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FEMINISM IS NOT SINGULAR

Hegemony & Socialist Strategy

Towards a Radical Democratic Politics

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Introduction

Left-wing thought today stands at a crossroads. The 'evident truths' of the past — the classical forms of analysis and political calculation, the nature of the forces in conflict, the very meaning of the Left's struggles and objectives — have been seriously challenged by an avalanche of historical mutations which have riven the ground on which those truths were constituted. Some of these mutations doubtless correspond to failures and disappointments: from Budapest to Prague and the Polish coup d'etat, from Kabul to the sequels of Communist victory in Vietnam and Cambodia, a question-mark has fallen more and more heavily over a whole way of conceiving both socialism and the roads that should lead to it. This has recharged critical thinking, at once corrosive and necessary, on the theoretical and political bases on which the intellectual horizon of the Left was traditionally constituted. But there is more to it than this. A whole series of positive new phenomena underlie those mutations which have made so urgent the task of theoretical reconsideration: the rise of the new feminism, the protest movements of ethnic, national and sexual minorities, the anti-institutional ecology struggles waged by marginalized layers of the population, the anti-nuclear movement, the atypical forms of social struggle in countries on the capitalist periphery — all these imply an extension of social conflictuality to a wide range of areas, which creates the potential, but no more than the potential, for an advance towards more free, democratic and egalitarian societies.

This proliferation of struggles presents itself, first of all, as a 'surplus' of the social vis-à-vis the rational and organized structures of society — that is, of the social 'order'. Numerous voices, deriving especially from the liberal-conservative camp, have insistently argued that Western societies face a crisis of governability and a threat of dissolution at the hands of the egalitarian danger. However, the new forms of social conflict have also thrown into crisis

theoretical and political frameworks closer to the ones that we shall seek to engage in dialogue in the major part of this book. These correspond to the classical discourses of the Left, and the characteristic modes in which it has conceived the agents of social change, the structuring of political spaces, and the privileged points for the unleashing of historical transformations. What is now in crisis is a whole conception of socialism which rests upon the ontological centrality of the working class, upon the role of Revolution, with a capital 'r', as the founding moment in the transition from one type of society to another, and upon the illusory prospect of a perfectly unitary and homogeneous collective will that will render pointless the moment of politics. The plural and multifarious character of contemporary social struggles has finally dissolved the last foundation for that political imaginary. Peopled with 'universal' subjects and conceptually built around History in the singular, it has postulated 'society' as an intelligible structure that could be intellectually mastered on the basis of certain class positions and reconstituted, as a rational, transparent order, through a founding act of a political character. Today, the Left is witnessing the final act of the dissolution of that Jacobin imaginary.

Thus, the very wealth and plurality of contemporary social struggles has given rise to a theoretical crisis. It is at the middle point of this two-way movement between the theoretical and the political that our own discourse will be located. At every moment, we have tried to prevent an impressionist and sociologistic descriptivism, which lives on ignorance of the conditions of its own discursivity, from filling the theoretical voids generated by the crisis. Our aim has been the exact opposite: to focus on certain discursive categories which, at first sight, appeared to be privileged condensation-points for many aspects of the crisis; and to unravel the possible meaning of a history in the various facets of this multiple refraction. All discursive eclecticism or wavering was excluded from the very start. As is said in an inaugural 'manifesto' of the classical period, when one enters new territory, one must follow the example of 'travellers who, finding themselves lost in a forest, know that they ought not to wander first to one side and then to the other, nor, still less, to stop in one place, but understand that they should continue to walk as straight as they can in one direction, not diverging for any slight reason, even though it was possibly chance alone that first determined them in their choice. By this means if they do not go exactly where they wish, they will at least arrive somewhere at the end, where probably they will be better off than in the middle of a forest.'[1]

The guiding thread of our analysis has been the transformations in the concept of hegemony, considered as a discursive surface and fundamental nodal point of Marxist political theorization. Our principal conclusion is that behind the concept of 'hegemony' lies hidden something more than a type of political relation *complementary* to the basic categories of Marxist theory. In fact, it introduces a *logic of the social* which is incompatible with those categories. Faced with the rationalism of classical Marxism, which presented history and society as intelligible totalities constituted around conceptually explicable laws, the logic of hegemony presented itself from the outset as a *complementary* and *contingent* operation, required for conjunctural imbalances within an evolutionary paradigm whose essential or 'morphological' validity was not for a moment placed in question. (One of the central tasks of this book will be to determine this specific logic of contingency.) As the areas of the concept's application grew broader, from Lenin to Gramsci, the field of contingent articulations also expanded, and the category of 'historical necessity' — which had been the cornerstone of classical Marxism — withdrew to the horizon of theory. As we shall argue in the last two chapters, the expansion and determination of the social logic implicit in the concept of 'hegemony' — in a direction that goes far beyond Gramsci — will provide us with an *anchorage* from which contemporary social struggles are *thinkable* in their specificity, as well as permitting us to outline a new politics for the Left based upon the project of a radical democracy.

One question remains to be answered: why should we broach this task through a critique and a deconstruction of the various discursive surfaces of classical Marxism? Let us first say that there is not *one* discourse and *one* system of categories through which the 'real' might speak without mediations. In operating deconstructively within Marxist categories, we do not claim to be writing 'universal history', to be inscribing our discourse as a moment of a single, linear process of knowledge. Just as the era of normative epistemologies has come to an end, so too has the era of universal discourses. Political conclusions similar to those set forth in this book could have been approximated from very different discursive formations — for example, from certain forms of Christianity, or from libertarian discourses alien to the socialist tradition — none of which could aspire to be *the* truth of society (or 'the insurpassable philosophy of our time', as Sartre put it). For this very reason, however, Marxism is *one* of the traditions through which it becomes possible to formulate this new conception of politics. For us, the validity of this point

post-Marxism

of departure is simply based on the fact that it constitutes our own past.

Is it not the case that, in scaling down the pretensions and the area of validity of Marxist theory, we are breaking with something deeply inherent in that theory: namely, its monist aspiration to capture with its categories the essence or underlying meaning of History? The answer can only be in the affirmative. Only if we renounce any epistemological prerogative based upon the ontologically privileged position of a 'universal class', will it be possible seriously to discuss the present degree of validity of the Marxist categories. At this point we should state quite plainly that we are now situated in a post-Marxist terrain. It is no longer possible to maintain the conception of subjectivity and classes elaborated by Marxism, nor its vision of the historical course of capitalist development, nor, of course, the conception of communism as a transparent society from which antagonisms have disappeared. But if our intellectual project in this book is *post*-Marxist, it is evidently also post-*Marxist*. It has been through the development of certain intuitions and discursive forms constituted within Marxism, and the inhibition or elimination of certain others, that we have constructed a concept of hegemony which, in our view, may be a useful instrument in the struggle for a radical, libertarian and plural democracy. Here the reference to Gramsci, though partially critical, is of capital importance. In the text we have tried to recover some of the variety and richness of Marxist discursivity in the era of the Second International, which tended to be obliterated by that impoverished monolithic image of 'Marxism-Leninism' current in the Stalin and post-Stalin eras and now reproduced, almost intact though with opposite sign, by certain forms of contemporary 'anti-Marxism'. Neither the defenders of a glorious, homogeneous and invulnerable 'historical materialism', nor the professionals of an anti-Marxism à la nouveaux philosophes, realize the extent to which their apologias or diatribes are equally rooted in an ingenuous and primitive conception of a doctrine's role and degree of unity which, in all its essential determinations, is still tributary to the Stalinist imaginary. Our own approach to the Marxist texts has, on the contrary, sought to recover their plurality, to grasp the numerous discursive sequences — to a considerable extent heterogeneous and contradictory — which constitute their inner structure and wealth, and guarantee their survival as a reference point for political analysis. The surpassing of a great intellectual tradition never takes place in the sudden form of a collapse, but in the way that river waters, having originated at a common source, spread in various directions and mingle with currents flowing down from other sources. This is how the discourses that constituted the field of classical Marxism may help to form the thinking of a new left: by bequeathing some of their concepts, transforming or abandoning others, and diluting themselves in that infinite intertextuality of emancipatory discourses in which the plurality of the social takes shape.

Note to Introduction

1. Descartes, 'Discourse on Method', in *Philosophical Works* Vol. 1, Cambridge 1968, p. 96.

1

Hegemony: the Genealogy of a Concept

We will start by tracing the *genealogy* of the concept of 'hegemony'. It should be stressed that this will not be the genealogy of a concept endowed from the beginning with full positivity. In fact, using somewhat freely an expression of Foucault, we could say that our aim is to establish the 'archaeology of a silence'. The concept of hegemony did not emerge to define a new type of relation in its specific identity, but to fill a hiatus that had opened in the chain of historical necessity. 'Hegemony' will allude to an absent totality, and to the diverse attempts at recomposition and rearticulation which, in overcoming this original absence, made it possible for struggles to be given a meaning and for historical forces to be endowed with full positivity. The contexts in which the concept appear will be those of a *fault* (in the geological sense), of a fissure that had to be filled up, of a contingency that had to be overcome. 'Hegemony' will be not the majestic unfolding of an identity but the response to a crisis.

Even in its humble origins in Russian Social Democracy, where it is called upon to cover a limited area of political effects, the concept of 'hegemony' already alludes to a kind of *contingent* intervention required by the crisis or collapse of what would have been a 'normal' historical development. Later, with Leninism, it is a keystone in the new form of political calculation required by the contingent 'concrete situations' in which the class struggle occurs in the age of imperialism. Finally, with Gramsci, the term acquires a new type of centrality that transcends its tactical or strategic uses: 'hegemony' becomes the key concept in understanding the very unity existing in a concrete social formation. Each of these extensions of the term, however, was accompanied by an expansion of what we could provisionally call a 'logic of the contingent'. In its turn, this expression stemmed from the fracture, and withdrawal to the explanatory horizon of the social, of the category of 'historical necessity' which

"logic of the contingent"

had been the cornerstone of Second International Marxism. The alternatives within this advancing crisis — and the different responses to it, of which the theory of hegemony is but one — form the object of our study.

The Dilemmas of Rosa Luxemburg

Let us avoid any temptation to go back to the 'origins'. Let us simply pierce a moment in time and try to detect the presence of that void which the logic of hegemony will attempt to fill. This arbitrary beginning, projected in a variety of directions, will offer us, if not the sense of a trajectory, at least the dimensions of a crisis. It is in the multiple, meandering reflections in the broken mirror of 'historical necessity' that a new logic of the social begins to insinuate itself, one that will only manage to think itself by questioning the very literality of the terms it articulates.

In 1906 Rosa Luxemburg published *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*. A brief analysis of this text — which already presents all the ambiguities and critical areas important to our theme — will provide us with an initial point of reference. Rosa Luxemburg deals with a specific theme: the efficacy and significance of the mass strike as a political tool. But for her this implies consideration of two vital problems for the socialist cause: the unity of the working class and the path to revolution in Europe. Mass strike, the dominant form of struggle in the first Russian revolution, is dealt with in its specific mechanisms as well as in its possible projections for the workers' struggle in Germany. The theses of Rosa Luxemburg are well known: while debate concerning the efficacy of the mass strike in Germany had centred almost exclusively on the political strike, the Russian experience had demonstrated an interaction and a mutual and constant enrichment between the political and economic dimensions of the mass strike. In the repressive context of the Tsarist state, no movement for partial demands could remain confined within itself: it was inevitably transformed into an example and symbol of resistance, thus fuelling and giving birth to other movements. These emerged at unpreconceived points and tended to expand and generalize in unforeseeable forms, so that they were beyond the capacity of regulation and organization of any political or trade union leadership. This is the meaning of Luxemburg's 'spontaneism'. The unity between the economic and the political struggle — that is to say, the very unity of the working class — is a

'spontaneism'

consequence of this movement of feedback and interaction. But this movement in turn is nothing other than the process of revolution.

If we move from Russia to Germany, Rosa Luxemburg argues, the situation becomes very different. The dominant trend is the fragmentation among diverse categories of workers, between the different demands of various movements, between economic struggle and political struggle. 'Only in the sultry air of the period of revolution can any partial little conflict between labour and capital grow into a general explosion. In Germany the most violent, most brutal collisions between the workers and the employers take place every day without the struggle over-leaping the bound of the individual factories . . . None of these cases . . . changes suddenly into a common class action. And when they grow into isolated mass strikes which have without question a political colouring, they do not bring about a general storm.'[1] This isolation and fragmentation is not a contingent event: it is a structural effect of the capitalist state, which is only overcome in a revolutionary atmosphere. 'As a matter of fact the separation of the political and the economic struggle and the independence of each is nothing but an artificial product of the parliamentarian period, even if historically determined. On the one hand, in the peaceful, "normal" course of bourgeois society the economic struggle is split into a multitude of individual struggles in every undertaking and dissolved in every branch of production. On the other hand, the political struggle is not directed by the masses themselves in a direct action, but in correspondence with the form of the bourgeois State, in a representative fashion, by the presence of legislative representation.'[2]

In these conditions and given that the revolutionary outbreaks in Russia could be explained by factors such as the comparative backwardness of the country, the absence of political liberties, or the poverty of the Russian proletariat — were not the perspectives for revolution in the West postponed *sine die*? Here Rosa Luxemburg's response becomes hesitant and less convincing as it assumes a characteristic course: namely, an attempt to minimize the differences between the Russian and the German proletariat, showing the areas of poverty and the absence of organization in various sectors of the German working class, as well as the presence of inverse phenomena in the most advanced sectors of the Russian proletariat. But what of those pockets of backwardness in Germany? Were they not residual sectors which would be swept away by capitalist expansion? And in that case, what guaranteed the emergence of a revolutionary situation? The answer to *our* question — Rosa Luxemburg does not at

any point formulate it in this text — comes to us abruptly and unequivocably a few pages later: '(The social democrats) must now and always hasten the development of things and endeavour to accelerate events. This they cannot do, however, by suddenly issuing the "slogan" for a mass strike at random at any moment, but first and foremost, by making clear to the widest layers of the proletariat the *inevitable advent* of this revolutionary period, the inner *social* factors making for it and the *political* consequences of it.'[3] Thus, the 'necessary laws of capitalist development' establish themselves as a guarantee for the future revolutionary situation in Germany. Everything is now clear: as there were no more bourgeois-democratic changes to be achieved in Germany (*sic*), the coming of a revolutionary situation could only be resolved in a socialist direction; the Russian proletariat — struggling against absolutism, but in a historical context dominated by the maturity of world capitalism which prevented it from stabilizing its own struggles in a bourgeois stage — was the vanguard of the European proletariat and pointed out to the German working class its own future. The problem of the differences between East and West, so important in the strategic debates of European socialism from Bernstein to Gramsci, was here resolved by being discarded.[4]

Let us analyse the various moments of this remarkable sequence. Concerning the constitutive mechanism of class unity, Rosa Luxemburg's position is clear: in capitalist society, the working class is necessarily fragmented and the recomposition of its unity only occurs through the very process of revolution. Yet the *form* of this revolutionary recomposition consists of a specific mechanism which has little to do with any mechanistic explanation. It is here that spontaneism comes into play. One could think that the 'spontaneist' theory simply affirms the impossibility of *foreseeing* the direction of a revolutionary process, given the complexity and variety of forms which it adopts. Nevertheless, this explanation is insufficient. For what is at stake is not merely the complexity and diversity inherent in a dispersion of struggles — when these are seen from the point of view of an analyst or a political leader — but also the constitution of the *unity* of the revolutionary subject on the basis of this complexity and diversity. This alone shows us that in attempting to determine the meaning of Luxemburgist 'spontaneism', we must concentrate not only on the plurality of forms of struggle but also on the relations which they establish among themselves and on the unifying effects which follow from them. And here, the mechanism of unification is clear: in a revolutionary situation, it is impossible *to fix the literal sense*

of each isolated struggle, because each struggle overflows its own literality and comes to represent, in the consciousness of the masses, a simple moment of a more global struggle against the system. And so it is that while in a period of stability the class consciousness of the worker — as a global consciousness constituted around his 'historical interests' — is 'latent' and 'theoretical', in a revolutionary situation it becomes 'active' and 'practical'. Thus, in a revolutionary situation the *meaning* of every mobilization appears, so to speak, as split: aside from its specific literal demands, each mobilization represents the revolutionary process as a whole; and these totalizing effects are visible in the overdetermination of some struggles by others. This is, however, nothing other than the defining characteristic of the symbol: the overflowing of the signifier by the signified.[5] *The unity of the class is therefore a symbolic unity*. Undoubtedly this is the highest point in Luxemburg's analysis, one which establishes the maximum distance from the orthodox theoreticians of the Second International (for whom class unity is simply laid down by the laws of the economic base). Although in many other analyses of the period a role is given to the contingent — exceeding the moment of 'structural' theorization — few texts advance as much as Rosa Luxemburg's in determining the specific mechanisms of this contingency and in recognizing the extent of its practical effects.[6]

Now, on the one hand, the analysis of Rosa Luxemburg has multiplied the points of antagonism and the forms of struggle — which we will from now on call the *subject positions* — up to the point of exploding all capacity for control or planning of these struggles by a trade-union or political leadership; on the other hand, it has proposed symbolic overdetermination as a concrete mechanism for the unification of these struggles. Here, however, the problems begin, since for Rosa Luxemburg this process of overdetermination constitutes a very precise unity: a *class unity*. Yet there is nothing in the theory of spontaneism which logically supports her conclusion. On the contrary, the very logic of spontaneism seems to imply that the resulting type of unitary subject should remain largely indeterminate. In the case of the Tsarist state, if the condition of overdetermination of the points of antagonism and the diverse struggles is a repressive political context, why cannot the class limits be surpassed and lead to the construction of, for example, partially unified subjects whose fundamental determination is popular or democratic? Even in Rosa Luxemburg's text — notwithstanding the dogmatic rigidity of the author, for whom every subject has to be a class subject — the surpassing of classist categories appears at a

number of points. 'Throughout the whole of the spring of 1905 and into the middle of summer there fermented throughout the whole empire an uninterrupted economic strike of almost the entire proletariat against capital — a struggle which on the one hand caught all the petty-bourgeois and liberal professions, and on the other hand penetrated to the domestic servants, the minor police officials and even to the stratum of the lumpen proletariat, and simultaneously surged from the towns to the country districts and even knocked at the iron gates of the military barracks.'[7]

Let us be clear about the meaning of our question: if the unity of the working class were an infrastructural datum constituted *outside* the process of revolutionary overdetermination, the question concerning the class character of the revolutionary subject would not arise. Indeed, both political and economic struggle would be symmetrical expressions of a class subject constituted prior to the struggles themselves. But if the unity *is* this process of overdetermination, an independent explanation has to be offered as to why there should be a necessary overlap between political subjectivity and class positions. Although Rosa Luxemburg does not offer such an explanation — in fact, she does not even perceive the problem — the background of her thought makes clear what this would have been: namely, an affirmation of the necessary character of the objective laws of capitalist development, which lead to an increasing proletarianization of the middle sectors and the peasantry and, thus, to a straightforward confrontation between bourgeoisie and proletariat. Consequently the innovatory effects of the logic of spontaneism appear to be strictly limited from the beginning.*

The effects are so limited, no doubt, because the area in which they operate is extremely circumscribed. But also because, in a second and more important sense, the logic of spontaneism and the logic of necessity do not converge as two distinct and positive principles to explain certain historical situations, but function instead as antithetical logics which only interact with each other through the reciprocal limitation of their effects. Let us carefully examine the point where they diverge. The logic of spontaneism is a logic of the symbol inasmuch as it operates precisely through the disruption of every literal meaning. The logic of necessity is a logic of the literal: it operates through fixations which, precisely because they are necessary, establish a meaning that eliminates any contingent variation. In this case, however, the relation between the two logics is a relation of frontiers, which can expand in one or another direction but never overcome the irreducible dualism introduced into the analysis.

In reality, we here witness the emergence of a *double void*. Seen from the category of necessity, the duality of logics merges with the determinable/indeterminable opposition: that is to say, it only points to the operational limits of that category. But the same thing occurs from the point of view of spontaneism: the field of 'historical necessity' presents itself as a limit to the working of the symbolic. The *limits* are, in actual fact, *limitations*. If the specificity of this limitation of effects is not immediately evident, this is because it is thought of as a confluence of two positive and different explanatory principles, each valid in its own area, and not as what each of them is: the purely negative reverse of the other. The double void created by dualism hereby becomes invisible. However, to make a void invisible is not the same as to fill it up.

Before we examine the changing forms of this double void, we may for a moment place ourselves within it and practise the only game it allows us: that is, to move the frontiers separating the two opposed logics. If we broaden the area corresponding to historical necessity, the result is a well-known alternative: either capitalism leads through its necessary laws to proletarianization and crisis; or else these necessary laws do not function as expected, in which case, following the very logic of Luxemburgist discourse, the fragmentation between different subject positions ceases to be an 'artificial product' of the capitalist state and becomes a permanent reality. It is the zero-sum game intrinsic to all economistic and reductionist conceptions. If, on the contrary, we move the boundary in the opposite direction, to the point where the class nature of political subjects loses its necessary character, the spectacle that appears before our eyes is not at all imaginary: it is the original forms of overdetermination assumed by social struggles in the Third World, with the construction of political identities having little to do with strict class boundaries; it is the rise of fascism, which would brutally dispel the illusion of the necessary character of certain class articulations; it is the new forms of struggle in the advanced capitalist countries, where during the last few decades we have witnessed the constant emergence of new forms of political subjectivity cutting across the categories of the social and economic structure. The concept of 'hegemony' will emerge precisely in a context dominated by the experience of fragmentation and by the indeterminacy of the articulations between different struggles and subject positions. It will offer a socialist answer in a politico-discursive universe that has witnessed a withdrawal of the category of 'necessity' to the horizon of the social. Faced with attempts to tackle the crisis of an essentialist

monism through a proliferation of dualisms — free-will/determinism; science/ethics; individual/collectivity; causality/teleology — the theory of hegemony will ground its response on a displacement of the terrain which made possible the monist/dualist alternative.

One final point before leaving Rosa Luxemburg. The limitation of effects which the 'necessary laws' produce in her discourse also functions in another important direction: as a limitation of the political conclusions capable of being derived from the 'observable tendencies' in advanced capitalism. The role of theory is not to elaborate intellectually the observable tendencies of fragmentation and dispersion, but to ensure that such tendencies have a transitory character. There is a split between 'theory' and 'practice' which is a clear symptom of a crisis. This crisis — to which the emergence of Marxist 'orthodoxy' represents only one answer — is the starting-point of our analysis. Yet it requires that we place ourselves at a point prior to this beginning, in order to identify the paradigm that entered into crisis. For this we can refer to a document of exceptional clarity and systematicity: Kautsky's 1892 commentary to the Erfurt Programme, the seminal manifesto of German Social Democracy.[9]

Crisis, Degree Zero

The Class Struggle is a typical Kautskian text which puts forward an indissociable unity of theory, history and strategy.[10] From our present-day perspective, of course, it appears extremely naïve and simplistic. Yet we must inquire into the various dimensions of this simplicity, for they will permit us to understand both the structural characteristics of the paradigm and the reasons that led to its crisis at the turn of the century.

The paradigm is simple, in a primary and literal sense that Kautsky quite explicitly presents a theory of the increasing *simplification* of the social structure and the antagonisms within it. Capitalist society advances towards an increasing concentration of property and wealth in the hands of a few enterprises; and a rapid proletarianization of the most diverse social strata and occupational categories is combined with a growing impoverishment of the working class. This impoverishment, and the necessary laws of capitalist development that are at its origin, hinder a real autonomization of spheres and functions within the working class: the economic struggle can have only modest and precarious successes, and this leads to a *de facto* subordination of trade-union to party organization, which alone can

substantially modify the position of the proletariat through the conquest of political power. The structural moments or instances of capitalist society also lack any form of relative autonomy. The state, for example, is presented in terms of the most crass instrumentalism. Thus, the simplicity of the Kautskian paradigm consists, first of all, in a simplification of the system of structural differences constitutive of capitalist society.

Yet the Kautskian paradigm is also simple in a second and less frequently mentioned sense, which is of crucial importance for our analysis. Here, the point is not so much that the paradigm reduces the number of pertinent structural differences, but that it fixes them through the attribution to each of a *single meaning*, understood as a precise location within a totality. In the first sense, Kautsky's analysis was simply economistic and reductionist; but if this were the only problem, the corrective would merely have to introduce the 'relative autonomies' of the political and the ideological, and render the analysis more complex through the multiplication of instances within a topography of the social. *Yet each one of these multiplied instances or structural moments would have an identity as fixed and singular as the instances of the Kautskian paradigm.*

In order to illustrate this *unicity of meaning*, let us examine how Kautsky explains the relationship between economic and political struggle: 'Occasionally someone has attempted to oppose the political struggle to the economic, and declared that the proletariat should give its exclusive attention to one or the other. The fact is that the two cannot be separated. The economic struggle demands political rights and these will not fall from heaven. To secure and maintain them the most vigorous political struggle is necessary. The political struggle is, in the last analysis, an economic struggle'.[11] Rosa Luxemburg also affirmed the unity of the two types of struggle, but she began from an *initial diversity*, and unity was a *unification*, the result of an overdetermination of discrete elements without any forms of fixed, a priori articulation. For Kautsky, however, unity is the starting-point: the working class struggles in the field of politics by virtue of an economic calculation. It is possible to pass from one struggle to the other through a purely logical transition. In the case of Rosa Luxemburg, each struggle had more than one meaning — as we have seen, it was reduplicated in a second symbolic dimension. Nor was its meaning fixed: for it depended upon variable articulations which, from her spontaneist perspective repelled any a priori determination (within the limits we have signalled). Kautsky, on the other hand, simplified the meaning of every

social antagonism or element by reducing it to a specific structural location, already fixed by the logic of the capitalist mode of production. The history of capitalism set out in *The Class Struggle* consists of *pure relations of interiority*. We can pass from working class to capitalists, from the economic sphere to the political sphere, from manufacture to monopoly capitalism, without having to depart for one instant from the internal rationality and intelligibility of a closed paradigm. Capitalism is, no doubt, presented to us as acting upon an external social reality, yet the latter simply dissolves upon entering into contact with the former. Capitalism changes, yet this change is nothing more than the unfolding of its endogenous tendencies and contradictions. Here the logic of necessity is not limited by anything: this is what makes *The Class Struggle* a pre-crisis text.

Finally, simplicity is present in a third dimension — that which refers to the role of theory itself. If this early Kautskian text is compared with others belonging to an earlier or later Marxist tradition, we find that it contains a rather surprising feature: it presents itself not as an intervention to unravel the underlying sense of history, but as the systematization and generalization of a transparent experience which is there for all to see. As there is no social hieroglyph to decode, there is a perfect correspondence between theory and the practices of the workers movement. With regard to the constitution of class unity, Adam Przeworski has pointed out the peculiarity of Kautsky's text: whereas Marx, from the time of the *Poverty of Philosophy*, presented the unity of the economic insertion and political organization of the working class as an unfinished process — this was the hiatus which the distinction between 'class in itself' and 'class for itself' tried to fill — Kautsky argues as if the working class has already completed the formation of its unity. 'It seems that Kautsky believed that by 1890 the formation of the proletariat into a class was a *fait accompli*; it was already formed as a class and would remain so in the future. The organized proletariat had nothing left to do but to pursue its historical mission, and the party could only participate in its realization.'[12] Similarly, when Kautsky refers to growing proletarianization and impoverishment, to the inevitable crises of capitalism, or to the necessary advent of socialism, he seems to be speaking not of potential tendencies revealed by analysis, but of empirically observable realities in the first two cases, and of a short-term transition in the third. Despite the fact that necessity is the dominant category in his discourse, its function is not to guarantee a meaning beyond experience, but to systematize experience itself.

Now, although the combination of elements underlying this optimism and simplicity is presented as part of a universal process of class constitution, it merely represented the crowning of the very specific historical formation of the *German* working class. Firstly, the political autonomy of the German working class was the result of two failures: that of the German bourgeoisie, after 1849, to set itself up as the hegemonic force of a liberal-democratic movement; and that of the Lassalleans' corporatist attempt to integrate the working class into the Bismarckian state. Secondly, the great depression of 1873–96, and the accompanying economic insecurity which affected all social strata, nurtured a general optimism about the imminent collapse of capitalism and the advent of proletarian revolution. Thirdly, the working class had a low degree of structural complexity: the trade unions were incipient and subordinated to the party both politically and financially; and in the context of the twenty-year depression, the prospects for an improvement in the workers' condition through trade-union activity seemed extremely limited. Only with difficulty was the General Commission of the German trade unions, established in 1890, able to impose its hegemony over the workers movement, amid the resistance of local trade union powers and the overall scepticism of Social Democracy.[13]

Under these conditions, the unity and autonomy of the working class, and the collapse of the capitalist system, virtually appeared as facts of experience. These were the reading parameters which gave the Kautskian discourse its acceptability. In reality, however, the situation was strictly German — or, at most, typical of certain European countries where the liberal bourgeoisie was weak — and certainly did not correspond to those processes of working-class formation in countries with a strong liberal (England) or democratic-Jacobin tradition (France), or where ethnic and religious identities predominated over those of class (the United States). But since, in the Marxist Vulgate, history advanced towards an ever greater simplification of social antagonisms, the extreme isolation and confrontation course of the German workers movement would acquire the prestige of a paradigm towards which other national situations had to converge and in relation to which they were merely inadequate approximations.[14]

The end of the depression brought the beginning of the crisis of this paradigm. The transition to 'organized capitalism', and the ensuing boom that lasted until 1914, made uncertain the prospect of a 'general crisis of capitalism'. Under the new conditions, a wave of

fin de siecle "crisis of Marxism"

successful trade union economic struggles enabled the workers to consolidate their organizational power and influence within Social Democracy. But at this point, a steady tension began to assert itself between the trade unions and the political leadership within the party, so that the unity and socialist determination of the working class became increasingly problematic. In all areas of society, an *autonomization of spheres* was taking place — which implied that any type of unity could only be attained through unstable and complex forms of rearticulation. From this new perspective, a serious question-mark appeared over the seemingly logical and simple sequence of the various structural moments of the 1892 Kautskian paradigm. And as the relationship between theory and programme was one of total implication, the political crisis was reduplicated in a theoretical one. In 1898 Thomas Masaryk coined an expression that soon became popular: the 'crisis of Marxism'.

This crisis, which served as the background to all Marxist debates from the turn of the century until the war, seems to have been dominated by two basic moments: the new awareness of the opacity of the social, of the complexities and resistances of an increasingly organized capitalism; and the fragmentation of the different positions of social agents which, according to the classical paradigm, should have been united.[15] In a famous passage of a letter to Lagardelle, Antonio Labriola stated at the beginning of the revisionism debate: 'Truly, behind all this rumour of controversy, there is a serious and essential problem: the ardent, lively and precocious hopes of some years ago — those expectations of over-precise details and contours — are now running up against the most complex resistance of economic relations and the most intricate meshing of the political world.'[16]

It would be wrong to see this as a merely transitory crisis; on the contrary, Marxism finally lost its innocence at that time. In so far as the paradigmatic sequence of its categories was subjected to the 'structural pressure' of increasingly atypical situations, it became ever more difficult to reduce social relations to structural moments internal to those categories. A proliferation of caesurae and discontinuities start to break down the unity of a discourse that considered itself profoundly monist. From then on, the problem of Marxism has been *to think those discontinuities* and, at the same time, to find *forms reconstituting* the unity of scattered and heterogeneous elements. The transitions between different structural moments have lost their originary logical transparency and reveal an opacity pertaining to contingent and laboriously constructed relations. The

Problem of Marxism: to find forms reconstituting the unity of struggle

specificity of the different responses to the crisis of this paradigm resides in the way of conceiving this relational moment — whose importance increases to the extent that its nature becomes less evident. This is what we must now analyse.

The First Response to the Crisis: the Formation of Marxist Orthodoxy

Marxist orthodoxy, as it is constituted in Kautsky and Plekhanov, is not a simple continuation of classical Marxism. It involves a very particular inflection, characterized by the new role assigned to theory. Instead of serving to systematize observable historical tendencies — as it did in Kautsky's text of 1892 — theory sets itself up as a guarantee that these tendencies will eventually coincide with the type of social articulation proposed by the Marxist paradigm. In other words, orthodoxy is constituted on the ground of a growing disjuncture between Marxist theory and the political practice of Social Democracy. It is the laws of motion of the infrastructure, guaranteed by Marxist 'science', which provide the terrain for the overcoming of this disjuncture and assure both the transitory character of the existing tendencies and the future revolutionary reconstitution of the working class.

Let us examine, in this regard, Kautsky's position on the relationship between party and unions, as expressed in his polemic with the theoreticians of the trade union movement.[17] Kautsky is perfectly aware of the strong tendencies toward fragmentation within the German working class: the rise of a labour aristocracy; the opposition between unionized and non-unionized workers; the counterposed interests of different wage categories; the conscious policy of the bourgeoisie to divide the working class; the presence of masses of Catholic workers subjected to a church populism which distances them from the Social Democrats, and so forth. He is equally conscious of the fact that the more *immediate material interests* predominate, the more tendencies toward fragmentation assert themselves; and that hence pure trade-union action cannot guarantee either the unity or the socialist determination of the working class.[18] These can be consolidated only if the immediate material interests of the working class are subordinated to the *Endziel*, the final socialist objective, and this presupposes the subordination of economic struggle to political struggle, and thus of the trade unions to the party.[19] But the party can represent this totalizing instance only insofar as it is the

depository of science — that is, of Marxist theory. The obvious fact that the working class was not following a socialist direction — English trade unionism was a resounding example of this, and by the turn of the century could no longer be ignored — led Kautsky to affirm a new privileged role for intellectuals which was to have such an important influence on Lenin's *What is to be Done*. Such intellectual mediation is limited in its effects, for, according to the Spinozist formula, its sole freedom consists in being the consciousness of necessity. However, it does entail the emergence of an articulating nexus that cannot simply be referred to the chain of a monistically conceived necessity.

The fissure that opened up in the identity of the class, the growing dissociation between the different subject positions of the workers, could only be surpassed by a future movement of the economic base whose advent was guaranteed by Marxist science. Consequently, everything depends on the predictive capacity of this science and on the necessary character of such predictions. It is no accident that the category of 'necessity' has to be affirmed with ever increasing virulence. It is well known how 'necessity' was understood by the Second International: as a natural necessity, founded on a combination of Marxism and Darwinism. The Darwinist influence has frequently been presented as a vulgar Marxist substitute for Hegelian dialectics; but the truth is that in the orthodox conception, Hegelianism and Darwinism combined to form a hybrid capable of satisfying strategic requirements. Darwinism alone does not offer 'guarantees for the future', since natural selection does not operate in a direction predetermined from the beginning.[20] Only if a Hegelian type of teleology is added to Darwinism — which is totally incompatible with it — can an evolutionary process be presented as a guarantee of future transitions.

This conception of class unity as a future unity assured by the action of ineluctable laws, had effects at a number of levels: on the type of articulation attributed to diverse subject positions; on the way of treating differences which could not be assimilated to the paradigm; and on the strategy for analysis of historical events. Concerning the first point, it is evident that if the revolutionary subject establishes its class identity at the level of the relations of production,[21] its presence at other levels can only be one of *exteriority* and it must adopt the form of *'representation of interests'*. The terrain of politics can only be a superstructure, insofar as it is a terrain of struggle between agents whose identity, conceived under the form of 'interests', has set itself up at another level. This essential identity

was thus *fixed*, once and for all, as an unalterable fact relating to the various forms of political and ideological representation into which the working class entered.[22]

Secondly, this reductionist problematic used two types of reasoning — which we may call the *argument from appearance* and the *argument from contingency* — to deal with differences that could not be assimilated to its own categories. The argument from appearance: everything presenting itself as different can be reduced to identity. This may take two forms: either appearance is a mere artifice of concealment, or it is a necessary form of the manifestation of essence. (An example of the first form: 'nationalism is a screen which hides the interests of the bourgeoisie'; an example of the second: 'the Liberal State is a necessary political form of capitalism'.) The argument from contingency: a social category or sector may not be reducible to the central identities of a certain form of society, but in that case its very marginality vis-à-vis the fundamental line of historical development allows us to discard it as irrelevant. (For example: 'because capitalism leads to the proletarianization of the middle classes and the peasantry, we can ignore these and concentrate our strategy on the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat'.) Thus, in the argument from contingency, identity is rediscovered in a diachronic totality: an inexorable succession of stages allows existing social reality to be divided into phenomena that are necessary or contingent, according to the stage of that society's approaching maturity. History is therefore a continuous concretization of the abstract, an approximation to a paradigmatic purity which appears as both sense and direction of the process.

Finally the orthodox paradigm, qua analytic of the present, postulates a strategy of *recognition*. In as much as Marxism claims to know the unavoidable course of history in its essential determinations, the understanding of an actual event can only mean to identify it as a moment in a temporal succession that is fixed a priori. Hence discussions such as: is the revolution of year *x* in country *y* *the* bourgeois-democratic revolution? Or, what forms should the transition to socialism assume in this or that country?

The three areas of effects analysed above present a common characteristic: the concrete is reduced to the abstract. Diverse subject positions are reduced to manifestations of a single position; the plurality of differences is either reduced or rejected as contingent; the sense of the present is revealed through its location in an a priori succession of stages. It is precisely because the concrete is in this way reduced to the abstract, that history, society and social agents have,

for orthodoxy, *an essence which operates as their principle of unification*. And as this essence is not immediately visible, it is necessary to distinguish between a *surface* or appearance of society and an *underlying reality* to which the ultimate sense of every concrete presence must necessarily be referred, whatever the level of complexity in the system of mediations.

It is clear which strategic conception could be derived from this vision of the course of capitalism. The subject of this strategy was, of course, the workers' party. Kautsky vigorously rejected the revisionist notion of a 'popular party' because, in his view, it involved a transference of the interests of other classes to the interior of the party and, consequently, a loss of the revolutionary character of the movement. However, his supposedly radical position, based on the rejection of any compromise or alliance, was the centrepiece of a fundamentally conservative strategy.[23] Since his radicalism relied on a process which did not require political initiatives, it could only lead to quietism and waiting. Propaganda and organization were the two basic — in fact the only — tasks of the party. Propaganda was geared not to the creation of a broader 'popular will', through the winning of new sectors to the socialist cause, but above all to the reinforcing of working-class identity. As to organization, its expansion did not involve greater political participation in a number of fronts, but the construction of a ghetto where the working class led a self-focused and segregated existence. This progressive institutionalization of the movement was well suited to a perspective in which the final crisis of the capitalist system would come from the bourgeoisie's own labours, while the working class merely prepared for its intervention at the appropriate moment. Since 1881 Kautsky had stated: 'Our task is not to organize the revolution but to organize ourselves for the revolution; not *to make* the revolution but to take advantage of it.'[24]

Obviously, alliances did not represent for Kautsky a fundamental strategic principle. In concrete circumstances, a variety of alliances were possible at the level of empirical tactics; but in the long term, just as the revolution would have a purely proletarian character, so did the working class occupy an isolated position in the anti-capitalist struggle. Kautsky's analysis of internal contradictions in other sectors precisely demonstrates the impossibility of establishing long-term democratic and anti-capitalist alliances with them. In the case of the peasantry, he attempts to prove that it is a disintegrating sector, so that working-class defence of its interests is a reactionary policy opposed to the general line of economic progress. Similarly,

in the Kautskian analysis of imperialism, the middle classes are increasingly united under the ideological domination of finance capital and militarism. Characteristically, Kautsky is never for one moment aware that this political and ideological hold dangerously accentuates the workers' isolation, and that, faced with the offensive of capital, the working class should respond with a counter-offensive to win over these middle sectors to the anti-capitalist cause. This line of thought is closed because, in his analysis, the increasingly reactionary character of the middle sectors corresponds to objective and unalterable processes. For the same reason, the isolation of the workers is not a threat to socialism, because this is guaranteed by historically given laws which in the long term will prove the powerlessness of all bourgeois machinations.

A good example of how Kautsky conceived the proletarian struggle may be found in his concept of 'war of attrition'. This refers not to a special tactic but to the totality of political actions undertaken by the working class since the 1860s. Three aspects are involved in war of attrition: (1) the preconstituted identity of the working class, which increasingly undermines the opponent's power but is not significantly modified in the course of the struggle; (2) an equally preconstituted identity of the bourgeoisie, which increases or reduces its capacity for domination but under no circumstances alters its own nature; (3) a prefixed line of development — once again the 'inexorable laws' — which gives a directional tendency to the war of attrition. This strategy has been compared to Gramsci's 'war of position',[25] but in reality the two are profoundly different. War of position presupposes the concept of hegemony which, as we shall see, is incompatible with the idea of a linear, predetermined development and, above all, with the preconstituted character of Kautskian subjects.

The role assigned by orthodox Marxism to theory confronts us with a paradox. On the one hand, its role increases as the widening gap between 'present consciousness' and 'historical mission' of the class can only be externally bridged through political intervention. On the other hand, since the theory underpinning political intervention is presented as consciousness of a necessary and mechanical determination, the analysis becomes ever more determinist and economist to the very extent that *the composition of historical forces depends more on theoretical mediation*. This is even more evident in Plekhanov than in Kautsky. The incipient development of capitalism in Russia failed to create a bourgeois civilization, with the result that the meaning of Russian reality could only be unravelled

through a comparison with Western capitalist development. For Russian Marxists, therefore, the social phenomena of their country were symbols of a text which transcended them and was available for a full and explicit reading only in the capitalist West. This meant that theory was incomparably more important in Russia than in the West: if the 'necessary laws of history' were not universally valid, the fleeting reality of a strike, of a demonstration, of a process of accumulation, threatened to melt away. A reformist like Guglielmo Ferrero[26] could wax ironic about the orthodox claim that Marxism constituted a coherent and homogeneous theoretical field. In the end, if the doctrine was eclectic and heteroclite, this scarcely affected the materiality of a social practice sanctioned by the ensemble of proletarian institutions — a practice which, in the revisionism controversy, began to establish its own relations of exteriority with theory. This, however, could not be Plekhanov's position, for he confronted phenomena which did not spontaneously point in a precise direction, but whose meaning relied on their insertion within an interpretative system. The more the meaning of the social depended upon theoretical formulation, the more the defence of orthodoxy turned into a political problem.

With these points in mind, it is not surprising that the principles of Marxist orthodoxy were given a much more rigid formulation in Plekhanov than in Kautsky. It is well known, for example, that he coined the term 'dialectical materialism'. But he was also responsible for the radical naturalism which led to such a strict separation between base and superstructure that the latter was considered to be no more than a combination of necessary expressions of the former. Moreover, Plekhanov's concept of economic base allows for no intervention by social forces: the economic process is completely determined by the productive forces, conceived as technology.[27] This rigid determination enables him to present society as a strict hierarchy of instances, with decreasing degrees of efficacy: '1) *the state of the productive forces*; 2) the economic relations these forces condition; 3) the socio-*political system* that has developed on the given economic "basis"; 4) the mentality of social man, which is determined in part by the economic conditions obtaining, and in part by the entire socio-political system that has arisen on that foundation; 5) the various ideologies that reflect the properties of that mentality.'[28] In *Socialism and Political Struggle* and *Our Differences*, Plekhanov formulated an equally rigid succession of stages through which the Russian revolutionary process had to pass, so that any 'uneven and combined development' was eliminated from the field of strategy.

All the early analysis of Russian Marxism — from Peter Struve's 'legal Marxism', through Plekhanov as the central moment, to Lenin's *Development of Capitalism in Russia* — tended to obliterate the study of specificities, representing these as nothing other than outwardly apparent or contingent forms of an essential reality: the abstract development of capitalism through which every society must pass.

Let us now make a final observation on orthodoxy. As we have seen, theory maintained that the growing disjuncture between final objective and current political practices would be resolved at some future moment, which operated as a *coincidentia oppositorum*. As this practice of recomposition, however, could not be left *entirely* to the future, a struggle had somehow to be waged in the present against the tendencies towards fragmentation. But since this struggle entailed forms of articulation which did not at that time *spontaneously* result from the laws of capitalism, it was necessary to introduce a social logic different from mechanical determinism — that is to say, a space that would restore *the autonomy of political initiative*. Although minimal, this space is present in Kautsky: it comprises the relations of exteriority, between the working class and socialism, which require the political mediation of intellectuals. There is a link here which cannot simply be explained by 'objective' historical determination. This space was necessarily broader for those tendencies which, in order to overcome the split between day-to-day practices and final objective, strove hardest to break with quietism and to achieve current political effects.[29] Rosa Luxemburg's spontaneism, and, more generally, the political strategies of the *Neue Linke* confirm this. The most creative tendencies within orthodoxy attempted to limit the effects of the 'logic of necessity', but the inevitable outcome was that they placed their discourse in a permanent dualism between a 'logic of necessity', producing ever fewer effects in terms of political practice, and a 'logic of contingency' which, by not determining its specificity, was incapable of theorizing itself.

Let us give two examples of the dualism created by these partial attempts to 'open the game'. The first is the concept of *morphological prediction* in Labriola. He stated: 'Historical foresight . . . (in *The Communist Manifesto*) does not imply, and this is still the case, either a chronological date or an advance picture of a social configuration, as was and is typical of old and new apocalypses and prophecies . . . In the theory of critical communism, it is the whole of society which, at a moment in the process, discovers the reason for its inevitable course, and which, at a salient point in its curve, sheds light on itself

and reveals its laws of motion. The prediction to which the *Manifesto* alludes for the first time was not chronological, of an anticipatory or promise-like nature; it was morphological, a word which, in my opinion, succinctly expresses everything.'[30] Labriola was here waging a twofold battle. The first was directed against tendencies critical of Marxism — Croce, Gentile[31] — who, basing the unpredictability of history on the non-systematic character of events, found a unitary order only in the consciousness of the historian. For his part, Labriola stressed the objective character of historical laws. However, these were *morphological* — that is, their area of validity was restricted to certain fundamental tendencies. Labriola's second battle, then, was against the forms of dogmatism which converted general tendencies into immediately legible facts on the surface of historical life. It is now clear that the way in which this twofold battle was waged could not but introduce a dualism which, in Labriola, found expression in the counterposition of historical development as narration and as morphology; and, more generally, in the decreasing capacity of Engels's dialectical paradigm to explain history.[32] Moreover, this dichotomy presents the same double void that we found in Rosa Luxemburg. For, the 'narrative' elements are counterposed to the 'morphological' ones not as something positive, with its own internal necessity, but as the contingent reverse of morphological necessity. According to Badaloni, the 'real unfolding of events can (for Labriola) give rise to intricate and unforeseeable vicissitudes. Nonetheless, what counts is that the understanding of these vicissitudes should occur within the genetical hypothesis (class contradiction and its progressive simplification). Thus, the proletariat is located not in an indeterminate historical time, but in that peculiar historical time which is dominated by the crisis of the bourgeois social formation.'[33] In other words, 'morphological necessity' constitutes a theoretico-discursive terrain which comprises not only its own distinctive territory but also what it excludes from itself — contingency. If an ensemble of 'events' are conceptualized as 'contingent', they are not conceptualized at all, except in their lack of certain attributes existent in the morphological tendencies opposed to them. However, since the life of society is ever more complex than the morphological categories of Marxist discourse — and this complexity was Labriola's starting point — the only possible consequence is that theory becomes an increasingly irrelevant tool for the understanding of concrete social processes.

Thus, to avoid falling into complete agnosticism, it is necessary at some point to introduce other explanatory categories. Labriola does

this, for example, in his concrete analyses, where diverse social categories are not simply conceptualized in their 'contingency', but are each endowed with a certain necessity or lawfulness of their own. What is the relationship between these 'factual' structural complexes and the structures which are the object of morphological prediction? A first possible solution would be 'dialectical': to maintain a monist perspective which conceives complexity as a system of mediations.[34] Labriola could not adopt this solution, however, because it would have forced him to extend the effects of necessity to the surface of historical life — the very area from which he wanted to displace them. But if the dialectical solution is rejected, it is not possible to pass logically from morphological analysis to the distinctive lawfulness of partial totalities. The transition therefore assumes an *external character* — which is to say that the conceptualization of these legalities is *external to Marxist theory*. Marxist theory cannot, then, be the 'complete and harmonious world-system' presented by Plekhanov and thinkable only within a closed model. The necessity/contingency dualism opens the way to a pluralism of structural legalities whose internal logics and mutual relations have to be determined.

This can be seen even more clearly if we examine Austro-Marxism, our second example of an 'open orthodoxy'. Here we find a more radical and systematic effort than Labriola's to diversify the starting points, to multiply the theoretical categories, and to autonomize areas of society in their specific determinations. Otto Bauer, in his obituary on Max Adler, referred to the beginning of the school in the following terms: 'Whereas Marx and Engels began from Hegel, and the later Marxists from materialism, the more recent "Austro-Marxists" had at their point of departure Kant and Mach.'[35] The Austro-Marxists were conscious of the obstacles to working-class unity in the dual monarchy, and of the fact that such unity depended upon constant political initiative. They therefore understood well what, from the different perspective of the Leninist tradition, was termed 'uneven and combined development'. 'In the Austro-Hungarian monarchy there are examples of all the economic forms to be found in Europe, including Turkey . . . The light of socialist propaganda shines everywhere in the midst of these divergent economic and political conditions. This creates a picture of extreme diversity . . . What exists in the International as a chronological development — the socialism of artisans, journeymen, workers in manufacture, factory workers, and agricultural workers, which undergoes alterations, with the political, the social, or the intellectual aspect of the movement predominating at any given

moment — takes places contemporaneously in Austria.'[36]

In this mosaic of social and national situations, it was impossible to think of national identities as 'superstructural' or of class unity as a necessary consequence of the infrastructure. Indeed, such a unity depended on a complex political construction. In the words of Otto Bauer: 'It is an intellectual force which maintains unity . . . "Austro-Marxism" today, as a product of unity and a force for the maintenance of unity, is nothing but the ideology of unity of the workers movement.'[37]

The moment of class unity is, thus, a political moment. The constitutive centre of what we might call a society's *relational configuration* or *articulatory form* is displaced towards the field of the superstructures, so that the very distinction between economic base and superstructure becomes blurred and problematic. Three main types of Austro-Marxist theoretical intervention are closely linked to this new strategic perspective: the attempt to limit the area of validity of 'historical necessity'; the suggestion of new fronts of struggle based upon the complexity of the social that was characteristic of mature capitalism; and the effort to think in a non-reductive manner the specificity of subject positions other than those of class. The first type of intervention is mainly connected with Max Adler's philosophical reformulation and his peculiar form of neo-Kantianism. The Kantian rethinking of Marxism produced a number of liberating effects: it broadened the audience for socialism, insofar as the justness of its postulates could be posed in terms of a universality transcending class bounds; it broke with the naturalist conception of social relations and, by elaborating concepts such as the 'social a priori', introduced a strictly discursive element into the constitution of social objectivity; and finally, it allowed Marxists to conceive the infrastructure as a terrain whose conformation depended upon forms of consciousness, and not upon the naturalistic movement of the forces of production. The second type of intervention also placed the base/superstructure distinction into question. In the discussion regarding Kautsky's *Road to Power*, Bauer, for example,[38] tried to show how wrong it was to conceive the economy as a homogeneous field dominated by an endogenous logic, given that in the monopoly and imperialist phase political, technico-organizational and scientific transformations were increasingly part of the industrial apparatus. In his view, if the laws of competition previously functioned as natural powers, they now had to pass through the minds of men and women. Hence the emphasis on the growing interlock between state and economy, which in the

1920s led to the debate about 'organized capitalism'. Views also changed about the points of rupture and antagonism created by the new configuration of capitalism: these were now located not solely in the relations of production, but in a number of areas of the social and political structure. Hence too, the new importance attributed to the very dispersion of the day-to-day struggle (*revolutionäre Kleinarbeit*), conceived in neither an evolutionary nor a reformist sense,[39] and the fresh significance acquired by the moment of political articulation. (This is reflected, among other things, in the new way of posing the relationship between party and intellectuals.[40]) Finally, with regard to the new subject positions and the ensuing break with class reductionism, it is sufficient to mention Bauer's work on the national question and Renner's on legal institutions.

The general pattern of the theoretico-strategic intervention of Austro-Marxism should now be clear: insofar as the practical efficacy of autonomous political intervention is broadened, the discourse of 'historical necessity' loses its relevance and withdraws to the horizon of the social (in exactly the same way that, in deist discourse, the effects of God's presence in the world are drastically reduced). This, in turn, requires a proliferation of new discursive forms to occupy the terrain left vacant. The Austro-Marxists, however, failed to reach the point of breaking with dualism and eliminating the moment of 'morphological' necessity. In the theoretico-political universe of *fin-de-siècle* Marxism, this decisive step was taken only by Sorel, through his contrast between *'mélange'* and *'bloc'*. We shall return to this below.

The Second Response to the Crisis: Revisionism

The orthodox response to the 'crisis of Marxism' sought to overcome the disjuncture between 'theory' and 'observable tendencies of capitalism' by intransigently affirming the validity of the former and the artificial or transitory character of the latter. Thus it would seem very simple to conclude that the revisionist response was symmetrically opposed, especially since Bernstein himself insisted on many occasions that he had no major disagreements with the programme and practices of the SPD as they had materialized since the Erfurt Congress, and that the only purpose of his intervention was to realize an *aggiornamento* adapting the theory to the concrete practices of the movement. Nevertheless, such a conclusion would obscure important dimensions of Bernstein's intervention. In particular, it would lead us into the error of identifying *reformism* with *revision-*

Bernstein:

ism.[41] The trade union leaders, who were the true spokesmen for a reformist policy within the SPD, expressed little interest in Bernstein's theoretical propositions and remained strictly neutral in the ensuing controversy — when they did not openly support orthodoxy.[42] Moreover, in crucial political debates on the mass strike[43] and the attitude to war, Bernstein's position was not only different from but strictly opposed to that of the reformist leaders in the trade unions and the party. Thus, in attempting to identify the precise difference between reformism and revisionism, we must stress that *what is essential in a reformist practice is political quietism and the corporatist confinement of the working class*. The reformist leader attempts to defend the gains and immediate interests of the class, and he consequently tends to consider it as a segregated sector, endowed with a perfectly defined identity and limits. But a 'revisionist' theory is not necessary for this; indeed, a 'revolutionary' theory can — in many cases — better fulfil the same role by isolating the working class and leaving to an indeterminate future any questioning of the existing power structure. We have already referred to the conservative character of Kautskian revolutionism. Reformism does not identify with either term of the revisionism/orthodoxy alternative but cuts across the two.

The basic issue confronting revisionist and orthodox theoreticians was not, therefore, the question of reformism. Neither was it the problem of peaceful or violent transition from capitalism to socialism — in relation to which the 'orthodox' did not have a clear and unanimous position. *The main point of divergence was that, whereas orthodoxy considered that the fragmentation and division characteristic of the new stage of capitalism would be overcome through changes in the infrastructure, revisionism held that this was to be achieved through autonomous political intervention*. The autonomy of the political from the economic base is the true novelty of Bernstein's argument. In fact, it has been pointed out[44] that behind each of Bernstein's critiques of classical Marxist theory, there was an attempt to recover the political initiative in particular spheres. Revisionism, at its best moments, represented a real effort to break with the corporative isolation of the working class. It is, also true, however, that just as the political was emerging as an autonomous instance, it was used to validate a 'reformist' practice which was to a large extent its opposite. This is the paradox that we must try to explain. It refers us to certain limitations in Bernstein's rupture with economism which would only be rigorously overcome in Gramsci. Autonomy of the political

and its limits: we must examine how these two moments are structured.

It is important to recognize that Bernstein, more clearly than any representative of orthodoxy, understood the changes affecting capitalism as it entered the monopoly era. His analyses were, in this sense, closer to the problematic of a Hilferding or a Lenin than to the orthodox theorizations of the time.[45] Bernstein also grasped the political consequences of capitalist reorganization. The three main changes — a-symmetry between the concentration of enterprises and the concentration of patrimonies; the subsistence and growth of the middle strata; the role of economic planning in the prevention of crises — could only involve a total change in the assumptions upon which Social Democracy had hitherto been based. It was not the case that the evolution of the economy was proletarianizing the middle classes and the peasantry and heightening the polarization of society, nor that the transition to socialism could be expected to follow from a revolutionary outbreak consequent upon a serious economic crisis. Under such conditions, socialism had to change its terrain and strategy, and the key theoretical moment was the break with the rigid base/superstructure distinction that had prevented any conception of the autonomy of the political. It was this latter instance to which the moment of recomposition and overcoming of fragmentation was now transferred in the revisionist analysis. 'Sciences, arts, a whole series of social relations are today much less dependent on economics than formerly, or, in order to give no room for misconception, the point of economic development attained today leaves the ideological, and especially the ethical, factors greater space for independent activity than was formerly the case. In consequence of this the interdependency of cause and effect between technical, economic evolution of other social tendencies is becoming always more indirect, and from that the necessities of the first are losing much of their power of dictating the form of the latter.'[46]

It is only this autonomization of the political, as opposed to the dictates of the economic base, that permits it to play this role of recomposition and reunification against infrastructural tendencies which, if abandoned to themselves, can only lead to fragmentation. This can clearly be seen in Bernstein's conception of the dialectic of working-class unity and division. Economically, the working class always appears more and more divided. The modern proletariat is not that dispossessed mass of which Marx and Engels wrote in the *Manifesto*: 'it is just in the most advanced of manufacturing industries

recognizing the relative autonom of the political

that a whole hierarchy of differentiated workmen are to be found, between those groups only a moderate feeling of identity exists.'[47] This diversification of interests — which was most apparent in the English case — was not simply the residue of a guildist past, as Cunow had argued, but was the result of the establishment of a democratic State. Although, under conditions of political repression, unity in struggle placed sectoral interests on a secondary level, these tended to blossom once again in a context of freedom.

Now, if the tendency towards division is inscribed in the very structure of modern capitalism, what is the source of the opposite moment, the tendency towards unification? According to Bernstein, it is the party. Thus, he speaks of the 'necessity of an organ of the class struggle which holds the entire class together in spite of its fragmentation through different employment, and that is the Social Democracy as a political party. In it, the special interest of the economic group is submerged in favour of the general interest of those who depend on income for their labour, of all the underprivileged.'[48] As we saw earlier, in Kautsky the party also represented the universal moment of the class; but while in his case political unity was the scientific prefiguration of a real unity to be achieved by the movements of the infrastructure, in Bernstein the moment of political articulation could not be reduced to such movements. The specificity of the political link escapes the chain of necessity; the irreducible space of the political, which in Kautsky was limited to the mediating role of the intelligentsia, appears here considerably enlarged.

However, in Bernstein's analysis of political mediation as constitutive of class unity, a barely perceptible ambiguity has slipped through to vitiate his entire theoretical construction. The ambiguity is this: if the working class appears increasingly divided in the economic sphere, and if its unity is autonomously constructed at the political level, in what sense is this political unity a *class* unity? The problem was not posed for orthodoxy, as the non-correspondence between economic and political identity was ultimately to be resolved by the evolution of the economy itself. In Bernstein's case, the logical conclusion would seem to be that political unity can be constituted only through an overcoming of the *class limitations* of the different fractions of workers, and that there should thus be a permanent structural hiatus between economic and political subjectivity. This is, however, a conclusion which Bernstein never reaches in his analysis. On the one hand, he insists that Social Democracy must be a party of all the oppressed and not only of the workers, but on the

Bernstein "the path is everything, the goal is nothing"

other he conceives this unity as that of an ensemble of sectors which 'accept the point of view of the workers and recognize them as the leading class'. As his biographer Peter Gay indicates,[49] Bernstein never went beyond this point. Consequently, a link is missing in his reasoning. The *class* character of the unification between the political and the economic is not produced in either of the two spheres, and the argument remains suspended in a void.

This conclusion may perhaps be excessive, because it assumes that Bernstein's reasoning moves on the same level as that of Kautsky or Rosa Luxemburg — that he is referring to *necessary* subjects of an ineluctable historical process. The truth is, however, that by denying that history is dominated by an abstract determinist logic, Bernstein precisely shifted the debate from this plane. In his conception, the centrality of the workers seems instead to refer to a historically contingent line of argument — for example, that the working class is better prepared than other sectors to fulfil the leading role, given its degree of concentration and organization. Yet the problem remains of why Bernstein presented these advantages — which were at most conjunctural — as *irreversible achievements*. The same ambiguity can be found in Bernstein's *dictum* that 'the path is everything and the goal is nothing'. Traditionally, this has been considered a typical 'gradualist' slogan.[50] However, in some of its meanings, *which produce both theoretical and political effects within the revisionist discourse*, gradualism is not *logically* entailed. The only necessary implication of this statement is that the working class *can* obtain concrete gains within the capitalist system, and that revolution cannot therefore be considered as an absolute moment in the passage from total dispossession to radical liberation. This does not *necessarily* imply the gradualist conception of slow, unilinear and irreversible advances, although it is true that Bernstein's line of argument concerning democratic advances links them to a gradualist perspective. Once again, we must therefore pose the problem of the terrain where these logically distinct structural moments unite.

This brings our investigation to the concrete forms of Bernstein's rupture with orthodox determinism, and to the type of concepts he deploys in order to fill the space opened by its collapse. When Bernstein questions whether any general mechanism can validly explain the course of history, his argument assumes a characteristic form: he does not criticise the type of historical causality proposed by orthodoxy, but attempts to create a space where the free play of subjectivity will be possible in history. Accepting the orthodox identification of objectivity and mechanical causality, he merely tries

to limit its effects.[51] He does not deny the scientific character of a part of Marxism, but he refuses to extend it to the point of creating a closed system that will cover the entire field of political prediction. The critique of the dogmatic rationalism of orthodoxy takes the form of a Kantian dualism. For Bernstein, there were three particular objections to the consideration of Marxism as a closed scientific system. First, Marxism had failed to show that socialism necessarily followed from capitalism's collapse. Secondly, this could not be demonstrated because history was not a simple objective process: *will* also played a role in it. Hence, history could only be explained as the result of an interaction between objective and subjective factors. Thirdly, as socialism was a *party programme* and therefore founded upon ethical decision, it could not be entirely scientific — could not be based upon objective statements whose truth or falsehood had to be accepted by all. Thus, the autonomy of the ethical subject was the basis of Bernstein's break with determinism.

Now — and this point is crucial — the introduction of the ethical subject cannot dispel the ambiguities we found earlier in Bernstein's reasoning. The ethical subject's free decision can at most create an area of indeterminacy in history, but it cannot be the foundation for a gradualist thesis. It is here that a new postulate — the progressive and ascending character of human history — intervenes to provide the terrain on which the political and the economic combine, imparting a sense of direction to every concrete achievement. The concept of evolution, *Entwicklung*,[52] plays a decisive role in the Bernsteinian discourse: in fact, his entire schema obtains its coherence from it. The unification of the political and economic spheres takes place not on the basis of theoretically defined articulations, but through a tendential movement underlying them both and dictated by the laws of evolution. For Bernstein, these laws are not at all the same as in the orthodox system: they include not only antagonistic but also harmonious processes. Yet in both cases they are conceived as *totalizing contexts* which fix a priori the meaning of every event. Thus, although 'the facts' are freed from the essentialist connections which linked them together in the orthodox conception, they are later reunited in a general theory of progress unconnected to any determinable mechanism. The rupture with mechanist objectivism, which considered classes as transcendent subjects, is achieved through the postulation of a new transcendent subject — the ethical subject — which imposes ascendancy in a humanity increasingly freed from economic necessity.[53] From here, it is impossible to move towards a theory of articulation and hegemony.

This clarifies why, in Bernstein, the autonomization of the political can be linked to acceptance of a reformist practice and a gradualist strategy. For if every advance is irreversible — given the *Entwicklung* postulate — its consolidation no longer depends upon an unstable articulation of forces and *ceases to be a political problem*. If, on the other hand, the ensemble of democratic advances depended upon a contingent correlation of forces, then abstract consideration of the justness of each demand would not be sufficient reason to assert its progressiveness. For example, a negative realignment of forces might be brought about by an ultra-left demand or its opposite, an absence of radical political initiatives in a critical conjuncture. But if the ensemble of democratic advances depends solely upon a law of progress, then the progressive character of any struggle or conjunctural demand is defined independently of its correlation with other forces operating at a given moment. The fact that the demands of the workers movement are considered just and progressive, and judged separately from their correlation with other forces, erases the only basis for criticism of the corporative confinement of the working class. Here lie the premises for a coincidence between theoretical revisionism and practical reformism: the broadening of political initiative to a number of democratic fronts never enters into contradiction with the quietism and corporatism of the working class.

This can be clearly seen if we consider the revisionist theory of the State. For orthodoxy, the problem was straightforward: the State was an instrument of class domination, and Social Democracy could only participate in its institutions with the purpose of spreading its own ideology, and defending and organizing the working class. Such participation was therefore marked by exteriority. Bernstein sees this problem from the opposite perspective: the growing economic power of the working class, the advance in social legislation, the 'humanization' of capitalism, all lead to the 'nationalization' of the working class; the worker is not merely a proletarian, he has also become a citizen. Consequently, according to Bernstein, the functions of social organization have a greater influence within the State than do those of class domination; its democratization transforms it into a State 'of all the people'. Once again, Bernstein has understood better than orthodoxy the basic truth that the working class is *already* on the terrain of the State, and that it is sterile dogmatism to seek to maintain with it pure relations of exteriority. In his discourse, however, this is immediately transformed into a totally illegitimate prediction: namely, that the State will become increasingly democratic as a necessary consequence of 'historical

evolution'.

Having reached this point, we may now apply the test we used for Rosa Luxemburg: to follow the logical lines of Bernstein's argument, while eliminating the essentialist presuppositions (in this case, the postulate of progress as a unifying tendency) which limit its effects. Two conclusions immediately arise from this test. First, democratic advances within the State cease to be cumulative and begin to depend upon a relationship of forces that cannot be determined a priori. The object of struggle is not simply punctual gains, but forms of articulating forces that will allow these gains to be consolidated. *And these forms are always reversible.* In that fight, the working class must struggle from where it really is: both *within* and *outside* the State. But — and this is the second conclusion — Bernstein's very clearsightedness opens up a much more disquieting possibility. If the worker is no longer just proletarian but also citizen, consumer, and participant in a plurality of positions within the country's cultural and institutional apparatus; if, moreover, this ensemble of positions is no longer united by any 'law of progress' (nor, of course, by the 'necessary laws' of orthodoxy), then the relations between them become an open articulation which offers no a priori guarantee that it will adopt a given form. There is also a possibility that contradictory and mutually neutralizing subject positions will arise. In that case, more than ever, democratic advance will necessitate a proliferation of political initiatives in different social areas — as required by revisionism, but with the difference that the meaning of each initiative comes to depend upon its relation with the others. To think this dispersion of elements and points of antagonism, and to conceive their articulation outside any a priori schema of unification, is something that goes far beyond the field of revisionism. Although it was the revisionists who first posed the problem in its most general terms, the beginnings of an adequate response would only be found in the Gramscian conception of 'war of position'.

The Third Response to the Crisis: Revolutionary Syndicalism

Our inquiry into revisionism has brought us to the point where Bernstein, paradoxically, faces the same dilemma as all orthodox currents (including his arch-enemy Rosa Luxemburg): the economic base is incapable of assuring class unity *in the present*; while politics, the sole terrain where that present unity can be constructed, is unable

convincingly to guarantee the *class* character of the unitary subjects. This antinomy can be perceived more clearly in revolutionary syndicalism, which constituted a third type of response to the 'crisis of Marxism'. In Sorel the antinomy is drawn with particularly sharp lines, because he was more conscious than Bernstein, or any orthodox theoretician, of the true dimensions of the crisis and of the price theory had to pay in order to overcome it in a satisfactory manner. We find in Sorel not only the postulation of an area of 'contingency' and 'freedom', replacing the broken links in the chain of necessity, but also an effort to think the specificity of that 'logic of contingency', of that new terrain on which a field of totalizing effects is reconstituted. In this sense, it is instructive to refer to the key moments of his evolution.[54]

Even in the relatively orthodox beginnings of Sorel's Marxist career, both the sources of his political interest and the theoretical assumptions behind his analysis showed a marked originality and were considerably more sophisticated than those of a Kautsky or a Plekhanov. He was far from keeping to the established idea of an underlying historical mechanism that both unified a given form of society and governed the transitions between diverse forms. Indeed, Sorel's chief focus of interest — and hence his frequent reference to Vico — was the type of moral qualities which allowed a society to remain united and in a process of ascension. Having no guarantee of positivity, social transformations were penetrated by negativity as one of their possible destinies. It was not simply the case that a given form of society was opposed by a different, positive form destined to replace it; it also faced the possibility of its own decay and disintegration, as was the case of the ancient world. What Sorel found attractive in Marxism was not in fact a theory of the necessary laws of historical evolution, but rather the theory of the formation of a new agent — the proletariat — capable of operating as an agglutinative force that would reconstitute around itself a higher form of civilization and supplant declining bourgeois society.

This dimension of Sorel's thought is present from the beginning. In his writings prior to the revisionism controversy, however, it is combined with an acceptance of the tendencies of capitalist development postulated by orthodoxy. In these writings, Sorel sees Marxism as a 'new real metaphysics'. All real science, he argues, is constituted on the basis of an 'expressive support', which introduces an artificial element into analysis. This can be the origin of utopian or mythical errors, but in the case of industrial society there is a growing unification of the social terrain around the image of the

mechanism. The expressive support of Marxism — the social character of labour and the category of 'commodity', which increasingly eliminates qualitative disctinctions — is not an arbitrary base, because it is the moulding and constitutive paradigm of social relations. Socialism, qua collective appropriation of the means of production, represents the necessary culmination of the growing socialization and homogenization of labour. The increasing sway of this productivist paradigm relies on the laws of motion of capitalism, which are not questioned by Sorel at this point of his career. But even so, the agent conscious of its own interests — the one that will shift society to a higher form — is not constituted by a simple objective movement. Here another element of Sorel's analysis intervenes: Marxism is not for him merely a scientific analysis of society; it is also the ideology uniting the proletariat and giving a sense of direction to its struggles. The 'expressive supports', therefore, operate as elements aggregating and condensing the historical forces that Sorel will call blocs. It should be clear that, vis-à-vis orthodox Marxism, this analysis already shifts the terrain on a crucial point: the field of so-called 'objective laws' has lost its character as the rational substratum of the social, becoming instead the ensemble of forms through which a class constitutes itself as a dominant force and imposes its will on the rest of society. However, as the validity of these laws is not questioned, the distance from orthodoxy is ultimately not that considerable.

The separation begins when Sorel, starting from the revisionism debate, accepts *en bloc* Bernstein's and Croce's critiques of Marxism, but in order to extract very different conclusions. What is striking in Sorel is the *radicalism* with which he accepts the consequences of the 'crisis of Marxism'. Unlike Bernstein, he does not make the slightest attempt to replace orthodoxy's historical rationalism with an alternative evolutionist view, and the possibility that a form of civilization may disintegrate always remains open in his analysis. The *totality* as a founding rational substratum has been dissolved, and what now exists is *mélange*. Under these circumstances, how can one think the possibility of a process of recomposition? Sorel's answer centres on social classes, which no longer play the role of structural locations in an objective system, but are rather poles of reaggregation that he calls *'blocs'*. The possibility of unity in society is thus referred to the will of certain groups to impose their conception of economic organization. Sorel's philosophy, in fact — influenced by Nietzsche and in particular by Bergson — is one of action and will, in which the future is unforeseeable, and hinges on will. Furthermore, the level at which the forces in struggle find their unity is that of an ensemble of images or 'language figures' — foreshadowing the theory of myth. However, the consolidation of classes as historical forces cemented by a 'political idea' is reliant upon their confrontation with opposing forces. Once its identity ceased to be based on a process of infrastructural unity (at this level there is only *mélange*), the working class came to depend upon a *split* from the capitalist class which could only be completed in struggle against it. For Sorel, 'war' thus becomes the condition for working-class identity, and the search for common areas with the bourgeoisie can only lead to its own weakening. This consciousness of a *split* is a juridical consciousness — Sorel sees the construction of revolutionary subjectivity as a process in which the proletariat becomes aware of a set of rights opposing it to the class adversary and establishes a set of new institutions that will consolidate these rights.[55] Sorel, however, an ardent Dreyfusard, does not see a necessary contradiction between the plurality of working-class positions within the political and economic system: he is a partisan of democracy and of the political struggle of the proletariat, and even considers the possibility that the working class, while in no way *economically* linked to the middle sectors, could become a pole for their political regroupment.

Sorel's break with the category of historical necessity

We see a clear pattern in Sorel's evolution: like all the tendencies struggling against the quietism of orthodoxy, he is compelled to displace the constitutive moment of class unity to the political level; but as his break with the category of 'historical necessity' is more radical than in other tendencies, he also feels obliged to specify the founding bond of political unity. This can be seen even more clearly when we move to the third stage of his thought, which corresponds to the great disillusion following the triumph of the Dreyfusard coalition. Millerand's brand of socialism is integrated into the system; corruption spreads; there is a continuous loss of proletarian identity; and energy saps away from the only class which, in Sorel's eyes, has the possibility of a heroic future that will remodel declining bourgeois civilization. Sorel then becomes a decided enemy of democracy, seeing it as the main culprit for that dispersion and fragmentation of subject positions with which Marxism had to grapple at the turn of the century. It was therefore necessary, at whatever cost, to restore the split and to reconstitute the working class as a unitary subject. As is well known, this led Sorel to reject political struggle and to affirm the syndicalist myth of the general strike. '(We) know that the general strike is indeed what I have said: the *myth* in which Socialism is wholly comprised, *i.e.* a body of

the myth of the general strike

images capable of evoking instinctively all the sentiments which correspond to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by Socialism against modern society. Strikes have engendered in the proletariat the noblest, deepest and most moving sentiments that they possess; the general strike groups them all in a co-ordinated picture, and, by bringing them together, gives to each one of them its maximum of intensity; appealing to their painful memories of particular conflicts, it colours with an intense life all the details of the composition presented to consciousness. We thus obtain that intuition of Socialism which language cannot give us with perfect clearness — and we obtain it as a whole, perceive it instantaneously.'[56]

The syndicalist 'general strike', or the 'revolution' in Marx, is a myth in that it functions as an ideological point of condensation for proletarian identity, constituted on the basis of the dispersion of subject positions. It is the one type of recomposing link that remains once political struggle has been discarded, and once it is thought that the economy of monopolies and imperialism — seen by Sorel as involving a process of refeudalization — is heightening the tendencies toward disintegration. More generally, one recognizes the old theme of *anti-physis* in Sorel's affirmation that societies have a 'natural' tendency to decay, and that the tendency to greatness is 'artificial'. Thus, violence is the only force which can keep alive the antagonism described by Marx. 'If a capitalist class is energetic, it is constantly affirming its determination to defend itself; its frank and consistently reactionary attitude contributes at least as greatly as proletarian violence towards keeping distinct that cleavage between classes which is the basis of all Socialism.'[57] From this perspective, it matters little whether or not the general strike can be realized: its role is that of a regulating principle, which allows the proletariat to think the *mélange* of social relations as organized around a clear line of demarcation; the category of totality, eliminated as an objective description of reality, is reintroduced as a mythical element establishing the unity of the workers' consciousness. As de Paola has pointed out,[58] the notion of 'cognitive instrument' — or expressive support — whose artificiality was recognized from the beginning, has been broadened to include fictions.

For Sorel, then, the possibility of a dichotomous division of society is given not as a datum of the social structure, but as a construction at the level of the 'moral factors' governing group conflict. Here we come face to face with the problem that we have found whenever a Marxist tendency has attempted to break with economism and to establish class unity at some other level. Why

does this politically or mythically reconstituted subject have to be a *class* subject? But whereas the inadequacy of Rosa Luxemburg's or Labriola's rupture with economism created the conditions for the invisibility of the double void that appeared in their discourses, in Sorel's case the very radicality of his anti-economism made this void clearly visible. So much so that some of his followers, having abandoned hope of a revolutionary recovery of the working class, gave themselves to a search for some other substitute myth capable of assuring the struggle against bourgeois decadence. It is known that they found it in nationalism. This was the avenue through which a *part* of Sorel's intellectual legacy contributed to the rise of fascism. Thus, in 1912 his disciple Edouard Berth was able to affirm: 'In fact, it is necessary that the two-sided nationalist and syndicalist movement, both parallel and synchronic, should lead to the complete expulsion of the kingdom of gold and to the triumph of heroic values over the ignoble bourgeois materialism in which present-day Europe is suffocating. In other words, it is necessary that this awakening of Force and Blood against Gold — whose first symptoms have been revealed by Pareto and whose signal has been given by Sorel in his *Réflexions sur la violence* and by Maurras in *Si le coup de force est possible* — should conclude with the absolute defeat of plutocracy.'[59]

Of course, this is merely *one* of the possible derivations from Sorel's analysis, and it would be historically false and analytically unfounded to conclude that it is a necessary outcome.[60] Historically false, because Sorel's influence made itself felt in a number of directions — it was, for example, crucial in the formation of Gramsci's thought. Analytically unfounded, because such a teleological interpretation assumes that the transition from *class* to *nation* was necessarily determined by the very structure of Sorel's thought, whereas the latter's most specific and original moment was precisely the indeterminate, non-apriori character of the mythically constituted subjects. Furthermore, this indeterminacy is not a weakness of the theory, for it affirms that social reality itself is indeterminate (*mélange*) and that any unification turns on the recomposing practices of a *bloc*. In this sense, there is no *theoretical* reason why the mythical reconstitution should not move in the direction of fascism, but equally none to exclude its advance in another direction — such as Bolshevism, for example, which Sorel enthusiastically welcomed. The decisive point — and this is what makes Sorel the most profound and original thinker of the Second International — is that the very identity of social agents becomes indeterminate and that every

indeterminate and all subjectivity depends upon a struggle

'mythical' fixation of it depends upon a struggle. The concept of 'hegemony' as it emerged in Russian Social Democracy — which, as we shall see, also supposed a logic of contingency — was from this point of view much less radical. Neither Lenin nor Trotsky was capable of questioning the *necessity* for social agents to have a class character. Only with Gramsci did the two traditions converge in his concept of 'historical bloc', where the concept of 'hegemony' derived from Leninism meets in a new synthesis with the concept of 'bloc' derived from Sorel.

Notes to Chapter One

1. R. Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, London (n.d.), p. 48.
2. Ibid., pp. 73-74.
3. Ibid., pp. 64-65. Emphasis in the original.
4. It is important to note that Bernstein's intervention in the German debate on the mass strike (*Der Politische Massenstreik und die Politische Lage der Sozialdemokratie in Deutschland*) refers to two basic differences between East and West — the complexity and resistance of civil society in the West, and the weakness of the State in Russia — which will later be central to Gramsci's argument. For an overview of the debate, see M. Salvadori, 'La socialdemocrazia tedesca e la rivoluzione russa del 1905. Il dibattito sullo sciopero di massa e sulle differenze fra Oriente e Occidente', in E.J. Hobsbawm et al., eds., *Storia del marxismo*, Milan 1979, vol. 2, pp. 547-594.
5. Cf. T. Todorov, *Théories du symbole*, Paris 1977, p. 291. 'One could say that there is a condensation every time a single signifier leads us to comprehend more than one signified; or more plainly: *every time that the signified is more abundant than the signifier*. The great German mythologist Creuzer already defined the symbol in that way: by "the inadequacy of being and form, and by the overflowing of the content compared to its expression".'
6. Although Rosa Luxemburg's work is the highest point in the *theoretical* elaboration of the mechanism of mass strike, the latter was posed as the fundamental form of struggle by the entire *Neue Linke*. See for example, A. Pannekoek, 'Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics', in A. Smart, ed., *Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism*, London 1978, pp. 50-73.
7. R. Luxemburg, p. 30.
8. Recently, a number of studies have discussed the fatalist or non-fatalist character of Luxemburgist spontaneism. In our opinion, however, these have given excessive emphasis to a relatively secondary problem, such as the alternative between mechanical collapse and conscious intervention of the class. The assertion that capitalism will mechanically collapse is so absurd that, as far as we know, nobody has upheld it. The decisive problem is, instead, that of knowing whether the subject of the anti-capitalist struggle does or does not constitute its entire identity within the capitalist relations of production; and, in this respect, Rosa Luxemburg's position is unequivocably affirmative. For that reason, statements concerning the inevitability of socialism are not simply concessions to the rhetoric of the time or the result of a psychological need, as Norman Geras maintains (Cf. N. Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg*, London 1976, p. 36), but rather the nodal point giving meaning to her entire theoretical and strategic

structure. As, according to Rosa Luxemburg, the advent of socialism has to be entirely explained *on the basis of the logic of capitalist development*, the revolutionary subject can only be the working class. (On Luxemburg's dogmatic adherence to Marx's theory of pauperization as the basis for the revolutionary determination of the working class, see G. Badia, 'L'analisi dello sviluppo capitalistico in Rosa Luxemburg', Feltrinelli Institute, *Annali*, Milan, p. 252.)
9. K. Kautsky, *The Class Struggle*, New York 1971.
10. 'The object of his (Kautsky's) entire struggle against revisionism was to be that of preserving a notion of the programme not as a complex of determinate political demands — destined to establish the initiative of the party in specific phases of struggle, and as such modifiable from time to time — but as an indissoluble bloc of theory and politics, within which the two terms lost their respective fields of autonomy and Marxism became the finalist ideology of the proletariat.' (L. Paggi, 'Intellettuali, teoria e partito nel marxismo della Seconda Internazionale'. Introduction to M. Adler, *Il socialismo e gli intellettuali*, Bari 1974.)
11. K. Kautsky, pp. 185-6.
12. A. Przeworski, 'Proletariat into a Class. The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's *The Class Struggle* to Recent Controversies', *Politics and Society*, 7, 1977.
13. For example, at the 1893 Cologne Congress of the SPD, Legien protested against statements by *Vorwärts* according to which 'the struggle for political power remains the most important at every moment, while the economic struggle always finds the workers deeply divided, and the more hopeless the situation is, the more acute and damaging the division becomes. Small-scale struggle would also certainly have its advantages, but these would be of secondary importance for the final objective of the party.' Legien asked: 'Are these arguments from a party organ adequate to attract indifferent workers to the movement? I seriously doubt it.' Quoted from N. Benvenuti's anthology of documents on the relationship between party and trade unions, *Partito e Sindicati in Germania: 1880-1914)*, Milan 1981, pp. 70-1.
14. This way of approaching the problem of class unity, according to which deviations from a paradigm are conceptualized in terms of contingent 'obstacles' and 'impediments' to its full validity, continues to dominate certain historiographical traditions. Mike Davis, for example, in a stimulating and highly interesting article ('Why the US Working Class is Different', *New Left Review* 123, Sept.-Oct. 1980), while showing the specificities of the formation of the American working class, conceptualizes these as deviations from a normal pattern which, at some moment of history, will eventually impose itself.
15. We must make clear that when we speak of 'fragmentation' or 'dispersion', it is always with reference to a discourse which postulates the unity of the dispersed and fragmented elements. If these 'elements' are considered without reference to any discourse, the application to them of terms such as 'dispersion' or 'fragmentation' lacks any meaning whatsoever.
16. A. Labriola, *Saggi sul materialismo storico*, Rome 1968, p. 302.
17. Kautsky's main writings on this matter are contained in the anthology by Benvenuti, *Partito e Sindicati*.
18. 'The nature of the trade unions is not therefore defined from the beginning. They may become an instrument of class struggle, but they may also become a fetter on it.' Kautsky in Benvenuti, p. 186.
19. 'The party seeks . . . to reach a final objective which once and for all does away with capitalist exploitation. With regard to this final objective, trade union activity, despite its importance and indispensability, can well be defined as a labour of Sisyphus, not in the sense of useless work, but of work which is never concluded and

has always to be begun again. It follows from all this that where a strong social-democratic party exists and has to be reckoned with, it has a greater possibility than the trade unions to establish the necessary line for the class struggle, and hence to indicate the direction which individual proletarian organizations not directly belonging to the party should take. In this way the indispensable unity of the class struggle can be safeguarded.' Kautsky in Benvenuti, p. 195.

20. Cf. Lucio Colletti's remarks in *Tramonto dell'ideologia*, Rome 1980, pp. 173-76. Jacques Monod argues in *Le hasard et la nécessité* (Paris 1970, pp. 46-7): 'In trying to base upon the laws of nature the edifice of their social doctrines, Marx and Engels also had to make a more clear and deliberate use of the "animist projection" than Spencer had done . . . Hegel's postulate that the more general laws which govern the universe in its evolution are of a dialectical order, finds its place within a system which does not recognize any permanent reality other than mind . . . But to preserve these subjective "laws" as such, so as to make them rule a purely material universe, is to carry out the animist projection in all its clarity, with all its consequences, starting with the abandonment of the postulate of objectivity.'

21. This does not contradict our earlier assertion that for Kautsky immediate material interests cannot constitute the unity and identity of the class. The point here is that the 'scientific' instance, as a separate moment, determines the totality of implications of the workers' insertion into the productive process. Science, therefore, *recognizes* the interests of which the different class fragments, in their partiality, do not have full consciousness.

22. This obviously simplified the problem of calculation, in a situation in which the clarity and transparency of interests reduced the problem of strategies to the ideal conditions of a 'rational choice'. Michel de Certeau has recently stated: 'I call "strategy" the calculation of those relations of force that are possible from the moment in which a subject of will (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) is isolated from an "environment" . . . Political, economic and scientific rationality is constructed upon this strategic model. Contrary to this, I call "tactics", a calculation that cannot count upon something of its own, nor therefore upon a frontier distinguishing the other as a visible totality.' *L'invention du quotidien*, Paris 1980, vol. 1, pp. 20-1. In the light of this distinction, it is clear that, inasmuch as the 'interests' of the Kautskian subjects are transparent, every calculation is of a strategic nature.

23. Cf. E. Matthias, *Kautsky e il kautskismo*, Rome 1971, *passim*.

24. Symmachos (K. Kautsky), 'Verschwörung oder Revolution?', *Der Sozialdemokrat*, 20/2/1881, quoted in H.J. Steinberg, 'Il partito e la formazione dell' ortodossia marxista', in E.J. Hobsbawm et al., vol. 2, p. 190.

25. See Perry Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review* 100, Nov. 1976/Jan. 1977.

26. Guglielmo Ferrero, *L'Europa giovane. Studi e viaggi nei paesi del Nord*, Milan 1897, p. 95.

27. Cf. Andrew Arato, 'L'antinomia del marxismo classico: marxismo e filosofia', in E.J. Hobsbawm et al., vol. 2, pp. 702-7.

28. G. Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, New York 1969, p. 80.

29. This relation between the logic of necessity and quietism was clearly perceived by the critics of orthodoxy. Sorel affirmed: 'Reading the works of the democratic socialists, one is surprised by the certainty with which they have their future at their disposal; they know the world is moving towards an inevitable revolution, of which they know the general consequences. Some of them have such a faith in their own theory that they end up in quietism.' Georges Sorel, *Saggi di critica del marxismo*, Palermo 1903, p. 59.

30. Antonio Labriola, 'In memoria del Manifesto dei Comunisti', in *Saggi del materialismo storico*, pp. 34-5.

31. With regard to Labriola's intervention in the debate on the revision of Marxism, see Roberto Racinaro, *La crisi del marxismo nella revisione de fine secolo*, Bari 1978, *passim*.

32. Cf. Nicola Badaloni, *Il marxismo de Gramsci*, Turin 1975, pp. 27-8.

33. Ibid., p. 13.

34. According to Badaloni, this is the solution which Labriola should have followed: 'Perhaps the alternative proposed by him was erroneous and the true alternative lay in a deepening and development of historical morphology, which was excessively simplified in Engels's exposition.' Badaloni, p. 27. With this, of course, the dualism would have been suppressed, but at the price of eliminating the area of morphological indeterminacy whose existence was essential for Labriola's theoretical project.

35. Otto Bauer, 'Was ist Austro-Marxismus', *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 3/11/1927. Translated in the anthology of Austro-Marxist texts: Tom Bottomore and Patrick Goode, *Austro-Marxism*, Oxford 1978, pp. 45-8.

36. Editorial in the first number of *Der Kampf*, 1907-8, reproduced in Bottomore and Goode, pp. 52-6.

37. Ibid., p. 55.

38. On this discussion, and the general politico-intellectual trajectory of Austro-Marxism, see the excellent introduction by Giacomo Marramao to his anthology of Austro-Marxist texts, *Austro-marxismo e socialismo di sinistra fra le due guerre*, Milan 1977.

39. 'To see the process of transformation of capitalist society into socialist society no longer as following the tempo of a unified and homogeneous logico-historical mechanism, but as the result of a multiplication and proliferation of endogenous factors of mutation of the relations of production and power — this implies, at the theoretical level, a major effort of empirico-analytical disaggregation of Marx's morphological prediction, and, at the political level, a supersession of the mystifying alternative between "reform" and "revolution". However, it does not in any way involve an evolutionist type of option, as if socialism were realizable through homeopathic doses.' Giacomo Marramao, 'Tra bolscevismo e socialdemocrazia: Otto Bauer e la cultura politica dell' austro-marxismo', in E.J. Hobsbawm et al., vol. 3, p. 259.

40. See Max Adler, *Il socialismo e gli intellettuali*.

41. 'The peculiarity of revisionism is misunderstood when it is a-critically placed on the same plane as reformism or when it is simply viewed as the expression, since 1890, of the social-reformist practice of the party. The problem of revisionism must, therefore, substantially limit itself to the person of Bernstein and cannot be extended to either Vollmar or Höchberg.' Hans-Josef Steinberg, *Il socialismo tedesco da Bebel a Kautsky*, Rome 1979, p. 118.

42. On the relationship between revisionism and trade unions, see Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism*, London 1962, pp. 137-140.

43. Bernstein's defence of the mass strike as a defensive weapon provoked the following commentary by the trade union leader Bömelburg: 'At one time, Eduard Bernstein does not know how far he ought to move to the right, another time he talks about political mass strike. These *litterati* . . . are doing a disservice to the labour movement.' Quoted in Peter Gay, p. 138.

44. Leonardo Paggi, p. 29.

45. Cf. Lucio Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, NLB, London 1972, p. 62.

46. E. Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*, New York 1978, pp. 15-6.
47. Ibid., p. 103.
48. E. Bernstein, *Die heutige Sozialdemokratie in Theorie und Praxis*, p. 133. Quoted by P. Gay, p. 207.
49. P. Gay, p. 120.
50. Earlier we distinguished between *reformism* and *revisionism*. We must now establish a second distinction between *reformism* and *gradualism*. The basic point of differentiation is that reformism is a political and trade-union *practice*, whereas gradualism is a *theory* about the transition to socialism. Revisionism is distinguished from both insofar as it is a critique of classical Marxism based on the autonomization of the political. These distinctions are important if, as we argue in the text, each of these terms does not necessarily imply the others and has an area of theoretical and political effects which may lead it in very different directions.
51. Hence his acceptance of a naive and technologistic notion of the economy, which is in the last instance identical to that found in Plekhanov. Cf. Colletti, pp. 63ff.
52. On Bernstein's concept of *Entwicklung* see Vernon L. Lidtke, 'Le premesse teoriche del socialismo in Bernstein', Feltrinelli Institute, *Annali*, 15th year, 1973, pp. 155-8.
53. The sense of our critique should not be misunderstood. We do not question the need for ethical judgements in the founding of a socialist politics — Kautsky's absurd denial of this, and his attempt to reduce the adherence to socialism to a mere awareness of its historical necessity, has been subjected to a devastating critique. Our argument is that from the presence of ethical judgements it does not follow that these should be attributed to a transcendental subject, constituted outside every discursive condition of emergence.
54. Among modern works on Sorel, we found the following particularly useful: Michele Maggi, *La formazione dell' egemonia in Francia*, Bari 1977; Michel Charzat, *Georges Sorel et la révolution au XXe siècle*, Paris 1977; Jacques Julliard, *Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme d'action directe*, Paris 1971; Gregorio de Paola, 'Georges Sorel, dalla metafisica al mito', in E.J. Hobsbawm et al., vol. 2, pp. 662-692; and with serious reservations, Zeev Sternhell, *Ni droite ni gauche. L'idéologie fasciste en France*, Paris 1983.
55. See Shlomo Sand, 'Lutte de classes et conscience juridique dans la pensée de Sorel', *Esprit* 3, March 1983, pp. 20-35.
56. G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, New York 1961, p. 127.
57. Ibid., p. 182.
58. G. de Paola, p. 688.
59. Quoted by Z. Sternhell, p. 105.
60. This is what weakens Sternhell's analysis (*Ni droite ni gauche*), despite his richness of information. The history presented by him seems organized around an extremely simple teleology, according to which every rupture with a materialist or positivist view can only be considered a forerunner of fascism.

2
Hegemony: The Difficult Emergence of a New Political Logic

It is necessary at this point to clarify the relationship between the double void that emerged in the essentialist discourse of the Second International, and the peculiar dislocation of stages to which the problematic of hegemony will constitute a political response. Let us begin by specifying those characteristics of the double void which make possible its comparison with the hegemonic suture.[1] Firstly, that void appears in the form of a dualism: its founding discourse does not seek to determine differential degrees of efficacity *within* a topography of the social, but to set limits on the embracing and determining capacity of *every* topographical structuration. Hence such formulations as: 'the infrastructure does not determine everything, because consciousness or will also intervenes in history'; or 'the general theory cannot account for concrete situations, because every prediction has a morphological character'. This dualism is constructed through a hypostasis of the indeterminate *qua* indeterminate: entities which escape structural determination are understood as the negative reverse of the latter. This is what makes dualism a relation of frontiers. If we observe closely, however, this response does not break at all with structural determinism: it merely comes down to a limitation of its effects. For example, it is perfectly possible to argue both that there are vast areas of social life which escape economic determinism, and that, in the limited area in which its effects are operative, the action of the economy must be understood according to a determinist paradigm. Nonetheless there is an obvious problem with this argument: in order to affirm that something is *absolutely* determined and to establish a clear line separating it from the indeterminate, it is not sufficient to establish the *specificity* of the determination; its *necessary character* must also be asserted. For this reason the supposed dualism is a spurious one: its two poles are not at the same level. The determinate, in establishing its specificity as necessary, sets the limits of variation of the indeterminate. The

determination must be necessary, not just specific

indeterminate is thus reduced to a mere *supplement*[2] of the determinate.

Secondly, as we have already seen, this apparent dualism responds to the fact that structural determination does not provide the foundation for a political logic in which a struggle can be waged here and now against tendencies towards fragmentation. It is immediately apparent, however, that the only terrain permitting the specificity of such a logic to be thought has been erased from the picture: as every theoretically determinable specificity is referred to the terrain of the infrastructure and the resulting class system, any other logic disappears into the general terrain of contingent variation, or is referred to entities escaping all theoretical determination, such as will or ethical decision.

Thirdly, and finally, in the Second International's discourse, the *class* unity of social agents rested upon the ever weaker base of mirror play: economic fragmentation was unable to constitute class unity and referred us on to political recomposition; yet political recomposition was unable to found the *necessary* class character of social agents.

Combined Development and the Logic of the Contingent

Let us now compare this ensemble of fissures, present in the theoretical discourse of the Second International, with the dislocations that the concept of hegemony will attempt to suture. Perry Anderson[3] has studied the emergence of the concept of hegemony in Russian Social Democracy — the theoreticians of the Comintern took it from there, and it reached Gramsci through them — and the results of his investigation are clear: the concept of hegemony fills a space left vacant by a crisis of what, according to Plekhanov's 'stagist' conception, should have been a normal historical development. For that reason, the hegemonization of a task or an ensemble of political forces belongs to the terrain of historical contingency. In European Social Democracy, the main problem had been the dispersion of working-class positions and the shattering of the unity postulated among these by Marxist theory. The very degree of maturity of bourgeois civilization reflected its structural order within the working class, subverting the latter's unity. By contrast, in the theory of hegemony as it was posed in the Russian context, the limits of an insufficiently developed bourgeois civilization forced the working class to come out of itself and to take on tasks that were not

its own. The problem, then, was no longer to assure class unity, but to maximize the political efficacity of working-class struggle in a historical terrain where contingency arose from the structural weakness of the bourgeoisie to assume its own tasks.

Let us examine how the steps leading to the emergence of the concept of 'hegemony' were structured. In the writings of Plekhanov and Axelrod, the term 'hegemony' was introduced to describe the process whereby the impotence of the Russian bourgeoisie to carry through its 'normal' struggle for political liberty forced the working class to intervene decisively to achieve it. There was thus a split between the class nature of the task and the historical agent carrying it out. This created a space of indeterminacy whose dimensions would vary considerably — they were minimal in Plekhanov, and expanded to a maximum in Trotsky. But at any event, this space was to be the crucial point from which the various revolutionary orientations divided. The Russian revolution — the revolution 'against *Capital*', as Gramsci called it — had to justify its strategy by broadening to the maximum the space of indeterminacy characteristic of the struggle for hegemony. Consequently, an opposition arose between a *necessary interior* (corresponding to the tasks of the class in a 'normal' development) and a *contingent exterior* (the ensemble of tasks alien to the class nature of the social agents which they had to assume at a given moment).

There are significant differences between these historical dislocations of the orthodox paradigm and those we found in the case of Western Europe. In both the dislocation produced a *displacement*; but whereas in Western Europe this involved a displacement of levels from the economic to the political within the same class, the displacement was much greater in Russia because it occurred between different classes. In Western Europe — with the exception of Austro-Marxism, where a multiplicity of national situations was presented as a dislocation of *stages* — we were confronted with a dissociation of the structural moments of a synchronic paradigm. Hence the thinking of the dissociation could not, as in Russian Social Democracy, take the form of a narrative. Finally, whereas the dislocation and crisis of the paradigm was a negative phenomenon in the other cases, in Russia it became a positive phenomenon: the disharmony between bourgeois tasks and the bourgeoisie's capacity to carry them out was the stepping-stone for the seizure of political power by the proletariat. For the same reason, the European forms of dislocation could be conceptualized purely through reference to negative categories — transience and contingency — which had to

Bourgeois tasks do not cease to be bourgeois just because they are assumed by prolet.

be overcome; but in the Russian case, since the dislocations expressed themselves as positive conjunctures permitting the advance of the working class — a certain way of infiltrating itself into history — it became necessary to characterize the new type of relationship between the working class and the alien tasks it had to assume at a given moment. This anomalous relation was called 'hegemony'.

We must now examine the specificity of the hegemonic relation in the discourse of Russian Social Democracy. In fact, 'hegemony' here designates, more than a relation, a *space* dominated by the tension between two very different relations: a) that of the hegemonized task and its 'natural' class agent; and b) that of the hegemonized task and the class hegemonizing it. If the coexistence of these two relations under imprecise conceptual forms is sufficient to give the term 'hegemony' a referential space, the precise determination of their logical articulation is a *sine qua non* for the conversion of 'hegemony' into a theoretical category. In this case, however, one has only to examine the two relations with care, in order to observe that they are not logically articulated at any point.

First of all, in the struggle against absolutism, none of the Russian Social Democratic analyses suggests that bourgeois tasks cease to be bourgeois when they are assumed by the proletariat. Class identity is constituted on the basis of the relations of production: for orthodoxy, it is within that primary structure that the antagonism between working class and bourgeoisie arises. This primary structure organizes itself like a narrative — we may call it *first narrative* — given that its movement is contradictory and tends to its self-elimination. In the structuring of this narrative, the laws of capitalist development are the plot, while the characters, with perfectly assigned roles, are the proletarian and capitalist classes. Now, the clarity of this history is marred by the emergence of an anomaly: the bourgeois class cannot fulfil its role, and this has to be taken over by the other character. We may call this role substitution the *second narrative* — in Trotsky's terms, the permanent revolution. What is the structural relation between these two narratives? It is sufficient to read briefly through the strategic debate, to convince ourselves that their articulation occurs in a theoretical terrain marked by the dominance of the first. Three considerations are enough to prove the point. (1.) The order of appearance of the characters is not altered by the second narrative: if the bourgeoisie is incapable of fulfilling 'its' tasks, these necessarily pass to the proletariat — yet the necessity of this transfer is only evident if one takes for granted the totality of the

(1)

evolutionary schema constituted at the level of the first narrative. (2.) The class nature of the tasks is not altered by the fact that they are assumed by one class or the other — the democratic tasks remain bourgeois even when their historical agent is the working class. (3.) The very identity of the social agents is determined by their structural positions in the first narrative. Thus there is an unequal relation between the two narratives: hegemonic relations *supplement* class relations. Using a distinction of Saussure's, we could say that hegemonic relations are always facts of *parole*, while class relations are facts of *langue*.

(2)

(3)

The sense and identity of the hegemonic task and the agents which put it into effect are totally contained within relation (a), as defined above. Hence the relation between the two components of relation (b) can only be one of *exteriority*. Now, a relation of exteriority can be considered under two aspects: as a relation of *exteriority* and as a *relation* of exteriority. The first aspect presents no difficulty: a relation is one of exteriority if the identity of its components is entirely constituted outside the relation. As to the relational moment, in order that the relation may be one of strict exteriority, it is necessary that no conceptual specificity should be attributable to it. (Otherwise, such specificity would become a structurally definable moment. And since this would require a special theory of its forms of articulation with other structural moments constituting the class as such, the identity of the class would inevitably be modified.) In other words, the relation of exteriority can only be thought of as *pure contingency*. This explains why the spurious dualism found in the discourse of the Second International is, for the same reasons, reproduced in the theory of hegemony. Relation (a) and relation (b) cannot be conceptually articulated, simply because the latter has no positive conceptual specificity whatsoever, and is reduced to a contingently variant terrain of relations between agents constituted outside itself. But, it could be argued, in Russian Social Democracy, from Plekhanov and Axelrod to Lenin and Trotsky, there was a positive and increasingly complex theory of hegemony! This is true, but it is not an objection to our argument. For such positivity and complexity refer to the *typology of situations* making possible hegemonic relations among classes, and to the *variety of relations* among social groups acting in a given conjuncture. Yet, the *specificity of the hegemonic link as such* is never discussed or, rather, there is a subtle sleight-of-hand making it invisible.

In order to see how this sleight-of-hand occurs, we should not focus on those approaches for which 'normal' forms of development

Specificity of hegemonic link made invisible in 2nd Int. the

Trotsky's dislocation of the stagist paradigm

dominate the course of history and the hegemonic moment occupies a clearly marginal place. (This is the case with Plekhanov, who saw intervention by the working class as a means of pressing the bourgeoisie to fulfil its own tasks.) More pertinent are those other approaches in which the hegemonic transference of tasks constitutes the very substance of revolution, so that it is comparatively more difficult for the specificity of the hegemonic link to be made invisible. In this sense Trotsky's texts are of exemplary clarity, since they place extreme emphasis on the peculiarities of Russian development as opposed to the course of Western European capitalism. As is well known, in a number of writings published before and after the 1905 Russian Revolution,[4] Trotsky raised the possibility of a working-class government that would undertake a direct transition to socialism, as against the Menshevik perspective for a bourgeois-democratic republic following the collapse of Tsarism, and the Bolshevik notion of a workers' and peasants' government that would restrict its reforms to a bourgeois-democratic mould. This possibility was inscribed in the very peculiarities of Russia's historical development: weakness of the bourgeoisie and urban civilization; disproportionate growth of the State as a military–bureaucratic apparatus becoming autonomous from classes; insertion of advanced forms of capitalism resulting from the 'privilege of backwardness'; freshness of the Russian proletariat, due to the absence of traditions tying it to a complex civil society; and so on. As the bourgeoisie had arrived too late to assume the historical tasks of the struggle against absolutism, the proletariat became the key agent for their realization. This dislocation in the stagist paradigm, and the supersession of the resulting hegemonic transference, were the very axis of Trotsky's theory of the revolution.

It would seem that no greater centrality could have been given to the hegemonic relation, as the very possibility of revolution revolved around it. However, we should look more closely at the forms which this centrality assumes in Trotsky's discourse. On two fundamental points his analysis is confronted with the specificity of social relations that seem to resist strict class reductionism — that is, the necessary character of relation (a) — and on both points he shrinks from a theoretical advance that would determine this specificity. The first point concerns the correlation between the structural weakness of the bourgeoisie and the exceptional role played by the State in the historical formation of Russian society. Faced with the theoretical challenge posed by the Bolshevik historian Pokrovsky — who, from a crudely economist viewpoint, insists that to grant such

importance to the State would be to detach it from its class bases — Trotsky fails to reply with a theoretical analysis of relative State autonomy in different capitalist social formations, appealing instead to the greenness of life against the greyness of theory: 'Comrade Pokrovsky's thought is gripped in a vice of rigid social categories which he puts in place of living historical forces . . . Where there are no "special features", there is no history, but only a sort of pseudo-materialist geometry. Instead of studying the living and changing matter of economic development, it is enough to notice a few outward symptoms and adapt them to a few ready-made clichés.'[5] With this, the 'special feature' constituted by the autonomization of the State from social classes is hereby placed on a terrain which severely limits its effects from the beginning: we are now dealing with *circumstances*, which belong to an eminently factual order and are capable of being incorporated into a *story* — hence the predominantly narrative tone of Trotsky's analysis — but which cannot be grasped conceptually.

This would not necessarily be negative if *all* social determinations were subjected to the same treatment, because Trotsky would then have to narrate — at the same level of Russia's specificities — the processes through which the economy manages to determine, in the last instance, all other social relations. This, however, does not happen; although there is a narration of the 'specificities', the features considered common to every capitalist social formation are not subjected to a narrative treatment. That the economy determines in the last instance the processes of history is something which, for Trotsky, is established at a level as extra-historical as Pokrovsky's, and in as dogmatic a manner. An order of 'essences' inescapably confronts an order of 'circumstances', and both are reproduced within the same social agents. What is liable in them to historical variation is reduced to that ensemble of characteristics which makes them deviate from a normal paradigm — the weakness of the bourgeoisie in Russia, the freshness of its proletariat, etc. These 'special features', however, do not in any way undermine the validity of the paradigm: this continues to produce its effects insofar as the social agents define their basic identity in relation to it, and insofar as the 'special features' present themselves merely as empirical advantages or disadvantages for the attainment of class objectives pre-established at the level of 'essences'.

This is clearly revealed in the second fundamental point where Trotsky's analysis touches the limits of the reductionist conception of classes: in the analysis of hegemony. As we saw earlier — and this

can also be applied to Trotsky's analysis — there is a split between the 'natural' class agent of a historical task and the concrete agent that puts it into effect. But we also saw that, for the agent which undertakes it, the class nature of a task is not altered by this split. The agent does not, therefore, *identify* with the task undertaken; its relation with that task remains at the level of a circumstantial calculation — even when this may involve 'circumstances' of epochal dimensions. The splitting of the task is an empirical phenomenon that does not affect its nature; the agent's connection to the task is also empirical, and a permanent schism develops between an 'inside' and an 'outside' of the agent's identity. Never for a moment do we find in Trotsky the idea that the democratic and anti-absolutist identity of the masses constitutes a specific subject position which different classes can articulate and that, in doing so, they modify their own nature. The unfulfilled democratic tasks are simply a stepping-stone for the working class to advance towards its strictly class objectives. In this way, the conditions are created not only for the specificity of the hegemonic link to be systematically conjured away (given that its factual or circumstantial character eschews any conceptual construction), but also for its disappearance to be made invisible. Indeed, the insertion of the hegemonic relation into a *narrative* of adjustments and recompositions, into a succession which cannot be subsumed under the principle of repetition, seems to give a *meaning* to that conceptually evanescent presence. Thus, the historico-narrative form in which Russian specificities are presented, plays an ambiguous role: if, on the one hand, it limits them to the terrain of the circumstantial, on the other, the fact that they can be thought, even under the weak form of a narrative, gives them a principle of organization, a certain *discursive presence*. Yet this is an extremely ephemeral presence, since the saga of hegemony concludes very quickly: there is no specificity, either for Trotsky or for Lenin, which can assure the survival of a Soviet State unless a socialist revolution breaks out in Europe, unless the victorious working classes of the advanced industrial countries come to the assistance of the Russian revolutionaries. Here the 'abnormality' of the dislocation of stages in Russia links up with the 'normal' development of the West; what we have called a 'second narrative' is reintegrated into the 'first narrative'; 'hegemony' rapidly finds its limits.

'Class Alliances': Between Democracy and Authoritarianism

This conception of the hegemonic link as external to the class identity of the agents is not, of course, exclusive to Trotskyism but characterizes the whole Leninist tradition. For Leninism, hegemony involves *political leadership* within a *class alliance*. The political character of the hegemonic link is fundamental, implying as it does that the terrain on which the link establishes itself is different from that on which the social agents are constituted. As the field of the relations of production is the specific terrain of class constitution, the presence of classes in the political field can only be understood as a *representation of interests*. Through their representative parties they unite under the leadership of one class, in an alliance against a common enemy. This circumstantial unity does not, however, affect the identity of the classes comprising the alliance, since their identity is constituted around 'interests' which are in the end strictly incompatible ('strike together but march separately'). The identity of the social agents, rationalistically conceived under the form of 'interests', and the transparency of the means of representation in relation to what is represented, are the two conditions which permit the exteriority of the hegemonic link to be established. This exteriority was at the root of those paradoxical situations in which the communist militant typically found himself. Often in the vanguard of a struggle for democratic liberties, he nevertheless could not identify with them since he would be the first to abolish them once the 'bourgeois-democratic' stage was completed.

At this point, it is important to note the ambiguity and the contradictory effects that stem from the centrality of hegemony in Leninist discourse. On the one hand, the concept is undoubtedly associated with the more authoritarian and negative tendencies of the Leninist tradition, for it postulates a clear separation within the masses between the leading sectors and those which are led. (This separation is evidently absent in the revolutionary strategy of Kautskian orthodoxy, in which a complete coincidence between political leadership and social base leaves no necessity for hegemonic recompositions.) But, on the other hand, the hegemonic relation entails a conception of politics which is *potentially* more democratic than anything found within the tradition of the Second International. Tasks and demands which, in classist economism, would have corresponded to different stages are now seen to coexist in the same historical conjuncture. This results in the acceptance of current political validity for a plurality of antagonisms and points of rupture,

so that revolutionary legitimacy is no longer exclusively concentrated in the working class. A structural dislocation thus emerges between 'masses' and 'classes', given that the line separating the former from the dominant sectors is not juxtaposed with class exploitation. Combined and uneven development becomes the terrain which for the first time allows Marxism to render more complex its conception of the nature of social struggles.

How, then, are we to account for this paradox: that at the very moment when the democratic dimension of the mass struggle was being enlarged, an ever more vanguardist and anti-democratic conception asserted itself in socialist political practice? Quite simply, by the fact that the ontological privilege granted to the working class by Marxism was transferred from the social base to the political leadership of the mass movement. In the Leninist conception, the working class and its vanguard do not transform their class identity by fusing it with the multiple democratic demands that are politically recomposed by the hegemonic practices; instead, they regard these demands as stages, as necessary yet transitory steps in pursuit of their own class objectives. Under such conditions, the relations between 'vanguard' and 'masses' cannot but have a predominantly external and manipulative character. Hence, to the extent that democratic demands become more diverse and the terrain of mass struggle more complex, a vanguard that continues to identify with the 'objective interests of the working class' must increasingly broaden the hiatus between its own identity and that of the sectors it seeks to lead. The very expansion of the democratic potential of the mass movement gives rise, in a strictly classist conception, to an increasingly authoritarian practice of politics. While democratization of the mass struggle depends upon a proliferation of points of rupture which overflow class boundaries, political authoritarianism emerges at the moment when, in order to ground the necessity of *class* hegemony, a distinction is established between leaders and led within mass movements. If this distinction were based upon a greater practical capacity for self-organization in the struggle for objectives shared by the entire movement, the consequences would not necessarily be authoritarian. But, as we have seen, it is actually posed in very different terms: one sector *knows* the underlying movement of history, and knows therefore the temporary character of the demands uniting the masses as a whole. The centrality attributed to the working class is not a practical but an *ontological* centrality, which is, at the same time, the seat of an *epistemological* privilege: as the 'universal' class, the proletariat — or rather its party — is the

depository of science. At this point, the schism between class identity and the identity of the masses becomes permanent. The *possibility* of this authoritarian turn was, in some way, present from the beginnings of Marxist orthodoxy; that is to say, from the moment in which a limited actor — the working class — was raised to the status of 'universal class'. If none of the theoreticians of the Second International advanced in this authoritarian direction, this was because for them the political centrality of the working class had to coincide with the proletarianization of the other social strata, and there was thus no room for a schism between *class* and *masses*. All that was necessary for the authoritarian turn to become inevitable, however, was that the seizure of power should be conceived as an act of masses broader than the working class, while the latter's political centrality was upheld as a principle *in classical terms*.

Let us now bring together several links in our argument. It has become clearer why the tension between the two relations embraced by the concept of hegemony — the relation between the hegemonized task and the class hegemonizing it, and the relation between the hegemonized task and the class that is its 'natural' agent — could never be resolved in an effective conceptual articulation. The condition for the maintenance of working-class unity and identity on the terrain of economist stagism — the only terrain capable of constituting it as a 'universal class' — was that the hegemonized tasks should not transform the identity of the hegemonic class, but enter into a merely external and factual relation with it. Moreover, the only way of affirming the external character of this relation was to tighten the bond between the hegemonized task and its 'natural' class agent. The terrain of hegemonic relations was, therefore, one of essentially pragmatic discourses. All the terminological innovations which Leninism and the Comintern introduce to Marxism belong to military vocabulary (tactical alliance, strategic line, so many steps forward and so many back); none refers to the very structuring of the social relations, which Gramsci would later address with his concepts of historical bloc, integral State, and so forth.

Now, this tension between the two relations embraced by the concept of hegemony is not distinct from the ambiguity we have located between a democratic and an authoritarian practice of hegemony. The relation between a hegemonic class and a democratic task or demand assumes an external, manipulative character only insofar as this task is bonded to a different class, and to a necessary stage within the evolutionist paradigm. Conversely, the democratic potential can be developed only if this bond is broken, only if the

conditions disappear which permitted the emergence of a rigid separation between leaders and led within the masses. At this point, we must present the conditions which would allow the original ambiguity to be overcome in either a democratic or an authoritarian practice of hegemony.

Democratic practice. As we have indicated, the terrain of hegemonic recomposition carries a potential for the democratic expansion and deepening of socialist political practice. Without hegemony, socialist practice can focus only on the demands and interests of the working class. But insofar as the dislocation of stages compels the working class to act on a *mass* terrain, it must abandon its class ghetto and transform itself into the articulator of a multiplicity of antagonisms and demands stretching beyond itself. From everything we have said, it is evident that the deepening of a mass democratic practice — which shuns vanguardist manipulation and an external characterization of the relation between class hegemony and democratic tasks — can be achieved only if it is recognized that these tasks do not have a necessary class character and if stagism is renounced in a thoroughgoing manner. It is necessary to break with the view that democratic tasks are bonded to a bourgeois stage — only then will the obstacle preventing a permanent articulation between socialism and democracy be eliminated. Four fundamental consequences follow from this. First, the very identity of classes is transformed by the hegemonic tasks they take on themselves: the rigid line of demarcation between the internal and the external has fallen. Second, inasmuch as the democratic demands of the masses lose their necessary class character, the field of hegemony ceases to involve a maximization of effects based on a zero-sum game among classes; the notion of 'class alliance' is also clearly insufficient, since hegemony supposes the construction of the very identity of social agents, and not just a rationalist coincidence of 'interests' among preconstituted agents. Thirdly, the field of politics can no longer be considered a 'representation of interests', given that the so-called 'representation' modifies the nature of what is represented. (In fact, the very notion of representation as transparency becomes untenable. What is actually called into question here, is the base/superstructure model itself.) Finally, insofar as the identity of social agents ceases to be exclusively constituted through their insertion in the relations of production, and becomes a precarious articulation among a number of subject positions, what is being implicitly challenged is the identification between social agents and classes.

Authoritarian practice. Here the conditions are the opposite. The

class nature of every demand or task has to be fixed a priori. There are bourgeois-democratic demands, petty-bourgeois demands, etc., and their relative progressiveness is established through a political calculation which analyses every conjuncture in terms of the traditional model of stages and the changes introduced by their uneven combination. There is, obviously, a complete separation between the hegemonic tasks of the working class and its class identity. The military conception of politics dominates the whole range of strategic calculations. But since the real working class is, of course, far from fully identifying with its 'historical interests', the dissociation becomes permanent between the materiality of the class and the political instance representing its 'true identity'. From Lenin's *What is to be Done* to the Bolshevization of the Communist parties under the Comintern, this line of demarcation becomes increasingly rigid and is reflected in the growing authoritarian turn of Communist politics. It is important to clarify what makes this turn inevitable. We do not seek to deny the need for political mediation in the socialist determination of the working class; even less, to oppose it with a workerism based upon the myth of a spontaneously socialist determination of the class. What is decisive, however, is *how* the nature of this political link is understood; and Leninism evidently makes no attempt to construct, through struggle, a mass identity not predetermined by any necessary law of history. On the contrary, it maintains that there is a 'for itself' of the class accessible only to the enlightened vanguard — whose attitude towards the working class is therefore purely pedagogical. The roots of authoritarian politics lie in this interweaving of science and politics. As a consequence, there is no longer any problem in considering the party as representative of the class — not of the class as flesh and blood, of course, but of that entelechy constituted by its 'historical interests'. Whereas the democratic practice of hegemony increasingly calls into question the transparency of the process of representation, the authoritarian practice has laid the ground for the relation of representation to become the basic political mechanism. Once every political relation is conceived as a relation of representation, a progressive substitutionism moves from class to party (representation of the objective interests of the proletariat) and from party to Soviet State (representation of the world interests of the Communist movement). A martial conception of class struggle thus concludes in an eschatological epic.

As we have seen, the roots of this transference of class unity to the political sphere go back to Second International orthodoxy. In Leninism as in Kautskyism, the constitutive character of the political

hegemonic tasks become central to communist strategy, as they are bound up with conditions of development of world capitalist system

moment does not entail that a major role is attributed to superstructures, because the privilege granted to the party is not 'topographical' but 'epistemological': it is founded not on the efficacy of the political level in constructing social relations, but on the scientific monopoly enjoyed by a given class perspective. This monopoly guaranteed, at a theoretical level, the overcoming of the split between the visible tendencies of capitalism and its underlying evolution. The difference between Kautskyism and Leninism is that for the former the split is purely temporary and internal to the class, and the process of overcoming it inscribed in the endogenous tendencies of capitalist accumulation; while for Leninism, the split is the terrain of a structural dislocation between 'class' and 'masses' which permanently defines the conditions of political struggle in the imperialist era.

This last point is decisive: hegemonic tasks become increasingly central to communist strategy, as they are bound up with the very conditions of development of the world capitalist system. For Lenin, the world economy is not a mere economic fact, but a political reality: it is an imperialist chain. The breaking points appear not at those links which are most advanced from the point of view of the contradiction between forces and relations of production, but instead, at those where the greatest number of contradictions have accumulated, and where the greatest number of tendencies and antagonisms — belonging, in the orthodox view, to diverse phases — merge into a ruptural unity.[6] This implies, however, that the revolutionary process can be understood only as a political articulation of dissimilar elements: there is no revolution without a social complexity external to the simple antagonism among classes; in other words, there is no revolution without hegemony. This moment of political articulation becomes more and more fundamental when one encounters, in the stage of monopoly capitalism, a growing dissolution of old solidarities and a general politicization of social relations. Lenin clearly perceives the transition to a new bourgeois mass politics — labelled by him Lloyd Georgism[7] — which is profoundly transforming the historical arena of class struggle. This possibility of unsuspected articulations, altering the social and political identities that are permissible and even thinkable, increasingly dissolves the obviousness of the logical categories of classical stagism. Trotsky will draw the conclusion that combined and uneven development is the historical condition of our time. This can only mean an unceasing expansion of hegemonic tasks — as opposed to purely class tasks, whose terrain shrinks like a wild ass's

skin. But if there is no historical process which does not involve a 'non-orthodox' combination of elements, what then is a normal development?

Communist discourse itself became increasingly dominated by the hegemonic character which every political initiative acquired in the new historical terrain of the imperialist era. As a result, however, it tended to oscillate in a contradictory manner between what we have called a democratic and an authoritarian practice of hegemony. In the 1920s economist stagism was everywhere in command, and as the prospect of revolution receded the class lines grew still more rigid. Since the European revolution was conceived purely in terms of working-class centrality, and since the Communist parties represented the 'historical interests' of the working class, the sole function of these parties was to maintain the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat in opposition to the integrationist tendencies of social democracy. In periods of 'relative stabilization', therefore, it was necessary to strengthen the class barrier with even greater intransigence. Hence, the slogan launched in 1924 for the Bolshevization of the Communist parties. Zinoviev explained it as follows: 'Bolshevization means a firm will to struggle for the hegemony of the proletariat, it means a passionate hatred for the bourgeoisie, for the counter-revolutionary leaders of social democracy, for centrism and the centrists, for the semi-centrists and the pacifists, for all the miscarriages of bourgeois ideology . . . Bolshevization is Marxism in action; it is dedication to the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, to the idea of Leninism.'[8] As a renewal of the revolutionary process would inevitably follow upon a worsening economic crisis, political periodization was a mere reflection of economics: the only task left to the Communist parties in periods of stabilization was to accumulate forces around a wholly classist and 'rupturist' identity which, when the crisis arrived, would open the way to a new revolutionary initiative. (Characteristically, the 'united front' policy was reinterpreted as a united front from below and as an opportunity to expose the social democratic leaders.) Under these conditions a manipulative approach to other social and political forces could not fail to gain ascendancy.

The break with this reductionist and manipulative conception — or the beginnings of a break, as it has never been overcome in the communist tradition — was linked to the experience of fascism in Europe and the cycle of anti-colonial revolutions. In the first case the crisis of the liberal-democratic State, and the emergence of radical-popular ideologies of the Right, challenged the conception of demo-

cratic rights and freedoms as 'bourgeois' by nature; and, at the same time, the anti-fascist struggle created a popular and democratic mass subjectivity which could potentially be fused with a socialist identity. In the terms of our earlier analysis, the link uniting the hegemonized task to its 'natural' class agent began to dissolve, and it became possible to fuse that task with the identity of the hegemonic class. In this new perspective, hegemony was understood as the democractic reconstruction of the nation around a new class core. This tendency would later be reinforced by the varied experiences of national resistance against the Nazi occupation. But the change in communist policy started with Dimitrov's report to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, where the Third Period line of 'class against class' was formally abandoned and the policy of the popular fronts first introduced.[9] While implicitly retaining the notion of hegemony as a merely external alliance of classes, the new strategy conceived democracy as a common ground which was not open to exclusive absorption by any one social sector. Under these conditions, it became more and more difficult to maintain a strict separation between hegemonic tasks and class identity. A number of formulas — ranging from Mao's 'new democracy' to Togliatti's 'progressive democracy' and 'national tasks of the working class' — attempted to locate themselves on a terrain that was difficult to define theoretically within Marxist parameters, since the 'popular' and the 'democratic' were tangible realities at the level of the mass struggle but could not be ascribed to a strict class belonging. Revolutions in the peripheral world which took place under a communist leadership present us with a similar phenomenon: from China to Vietnam or Cuba, the popular mass identity was other and broader than class identity. The structural split between 'masses' and 'class', which we saw insinuating itself from the very beginning of the Leninist tradition, here produced the totality of its effects.

At this point, communist discourse was confronted by a pair of crucial problems. How should one characterize that plurality of antagonisms emerging on a mass terrain different from that of classes? And how could the hegemonic force retain a strictly proletarian character, once it had incorporated the democratic demands of the masses in its own identity? The main response to the first question was to implement a set of discursive strategies whereby the relationship established between classes went beyond their specifically class character, while *formally* remaining on a classist terrain. Consider, for example, the use of enumeration in communist discourses. To enumerate is never an innocent operation; it involves

critique of enumerations

major displacements of meaning. Communist enumeration occurs within a dichotomic space that establishes the antagonism between dominant and popular sectors; and the identity of both is constructed on the basis of enumerating their constitutive class sectors. On the side of the popular sectors, for example, would be included: the working class, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, progressive fractions of the national bourgeoisie, etc. This enumeration, however, does not merely affirm the separate and literal *presence* of certain classes or class fractions at the popular pole; it also asserts their *equivalence* in the common confrontation with the dominant pole. A relation of equivalence is not a relation of identity among objects. Equivalence is never tautological, as the substitutability it establishes among certain objects is only valid for determinate positions within a given structural context. In this sense, equivalence displaces the identity which makes it possible, from the objects themselves to the contexts of their appearance or presence. This, however, means that in the relation of equivalence the identity of the object is split: on the one hand, it maintains its own 'literal' sense; on the other, it symbolizes the contextual position for which it is a substitutable element. This is exactly what occurs in the communist enumeration: from a strictly classist point of view, there is no identity whatsoever among the sectors of the popular pole, given that each one has differentiated and even antagonistic interests; yet, the relation of equivalence established among them, in the context of their opposition to the dominant pole, constructs a 'popular' discursive position that is irreducible to class positions. In the Marxist discourse of the Second International, there were no equivalential enumerations. For Kautsky, each class sector occupied a specific differential position within the logic of capitalist development; one of the constitutive characteristics of Marxist discourse had been, precisely, the dissolution of the 'people' as an amorphous and imprecise category, and the reduction of every antagonism to a class confrontation which exhausted itself in its own literality, without any equivalential dimension. As to the discourse of 'combined and uneven development', we have seen that the dislocation of stages and the hegemonic recompositions were merely thought of as a more complex movement among classes, whose factual character made room for a narrative of exceptionalities but not for a conceptualization of specificities. In Rosa Luxemburg we come closer to a symbolic-equivalential split which subverts the literal sense of each concrete struggle; but as we saw, her attribution of a necessary class character to the resulting social agent places a rigid limit on the

expansive logic of equivalences. Only in the enumerative practices of the popular fronts period does the 'people' — that agent central to the political and social struggles of the nineteenth century — re-emerge, timidly at first, in the field of Marxist discursivity.

From what we have said, it is clear that the condition for the emergence of the 'people' as a political agent in communist discourse has been the relation of equivalence which splits the identity of classes and thereby constitutes a new type of polarization. Now, this process takes place entirely within the field of the hegemonic practices. Communist enumeration is not the confirmation of a de facto situation, but has a performative character. The unity of an ensemble of sectors is not a datum: it is a project to be built politically. The hegemonization of such an ensemble does not, therefore, involve a simple conjunctural or momentary agreement; it has to build a structurally new relation, different from class relations. This shows that the concept of 'class alliance' is as inadequate to characterize a hegemonic relation as the mere listing of bricks would be to describe a building. Nevertheless, given its internal logic, the relation of equivalence cannot display its presence simply through the incidental substitutability of its terms; it must give rise to a *general equivalent* in which the relation as such crystallizes symbolically. It is at this point, in the political case we are examining, that national-popular or popular-democratic symbols emerge to constitute subject positions different from those of class; the hegemonic relation then definitively loses its factual and episodic character, becoming instead a stable part of every politico-discursive formation. In this sense Mao's analyses of contradiction — despite their near-to-zero philosophical value — do have the great merit of presenting the terrain of social struggles as a proliferation of contradictions, not all of them referring back to the class principle.

The other series of problems facing communist discourse concerned the question of how to maintain the class identity of the hegemonic sector. Formulated in its most general terms, the issue is the following: if in the new conception the hegemonic relation transforms the identity of the hegemonic sector, and if the condition of social struggles in the imperialist era entails that these occur in an increasingly complex terrain dominated by recomposing practices, does it not follow that the class identity of the hegemonic subjects is put into question? Up to what point can we continue to refer to a class core as the articulating principle of the various subject positions? Two answers — or rather, two ways of arriving at an answer — are possible here. And in the end they depend on the two

conceptions of hegemony — democratic and authoritarian — that we described earlier. For one of them, characterizing most of the communist tradition, the solution is found in an *ad nauseam* extension of the model of representation. Each instance is the representation of another, until a final class core is reached which supposedly gives meaning to the whole series. This response evidently denies all opacity and density to political relations, which are a bare stage on which characters constituted beyond them — the classes — wage their struggle. Furthermore, the class represented in this way cannot but be the class 'for itself', the finalist perspective incarnated in the 'scientific' cosmovision of the party; that is, the *ontologically* privileged agent. In this way, all concrete problems concerning the practice of representation are simply eliminated. The other response accepts the structural diversity of the relations in which social agents are immersed, and replaces the principle of representation with that of *articulation*. Unity between these agents is then not the expression of a common underlying essence but the result of political construction and struggle. If the working class, as a hegemonic agent, manages to articulate around itself a number of democratic demands and struggles, this is due not to any a priori structural privilege, but to a political initiative on the part of the class. Thus, the hegemonic subject is a class subject only in the sense that, on the basis of class positions, a certain hegemonic formation is *practically* articulated; but, in that case we are dealing with concrete workers and not with the entelechy constituted by their 'historical interests'. In the world of the Third International, there was only one thinker in whom the notion of politics and hegemony as articulation found — with all its ambiguities and limitations — a theoretically mature expression. We are, of course, referring to Antonio Gramsci.

The Gramscian Watershed

The specificity of Gramscian thought is usually presented in two different and apparently contradictory ways. In one interpretation, Gramsci was an eminently Italian theoretician whose conceptual innovations were related to the particular conditions of Italy's backwardness: failure of the Risorgimento project to construct a unified national State; strong regional split between industrial North and agrarian Mezzogiorno; lack of integration of the Catholic masses into the political life of the country, as a result of the Vatican question; insufficient and contradictory development of capitalism;

etc. 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

"segregation effect" a consequence of the tendency to use military metaphor

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.

Social Democracy: From Stagnation to 'Planism'

The political and theoretical void which the turn to a hegemonic politics tried to fill, can also be found in the practice of the social-democratic parties after the First World War. In their case, the

dislocation between strictly class tasks and the new political tasks of the movement took a characteristic form: that of a contradiction between the limited list of demands and proposals coming forth from the labour movement, and the diversity and complexity of the political problems confronted by a social democracy *thrown* into power as a result of the post-war crisis. This new and peculiar form of 'uneven and combined' development could not but set up paralysing political effects in social forces which had placed all their bets on the progressive development of the productive forces, with the proviso that this would lead to power only when the 'objective conditions' matured. The narrowly classist mentality of the social-democratic parties would here produce all its negative consequences. This was evident in the limited capacity of the social-democratic parties to hegemonize the broad range of democratic demands and antagonisms resulting from the post-war crisis. 'From the turn of the century until the end of the First World War, the European Socialist movement, under its cloak of a revolutionary party, was thus a mere parliamentary instrument of trade unionism. Its real activity was restricted to trade union problems, its constructive action to questions of wages and hours, social insurance, tariff problems and, at the most, suffrage reform. The struggle against militarism, and the prevention of the war, important as it was, was "incidental" to the main work of the party.'[22] This mentality was to dominate social-democratic activity as a whole between the end of the war and the Great Depression. In Germany, for example, from November 1918 onwards, most of the decrees passed by the Socialist Council of People's Commissars referred almost exclusively to trade union demands and reforms in the suffrage system; no attempt whatsoever was made to face up to key political and economic problems. This narrow classist mentality was also reflected in the total absence of a policy of radical democratization in those societies where the social democrats came to government. The classist mentality — reformist or revolutionary, it matters little — closed the road to the construction of a collective will articulating a variety of democratic demands and antagonisms within a new popular hegemonic bloc. Neither the Army nor the bureaucracy was subjected to any reform whatsoever. And as for foreign policy, the social-democratic governments — and, above all, socialist ministers participating in cabinets dominated by other political forces — restricted themselves to following the dominant tendencies without formulating any political alternative.

In the strictly economic field, the dominant policy of the post-war social democracies was one of nationalizations (called 'socializations'). In *Der Weg zum Sozialismus*,[23] Otto Bauer proposed a graduated series of nationalizations together with democratic management of the enterprises. Projects for nationalization appeared in a number of other countries, and in some of them like Germany, Britain and Sweden, commissions were set up to study socialization plans. Yet nothing came of this activity. 'Although social democrats formed or entered government in several countries, the global result of the first attempts at socialization was nil: with the exception of the French armament industry in 1936, not a single company was nationalized in Western Europe by a social-democratic government during the entire inter-war period.'[24] After the socialization fiasco, social democracy did not have the least alternative economic project until the Great Depression.

There are various reasons for this failure, but they all come down to two main factors. First, there was a lack of a hegemonic project: having renounced any attempt to articulate a broad front of democratic struggles, and aspiring instead merely to represent workers' interests, social democracy found itself powerless to alter the social and political logic of the State apparatuses. At this point, an option clearly emerged: either to participate in bourgeois cabinets in order to obtain the maximum number of social measures favourable to working-class sectors; or else, to enter into opposition and thereby to double one's impotence. The pressure-group character of trade union interests, typical of social democracy, nearly always imposed the first alternative.

There was, however, a second reason for the paralysis of social democracy with regard to any structural change: and this was the persistence of the Second International's economism, the view that the economy constituted a homogeneous space dominated by necessary laws, not susceptible to conscious regulation. A. Sturmthal perceptively comments: 'Oddly enough, the Radical Marxist tradition, still alive in Herman Müller and other right-wing leaders, increased their stubborn support of *laissez-faire*. The belief that "capitalism cannot be reformed" was part of the Marxist credo, designed at the beginning of the Socialist party to separate it from all middle-class reform movements. Capitalism was supposed to follow its own laws; only a Socialist revolution . . . would permit banishment of the evil social consequences of the old system. The obvious implication of this theory was the belief in revolutionary rather than democratic methods, but even when the socialist movement accepted democracy it did not completely abandon the basic ideology of its original theory. Capitalist government had to be

administered according to this view, within the traditional framework of capitalist economy . . . Thus Herman Müller had the support of the Radicals, who otherwise held him in deep mistrust.'[25]

It was the Great Depression which forced a change in this perspective and, at the same time, gave a new basis for the redefinition of social-democratic politics. The 'planism' of the 1930s was the first expression of the new type of attitude. While creating a new welfare-state economic alternative, the implementation of Keynesianism allowed a universalist status to be granted to the interests of the workers, inasmuch as a high-wages policy became a stimulus for economic growth by contributing to the expansion of aggregate demand.[26]

Planism at its height — as it was formulated in the works of its main exponent Henri De Man[27] — was, however, more than a simple economic proposal: it was an attempt to recast the objectives of the socialist movement in a radically new, anti-economist version. All the elements we saw emerging in the crisis of the economist and reductionist version of Marxism are present in De Man: the critique of the rationalist conception of subjectivity based on economic 'interests' — he was one of the first socialists seriously to study psychoanalysis; the critique of class reductionism; the necessity of a mass bloc broader than the working class; the need to put forward socialism as a *national* alternative, as an organic reconstitution of the nation on a new basis; the requirement of a myth — in the Sorelian sense — which would cement the diverse components of a collective socialist will. The 'Plan' was, therefore, not a simple economistic instrument; it was the very axis for the reconstitution of a historical bloc which would make it possible to combat the decline of bourgeois society and to counter the advance of fascism. (The pro-fascist position which De Man personally adopted after 1938, and the similar evolution of Marcel Déat's socialists in France, should not make us forget the significance of planism as a real effort to regain the political initiative for socialism in the transformed social climate following the war and the Depression. Many of its themes became the common patrimony of social democracy after 1945 — particularly its economic-technocratic aspects; while its more radical and renovating political insights tended in the main to be cast aside.)

In this respect, it is instructive to recall a frequently noted ambiguity[28] which goes to the heart of the limitations of social-democratic politics after World War II. The project of the left-wing supporters of planism was to establish a mixed economy in which

the capitalist sector would gradually disappear; thus, it was in effect a road of transition to socialism. For a more technocratic variant, however, the point was merely to create an area of state intervention which would correct — particularly through the control of credit — the imbalances inherent in the course of capitalism. The terms of this alternative show very clearly that both the left and right alternatives related to *economic policy*; while projects for radical democratization and the construction of a new collective will were either absent or occupied a marginal position. Before 1945 it was the inveterate classism of the social-democratic movements which barred any attempt at hegemonic articulation. After 1945 — with the creation of the Welfare State — this classism slackened considerably, not of course in the direction of a deepening of the democratic process, but simply through the expansion of a Keynesian State in which the interests of the different sectors were no longer defined along clear-cut class lines. In this sense, social democracy became a politico-economic alternative *within* a given State form, and not a radical alternative to that form. (Here we are evidently referring not to a 'revolutionary' alternative, involving the violent overthrow of the existing State, but to a deepening and articulation of a variety of antagonisms, within both the State and civil society, which allows a 'war of position' against the dominant hegemonic forms.) As a result of this absence of a hegemonic alternative, social democracy reduced itself to a combination of, on the one hand, privileged pragmatic relations with the trade unions and, on the other, more or less left-wing technocratic policies, which in any case made everything dependent upon solutions implemented at a State level. This is the root of the absurd notion according to which the degree of 'leftness' of a programme is gauged by the number of companies it proposes to nationalize.

The Last Redoubt of Essentialism: the Economy

Our earlier analysis can be seen from two different perspectives which are, strictly speaking, complementary. From a first point of view, the picture we have presented is of a process of splits and fragmentations through which the disaggregation of the orthodox paradigm took place. But the space occupied by this paradigm does not remain empty: from a second point of view, the same process can be seen as the emergence and expansion of the new articulatory and recomposing logic of hegemony. We saw, however, that this expan-

economism, hegemonic articulations and contingency

sion met a limit. Whether the working class is considered as the political leader in a class alliance (Lenin) or as the articulatory core of a historical bloc (Gramsci), its fundamental identity is constituted in a terrain different from that in which the hegemonic practices operate. Thus, there is a threshold which none of the strategic-hegemonic conceptions manages to cross. If the validity of the economist paradigm is maintained in a certain instance — last though decisive, as it is the rational substratum of history — it is accorded a necessity such that hegemonic articulations can be conceived only as mere contingency. This final rational stratum, which gives a tendential sense to all historical processes, has a specific location in the topography of the social: at the economic level.

The economic level, however, must satisfy three very precise conditions in order to play this role of constituting the subjects of hegemonic practices. *Firstly*, its laws of motion must be strictly endogenous and exclude all indeterminacy resulting from political or other external interventions — otherwise, the constitutive function could not refer exclusively to the economy. *Secondly*, the unity and homogeneity of social agents, constituted at the economic level, must result from the very laws of motion of this level (any fragmentation and dispersion of positions requiring an instance of recomposition external to the economy is excluded). *Thirdly*, the position of these agents in the relations of production must endow them with 'historical interests', so that the presence of such agents at other social levels — through mechanisms of 'representation' or 'articulation' — must ultimately be explained on the basis of economic interests. The latter are, therefore, not restricted to a determinate social sphere, but are the anchorage for a globalizing perspective on society.

Even those Marxist tendencies which struggled hardest to overcome economism and reductionism mantained, in one way or another, that essentialist conception of the structuring of economic space which we have just described. Thus, the debate between economist and anti-economist tendencies within Marxism was necessarily reduced to the secondary problem of the weight that should be attached to the superstructures in the determination of historical processes. Yet the most 'superstructuralist' of conceptions retained a naturalist vision of the economy — even when it attempted to limit the area of its effects. In the remainder of this chapter we will probe this last redoubt of orthodox essentialism. Referring to certain contemporary debates, we will attempt to demonstrate that the space of the economy is itself structured as a

political space, and that in it, as in any other 'level' of society, those practices we characterized as hegemonic are fully operative. Before we embark on this task, however, it is necessary to distinguish two very different problems which have frequently been confused in the critique of economism: the first refers to the nature and constitution of the economic space; the second, *which has no relation whatsoever with the first*, concerns the relative weight of the economic space in the determination of social processes external to itself. The first is the decisive problem, and constitutes the ground for a radical break with essentialist paradigms. The second, for reasons we will attempt to clarify in this book, cannot be determined at the level of a general theorization of the social. (To assert that what occurs at *all* levels of society *in a given conjuncture* is absolutely determined by what happens at the level of the economy, is not — strictly speaking — logically incompatible with an anti-economist response to our first question.)

Our three conditions for the ultimate constitution of hegemonic subjects by the economic level correspond to three basic theses of classical Marxist theory: the condition regarding the endogenous character of the laws of motion of the economy corresponds to the thesis of the neutrality of the productive forces; the condition of the unity of social agents at the economic level, to the thesis of the growing homogenization and impoverishment of the working class; and the condition that the relations of production should be the *locus* of 'historical interests' transcending the economic sphere, to the thesis that the working class has a fundamental interest in socialism. We will now attempt to demonstrate that these three theses are false.

For Marxism, the development of the productive forces plays the key role in the historical evolution towards socialism, given that 'the past development of the productive forces makes socialism possible, and their future development makes socialism necessary.'[29] They are at the root of the formation of an ever more numerous and exploited proletariat, whose historical mission is to take possession of, and collectively manage, highly socialized and developed productive forces. At present, the capitalist relations of production constitute an insurmountable obstacle to the advance of these productive forces. The contradiction between bourgeoisie and proletariat is, therefore, the social and political expression of a primal economic contradiction, one which combines a general law of development of the productive forces with the laws of development specific to the capitalist mode of production. According to this view, if history has a sense and a rational substratum, it is due to the general law of

development of the productive forces. Hence, the economy may be understood as a mechanism of society acting upon objective phenomena independently of human action.

Now, in order that this general law of development of the productive forces may have full validity, it is necessary that all the elements intervening in the productive process be submitted to its determinations. To ensure this, Marxism had to resort to a fiction: it conceived of labour-power as a commodity. Sam Bowles and Herbert Gintis have shown how this fiction would make Marxism blind to a whole series of characteristics of labour-power as an element of the process of capitalist production. Labour-power differs from the other necessary elements of production in that the capitalist must do more than simply purchase it; he must also make it produce labour. This essential aspect, however, escapes the conception of labour-power as a commodity whose use-value is labour. For if it were merely a commodity like the others, its use-value could obviously be made automatically effective from the very moment of its purchase. 'The designation of labour as the use-value of labour-power to capital obscures the absolutely fundamental distinction between productive inputs *embodied in people capable of social practices* and all those remaining inputs for whom ownership by capital is sufficient to secure the "consumption" of their productive services.'[30] A large part of the capitalist organization of labour can be understood only as a result of the necessity to extract labour from the labour-power purchased by the capitalist. The evolution of the productive forces becomes unintelligible if this need of the capitalist to exercise his domination at the very heart of the labour process is not understood. This, of course, calls into question the whole idea of the development of the productive forces as a natural, spontaneously progressive phenomenon. We can therefore see that both elements of the economist viewpoint — labour power as a commodity, and the development of the productive forces as a neutral process — reinforce each other. Little wonder that the study of the labour process was for long depreciated within the Marxist tradition.

It was the publication of Braverman's *Labour and Monopoly Capital*[31] which finally triggered off the debate. It defends the thesis that the guiding principle of technology under capitalism is the separation of conception and execution, producing ever more degraded and 'deskilled' labour. Taylorism is the decisive moment in this struggle of the capitalists to dominate the workers and control the labour process. Braverman postulates that it is the law of capital accumulation which lies behind the need of capital to wrest control

of the labour process from the direct producer; he, however, fails to provide a real explanation why this is expressed through an unceasing effort to destroy the skills of the workers and to reduce them to mere performers. Above all, he presents this logic of domination as an omnipotent force — operating apparently without trammels — as if the economic forces available to capital did not permit the working class to resist and influence the course of development. Here, the old notion of labour-power as commodity, entirely subject to the logic of capital, continues to produce its effects.

Contrary to Braverman's argument, the critique of the notion of labour-power as a commodity whose use-value is labour allows us to understand capital's need to control the labour process. The fact is that once labour-power is purchased, the maximum possible labour has to be extracted from it. Hence the labour process cannot exist without a series of relations of domination. Hence, too, well before the advent of monopoly capitalism, the capitalist organization of labour had to be both a technique of production and a technique of domination. This aspect has been stressed in a number of works, such as those by Stephen Marglin and Katherine Stone,[32] who argue that the fragmentation and specialization of labour bear no relation whatsoever to a supposed need for efficiency, but are instead the effect of capital's need to exercise its domination over the labour process. Since the worker is capable of social practices, he could resist the imposed control mechanisms and force the capitalist to use different techniques. Thus, it is not a pure logic of capital which determines the evolution of the labour process; the latter is not merely the place where capital exerts its domination, but the ground of a struggle.

A number of recent studies, undertaken in Western Europe and the United States, have analysed the evolution of the labour process from the point of view of the relation of forces between workers and capitalists, and of the workers' resistance. These reveal the presence of a 'politics of production', and challenge the idea that the development of capitalism is the effect solely of the laws of competition and the exigencies of accumulation. Richard Edwards, in *Contested Terrain*,[33] distinguishes three main forms of control: simple control based on vigilance; technical control, corresponding to the subordination of the worker to the rhythm of the machine as found on the assembly line; and finally, bureaucratic control — manifesting itself through the institutionalization of hierarchical power — by which control depends no longer on the physical structure of the labour process, as in the previous case, but on its social structure. He

working class struggles have forced capital to modify its internal composition and forms of domination — M. Tronti

maintains that the workers' resistance explains the need for capital to experiment with new forms. Similarly, Jean-Paul Gaudemar isolates four cycles of technological domination in the case of France: *'a "panoptic" cycle; a cycle of extensive disciplining* (in the factory *and* outside the factory); a cycle founded on a twofold process involving internalization of discipline within a labour process remodelled on mechanization, a cycle which I propose to call *cycle of mechanist discipline;* finally, *a cycle of contractual discipline,* in which the internalization of discipline proceeds by formal and real modes of a partial delegation of power.'[34] For its part, the Italian *operaista* current of the sixties demonstrated how the development of capital, far from blindly imposing its logic on the working class, is subordinated to the latter's struggle. Mario Tronti,[35] for example, points out that working-class struggles have forced capital to modify its internal composition and forms of domination — for, by imposing a limit on the working day, they have compelled capital to pass from absolute to relative surplus value. This leads Panzieri to uphold the thesis that production is a 'political mechanism', and that it is necessary to analyse 'technology and the organization of labour as establishing a relation of forces among classes.'[36] The idea common to these works is that specific historical forms of capitalist control have to be studied as part of overall social relations, given that the changing organizational forms of the labour process cannot be understood merely in terms of the difference between absolute and relative surplus value. Moreover, a comparative historical analysis reveals important differences among the various countries. The strength of trade unions in Britain, for example, has made possible a greater resistance to change than elsewhere.

Workers' struggles, understood in these terms, obviously cannot be explained by an endogenous logic of capitalism, since their very dynamism cannot be subsumed under the 'commodity' form of labour-power. But if this split between a logic of capital and a logic of workers' resistance influences the organization of the capitalist labour process, it must also crucially affect the character and rhythm of expansion of the productive forces. Thus, the thesis that the productive forces are neutral, and that their development can be conceived as natural and unilinear, is entirely unfounded. This also removes the only ground on which the economy could be understood as an autonomous and self-regulated universe. The first condition, therefore, of the exclusive privilege granted to the economic sphere in the constitution of social agents, is not fulfilled.

This conclusion should already make us suspect that the second

condition is also not fulfilled, as the economy could hardly constitute subjects unified by a single logic which it does not itself possess. Nevertheless, it is important to explore the variegated decentring of the diverse positions of the 'working class' subject. In the first place, the very concept of working class in Marx covers two distinct relations with their own laws of motion: the wage relation established through the sale of labour-power — which turns the worker into a proletarian; and that resulting from the worker's location in the labour process — which makes him a manual worker. This dichotomy underpins the pregnant distinction drawn by Michael Burawoy[37] between relations *of* production and relations *in* production. If for Marx the distinction is not evident, it is not only because the two sets of relations tended to coincide in his immediate historical experience; but also because, seeing labour-power as a simple commodity, he tended to withdraw all autonomy and relevance from the relations established in the labour process. It does, however, remain clear that both relations have evolved in a different manner, making problematic the common 'working class' label which united them: whereas the wage form has become generalized in advanced capitalism, the class of industrial workers has declined in numbers and importance. This dysymmetry is at the root of the ambiguities which have dominated recent debate on the limits of the working class.

Once the theory of impoverishment proved untenable as a specific mechanism for the constitution of working-class unity, two new attempts were made to find an economic basis for such unity: one centred on the phenomenon of 'deskilling' (Braverman), while the other sought to identify a more restricted core of workers who would constitute the 'true' working class (Poulantzas). Braverman, starting from his analysis of Taylorism, argues that the degradation of labour resulting from the separation between conception and execution brings ever broader strata of workers — be they employed by the commodity-producing sectors or not — within the category of the proletarianized working class.[38] According to him, the polarization foreseen by Marx is therefore in the process of fulfilment, and the ongoing degradation of its labour conditions will push the working class to organize itself and struggle politically against the system. However, few studies dealing with the North American working class share Braverman's homogenization thesis. On the contrary, the general tendency is to insist on the division and fragmentation of the working class. The works of Edwards, Gordon and Reich[39] demonstrate, for example, how the forms of control in

Braverman - deskilling as a basis for working-class unity

forms of control in the labor process, racism and sexism, create segmentation of the labor market and fragmentation of the working class

the labour process, combined with racism and sexism, have created a segmentation of the labour market which has crystallized in the fractioning of the working class.[40] Similar work in Western Europe[41] also vitiates the thesis of a progressive simplification of the social structure and confirms that the current general tendency is towards a polarization between two sectors of the economy: a well-paid and protected general sector, and a peripheral sector of unskilled or semi-skilled workers for whom no security exists. If we add a third sector, that of the structurally unemployed whose number is constantly growing, it becomes apparent that the thesis of homogenization truly cannot be sustained. Furthermore, deskilling does not display the general character attributed to it by Braverman: although it is increasing in some sectors, there is also a parallel process of the creation of new skills.

Furthermore, the creation of a dual labour-power market must be related to the different capitalist strategies to combat shopfloor resistance and cannot be seen as a simple effect of capitalist development. Thus Andrew Friedman has shown how in the British case, capitalists employ various strategies according to the capacity of the different groups of workers to resist their authority.[42] Within a given country and within the same company, a distinction may be drawn between central and peripheral workers, belonging to different labour markets, whose wages and working conditions reflect their unequal capacity for resistance. Women and immigrants are generally situated in the unprotected market. Friedman, however, sees this segmentation not as the result of a conspiracy to divide the working class, but as the consequence of relations of force in which the unions themselves play an important role. The divisions within the working class are therefore more deeply rooted than many wish to allow; and they are, to a certain extent, the result of the workers' own practices. They are political, and not merely economic divisions.

It is impossible to talk today about homogeneity of the working class, and a fortiori to trace it to a mechanism inscribed in the logic of capitalist accumulation. In order to maintain the idea of a workers' identity around common interests, derived from a class insertion in the relations of production, the second tendency we mentioned earlier has therefore attempted to locate the *true* working class by means of a more restricted definition. The reality of fragmentation is fully accepted, and the unitary identity is attributed to one of the fragments. In this respect, it is instructive to examine the debate which opposed Erik Olin Wright to Nicos Poulantzas.[43] According

to Poulantzas, productive labour is the criterion for identifying the limits of the working class,[44] and unproductive waged workers constitute a 'new petty bourgeoisie'. The heterogeneity of the sectors included in this category does not create a special problem for Poulantzas. Since, in his view, classes cannot be defined only at the economic level, and since the old and the new petty bourgeoisie occupy the same ideological position with regard to the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, he feels quite justified in bracketing them in the same class category. This approach has been criticized by Eric Olin Wright, who rejects not only Poulantzas's definition of productive labour, but also the very idea that such a criterion could serve to define the limits of the working class. His argument is that the distinction between productive and unproductive labour does not in any way imply that unproductive workers have different class interests and are not concerned with socialism. He states: 'For two positions within the social division of labour to be placed in different classes on the basis of economic criteria implies that they have fundamentally different class *interests* at the economic level.'[45] The solution he offers is to make a distinction between 'ambiguous' and 'non-ambiguous' class positions. The latter characterize the proletariat, the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie.[46] Together with these three non-ambiguous positions, Wright distinguishes what he calls 'contradictory class locations', half-way between the two non-ambiguous positions. Where the economic criteria are contradictory, ideological and political struggle will play a determinant role in the definition of class interests.

The reason for this Diogenes-like search for the 'true' working class is, of course, political: the object is to determine that category of workers whose *economic* interests link them directly to a socialist perspective, and who are therefore destined to lead the anti-capitalist struggle. The problem, however, with these approaches which start from a restricted definition of the working class, is that they are still based on the concept of 'objective interest' — a concept which lacks any theoretical basis whatsoever, and involves little more than an arbitrary attribution of interests, by the analyst, to a certain category of social agents. In the classical view, class unity was constructed around interests, but it was not a datum of the social structure; it was a *process* of unification, resulting from the impoverishment and proletarianization which went hand in hand with the development of the productive forces. Braverman's homogenization through *deskilling* belongs to the same explanatory level. The *objective* interests were *historical* interests, insofar as they depended upon a rational and

necessary movement of history accessible to scientific knowledge. What cannot be done is to abandon the eschatological conception of history, and to retain a notion of 'objective interest' which only has sense within the former. Both Poulantzas and Wright seem to assume that the fragmentation of the working class is a fragmentation of positions *among diverse* social agents. Neither pays heed to a more substantial reality of which classical Marxism was well aware: namely, that a fragmentation of positions exists *within* the social agents themselves, and that these therefore lack an ultimate rational identity. The tension between economic and political struggle — and theoretical analyses of working-class 'embourgeoisement' or Bernstein's assertion that through the progress of democracy the worker ceases to be a proletarian and becomes a citizen, etc. — implied that the working class was dominated by a plurality of weakly integrated and frequently contradictory subject positions. Here, the alternative is clear: either one has a theory of history according to which this contradictory plurality will be eliminated and an absolutely united working class will become transparent to itself at the moment of proletarian chiliasm — in which case its 'objective interests' can be determined from the very beginning; or else, one abandons that theory and, with it, any basis for privileging certain subject positions over others in the determination of the 'objective' interests of the agent as a whole — in which case this latter notion becomes meaningless. In our view, in order to advance in the determination of social antagonisms, it is necessary to analyse the plurality of diverse and frequently contradictory positions, and to discard the idea of a perfectly unified and homogenous agent, such as the 'working class' of classical discourse. The search for the 'true' working class and its limits is a false problem, and as such lacks any theoretical or political relevance.

Evidently, this implies not that working class and socialism are incompatible, but the very different statement that fundamental interests in socialism cannot be *logically* deduced from determinate positions in the economic process. The opposite view — that such a link is provided by the workers' interest in preventing capitalist absorption of the economic surplus — would only be valid if one further assumed (a) that the worker is a homo *oeconomicus* who tries to maximize the economic surplus just as much as the capitalist; or b) that he is a spontaneously cooperative being, who aspires to the social distribution of his labour product. Even then, however, neither of these barely plausible hypotheses would supply the requisite proof, for there is no logical connection whatsoever

GRAMSCIAN ARTICULATION

between positions in the relations of production and the mentality of the producers. The workers' resistance to certain forms of domination will depend upon the position they occupy within the ensemble of social relations, and not only in those of production. At this point, it is obvious that our last two conditions for the agents of hegemony to be exclusively constituted by the economic sphere — that they should be fully constituted as subjects within that space, and that they should be endowed with 'historical interests' derived from their class positions — are not fulfilled either.

Facing the Consequences

Let us draw the conclusions. It is not the case that the field of the economy is a self-regulated space subject to endogenous laws; nor does there exist a constitutive principle for social agents which can be fixed in an ultimate class core; nor are class positions the necessary location of historical interests. From this point, the implications quickly follow. Since Kautsky, Marxism knew that the socialist determination of the working class does not arise spontaneously but depends upon the political mediation of intellectuals. Such mediation, however, was not conceived as *articulation* — that is to say, as a *political construction* from dissimilar elements. It had an epistemological basis: socialist intellectuals *read* in the working class its objective destiny. In Gramsci politics is finally conceived as articulation, and through his concept of historical bloc a profound and radical complexity is introduced into the theorization of the social. Yet even for Gramsci, the ultimate core of the hegemonic subject's identity is constituted at a point external to the space it articulates: the logic of hegemony does not unfold all of its deconstructive effects on the theoretical terrain of classical Marxism. We have witnessed, however, the fall of this last redoubt of class reductionism, insofar as the very unity and homogeneity of class subjects has split into a set of precariously integrated positions which, once the thesis of the neutral character of the productive forces is abandoned, cannot be referred to any necessary point of future unification. The logic of hegemony, as a logic of articulation and contingency, has come to determine the very identity of the hegemonic subjects. A number of consequences follow from this, representing as many starting points for our subsequent analysis.

1. Unfixity has become the condition of every social identity. The fixity of every social element in the first theorizations of hegemony

historical tasks have ceased to

 have any necessary link with class

proceeded, as we saw, from the indissoluble link between the hegemonized task and the class that was supposed to be its natural agent; while the bond between the task and the class which hegemonized it was merely factual or contingent. But, insofar as the task has ceased to have any *necessary* link with a class, its identity is given to it solely by its articulation within a hegemonic formation. Its identity, then, has become purely relational. And as this system of relations has itself ceased to be fixed and stable — thereby making hegemonic practices possible — the sense of every social identity appears constantly deferred. The moment of the 'final' suture never arrives. With this, however, not only does the very category of necessity fall, but it is no longer possible to account for the hegemonic relation in terms of pure contingency, as the space which made intelligible the necessary/contingent opposition has dissolved. The idea that the hegemonic link could be grasped theoretically through a mere narrative exercise proves to have been a mirage. The link must instead be defined in terms of new theoretical categories whose status, insofar as they attempt to apprehend a type of relation that never manages to be identical to itself, constitutes a problem.

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2. Let us briefly refer to the *dimensions* in which this unfixity of the social produces its effects. The first belongs to the terrain of political subjectivity. We have seen that in Rosa Luxemburg, the symbolic dimension linking the different antagonisms and political points of rupture was the matrix of new social forces — the ones Gramsci was to call 'collective wills'. This logic of the symbolic constitution of the social encountered precise limits in the persistence, at a morphological level, of the economist conception of history. Once this has been dissolved, however, the overflowing of class bounds by the various forms of social protest can freely operate. (*Freely*, that is, of any a priori class character of struggles or demands — obviously not in the sense that *every* articulation is possible in a given conjuncture.) If this is the case, however, three important consequences can be derived for our analysis. **The first** refers to the link between socialism and concrete social agents. We have demonstrated that there is no logical and necessary relation between socialist objectives and the positions of social agents in the relations of production; and that the articulation between them is external and does not proceed from any *natural* movement of each to unite with the other. In other words, their articulation must be regarded as a hegemonic relation. It follows that, from the socialist point of view, the direction of the workers' struggle is not uniformly progressive: it depends, *just as with any other social struggle*, upon its forms of articulation within a

new social forces collective wills decline of economism retreat from class

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given hegemonic context. For the same reason, a variety of other points of rupture and democratic antagonisms can be articulated to a socialist 'collective will' *on an equal footing* with workers' demands. The era of 'privileged subjects' — in the ontological, not practical sense — of the anti-capitalist struggle has been definitively superseded. **The second consequence** refers to the nature of the 'new social movements', which have been so much discussed during the last decade. Here, the two dominant tendencies of thought are incompatible with our theoretical position. The first approaches the nature and efficacy of these movements within a problematic of the privileged subject of socialist change: thus, they are considered either as marginal or peripheral with regard to the working class (the fundamental subject in the orthodox view) or as a revolutionary substitute for a working class which has been integrated into the system (Marcuse). Everything we have said so far, however, indicates that there are no privileged points for the unleashing of a socialist political practice; this hinges upon a 'collective will' that is laboriously constructed from a number of dissimilar points. Nor can we agree, therefore, with the other dominant tendency in the discussion of new social movements, which consists in a priori affirmation of their progressive nature. The political meaning of a local community movement, of an ecological struggle, of a sexual minority movement, is not given from the beginning: it crucially depends upon its hegemonic articulation with other struggles and demands. **The third consequence** refers to the form of conceiving the relation among different subject positions, which our analysis has tended to de-totalize. However, were the decentring operation to be concluded at this point, we would only have managed to affirm a new form of fixity: that of the various decentred subject positions. If these themselves are not fixed, it is clear that a logic of de-totalization cannot simply affirm the *separation* of different struggles and demands, and that the articulation cannot just be conceived as the linkage of dissimilar and fully constituted elements. It is here that the radicalization of the concept of 'overdetermination' will give us the key to the specific logic of social articulations.

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3. The logic of our analysis would seem, however, to imply that the very notion of 'hegemony' should be put into question. The discursive areas of the emergence and validity of this category were originally limited to the theoretical terrain of a split. A class constituted at the level of essences was confronted with historical contingencies forcing it to take on tasks alien to its own nature. But we have seen, on the one hand, that this split could not survive the

collapse of the distinction between these two planes; and, on the other, that insofar as there was an advance in a democratic direction, the hegemonized task altered the identity of the hegemonic subject. Does this mean that 'hegemony' was merely a transitional concept, a moment in the dissolution of the essentialist discourse, and unable to outlive it? In the next two chapters we will attempt to show that this is not an adequate answer, and that the tensions inherent in the concept of hegemony are also inherent in every political practice and, strictly speaking, every social practice.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. The concept of 'suture', which we will be using frequently, is taken from psychoanalysis. Its explicit formulation is attributed to Jacques-Alain Miller ('Suture elements of the logic of the signifier', *Screen*, Winter 1977/78, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 24–34), although it implicity operates in the whole of Lacanian theory. It is used to designate the production of the subject on the basis of the chain of its discourse; that is, of the non-correspondence between the subject and the Other — the symbolic — which prevents the closure of the latter as a full presence. (Hence, the constitution of the unconscious as *edge* operating the junction/division between the subject and the Other.) 'Suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse; we shall see that it figures there as the element which is lacking, in the form of a stand-in. For while there lacking, it is not purely and simply absent. Suture, by extension — the general relation of lack to the structure of which it is an element, inasmuch as it implies the position of a taking-the-place of' (Miller, pp. 25–6). This moment of lack is, however, only one aspect. In a second aspect, suture implies a filling-in. As Stephen Heath points out, 'suture names not just a structure of lack but also an availability of the subject, a certain closure . . . It is not surprising . . ., therefore, that Lacan's own use of the term "suture" . . . gives it sense of a "pseudo-identification", defines it as "function of the imaginary and the symbolic". . . . The stake is clear: the "I" is a division but joins all the same, the stand-in is the lack in the structure, but nevertheless simultaneously, the possibility of a coherence, of the *filling* in' (S. Heath, 'Notes on Suture', *Screen*, pp. 55–6). It is this double movement that we will attempt to stress in our extension of the concept of suture to the field of politics. Hegemonic practices are suturing insofar as their field of operation is determined by the openness of the social, by the ultimately unfixed character of every signifier. This original lack is precisely what the hegemonic practices try to fill in. A *totally* sutured society would be one where this filling-in would have reached its ultimate consequences and would have, therefore, managed to identify itself with the transparency of a closed symbolic order. Such a closure of the social is, as we will see, impossible.

2. In the sense in which Jacques Derrida has talked about a 'logic of the supplement'. The supplementary of the 'indeterminate' disappears, of course, if the link between the specificity and the necessity of the 'determinate' is broken. We have seen that this is what happens with Sorel's myth. In that case, however, the only terrain that made possible the emergence of the dualism, also disappears.

3. P. Anderson, pp. 15ff.

4. Concerning the initial formulation of Trotsky's thesis of permanent revolution, see A. Brossat, *Aux origines de la révolution permanente: la pensée politique du jeune Trotsky*, Paris 1974; and Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development*, London 1981, chapter 2.

5. L. Trotsky, *1905*, London 1971, pp. 333, 339.

6. 'There are no miracles in nature or history, but every abrupt turn in history, and this applies to every revolution, presents such a wealth of content, unfolds such unexpected and specific combinations of forms of struggle and alignment of forces of the contestants, that to the lay mind there is much that must appear miraculous . . . That the revolution succeeded so quickly and — seemingly, at the first superficial glance — so radically, is only due to the fact that, as extremely unique historical situation, *absolutely dissimilar currents, absolutely heterogeneous* class interests, *absolutely contrary* political and social strivings have *merged* and in a strikingly "harmonious" manner.' Lenin, *Letters from Afar*, First Letter. The First Stage of the First Revolution', *Collected Works*, vol. 23, pp. 297, 302.

7. 'The mechanics of political democracy works in the same direction. Nothing in our times can be done without elections; nothing can be done without the masses. And in this era of printing and parliamentarism it is *impossible* to gain the following of the masses without a widely ramified, systematically managed, well-equipped system of flattery, lies, fraud, juggling with fashionable and popular catchwords, and promising all manner of reforms and blessings to the workers right and left — as long as they renounce the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. I would call this system Lloyd-Georgism after the English minister Lloyd George, one of the foremost and most dexterous representatives of this system in the classic land of the "bourgeois labour party". A first-class bourgeois manipulator, an astute politician, a popular orator who will deliver any speeches you like, even revolutionary ones, to a labour audience, and a man who is capable of obtaining sizeable sops for docile workers in the shape of social reforms (insurance, etc.), Lloyd George serves the bourgeoisie splendidly, and serves it precisely *among* the workers, brings its influence *precisely* to the proletariat, to where the bourgeoisie needs it most and where it finds it most difficult to subject the masses morally.' Lenin, 'Imperialism and the Split of Socialism', *Collected Works*, vol. 23, p. 117–8.

8. *Pyatyi vsemirnyi Kongress Komunisticheskogo Internatsionala. 17 iunlya-8 iuliya 1924 g. Stenograficheskiiotchet*, Moscow-Leningrad 1925, I, pp. 482-3. Quoted in M. Hájek, 'La bolscevizzazione dei partiti comunisti', in E.J. Hobsbawm et al., eds., *Storia*, Turin 1980, vol. 3, p. 468.

9. Cf. E. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, London 1977, pp. 138ff.

10. Cf. especially Ch. Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, London 1980.

11. B. de Giovanni, 'Lenin and Gramsci: State, Politics and Party', in Ch. Mouffe, ed., *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, London 1979, pp. 259–288. For a critique of de Giovanni's conception, see Ch. Mouffe's introduction to that volume.

12. A. Gramsci, 'Notes on the Southern Question', in *Selections from Political Writings 1921-26*, ed. and trans. Q. Hoare, London 1978, p. 443.

13. With regard to the relationship between hegemony, ideology and state in Gramsci, see Ch. Mouffe, 'Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci', in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, pp. 168–204; and Ch. Mouffe, 'Hegemony and the Integral State in Gramsci: Towards a New Concept of Politics', in G. Bridges and R. Brunt, eds., *Silver Linings: Some Strategies for the Eighties*, London 1981.

14. A. Gramsci, *Quaderni dal Carcere*, ed. V. Gerratana, Turin 1975, vol. 2, p. 349.

15. Ibid., p. 1058.

16. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1875.

17. See the essays contained in the volume *Clausewitz en el pensamiento marxista*,

Mexico 1979, in particular the work by Clemente Ancona, 'La influencia de *De la Guerra* de Clausewitz en el pensamiento marxista de Marx a Lenin', pp. 7-38. These essays refer, however, more to the relationship between war and politics than to the political metaphorization of military notions.

18. In a literal sense, which includes armed confrontations themselves. From Mao onwards, 'people's war' is conceived as a process of constitution of a mass 'collective will', wherein the military aspects are subordinate to the political ones. 'War of position', therefore, transcends the alternative armed struggle/peaceful struggle.

19. Althusser has wrongly assimilated Gramscian 'absolute historicism' to the other forms of 'leftism' of the twenties, such as the works of Lukács and Korsch. Elsewhere, we have argued (see E. Laclau, 'Togliatti and Politics', *Politics and Power* 2, London 1980, pp. 251-258) that this assimilation rests on a misunderstanding, insofar as what Gramsci calls 'absolute historicism' is precisely the radical rejection of any essentialism and of any a priori teleology, and it is, therefore, incompatible with the notion of 'false consciousness'. On the specificity of Gramsci's intervention in this regard, see C. Buci-Glucksmann, op. cit.

20. An adequate study of the positions adopted by Kautsky after the war, particularly with regard to the October revolution, can be found in A. Bergounioux and B. Manin, *La social-démocratie ou le compromis*, Paris 1979, pp. 73-104.

21. This is why the critique undertaken by M. Salvadori ('Gramsci and the PCI: Two Conceptions of Hegemony', in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, pp. 237-258) to the theoreticians of the Italian Communist Party, is so unconvincing. According to this critique, Eurocommunism could not legitimately claim the Gramscian tradition as the source of its democratic strategy, for Gramsci's thought continues to attribute an essential importance to the moment of rupture and seizure of power. Gramsci would, thus, constitute the highest moment of a Leninism adapted to the conditions of Western Europe. There is no doubt that for Gramsci 'war of position' is merely a prelude to 'war of movement'; yet, this does not justify talking about a 'structural Leninism' in Gramsci. This would only be justified if the alternative reform/ revolution, peaceful/violent road, was the only relevant distinction; but, as we have seen, the totality of Gramscian thought moves in the direction of withdrawing the importance and eliminating the absolute character of this alternative. In more important aspects, neither the Gramscian conception of political subjectivity, nor its form of conceptualizing the hegemonic links, is compatible with the Leninist theory of 'class alliance'.

22. A. Sturmthal, *The Tragedy of European Labour, 1918-1939*, London 1944, p. 23. This early work is a highly penetrating attempt to establish a relation between the limits of Social Democratic politics and the corporative mentality of the unions.

23. Vienna 1919.

24. A. Przeworski, 'Social Democracy as a Historical Phenomenon', *New Left Review*, no. 122, July-August 1980, p. 48.

25. A. Sturmthal, pp. 39-40.

26. A. Przeworski, 'Social Democracy', p. 52.

27. Cf. particularly *Au-delà du marxisme* (1927) and *L'Idée socialiste* (1933).

28. See, for example, A. Bergounioux and B. Manin, pp. 118-120.

29. G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, Oxford 1978, p. 206.

30. S. Bowles and H. Gintis, 'Structure and Practice in the Labour Theory of Value', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 12, no. 4, p. 8. This idea had already been criticized by Castoriadis in a 1961 article, 'Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne', *Capitalisme moderne et révolution*, Paris 1979, vol. 1.

31. H.B. Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital. The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, New York 1974.

32. S. Marglin, 'What do Bosses Do?', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1974; K. Stone, 'The Origins of Job Structure in the Steel Industry', *Review*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1974.

33. R. Edwards, *Contested Terrain: the Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century*, New York 1979.

34. Jean P. de Gaudemar, *L'ordre et la production. Naissance et formes de la discipline d'usine*, Paris 1982, p. 24.

35. M. Tronti, *Ouvriers et capital*, Paris 1977, p. 106.

36. Panzieri, quoted by B. Coriat, 'L'operaïsme italien', *Dialectiques*, no. 30, p. 96.

37. M. Burawoy, 'Terrains of Contest: Factory and State under Capitalism and Socialism', *Socialist Review*, no. 58.

38. Braverman, passim.

39. D. Gordon, R. Edwards and M. Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers*, Cambridge 1982.

40. They distinguish the existence of three labour markets corresponding to three different sections of the working class. The first includes most occupations of a professional type. It is the domain of the middle sectors who enjoy stable employment with possibilities of promotion and of relatively high salaries. These characteristics can also be found in the first subordinate market, with the difference that the workers of this sector — the 'traditional' working class together with the semi-skilled workers of the tertiary sector — only possess specific skills acquired in the enterprise, and that their work is repetitive and tied to the rhythm of the machines. Thirdly, we encounter the 'secondary market' with its unskilled workers, having no possibilities of promotion, without employment security and with low wages. These workers are not unionized, the turnover is quick and the proportion of blacks and women is very high.

41. See, for example, M. Paci, *Mercato del Lavoro e classi sociali in Italia: Ricerche sulla composizione del proletariato*, Bologna 1973. For a more general perspective on industrial societies, see S. Berger and M. Piore, *Dualism and Discontinuity in Industrial Societies*, Cambridge 1980.

42. A.L. Friedman, *Industry & Labour. Class Struggle at Work and Monopoly Capitalism*, London 1977.

43. N. Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, NLB, London 1975; E. Olin Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State*, London 1978.

44. The concept of 'productive labour' is more restricted in Poulantzas than in Marx, as he defines it as 'labour that produces surplus-value while *directly reproducing the material elements that serve as the substratum of the relation of exploitation: labour that is directly involved in material production by producing use-values that increase material wealth*' (p. 216).

45. Wright, p. 48.

46. The criteria for belonging to the proletariat are: 1) absence of control over the physical means of production; 2) absence of control over investments and the process of accumulation; 3) absence of control over other people's labour-power. The bourgeoisie is, on the contrary, defined by its exercise of control over the three items, while the petty bourgeoisie controls investments, the process of accumulation and the physical means of production — it does not exercise control over other people's labour-power.