessary theoretical elements to determine the specificity of the concept of hegemony.

Hegemony

We must now see how our different theoretical categories link up to produce the concept of 'hegemony'. The general field of the emergence of hegemony is that of articulatory practices, that is, a field where the 'elements' have not crystallized into 'moments'. In a closed system of relational identities, in which the meaning of each moment is absolutely fixed, there is no place whatsoever for a hegemonic practice. A fully successful system of differences, which excluded any floating signifier, would not make possible any articulation; the principle of repetition would dominate every practice within this system and there would be nothing to hegemonize. It is because hegemony supposes the incomplete and open character of the social, that it can take place only in a field dominated by articulatory practices.

This, however, immediately poses the problem: who is the articulating subject? We have already seen the answer that the Marxism of the Third International gave to this question: from Lenin to Gramsci it maintained — with all the nuances and differences we analysed earlier — that the ultimate core of a hegemonic force consists of a fundamental class. The difference between hegemonic and hegemonized forces is posed as an ontological difference between the planes of constitution of each of them. Hegemonic relations are syntactic relations founded upon morphological categories which precede them. But it is clear that this cannot be our answer, for it is precisely that differentiation of planes which all our previous analysis has attempted to dissolve. In point of fact, we are once again confronted with the interiority/exteriority alternative, and with the two equally essentialist solutions which we would face if we

accepted it as exclusive. The hegemonic subject, as the subject of any articulatory practice, must be partially exterior to what it articulates — otherwise, there would not be any articulation at all. On the other hand, however, such exteriority cannot be conceived as that existing between two different ontological levels. Consequently, it would seem that the solution is to reintroduce our distinction between discourse and general field of discursivity: in that case, both the hegemonic force and the ensemble of hegemonized elements would constitute themselves on the same plane — the general field of discursivity — while the exteriority would be that corresponding to different discursive formations. No doubt this is so, but it must be further specified that this exteriority cannot correspond to two fully constituted discursive formations. For, what characterizes a discursive formation is the regularity in dispersion, and if that exteriority were a regular feature in the relation between the two formations, it would become a new difference and the two formations would not, strictly speaking, be external to each other. (And with this, once again, the possibility of any articulation would disappear.) Hence, if the exteriority supposed by the articulatory practice is located in the general field of discursivity, it cannot be that corresponding to two systems of fully constituted differences. It must therefore be the exteriority existing between subject positions located within certain discursive formations and 'elements' which have no precise discursive articulation. It is this ambiguity which makes possible articulation as a practice instituting nodal points which partially fix the meaning of the social in an organized system of differences.

We must now consider the specificity of the hegemonic practice within the general field of articulatory practices. Let us start from two situations which we would *not* characterize as hegemonic articulations. At one extreme we could refer, as an example, to a reorganization of an ensemble of bureaucratic administrative functions according to criteria of efficiency or rationality. Here are present central elements of any articulatory practice: constitution of an organized system of differences — of moments, therefore — starting from disaggregated and dispersed elements. And here, however, we would not speak of hegemony. The reason is that in order to speak of hegemony, the articulatory moment is not sufficient. It is also necessary that the articulation should take place through a confrontation with antagonistic articulatory practices — in other words, that hegemony should emerge in a field criss-crossed by antagonisms and therefore suppose phenomena of equivalence

and frontier effects. But, conversely, not every antagonism supposes hegemonic practices. In the case of millennarianism, for example, we have an antagonism in its most pure form, and yet there is no hegemony because there is no articulation of floating elements: the distance between the two communities is something immediately given and acquired from the beginning, and it does not suppose any articulatory construction. The chains of equivalence do not construct the communitarian space; rather, they operate on pre-existing communitarian spaces. Thus, the two conditions of a hegemonic articulation are the presence of antagonistic forces and the instability of the frontiers which separate them. Only the presence of a vast area of floating elements and the possibility of their articulation to opposite camps — which implies a constant redefinition of the latter — is what constitutes the terrain permitting us to define a practice as hegemonic. Without equivalence and without frontiers, it is impossible to speak strictly of hegemony.

At this point it is clear how we may recover the basic concepts of Gramscian analysis, although it will be necessary to radicalize them in a direction that leads us beyond Gramsci. A conjuncture where there is a generalized weakening of the relational system defining the identities of a given social or political space, and where, as a result there is a proliferation of floating elements, is what we will call following Gramsci, a conjuncture of *organic crisis*. It does not emerge from a single point, but it is the result of an overdetermination of circumstances; and it reveals itself not only in a proliferation of antagonisms but also in a generalized crisis of social identites. A social and political space relatively unified through the instituting of nodal points and the constitution of *tendentially* relational identities, is what Gramsci called a *historical bloc*. The type of link joining the different elements of the historical bloc — not unity in any form of historical a priori, but regularity in dispersion — coincides with our concept of discursive formation. Insofar as we consider the historical bloc from the point of view of the antagonistic terrain in which it is constituted, we will call it *hegemonic formation*.

Finally, inasmuch as the hegemonic formation implies a phenomenon of frontiers, the concept of *war of position* reveals its full significance. Through this concept Gramsci brings about two important theoretical effects. The first is to confirm the impossibility of any closure of the social: since the frontier is internal to the social, it is impossible to subsume the social formation as an empirical referent under the intelligible forms of a society. Every 'society' constitutes its own forms of rationality and intelligibility by dividing itself; that

is, by expelling outside itself any surplus of meaning subverting it. But, on the other hand, insofar as that frontier varies with the fluctuations in the 'war of position', the identity of the actors in confrontation also changes, and it is therefore impossible to find in them that final anchorage not offered to us by any sutured totality. Earlier we said that the concept of war of position led to a demilitarization of war; it actually does something more: it introduces a radical ambiguity into the social which prevents it from being fixed in any transcendental signified. This is, however, the point at which the concept of war of position displays its limits. War of position *supposes* the division of the social space into two camps and presents the hegemonic articulation as a logic of mobility of the frontier separating them. However, it is evident that this assumption is illegitimate: the existence of two camps may in some cases be an *effect* of the hegemonic articulation but not its a priori condition — for, if it were, the terrain in which the hegemonic articulation operated would not itself be the product of that articulation. The Gramscian war of position supposes the type of division of the political space which earlier we characterized as specific to *popular* identities. Its advance over the nineteenth-century conception of the 'people' consists in the fact that for Gramsci such a popular identity is no longer something simply given, but has to be constructed — hence the articulatory logic of hegemony; there still remains, however, from the old conception, the idea that such a construction *always* operates on the basis of expanding the frontier within a dichotomically divided political space. This is the point where the Gramscian view becomes unacceptable. As we pointed out earlier, the proliferation of these political spaces, and the complexity and difficulty of their articulation, are a central characteristic of the advanced capitalist social formations. We will thus retain from the Gramscian view the logic of articulation and the political centrality of the frontier effects, but we will eliminate the assumption of a single political space as the *necessary* framework for those phenomena to arise. We will therefore speak of *democratic* struggles where these imply a plurality of political spaces, and of *popular* struggles where certain discourses *tendentially* construct the division of a single political space in two opposed fields. But it is clear that the fundamental concept is that of 'democratic struggle', and that popular struggles are merely specific conjunctures resulting from the multiplication of equivalence effects among the democratic struggles.

It is clear from the above that we have moved away from two key aspects of Gramsci's thought: (a) his insistence that hegemonic

subjects are necessarily constituted on the plane of the fundamental classes; and (b) his postulate that, with the exception of interregna constituted by organic crises, every social formation structures itself around a single hegemonic centre. As we pointed out earlier, these are the two last elements of essentialism remaining in Gramscian thought. But, as a result of abandoning them, we must now confront two successive series of problems that did not arise for Gramsci.