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Hegemony and Socialist Strategy -- *Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*

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Notat om layout

Sideoppsett: Hver side er skilt med fire linjeskift. Sidetallene er plassert øverst på sidene, og er skilt fra den tilhørende teksten med et dobbelt linjeskift.

Overskrifter: Det er to nivåer av overskrifter. Alle registrert i innholdsfortegnelsen.

Notene Finnes i slutten av hvert av fire kapitlene. Samt Introduction. Notene kan finnes gjennom innholdsfortegnelsen, og har overskrift på nivå 2.

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Boken fortsetter

3. Beyond the Positivity of the Social: Antagonisms and Hegemony

We now have to construct theoretically the concept of hegemony. Our analysis has so far provided us with something more and something less than a precise discursive location from which to embark. Something more, inasmuch as the space of hegemony is not merely that of a localized 'unthought': it is rather a space in which bursts forth a whole conception of the social based upon an intelligibility which reduces its distinct moments to the interiority of a closed paradigm. Something less, inasmuch as the diverse surfaces of emergence of the hegemonic relation do not harmoniously come together to form a theoretical void that a new concept is required to fill. On the contrary, some of them would seem to be surfaces of *dissolution* of the concept: for the relational character of every social identity implies a breaking-up of the differentiation of planes, of the unevenness between articulator and articulated, on which the hegemonic link is founded. To construct the concept of hegemony therefore involves not a simple speculative effort within a coherent context, but a more complex strategic movement requiring negotiation among mutually contradictory discursive surfaces.

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

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

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

From our present perspective, this is the ambiguity which Hegel's thought presents in its approach to the dialectic of unity and fragmentation. His work is at once the highest moment of German Romanticism and the first modern — that is to say, post-Enlightenment — reflection on society. It is not a critique of society from utopia, nor a description and theorization of the mechanisms which

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make possible an order that is accepted as certain and given; rather, Hegel's reflection starts from the opaqueness of the social vis-à-vis elusive forms of a rationality and intelligibility detectable only by reference to a cunning of reason which leads separation back to unity. Hegel thus appears as located in a watershed between two epochs. In a first sense, he represents the highest point of rationalism: the moment when it attempts to embrace within the field of reason, without dualisms, the totality of the universe of differences. History and society, therefore, have a rational and intelligible structure. But, in a second sense, this synthesis contains all the seeds of its dissolution, as the rationality of history can be affirmed only at the price of introducing contradiction into the field of reason. It would, therefore, be sufficient to show that this is an impossible operation requiring constant violation of the method that it itself postulates — as was already demonstrated in the nineteenth century by Trendelenburg³ — for the Hegelian discourse to become something very different: a series of contingent and not logical transitions. It is precisely here that Hegel's modernity lies: for him, identity is never positive and closed in itself, but is constituted as transition, relation, difference. If, however, Hegel's logical relations become contingent transitions, the connections between them cannot be fixed as moments of an underlying or sutured totality. This means that they are articulations. In the Marxist tradition, this area of ambiguity is displayed in the contradictory uses of the concept of 'dialectics'. On the one hand, this has been uncritically introduced whenever an attempt has been made to escape the logic of fixation — that is, to think articulation. (Consider, for example, Mao Tse-tung's picturesque notion of dialectics: his very incomprehension of the logical character of dialectical transitions enables a logic of articulation to be introduced, in a dialectical disguise, at the politico-discursive level.) On the other hand, 'dialectics' exerts an effect of closure in those cases where more weight is attached to the necessary character of an a priori transition, than to the discontinuous moment of an open articulation. We should not reproach Marxists too much for these ambiguities and imprecisions if, as Trendelenburg already pointed out, they were present . . . in Hegel himself.

Now, this area of ambiguity constituted by the discursive uses of 'dialectics' is the first that has to be dissolved. In order to place ourselves firmly within the field of articulation, we must begin by renouncing the conception of 'society' as founding totality of its partial processes. We must, therefore, consider the openness of the social as the constitutive ground or 'negative essence' of the existing,

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and the diverse 'social orders' as precarious and ultimately failed attempts to domesticate the field of differences. Accordingly, the multiformity of the social cannot be apprehended through a system of mediations, nor the 'social order' understood as an underlying principle. There is no sutured space peculiar to 'society', since the social itself has no essence. Three remarks are important here. First, the two conceptions imply different logics of the social: in the case of 'mediations', we are dealing with a system of logical transitions in which relations between objects are conceived as following a relation between concepts; in the second sense, we are dealing with contingent relations whose nature we have to determine. Secondly, in criticizing the conception of society as an ensemble united by necessary laws, we cannot simply bring out the non-necessary character of the *relations* among elements, for we would then retain the necessary character of the *identity* of the elements themselves. A conception which denies any essentialist approach to social relations, must also state the precarious character of every identity and the impossibility of fixing the sense of the 'elements' in any ultimate literality. Thirdly, it is only in contrast to a discourse postulating

their unity; that an ensemble of elements appears as fragmented or dispersed. Outside any discursive structure, it is obviously not possible to speak of fragmentation, nor even to specify elements. Yet, a discursive structure is not a merely 'cognitive' or 'contemplative' entity; it is an *articulatory practice* which constitutes and organizes social relations. We can thus talk of a growing complexity and fragmentation of advanced industrial societies — not in the sense that, *sub specie aeternitatis*, they are more complex than earlier societies; but in the sense that they are constituted around a fundamental asymmetry. This is the asymmetry existing between a growing proliferation of differences — a surplus of meaning of 'the social' — and the difficulties encountered by any discourse attempting to fix those differences as moments of a stable articulatory structure.

We must, therefore, begin by analysing the category of *articulation*, which will give us our starting-point for the elaboration of the concept of hegemony. The theoretical construction of this category requires us to take two steps: to establish the possibility of specifying the elements which enter into the articulatory relation; and to determine the specificity of the relational moment comprising this articulation. Although this task could be broached from a number of different points, we prefer to begin with a *détour*. We shall first analyse in detail those theoretical discourses in which some of the concepts we will elaborate are present, but in which their develop

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ment is still inhibited by the basic categories of an essentialist discourse. Let us, in this sense, consider the evolution of the Althusserian school: by radicalizing *some* of its themes in a way that will explode its basic concepts, we will attempt to constitute a ground that will allow us to construct an adequate concept of 'articulation'.

Social Formation and Overdetermination

Althusser began his theoretical trajectory by trying drastically to differentiate his conception of society as a 'complex structured whole', from the Hegelian notion of totality. The Hegelian totality could be very complex, but its complexity was always that of a plurality of moments in a single process of self-unfolding. 'The *Hegelian totality* is the alienated development of the Idea; so, strictly speaking, it is the phenomenon, the self-manifestation of this simple principle which persists in all its manifestations, and therefore even in the alienation which prepares its restoration.'⁴ This conception, which reduces the real to the concept by identifying differences with necessary mediations in the self-unfolding of an essence, is of a very different order from the Althusserian complexity, which is the one inherent in a process of *overdetermination*. Given the indiscriminate and imprecise use subsequently made of this key Althusserian concept, it is necessary to specify its original meaning and the theoretical effects it was called upon to produce in Marxist discourse. The concept comes from psychoanalysis, and its extension had more than a superficially metaphoric character. In this regard, Althusser is very clear: 'I did not invent this concept. As I pointed out, it is borrowed from two existing disciplines: specifically, from linguistics and psychoanalysis. In these disciplines it has an objective dialectical "connotation", and — particularly in psychoanalysis — one sufficiently related formally to the content it designates here for the loan not to be an arbitrary one.' For Freud, overdetermination is no ordinary process of 'fusion' or 'merger' — which would at most be a metaphor established by analogy with the physical world, compatible with any form of multi-causality; on the contrary, it is a very precise type of fusion entailing a symbolic dimension and a plurality of meanings. The concept of overdetermination is constituted in the field of the symbolic, and has no meaning whatsoever outside it. Consequently, the most profound *potential* meaning of Althusser's statement that everything existing in the social is over-determined, is the assertion that the social constitutes itself as a

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symbolic order. The symbolic — i.e., overdetermined — character of social relations therefore implies that they lack an ultimate literality which would reduce them to necessary moments of an immanent law. There are not *two* planes, one of essences and the other of appearances, since there is no possibility of fixing an *ultimate* literal sense for which the symbolic would be a second and derived plane of signification. Society and social agents lack any essence, and their regularities merely consist of the relative and precarious forms of fixation which accompany the establishment of a certain order. This analysis seemed to open up the possibility of elaborating a new concept of articulation, which would start from the overdetermined character of social relations. But this did not occur. The concept of overdetermination tended to disappear from Althusserian discourse, and a growing closure led to the installation of a new variant of essentialism. This process, already started in 'On the Materialist Dialectic', was to culminate in *Reading Capital*.

If the concept of overdetermination was unable to produce the totality of its deconstructive effects within Marxist discourse, this was because, from the very beginning, an attempt was made to render it compatible with another central moment in Althusserian discourse that is, strictly speaking, incompatible with the first: namely, determination in the last instance by the economy. Let us consider the implications of this concept. If this ultimate determination were a truth valid *for every society*, the relationship between such determination and the conditions making it possible would not develop through a contingent historical articulation, but would constitute an a priori necessity. It is important to note that the problem under discussion is not that the economy should have its conditions of existence. This is a tautology, for if something exists, it is because given conditions render its existence possible. The problem is that if the 'economy' is determinant in the last instance *for every type of society*, it must be defined independently of any specific type of society; and the conditions of existence of the economy must also be defined separately from any concrete social relation. In that case, however, the only reality of those conditions of existence would be that of assuring the existence and determining role of the economy — in other words, they would be an internal moment of the economy as such; the difference would not be constitutive.'

There is, however, something more. Althusser starts by affirming the need not to hypostatize the abstract, given that there is no reality which is not overdetermined. In this sense, he approvingly quotes both Mao's analysis of contradiction and Marx's rejection, in the

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1857 Introduction, of abstractions like 'production', which only have meaning in terms of a concrete system of social relations. Yet, Althusser lapses into the very defect he criticizes: there is an abstract universal object, the 'economy', which produces concrete effects (determination in the last instance here and now); and there is another equally abstract object (conditions of existence) whose forms vary historically, but which are unified by the pre-established essential role of assuring the reproduction of the economy; finally, as the economy and its centrality are invariables of any possible social arrangement, the possibility opens up of providing a *definition* of society. Here the analysis has turned full circle. If the economy is an object which can determine any type of society in the last instance, this means that, at least with reference to that instance, we are faced with simple determination and not overdetermination. If society has a last instance which determines its laws of motion, then *the relations between the overdetermined instances and the last instance must be conceived in terms of simple, one-directional determination by the latter*. We can deduce from this that the field of overdetermination is extremely limited: it is the field of contingent variation as opposed to essential determination. And, if society does have a last and essential determination, the difference is not constitutive and the social is unified in the sutured space of a rationalist paradigm. Thus, we are confronted with exactly the same dualism that we found reproduced since the end of the nineteenth century in the field of Marxist discursiveness.

This is the point where the disarticulation of Althusser's rationalism will begin. It is important to note that the inconsistent dualism of the starting-point will be transmitted to those very theoretical forms which will preside over the disaggregation of the original schema. In effect, two possibilities arose: the first was to develop all the implications of the concept of overdetermination, showing the impossibility of a concept such as 'determination in the last instance by the economy' and affirming the precarious and relational character of every identity. The second possibility was to demonstrate the *logical inconsistency* of the necessary links postulated among the *elements* of the social totality, and thus to show, by a different path, the impossibility of the object 'society' as a rationally unified totality. The course actually followed was the latter. In consequence, the critique of the initial rationalism took place in a terrain which accepted the ana-

lytical assumptions of rationalism, while denying the possibility of a rationalist conception of the social. The result of this deconstructive escalation was that the concept of articulation became strictly unthinkable. It is the critique of this line

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of thought which will provide us with a different basis for construct-ing our concept of articulation.

The attempt to break the logical connections among the different moments of the Althusserian rationalist paradigm started with a self-criticism by Balibar,⁹ and it was carried to its ultimate consequences in certain currents of British Marxism.¹⁰ The pattern of Balibar's self-criticism involved the introduction of hiatuses at various points in the argument of *Reading Capital* — hiatuses in which the logical transitions were shown to have had a spurious character. He filled these, however, by diversifying the entities which were supposed to effect the transition from abstract to concrete. Thus, the understanding of the transition from one mode of production to another necessitated an expansion of the terrain of class struggle, whose unevenness prevented its reduction to the simple logic of a single mode of production. It was argued that reproduction required superstructural processes which could not be reduced to that logic; and that the unevenness of the diverse aspects of a conjuncture had to be understood in terms of a combination, in which the abstract unity of the participating elements dissolved. It is clear, however, that these analyses only succeeded in reproducing on an enlarged scale the difficulties of the initial formulation. What actually are these classes whose struggles must account for the processes of transition? If they are social agents constituted around interests determined by the relations of production, the rationality of their action and the forms of their political calculation can be determined by the logic of the mode of production. If, on the contrary, this does not exhaust the identity of classes, then where is their identity constituted? Similarly, to know that the superstructures intervene in the process of reproduction does not lead us very far, if we also know from the start that they are *superstructures*, that they have a place assigned to them within the topography of the social. A further step along this deconstructive line can be found in the work of Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, where the concepts of 'determination in the last instance' and 'structural causality' were subjected to a devastating critique. Having established the non-necessary character of the correspondence between productive forces and relations of production, *they* concluded that the concept of mode of production had to be discarded as a legitimate object of Marxist discourse. Once any totalizing perspective was abandoned, the type of articulation existent in a concrete social formation was posed in the following terms: 'The social formation is not a totality governed by an organizing principle, determination in the last instance, struc-

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turai causality, or whatever. It should be conceived as consisting of a definite set of relations of production together with economic, political and cultural forms in which their conditions of existence are secured. But there is no necessity for those conditions of existence to be secured and no necessary structure of the social formation in which those relations and forms must be combined. As for classes ... if they are conceived as economic classes, as categories of economic agents occupying definite positions of possession of or separation from the means of production, then they cannot also be conceived as, or represented by, political forces and ideological forms.'⁹

We are here presented with a conception of social formation which specifies *certain* objects of classical Marxist discourse — relations of production, productive forces, etc. — and reconceptualizes the articulation between those objects in terms of 'securing the conditions of existence'. We will attempt to prove: a) that the criterion for specifying objects is illegitimate; b) that the conceptualization of the relation among them in terms of mutually 'securing their conditions of existence', does not provide any concept of articulation.

Regarding the first point, Cutler et al. start with the unobjectionable statement that — unless we fall into a dogmatically rationalist attempt to determine at the conceptual level a general mechanism of reproduction of the social formation — it is impossible to derive from the conditions of existence of a certain conceptually specified relation, the necessity that those conditions be fulfilled or that specific forms be adopted by them. This is followed, however, by an entirely

illegitimate assertion: namely, that the relations of production of a given social formation can be specified separately from the concrete forms securing their conditions of existence. Let us examine the problem with attention. The conditions of existence of capitalist relations of production — for example, the legal conditions which secure private property — are *logical* conditions of existence, in so far as it would be contradictory to affirm the possibility of existence of those relations of production if such conditions were not fulfilled. It is also *a logical* conclusion that nothing in the concept of 'capitalist relations of production' implies that they should secure their own conditions of existence. Indeed, at the level of the same discourse which constitutes the former as an object, it follows that the latter would be *externally* secured. But, precisely because of this, it is inappropriate to say that it is not known how, in each case, these relations of production are to be secured, given that the distinction relations of production/conditions of exis

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tence is a logical distinction within a discourse about the abstract concept of relation of production, which does not diversify into a variety of concrete cases. Thus, if it is stated that in Britain the conditions of existence of capitalist relations of production are secured by these or those institutions, a doubly illegitimate discursive transposition is brought into play. On the one hand, it is asserted that certain concrete discourses and institutional practices secure the conditions of existence of an abstract entity — the capitalist relations of production — belonging to another discursive order; on the other hand, if the abstract term 'capitalist relations of production' is used to designate the relations of production in Britain, it is evident that an object specified in a certain discourse is being used as *a name to point out, as referents, the objects constituted by other discourses and practices — those comprising the ensemble of British productive relations. In this case, however, as these are not merely 'capitalist relations of production in general' but the locus of a multiplicity of practices and discourses, there is no longer any terrain in which the exteriority of the relations of production to their conditions of existence can be established a priori. Moreover, as the possibility of specifying distinctions among objects was based on a logical criterion, what is in question is the very pertinence of this criterion. If, as Cutler et al. argue, a relation between concepts does not imply a relation between the objects specified in those concepts, nor is it the case that a separation between objects can be derived from a separation between concepts. Cutler et al. maintain the specific identity and separation of the objects, but only by specifying one of the objects in a certain discourse and the other in a different dis-course.*

Let us now move on to our second problem. Can the link called 'securing the conditions of existence' be understood as an articulation of elements? Whatever conception one might have of a relation of articulation, this must include a system of differential positions; and, given that this system constitutes *a configuration, the problem necessarily arises of the relational or non-relational character of the identity of the elements involved. Is it possible to consider that the 'securing of the conditions of existence' constitutes an adequate analytical terrain for posing the problems raised by this relational moment? Evidently not. To secure a condition of existence is to fill a logical requirement of an object's existence, but it does not constitute a relation of existence between two objects. (For example, certain juridical forms can contribute the conditions of existence of*

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certain relations of production, even if the latter do not actually exist.) If, on the other hand, we consider the relations — and not simply the logical compatibility — existing between an object and the instance or instances that secure its conditions of existence, it is evident that those relations cannot be conceptualized on the basis that these instances secure the object's conditions of existence, simply because the securing does not constitute *a relation*. Consequently, it is necessary to move to a different terrain, if one wishes to think the specificity of the relation of articulation.

Hirst and Wooley contend: 'He (Althusser) conceives social relations as *totalities*, as a whole governed by a single determinative principle. This whole must be consistent with itself and must subject all agents and

relationships within its purview to its effects. We on the other hand consider social relations as aggregates of institutions, forms of organization, practices and agents which do not answer to any single causal principle or logic of consistency, which can and do differ in form and which are not essential to one another." This paragraph reveals all the problems posed by a purely logicist deconstruction. The notion of totality is here rejected by reference to the non-essential character of the links uniting the elements of the presumed totality. In this, we have no disagreements. But, once elements such as 'institutions', 'forms of organization' or 'agents' have been specified, a question immediately arises. If these aggregates — by contrast with the totality — are considered legitimate objects of social theorization, must we conclude that the relations among the internal components of each of them are essential and necessary? If the answer is yes, we have clearly moved from an essentialism of the totality to an essentialism of the elements; we have merely replaced Spinoza with Leibnitz, except that the role of God is no longer to establish harmony among the elements, but simply to secure their independence. If, on the contrary, the relations among those internal elements are neither essential nor necessary, then, besides having to specify the nature of relations characterized in a purely negative manner, we are compelled to explain why these non-necessary relations among internal components of the 'legitimate' objects cannot exist *among the legitimate objects themselves*. Should this prove possible, a certain notion of totality could be reintroduced, with the difference that it would no longer involve an underlying principle that would unify 'society', but an ensemble of totalizing effects in an open relational complex. But if we move solely within the alternative 'essential relations or non-relational

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identities', all social analysis will involve a pursuit of the infinitely receding mirage of logical atoms irreducible to any subsequent division.

The problem is that this entire debate concerning the *separation* among elements and objects has evaded a prior and fundamental issue: that of the *terrain* where the separation occurs. In this way, a very classical alternative has surreptitiously crept into the analysis: either the objects are separated as conceptually discrete elements — in which case we are dealing with a logical separation; or else, they are separated as empirically given objects — in which case it is impossible to elude the category of 'experience'. Thus, by failing to specify the terrain in which the unity or separation among objects takes place, we once again fall back into the 'rationalism or empiricism' alternative which the Hindess and Hirst current tries by all possible means to avoid. This unsatisfactory situation was, in fact, predetermined from the beginning: from the moment when the critique of Althusser's rationalism adopted the form of a critique of the logical connections postulated among different elements of the 'totality'. For, a logical deconstruction can only be implemented if the disconnected 'elements' are conceptually specified and fixed; that is, if a full and unequivocal identity is attributed to them. The only path that is then left open is a logical pulverization of the social, coupled with a theoretically agnostic descriptivism of the 'concrete situations'.

In the original Althusserian formulation, however, a very different theoretical undertaking was foreshadowed: that of a break with orthodox essentialism not through the logical disaggregation of its categories — with a resultant *fixing* of the identity of the disaggregated elements — but through the critique of every type of fixity, through an affirmation of the incomplete, open and politically negotiable character of every identity. This was the logic of over-determination. For it, the sense of every identity is overdetermined inasmuch as all literality appears as constitutively subverted and exceeded; far from there being an essentialist *totalization*, or a no less essentialist *separation* among objects, the presence of some objects in the others prevents any of their identities from being fixed. Objects appear articulated not like pieces in a clockwork mechanism, but because the presence of some in the others hinders the suturing of the identity of any of them. Our examination of the history of Marxism has, in this sense, shown a very different spectacle from that depicted by the naive positivism of 'scientific' socialism: far from a rationalist game in which social agents, perfectly constituted around interests,

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wage a struggle defined by transparent parameters, we have seen the difficulties of the working class in constituting itself as a historical subject, the dispersion and fragmentation of its positionalities, the emergence of forms of social and political reaggregation — 'historical bloc', 'collective will', 'masses', 'popular sectors' — which define new objects and new logics of their conformation. Thus, we are in the field of the overdetermination of some entities by others, and the relegation of any form of paradigmatic fixity to the ultimate horizon of theory. It is this specific logic of articulation that we must now attempt to determine.

Articulation and Discourse

In the context of this discussion, we will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call *moments*. By contrast, we will call *element* any difference that is not discursively articulated. In order to be correctly understood, these distinctions require three main types of specification: with regard to the characteristic coherence of the discursive formation; with regard to the dimensions and extensions of the discursive; and with regard to the openness or closure exhibited by the discursive formation.

1. A discursive formation is not unified either in the logical coherence of its elements, or in the a priori of a transcendental subject, or in a meaning-giving subject à la Husserl, or in the unity of an experience. The type of coherence we attribute to a discursive formation is — with the differences we will indicate later — close to that which characterizes the concept of 'discursive formation' formulated by Foucault: regularity in dispersion. In the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault rejects four hypotheses concerning the unifying principle of a discursive formation — reference to the same object, a common style in the production of statements, constancy of the concepts, and reference to a common theme. Instead, he makes dispersion itself the principle of unity, insofar as it is governed by rules of formation, by the complex conditions of existence of the dispersed statements." A remark is necessary at this point. A dispersion governed by rules may be seen from two symmetrically opposed perspectives. In the first place, as *dispersion*: this requires

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determination of the point of reference with respect to which the elements can be thought of as dispersed. (In Foucault's case, one can evidently speak of dispersion only by reference to the type of absent unity constituted around the common object, the style, the concepts and the theme.) But the discursive formation can also be seen from the perspective of the *regularity* in dispersion, and be thought, in that sense, as an ensemble of differential positions. This ensemble is not the expression of any underlying principle external to itself — it cannot, for instance, be apprehended either by a hermeneutic reading or by a structuralist combinatoriality — but it constitutes a con-figuration, which in certain contexts of exteriority can be *signified* as a totality. Given that our principal concern is with articulatory practices, it is this second aspect which interests us in particular.

Now, in an articulated discursive totality, where every element occupies a differential position — in our terminology, where every *element* has been reduced to a *moment* of that totality — all identity is relational and all relations have a necessary character. Benveniste, for example, states with reference to Saussure's principle of value: "To say that the values are "relative" means that they are relative *to each other*. Now, is that not precisely the proof of their *necessity*? . . . Whoever says system says arrangement or conformity of parts in a structure which transcends and explains its elements. Everything is *so necessary* in it that modifications of the whole and of the details reciprocally condition one another. The relativity of values is the best proof that they depend closely upon one another in the synchrony of a system which is always being threatened, always being restored. The point is that all values are values of opposition and are defined only by their difference . . . If language is some-thing other than a fortuitous conglomeration of erratic notions and sounds uttered at random, it is because necessity is inherent in its structure as in all structure." Necessity derives, therefore, not from an underlying intel-

ligible principle but from the regularity of a system of structural positions. In this sense, no relation can be contingent or external, since the identity of its elements would then be specified outside the relation itself. But this is no more than to affirm that in a discursive-structural formation constituted in this way, the practice of articulation would be impossible: the latter involves working on *elements*, while here we would be confronted only with *moments* of a closed and fully constituted totality where every moment is subsumed from the beginning under the principle of repetition. As we shall see, if contingency and articulation are possible, this is because no discursive formation is a sutured totality

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

2. Our analysis rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices. It affirms: a) that every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence; and b) that any distinction between what are usually called the linguistic and behavioural aspects of a social practice, is either an incorrect distinction or ought to find its place as a differentiation within the social production of meaning, which is structured under the form of discursive totalities. Foucault, for example, who has maintained a distinction — in our opinion inconsistent — between discursive and non-discursive practices,¹³ attempts to determine the relational totality that founds the regularity of the dispersions of a discursive formation. But he is only capable of doing this in terms of a discursive practice: '[Clinical medicine must be regarded] as the establishment of a relation, in medical discourse, between a number of distinct elements, some of which concerned the status of doctors, others the institutional and technical site from which they spoke, others their position as subjects perceiving, observing, describing, teaching, etc. It can be said that this relation between different elements (some of which are new, while others were already in existence) is effected by clinical discourse: it is this, as a practice, that establishes between them all a system of relations that is not "really" given or constituted *a priori*; and if there is a unity, if the modalities of enunciation that it uses, or to which it gives place, are not simply juxtaposed by a series of historical contingencies, it is because it makes constant use of this group of relations.⁷⁴ Two points have to be emphasized here. Firstly, if the so-called non-discursive complexes — institutions, techniques, productive organization, and so on — are analysed, we will only find more or less complex forms of differential positions among objects, which do not arise from a necessity external to the system structuring them and which can only therefore be conceived as discursive articulations. Secondly, the very logic of Foucault's argument concerning the articulatory nature of clinical discourse implies that the identity of the articulated elements must be at least partially modified by that articulation: that is, the category of dispersion only partially permits us to think the specificity of the regularities. The status of the dispersed entities is constituted in some intermediate region between the elements and the moments.¹⁵ We cannot enter here into all the complexities of a theory of discourse as we understand it, but we should at least indicate the

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

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

(b) At the root of the previous prejudice lies an assumption of the *mental* character of discourse. Against this, we will affirm the *material* character of every discursive structure. To argue the opposite is to accept the very classical dichotomy between an objective field constituted outside of any discursive intervention, and a discourse consisting of the pure expression of thought. This is, precisely, the dichotomy

which several currents of contemporary thought have tried to break.¹⁶ The theory of speech acts has, for example, under-lined their performative character. Language games, in Wittgenstein, include within an indissoluble totality both language and the actions interconnected with it: 'A is building with building-stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs, and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block", "pillar", "slab", "beam". A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such and such a call.' The conclusion is inevitable: 'I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the "language-game".'¹⁸ It is evident that the very material properties of objects are part of what Wittgenstein calls language game, which is an example of what we have called discourse. What constitutes a differential position and therefore a relational identity with certain linguistic elements, is not the idea of building-stone or slab, but the building-stone or the slab as such. (The connection with the idea of 'building-stone' has not, as far as we know, been sufficient to construct any building.) The linguistic and non-linguistic elements are not merely juxtaposed, but constitute a differential and structured system of positions — that is, a discourse. The differential positions include, therefore, a dispersion of very diverse material elements.¹⁹

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It might be argued that, in this case, the discursive unity is the teleological unity of a project; but this is not so. The objective world is structured in relational sequences which do not necessarily have a finalistic sense and which, in most cases, do not actually require any meaning at all: it is sufficient that certain regularities establish differential positions for us to be able to speak of a discursive formation. Two important conclusions follow from this. The first is that the material character of discourse cannot be unified in the experience or consciousness of a founding subject; on the contrary, diverse *subject positions* appear dispersed within a discursive formation. The second consequence is that the practice of articulation, as fixation/dislocation of a system of differences, cannot consist of purely linguistic phenomena; but must instead pierce the entire material density of the multifarious institutions, rituals and practices through which a discursive formation is structured. The recognition of this complexity, and of its discursive character, began to beat an obscure path in the terrain of Marxist theorization. Its characteristic form was the progressive affirmation, from Gramsci to Althusser, of the material character of *ideologies*, inasmuch as these are not simple systems of ideas but are embodied in institutions, rituals and so forth. What did, however, become an obstacle for the full theoretical unfolding of this intuition was that, in all cases, it was referred to the field of *ideologies*; that is, to formations whose identity was thought under the concept of 'superstructure'. It was an a priori unity vis-à-vis the dispersion of its materiality, so that it required an appeal either to the unifying role of a class (Gramsci), or to the functional requirements of the logic of reproduction (Althusser). But once this essentialist assumption is abandoned, the category of articulation acquires a different theoretical status: articulation is now a discursive practice which does not have a plane of constitution prior to, or outside, the dispersion of the articulated elements.

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

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is impossible as an objective relation between two entities. But this excludes the possibility of conceptually specifying a wide range of relations among objects in the social and political field. What we characterized as 'communist enumeration', for example, is based on a relation of *equivalence* among different class sectors within a social space divided into two antagonistic camps. But this equivalence supposes the operation of the principle of analogy among literally diverse contents — and what is this but a metaphorical transpo-

sition? It is important to observe that the equivalence constituted through communist enumeration is not the discursive *expression* of a real movement constituted outside discourse; on the contrary, this enumerative discourse is a real force which contributes to the moulding and constitution of social relations. Something similar occurs with a notion such as 'contradiction' — to which we will return below. If we consider social relations from the perspective of a naturalist paradigm, contradiction is excluded. But if we consider social relations as discursively constructed, contradiction becomes possible. For, whereas the classical notion of 'real object' excludes contradiction, a relation of contradiction can exist between two objects of discourse. The main consequence of a break with the discursive/extra-discursive dichotomy is the abandonment of the thought/reality opposition, and hence a major enlargement of the field of those categories which can account for social relations. Synonymy, metonymy, metaphor are not forms of thought that add a second sense to a primary, constitutive literality of social relations; instead, they are part of the primary terrain itself in which the social is constituted. Rejection of the thought/reality dichotomy must go together with a rethinking and interpenetration of the categories which have until now been considered exclusive of one or the other.

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

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

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

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

Thus, neither absolute fixity nor absolute non-fixity is possible. We will now consider these two successive moments, beginning with non-fixity. We have referred to 'discourse' as a system of differential entities — that is, of moments. But we have just seen that such a system only exists as a partial limitation of a 'surplus of meaning' which subverts it. Being inherent in every discursive situation, this 'surplus' is the necessary terrain for the constitution of every social practice. We will call it the *field of discursivity*. This term indicates the form of its relation with every concrete discourse: it determines at the same time the necessarily discursive character of any object, and the impossibility of any given discourse to implement a final suture. On this point, our analysis meets up with a number of contemporary currents of thought which — from Heidegger to Wittgenstein — have insisted on the impossibility of fixing ultimate meanings. Derrida, for example, starts from a radical

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break in the history of the concept of structure, occurring at the moment in which the centre — the *transcendental signified* in its multiple forms: eidos, arché, telos, energieia, ousia, alétheia, etc. — is abandoned, and with it the possibility of fixing a meaning which underlies the flow of differences. At this point, Derrida generalizes the concept of discourse in a sense coincident with that of our text. 'It became necessary to think both the law which somehow governed desire for a centre in the constitution of structure, and the process of signification which orders the displacements and substitutions for this law of central presence — but as a central presence which has never been itself, has always already been exiled from itself into its own substitute. The substitute does not substitute itself for anything which has somehow existed before it, henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no centre, that the centre could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the centre had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse — provided we can agree on this word — that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.'

Let us move on to our second dimension. The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations — otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a meaning. If the social does not manage to fix itself in the intelligible and instituted forms of a *society*, the social only exists, however, as an effort to construct that impossible object. Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre. We will call the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation, *nodal points*. (Lacan has insisted on these partial fixations through his concept of *points de capiton*, that is, of privileged signifiers that fix the meaning of a signifying chain. This limitation of the productivity of the signifying chain establishes the positions that make predication possible — a discourse incapable of generating any fixity of meaning is the discourse of the psychotic.)

Saussure's analysis of language considered it as a system of differences without positive terms; the central concept was that of *value*,

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according to which the meaning of a term was purely relational and determined only by its opposition to all the others. But this shows us that we are presented with the conditions of possibility of a *closed* system: only within it is it possible to fix in such a manner the meaning of every element. When the linguistic model was introduced into the general field of human sciences, it was this effect of systematicity that predominated, so that structuralism became a new form of essentialism: a search for the underlying structures constituting the inherent law of any possible variation. The critique of structuralism involved a break with this view of a fully constituted structural space; but as it also rejected any return to a conception of unities whose demarcation was given, like a nomenclature, by its reference to an object, the resulting conception was of a relational space unable to constitute itself as such — of a field dominated by the desire for a structure that was always finally absent. The sign is the name of a split, of an impossible suture between signified and signifier.²²

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

manages to be identical to itself, as every nodal point is constituted within an intertextuality that overflows it. *The practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity.*

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

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acquired, it cannot be *wholly* subsumed under the principle of repetition; rather, it always consists in the construction of new differences. The social is articulation insofar as 'society' is impossible. Earlier we said that, for the social, necessity only exists as a partial effort to limit contingency. This implies that the relations between 'necessity' and 'contingency' cannot be conceived as relations between two areas that are delimited and external to each other — as, for example, in Labriola's morphological prediction — because the contingent only exists within the necessary. This presence of the contingent in the necessary is what we earlier called *subversion*, and it manifests itself as symbolization, metaphorization, paradox, which deform and question the literal character of every necessity. Necessity, therefore, exists not under the form of an underlying principle, of a ground, but as an effort of literalization which fixes the differences of a relational system. The necessity of the social is the necessity proper to purely relational identities — as in the linguistic principle of value²³ — not natural 'necessity' or the necessity of an analytical judgement. 'Necessity', in this sense, is simply equivalent to a 'system of differential positions in a sutured space'.

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

The Category of 'Subject'

Discussion of this category requires us to distinguish two very different problems, which have frequently been confused in recent debates: the problem of the discursive or pre-discursive character of

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the category of subject; and the problem of the relationship among different subject positions.

The first problem has received more consistent attention, and has led to a growing questioning of the 'constitutive' role that both rationalism and empiricism attribute to 'human individuals'. This critique has essentially borne upon three conceptual targets: the view of the subject as an agent both rational and transparent to itself; the supposed unity and homogeneity of the ensemble of its positions; and the conception of the subject as origin and basis of social relations (the problem of constitutivity in the strict sense). We do not need to refer in detail to the main dimensions of this critique, as its classical moments — Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger — are well enough known. More recently, Foucault has shown how the tensions of the 'analytic of finitude', characteristic of what he has called the 'Age of Man', are resolved into a set of oppositions — the empirical/the transcendental, the Cogito/the unthought, withdrawal/return of the origin — which are insurmountable insofar as the category of 'Man' is maintained as a unified subject.²⁴ Other

analyses have pointed out the difficulties in breaking with the category of 'originative subject', which continues to creep into the very conceptions that seek to implement the rupture with it.²⁵

With regard to this alternative, and to its diverse constitutive elements, our position is clear. Whenever we use the category of 'subject' in this text, we will do so in the sense of 'subject positions' within a discursive structure. Subjects cannot, therefore, be the origin of social relations — not even in the limited sense of being endowed with powers that render an experience possible — as all 'experience' depends on precise discursive conditions of possibility.²⁶ This, however, is only an answer to our first problem, which in no way anticipates the solution that will be given to the second. From the discursive character of all subject positions, nothing follows concerning the type of relation that could exist among them. As every subject position is a discursive position, it partakes of the open character of every discourse; consequently, the various positions cannot be totally fixed in a closed system of differences. We can see why these very different problems were confused. Since the affirmation of the discursive character of every subject position was linked to the rejection of the notion of subject as an originative and founding totality, the analytic moment that had to prevail was that of dispersion, detotalization or decentring of certain positions with regard to others. Every moment of articulation or relation among

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them broke the cognitive effects of the dispersion metaphor, and led to the suspicion of a retotalization which would surreptitiously reintroduce the category of subject as a unified and unifying essence. From here, it was but one step to transform that *dispersion* of subject positions into an effective *separation* among them. However, the transformation of dispersion into separation obviously creates all the analytical problems we signalled earlier — especially those inherent in the replacement of the essentialism of the totality with an essentialism of the elements. If every subject position is a discursive position, the analysis cannot dispense with the forms of overdetermination of some positions by others — of the contingent character of all necessity which, as we have seen, is inherent in any discursive difference.

Let us consider two cases which have recently given rise to important discussions: that relating to the status of apparently abstract categories (above all, 'Man'); and that relating to the 'subject' of feminism. The first is at the centre of the entire recent debate on humanism. If the status of 'Man'²⁷ were that of an *essence*, its location with regard to other characteristics of 'human beings' would be inscribed on a logical scale proceeding from the abstract to the concrete. This would open the way for all the familiar tricks of an analysis of concrete situations in terms of 'alienation' and 'misrecognition'. But if, on the contrary, 'Man' is a discursively constructed subject position, its presumed abstract character in no way anticipates the form of its articulation with other subject positions. (The range is here infinite, and it challenges the imagination of any 'humanist'. For example, it is known how, in the colonial countries, the equivalence between 'rights of Man' and 'European values' was a frequent and effective form of discursively constructing the acceptability of imperialist domination.) The confusion created by E.P. Thompson in his attack on Althusser²⁸, rests precisely on this point. When referring to 'humanism', Thompson believes that if humanist values are denied the status of an essence, then they are deprived of all historical validity. In reality, however, what is important is to try to show how 'Man' has been produced in modern times, how the 'human' subject — that is, the bearer of a human identity without distinctions — appears in certain religious discourses, is embodied in juridical practices and is diversely constructed in other spheres. An understanding of this dispersion can help us to grasp the fragility of 'humanist' values themselves, the possibility of their perversion through equivalential articulation with other values, and their restriction to certain categories of the population — the prop-

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erty-owning class, for example, or the male population. Far from considering that 'Man' has the status of an essence — presumably a gift from heaven — such an analysis can show us the historical conditions of its emergence and the reasons for its current vulnerability thus enabling us to struggle more efficiently, and

without illusions in defence of humanist values. But it is equally evident that the analysis cannot simply remain at the moment of *dispersion*, given that 'human identity' involves not merely an ensemble of dispersed positions but also the forms of overdetermination existing among them. 'Man' is a fundamental nodal point from which it has been possible to proceed, since the eighteenth century, to the 'humanization' of a number of social practices. To insist on the dispersion of these positions from which 'Man' has been produced, constitutes only

first moment; in a second stage, it is necessary to show the relation of overdetermination and totalization that are established among these. The non-fixation or openness of the system of discursive differences is what makes possible these effects of analogy and interpenetration.

Something similar may be said about the 'subject' of feminism. The critique of feminist essentialism has been carried out in particular by the English journal *m/f*: a number of important studies have rejected the notion of a preconstituted category 'women's oppression' — whether its cause is located in the family, the mode of production or elsewhere — and have attempted to study 'the particular historical moment, the institutions and practices through which the category of woman is produced'.²⁹ Once it is denied that there is a single mechanism of women's oppression, an immense field of action opens up for feminist politics. One can then perceive the importance of punctual struggles against any oppressive form of constructing sexual differences, be it at the level of law, of the family, of social policy, or of the multiple cultural forms through which the category of 'the feminine' is constantly produced. We are, therefore, in the field of a dispersion of subject positions. The difficulty with this approach, however, arises from the one-sided emphasis given to the moment of dispersion — so one-sided that we are left with only a heterogeneous set of sexual differences constructed through practices which have no relation to one another. Now, while it is absolutely correct to question the idea of an original sexual division represented a posteriori in social practices, it is also necessary to recognize that overdetermination among the diverse sexual differences produces a systematic effect of sexual *division*. "Every construction of sexual differences, whatever their multiplicity

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and heterogeneity, invariably constructs the feminine as a pole subordinated to the masculine. It is for this reason that it is possible to speak of a sex/gender system." The ensemble of social practices, of institutions and discourses which produce woman as a category, are not completely isolated but mutually reinforce and act upon one another. This does not mean that there is a single cause of feminine subordination. It is our view that once female sex has come to connote a feminine gender with specific characteristics, this 'imaginary signification' produces concrete effects in the diverse social practices. Thus, there is a close correlation between 'subordination', as a general category informing the ensemble of significations constituting 'femininity', and the autonomy and uneven development of the diverse practices which construct the concrete forms of subordination. These latter are not the *expression* of an immutable feminine essence; in their construction, however, the symbolism which is linked to the feminine condition in a given society, plays a primordial role. The diverse forms of concrete subordination react, in turn, by contributing to the maintenance and reproduction of this symbolism." It is therefore possible to criticize the idea of an original antagonism between men and women, constitutive of the sexual division, without denying that in the various forms of construction of 'femininity', there is a common element which has strong over-determining effects in terms of the sexual division.

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

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imate conclusion to slip through that the other positions occupied by these agents are also 'working-class positions'. (They are obviously 'working-class' in the second sense, but not necessarily in the first.) The implicit assumption of the unity and transparency of the consciousness of every social agent serves to consolidate the ambiguity — and hence the confusion.

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

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

This assertion could, however, only be upheld if political practice was a perfectly delimited field, whose frontiers with the economy could be drawn *more geometrico* — that is, if we excluded as a matter of principle any overdetermination of the political by the economic or vice versa. But we know that this separation can only be established a priori in an essentialist conception, which derives a real separation among elements from a conceptual separation, transforming the conceptual specification of an identity into a fully and absolutely differentiated discursive position. Yet, if we accept the overdetermined character of every identity, the situation changes. *There is* a different way which — although we do not know whether it is middle — is in any case a third way. The 'winning over of agents to their historical interests' is, quite simply, an articulatory practice which constructs a discourse wherein the concrete demands of a group — the industrial workers — are conceived as steps towards a total liberation involving the overcoming of capitalism. Undoubtedly,

there is no essential necessity for these demands to be articulated in this way. But nor is there an essential necessity for them to be articulated in any other way, given that, as we have seen, the relation of articulation is not a relation of necessity. What the discourse of 'historical interests' does is *to hegemonize* certain demands. On this point, Cutler et al. are absolutely right: political practice constructs the interests it represents. But if we observe closely, we will note that, far from being consolidated, the separation between the economic and the political is hereby *eliminated*. For, a reading in socialist terms of immediate economic struggles discursively articulates the political and the economic, and thus does away with the exteriority existing between the two. The alternative is clear: either

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the separation between the political and the economic takes place on an extra-discursive plane which secures it a priori; or else that separation is the result of discursive practices, and it is not possible to immunize it a priori from every discourse constructing their unity. If the dispersion of positions is a condition of any articulatory practice, there is no reason why that dispersion should *necessarily* take the form of a separation between the political and the economic identity of social agents. Were economic identity and political identity to be sutured, the conditions of any relation of representation would evidently disappear: we would have returned to the tautological situation in which representative and represented are moments of a single relational identity. Let us accept instead that neither the political identity nor the economic identity of the agents crystallizes as differential moment of a unified discourse, and that the relation between them is the precarious unity of a tension. We already know what this means: the subversion of each of the terms by a polysemy which prevents their stable articulation. In this case, the economic is and is *not* present in the political and vice versa; the relation is not one of literal differentiations but of unstable analogies between the two terms. Now, this form of presence through metaphorical trans-position is the one that the *factio iuris* of representation attempts to think. Representation is therefore constituted not as a definite type of relation; but as the field of an unstable oscillation whose vanishing point is, as we saw, either the literalization of the fiction through the breaking of every link between representative and represented, or the disappearance of the separate identity of both through their absorption as moments of a single identity.

All this shows us that the specificity of the category of subject cannot be established either through the absolutization of a dispersion of 'subject positions', or through the equally absolutist unification of these around a 'transcendental subject'. The category of subject is penetrated by the same ambiguous, incomplete and polysemical character which overdetermination assigns to every discursive identity. For this reason, the moment of closure of a discursive totality, which is not given at the 'objective' level of that totality, cannot be established at the level of a 'meaning-giving subject', since the subjectivity of the agent is penetrated by the same precariousness and absence of suture apparent at any other point of the discursive totality of which it is part. 'Objectivism' and 'subjectivism'; 'holism' and 'individualism' are symmetrical expressions of the *desire* for a fullness that is permanently deferred. Owing to this very absence of a final suture, the dispersion of subject positions

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cannot constitute a solution: given that none of them manages ultimately to consolidate itself as a *separate position*, there is a game of overdetermination among them that reintroduces the horizon of an impossible totality. It is this game which makes hegemonic articulation possible.

Antagonism and Objectivity

The impossibility of closure (i.e., the impossibility of 'society') has up to this point been presented as the precariousness of every identity, which manifests itself as a continuous movement of differences. We must now, however, ask ourselves: are there not some 'experiences', some discursive forms, in which what is manifested is no longer the continuous deferment of the 'transcendental signified', but the very vanity of this deferring, the final impossibility of any stable difference and, thus, of any 'objectivity'? The answer is yes. This 'experience' of the limit of all objectivity does have a form of precise discursive presence, and this is *antagonism*.

Antagonisms have been widely studied in historical and socio-logical literature. From Marxism to the various forms of 'conflict theory', a whole range of explanations have been given as to how and why antagonisms emerge in society. This theoretical diversity does, however, display a common feature: the discussion has centred almost exclusively on the description of antagonisms and their original causes. Only rarely has an attempt been made to address the core of our problem: what is an antagonistic relation? what type of relation among objects does it suppose? Let us begin with one of the few discussions which have broached this question: namely, that initiated by Lucio Colletti's analysis of the specificity of social antagonisms, and of the claims which the categories 'real opposition' and 'contradiction' can make to account for that specificity.³⁴

Colletti starts from the Kantian distinction between real opposition (*Realrepuganz*) and logical contradiction. The first coincides with the principle of contrariety and responds to the formula 'A — B': each of its terms has its own positivity, independent of its relation with the other. The second is the category of contradiction and responds to the formula 'A — not A': the relation of each term with the other exhausts the reality of both. Contradiction occurs in the terrain of the proposition; it is only possible to enter into contradictions at a logico-conceptual level. The first type of opposition occurs, on the contrary, in the terrain of real objects, for no *real*

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object exhausts its identity by its opposition to another object; it has a reality of its own, independent of that opposition.³⁵ Colletti then concludes that whereas Hegel, as an idealist philosopher who reduced reality to the concept, could introduce contradiction into the real, this is incompatible with a materialist philosophy like Marxism which starts from the extra-mental character of the real. According to this view, Marxists fell into a lamentable confusion by considering antagonisms as contradictions. Colletti's programme is to re-interpret the former in terms of real oppositions.

Let us note that Colletti starts from an exclusive alternative: *either* something is a real opposition, *or* it is a contradiction. This derives from the fact that his universe has room for only two types of entities, real objects and concepts; and that the starting-point and permanent assumption of all his analysis is the separation between thought and reality. There follow a number of consequences which, as we shall try to show, destroy the credentials of both 'real opposition' and 'contradiction' as categories capable of accounting for antagonisms. First of all, it is clear that an antagonism cannot be a *real* opposition. There is nothing antagonistic in a crash between two vehicles: it is a material fact obeying positive physical laws. To apply the same principle to the social terrain would be tantamount to saying that what is antagonistic in class struggle is the physical act by which a policeman hits a worker militant, or the shouts of a group in Parliament which prevent a member of an opposing sector from speaking. 'Opposition' is here a concept of the physical world which has been metaphorically extended to the social world, or vice versa; but there is evidently little point in pretending that there is a common core of meaning which is sufficient to explain the type of relation implicit in both cases. This is even clearer if, in order to refer to the social, we replace 'opposed forces' with 'enemy forces' — for in this case, the metaphorical transposition to the physical world, at least in a post-Homeric universe, has not taken place. It may be objected that it is not the *physical* character of the opposition that counts but only its *extra-logical* character. But it is even less clear how a theory of the specificity of social antagonisms can be grounded upon the mere opposition to logical contradiction that is shared by a clash between two social forces and a collision between two stones.³⁶

Furthermore, as Roy Edgley³⁹ and Jon Elster⁴⁰ have pointed out, two different assertions are mixed together in this problem: (a) that the real is contradictory, and (b) that contradictions exist in reality. Regarding the first, there can be no doubt that the statement is self-defeating. Popper's famous critique of the dialectic³⁹ is, from

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this point of view, unobjectionable. The second assertion, however, is undeniable: it is a fact that in reality there are situations which can only be described in terms of logical contradiction. Propositions are also a part of the real and, insofar as contradictory propositions exist empirically, it is evident that contradictions exist *in* the real. People argue and, inasmuch as a set of social practices — codes, beliefs, etc. — can adopt a propositional structure, there is no reason why they should not give rise to contradictory propositions. (At this point, however, Edgley falls into the obvious fallacy of believing that the possible real existence of contradictory propositions proves the correctness of the dialectic. The dialectic is a doctrine about the essentially contradictory nature of the real, not about the empirical existence of contradictions in reality.)

It would thus seem that the category of contradiction has an assured place within the real, and that it provides the basis from which to account for social antagonisms. But a moment's reflection is sufficient to convince us that this is not so. We all participate in a number of mutually contradictory belief systems, and yet no antagonism emerges from these contradictions. Contradiction does not, therefore, necessarily imply an antagonistic relation.⁴⁰ But if we have excluded both 'real opposition' and 'contradiction' as categories accounting for antagonism, it would seem that the latter's specificity cannot be apprehended. The usual descriptions of antagonisms in the sociological or historical literature confirm this impression: they explain the *conditions* which made antagonisms possible, but not the antagonisms as such. (The description proceeds through expressions such as 'this provoked a reaction' or 'in that situation X or Z found itself forced to react'. In other words, there is a sudden jump from explanation to an appeal for our common sense or experience to complete the meaning of the text: that is to say, the explanation is interrupted.)

Let us attempt to unravel the meaning of this interruption. First, we must ask ourselves whether the impossibility of assimilating antagonism to real opposition or to contradiction, is not the impossibility of assimilating it to something shared by these types of relation. They do, in fact, share something, and that is the fact of being *objective relations* — between conceptual objects in the second case, and between real objects in the first. But in both cases, it is something that the objects *already are* which makes the relation intelligible. That is, in both cases we are concerned with full identities. In the case of contradiction, it is because A *is fully* A that being-not-A is a contradiction — and therefore an impossibility. In

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the case of real opposition, it is because A is also fully A that its relation with B produces an objectively determinable effect. But in the case of antagonism, we are confronted with a different situation: the presence of the 'Other' prevents me from being totally myself. The relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution. The presence of the Other is not a logical impossibility: it exists; so it is not a contradiction. But neither is it subsumable as a positive differential moment in a causal chain, for in that case the relation would be given by what each force is and there would be no negation of this being. (It is because a physical force is a physical force that another identical and countervailing force leads to rest; in contrast, it is because a peasant *cannot be a peasant that an antagonism exists with the landowner expelling him from his land.*) *Insofar as there is antagonism, I cannot be a full presence for myself. But nor is the force that antagonizes me such a presence: its objective being is a symbol of my non-being and, in this way, it is overflowed by a plurality of meanings which prevent its being fixed as full positivity. Real opposition is an objective relation — that is, determinable, defmable — among things; contradiction is an equally definable relation among concepts; antagonism constitutes the limits of every objectivity, which is revealed as partial and precarious objectification. If language is a system of differences, antagonism is the failure of difference: in that sense, it situates itself within the limits of language and can*

only exist as the disruption of it — that is, as metaphor. We can thus understand why sociological and historical narratives must interrupt themselves and call upon an 'experience', transcending their categories, to fill their hiatuses: for every language and every society are constituted as a repression of the consciousness of the impossibility that penetrates them. Antagonism escapes the possibility of being apprehended through language, since language only exists as an attempt to fix that which antagonism subverts.

Antagonism, far from being an objective relation, is a relation wherein the limits of every objectivity are *shown* — in the sense in which Wittgenstein used to say that what cannot be *said* can be *shown*. But if, as we have demonstrated, the social only exists as a partial effort for constructing society — that is, an objective and closed system of differences — antagonism, as a witness of the impossibility of a final suture, is the 'experience' of the limit of the social. Strictly speaking, antagonisms are not *internal* but *external* to society; or rather, they constitute the limits of society, the latter's impossibility of fully constituting itself. This statement may seem

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paradoxical, but only if we surreptitiously introduce certain assumptions which must be carefully excluded from our theoretical perspective. In particular, two such assumptions would make absurd our thesis concerning the theoretical location of antagonism. The first is the identification of 'society' with an ensemble of *physically* existing agents who live within a given territory. If this criterion is accepted, it is obvious that antagonisms occur *among* those agents and are not external to them. But it does not necessarily follow, from the 'empirical' coexistence of the agents, that the relations among them should be shaped according to an objective and intelligible pattern. (The price of identifying 'society' with the referent would be to empty it of any rationally specifiable content.) However, accepting that 'society' is an intelligible and objective ensemble, we would introduce another assumption incompatible with our analysis if we attributed to that *rational totality* the character of an underlying principle of the social conceived as an *empirical totality*. For there would then no longer be any aspect of the second which could not be reabsorbed as a moment of the first. In that case antagonisms, like everything else, would have to be *positive internal* moments of society, and we would have returned to the Hegelian cunning of reason. But if we maintain our conception of the social as a non-sutured space, as a field in which all positivity is metaphorical and subvertible, then there is no way of referring the *negation* of an objective position to an underlying positivity — be it causal or of any other type — which would account for it. Antagonism as the negation of a given order is, quite simply, the limit of that order, and not the moment of a broader totality in relation to which the two poles of the antagonism would constitute differential — i.e. objective — partial instances. (Let us be understood: the conditions which made the antagonism possible may be described as *positivi-ties*, but the antagonism as such is not reducible to them.)

We must consider this 'experience' of the limit of the social from two different points of view. On the one hand, as an experience of failure. If the subject is constructed through language, as a partial and metaphorical incorporation into a symbolic order, any putting into question of that order must necessarily constitute an identity crisis. But, on the other hand, this experience of failure is not an access to a diverse ontological order, to a something beyond differences, simply because . . . there is no beyond. The limit of the social cannot be traced as a frontier separating two territories — for the perception of a frontier supposes the perception of something beyond it that would have to be objective and positive — that is, a

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new difference. The limit of the social must be given within the social itself as something subverting it, destroying its ambition to constitute a full presence. Society never manages fully to be society, because everything in it is penetrated by its limits, which prevent it from constituting itself as an objective reality. We must now consider the way in which this subversion is discursively constructed. As we have seen, this will require us to determine the forms assumed by the presence of the antagonistic as such.

Equivalence and Difference

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

referents — for example, men or white people as biological referents — they find themselves in difficulties. For, such struggles ignore the specificity of the political spaces in which the other democratic antagonisms emerge. Take, for example, a discourse which presents men, qua biological reality, as the enemy. 'What will happen to a discourse of this kind when it is necessary to develop antagonisms like the struggle for the freedom of expression or the struggle against the monopolization of economic power, both of

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

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

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

Hegemony

We must now see how our different theoretical categories link up to produce the concept of 'hegemony'. The general field of the emergence of hegemony is that of articulatory practices, that is, a field where the 'elements' have not crystallized into 'moments'. In a closed system of relational identities, in which the

meaning of each moment is absolutely fixed, there is no place whatsoever for a hegemonic practice. A fully successful system of differences, which excluded any floating signifier, would not make possible any articulation; the principle of repetition would dominate every practice within this system and there would be nothing to hegemonize. It is because hegemony supposes the incomplete and open character of the social, that it can take place only in a field dominated by articulatory practices.

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

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

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

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and frontier effects. But, conversely, not every antagonism supposes hegemonic practices. In the case of millenarianism, for example, we have an antagonism in its most pure form, and yet there is no hegemony because there is no articulation of floating elements: the distance between the two communities is something immediately given and acquired from the beginning, and it does not suppose any articulatory construction. The chains of equivalence do not construct the communitarian space; rather, they operate on pre-existing communitarian spaces. Thus, the two conditions of a hegemonic articulation are the presence of

antagonistic forces and the instability of the frontiers which separate them. Only the presence of a vast area of floating elements and the possibility of their articulation to opposite camps — which implies a constant redefinition of the latter — is what constitutes the terrain permitting us to define a practice as hegemonic. Without equivalence and without frontiers, it is impossible to speak strictly of hegemony.

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

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

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

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

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

The first problem concerns the separation of planes, the external moment which hegemony, like any articulatory relation, supposes. As we have seen, this does not present any problems for Gramsci, as the final class core of a 'collective will' is not, in his analysis, the result of hegemonic articulations. But how do things stand once the ontological privilege of this final core has been dissolved? If, in the case of a successful hegemony, the articulatory practices have managed to construct a structural system of differences, of relational identities, does not the external character of the hegemonic force also disappear? Does it not become a new difference within the historical bloc? The answer must undoubtedly be affirmative. A situation in which a system of differences had been so welded together would imply the end of the hegemonic form of politics. In that case there would be relations of subordination or power, but not, strictly speaking, hegemonic relations. For, with the disappearance of the separation of planes, of the moment of exteriority, the field of articulatory practices would also have disappeared. The hegemonic dimension of politics only expands as the open, non-sutured character of the social increases. In a medieval peasant community the area open to differential articulations is minimal and, thus, there are no hegemonic forms of articulation: there is an abrupt transition from repetitive practices within a closed system of differences to frontal and absolute equivalences when the community finds itself threatened. This is why the hegemonic form of politics only becomes dominant at the beginning of modern times, when the reproduction of the different social areas takes place in permanently changing conditions which constantly require the construction of new systems of differences. Hence the area of articulatory practices is immensely broadened. Thus the conditions and the possibility of a pure fixing of differences recede; every social identity becomes the meeting point for a multiplicity of articulatory practices, many of them antagonistic. In these circumstances, it is not possible to arrive at a complete interiorization that totally bridges the gap between articulated and articulator. But, it is important to emphasize, neither

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is it possible for the identity of the articulating force to remain separate and unchanged. Both are subjected to a constant process of subversion and redefinition. This is so much the case that not even a system of equivalences is immune to the danger of being transformed into a new difference: it is known how the frontal opposition of many groups to a system can cease to be exterior to it and become simply a contradictory but internal location within that system — that is, another difference. A hegemonic formation also embraces what opposes it, insofar as the opposing force accepts the system of basic articulations of that formation as something it negates, but the *place of the negation* is defined by the internal parameters of the formation itself. So, the theoretical determination of the conditions of extinction of the hegemonic form of politics, also explains the reasons for the constant expansion of this form in modern times.

The second problem refers to the singleness of the hegemonic centre. Once we reject the ontological plane, which would inscribe hegemony as *centre* of the social and hence as its essence, it is evidently not possible to maintain the idea of the singleness of the nodal hegemonic point. Hegemony is, quite simply, a political *type of relation, a form*, if one so wishes, of politics; but not a determinable location within a topography of the social. In a given social formation, there can be a variety of hegemonic nodal points. Evidently some of them may be highly overdetermined: they may constitute points of condensation of a number of social relations and, thus, become the focal point of a multiplicity of totalizing effects. But insofar as the social is an infinitude not reducible to any underlying unitary principle, the mere idea of a centre of the social has no meaning at all. Once the status of the concept of hegemony and the characteristic plurality of the social has been redefined in these terms, we must ask ourselves about the forms of relation existing between them. This irreducible plurality of the social has frequently been conceived as an autonomization of spheres and forms of struggle. This requires that we briefly analyse some of the problems related to the concept of 'autonomy'. In recent years there has been considerable debate concerning, for example, the concept of 'relative autonomy of the State',⁴¹ but it has mostly been posed in terms that have led it into a dead end. In general, such attempts to explain the 'relative autonomy of the State' were made in a

framework that accepted the assumption of a sutured society — for example, through determination in the last instance by the economy — and so the problem of relative autonomy, be it of the State or of any other entity, became insoluble. For, either the structural framework con-

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stituted by the basic determinations of society explains not only the limits of autonomy but also the nature of the autonomous entity — in which case that entity is another structural determination of the system and the concept of 'autonomy' is redundant; or else the autonomous entity is not determined by the system, in which case it is necessary to explain where it is constituted, and the premise of a sutured society would also have to be discarded. It is precisely the wish to combine this premise with a concept of autonomy inconsistent with it, that has marred most contemporary Marxist debate on the State — the work of Poulantzas in particular. If, however, we renounce the hypothesis of a final closure of the social, it is necessary to start from a plurality of political and social spaces which do not refer to any ultimate unitarian basis. Plurality is not the phenomenon to be explained, but the starting point of the analysis. But if, as we have seen, the identity of each of these spaces is always precarious, it is not possible simply to affirm the equation between autonomy and dispersion. Neither total autonomy nor total subordination is, consequently, a plausible solution. This clearly indicates that the problem cannot be resolved in the terrain of a stable system of differences; that both autonomy and subordination — and their different degrees of relativity — are concepts which only acquire their meaning in the field of articulatory practices and, insofar as these operate in political fields crisscrossed by antagonisms, of hegemonic practices. Articulatory practices take place not only *within* given social and political spaces, but *between* them. The autonomy of the State as a whole — assuming for a moment that we can speak of it as a unity — depends on the construction of a political space which can only be the result of hegemonic articulations. And something similar can be said for the degree of unity and autonomy existing among the different branches and apparatuses of the State. That is, the autonomization of certain spheres is not the necessary structural effect of anything, but rather the result of precise articulatory practices constructing that autonomy. *Autonomy, far from being incompatible with hegemony, is a form of hegemonic construction.*

Something similar can be said for the other important use made of the concept of autonomy in recent years: autonomy linked to the pluralism required by the expansion of the new social movements. Here we are in the same situation. If the identity of the subjects or social forces that become autonomous was constituted once and for all, the problem would be posed *only* in terms of autonomy. But if these identities depend on certain precise social and political conditions of existence, autonomy itself can only be defended and

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expanded in terms of a wider hegemonic struggle. The feminist or ecological political subjects, for example, are up to a certain point, *like any other social identity*, floating signifiers, and it is a dangerous illusion to think that they are assured once and for all, that the terrain which has constituted their discursive conditions of emergence cannot be subverted. The question of a hegemony which would come to threaten the autonomy of certain movements is, therefore, a badly posed problem. Strictly speaking, this incompatibility would *only* exist if the social movements were monads, disconnected one from another; but if the identity of each movement can never be acquired once and for all, then it cannot be indifferent to what takes place outside it. That, in certain circumstances, the class political subjectivity of white workers in Britain is overdetermined by racist or anti-racist attitudes, is evidently important for the struggle of the immigrant workers. This will bear upon certain practices of the trade union movement, which will in turn have consequences in a number of aspects of State policy and ultimately rebound upon the political identity of the immigrant workers themselves. Here there clearly is a hegemonic struggle, insofar as the articulation between the trade union militancy of white workers and racism or anti-racism is not defined from the beginning; but the forms of this struggle undertaken by anti-racist movements will in part pass through the autonomization of certain activities and organizational forms, partly through systems of alliances with other forces, and partly through the construction of systems of equivalence among contents of the different movements. For, nothing can consolidate anti-racist struggles more than the construction of stable forms of overdetermination among such

contents as anti-racism, anti-sexism and anti-capitalism which, left to themselves, do not necessarily tend to converge. Once again, autonomy is not opposed to hegemony, but is an internal moment of a wider hegemonic operation. (Evidently, this operation does not necessarily pass through the 'party' form, nor through a single institutional form, nor through any other type of a priori arrangement.)

If hegemony is a *type of political relation* and not a topographical concept, it is clear that it cannot either be conceived as an irradiation of effects from a privileged point. In this sense, we could say that hegemony is basically metonymical: its effects always emerge from a surplus of meaning which results from an operation of displacement. (For example, a trade union or a religious organization may take on organizational functions in a community, which go beyond the traditional practices ascribed to them, and which are combated and

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resisted by opposing forces.) This moment of dislocation is essential to any hegemonic practice: we have witnessed it from the very emergence of the concept in Russian Social Democracy, under the form of the exteriority of class identity to the hegemonic tasks; and our conclusion is that no social identity is ever totally acquired — a fact which gives the articulatory-hegemonic moment the full measure of its centrality. The condition of this centrality is, therefore, the collapse of a clear demarcation line between the internal and the external, between the contingent and the necessary. But this leads to an inescapable conclusion: no hegemonic logic can account for the totality of the social and constitute its centre, for in that case a new suture would have been produced and the very concept of hegemony would have eliminated itself. The openness of the social is, thus, the precondition of every hegemonic practice. Now, this necessarily leads to a second conclusion: the hegemonic formation, as we have conceived it, cannot be referred to the specific logic of a single social force. Every historical bloc — or hegemonic formation — is constructed through regularity in dispersion, and this dispersion includes a proliferation of very diverse elements: systems of differences which partially define relational identities; chains of equivalences which subvert the latter but which can be transformistically recovered insofar as the place of opposition itself becomes regular and, in that way, constitutes a new difference; forms of overdetermination which concentrate either power, or the different forms of resistance to it; and so forth. The important point is that every form of power is constructed in a pragmatic way and *internally* to the social, through the opposed logics of equivalence and difference; power is never *foundational*. The problem of power cannot, therefore, be posed in terms of the search for *the class* or *the dominant sector* which constitutes the centre of a hegemonic formation, given that, by definition, such a centre will always elude us. But it is equally wrong to propose as an alternative, either pluralism or the total diffusion of power within the social, as this would blind the analysis to the presence of nodal points and to the partial concentrations of power existing in every concrete social formation. This is the point at which many of the concepts of classical analysis — 'centre', 'power', 'autonomy', etc. — can be reintroduced, if their status is redefined: all of them are contingent *social logics* which, as such, acquire their meaning in precise conjunctural and relational contexts, where they will always be limited by other — frequently contradictory — logics; but none of them has absolute validity, in the sense of defining a space or structural

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moment which could not in its turn be subverted. It is, therefore, impossible to arrive at a theory of the social on the basis of absolutizing any of those concepts. If society is not sutured by any single unitary and *positive* logic, our understanding of it cannot provide that logic. A 'scientific' approach attempting to determine the 'essence' of the social would, in actual fact, be the height of utopianism.

One important point before we conclude. In the foregoing argument we spoke of 'social formation' as an empirical referent, and of 'hegemonic formation' as an articulated totality of differences. The same term — 'formation' — is used, therefore, in two totally different senses, and

we must attempt to eliminate the resulting ambiguity. The problem in its more general form may be formulated as follows: if an ensemble of empirically given agents (in the case of a social formation) or an ensemble of discursive moments (in the case of a hegemonic formation) are included in the totality implied by the notion of formation, it is because through that totality it is possible to distinguish them with regard to something external to the latter. Thus, it is on the basis of its own limits that a formation is shaped as a totality. If we pose the problem of the construction of these limits in the case of a hegemonic formation, we will have to distinguish two levels: that related to the abstract conditions of possibility of every 'formation', and that related to the specific difference which the logic of hegemony introduces into it. Let us begin from the internal space of a formation as a relatively stable system of differences. It is clear that the logic of difference is not sufficient to construct limits, for if it were exclusively dominant, what lay beyond it could only be other differences, and the regularity of these would transform them into a part of the formation itself. If we remain in the field of differences, we remain in the field of an infinitude which makes it impossible to think any frontier and which, consequently, dissolves the concept of 'formation'. That is, limits only exist insofar as a systematic ensemble of differences can be cut out as *totality* with regard to something *beyond* them, and it is only through this cutting out that the totality constitutes itself as formation. If, from what has been said, it is clear that that beyond cannot consist in something positive — in a new difference — then the only possibility is that it will consist in something negative. But we already know that the logic of equivalence is the one that introduces negativity into the field of the social. This implies that a formation manages *to signify itself* (that is, to constitute itself as such) only by transforming the limits into frontiers, by constituting a

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chain of equivalences which constructs what is beyond the limits as that which it *is not*. It is only through negativity, division and antagonism that a formation can constitute itself as a totalizing horizon.

The logic of equivalence, however, is merely the most abstract and general condition of existence of every formation. In order to be able to speak of hegemonic formation, we have to introduce another condition provided by our previous analysis: namely, that continuous redefinition of the social and political spaces and those constant processes of displacement of the limits constructing social division, which are proper to contemporary societies. It is only under these conditions that the totalities shaped through the logic of equivalence acquire a hegemonic character. But this would seem to imply that, insofar as this precariousness tends to make unstable the internal frontiers of the social, the category of formation itself is threatened. And this is exactly what occurs: if every frontier disappears, this does not simply mean that the formation is more difficult to *recognize*. As the totality is not a datum but a construction, when there is a breaking of its constitutive chains of equivalence, the totality does something more than conceal itself: *it dissolves*.

It follows from this that the term 'social formation', when used to designate a referent, is meaningless. Social agents do not, as referents, constitute any formation. If the term 'social formation' attempts, for example, in an apparently neutral way, to designate the social agents living in a given territory, the problem is immediately posed of the limits of that territory. And here it is necessary to define political boundaries — that is, configurations constituted at a level different from that of the simple referential entity of the agents. Here there are two options: either the political limits are considered as a simple external datum — in which case terms such as 'French social formation' or 'English social formation' designate hardly more than 'France' or 'England', and the term 'formation' is clearly excessive; or else the agents are reintegrated into the various formations constituting them — and in that case there is no reason why these should coincide with national frontiers. Certain articulatory practices will make them coincide with the limits of the formation as such. But in either case this is an open process which will depend on the multiple hegemonic articulations shaping a given space, and operating within it at the same time.

Through this chapter we have attempted to show, at several points in our argument, the openness and indeterminacy of the

social, which gives a primary and founding character to negativity and antagonism, and assures the existence of articulatory and hegemonic practices. We must now once again take up the line of our political argument of the first two chapters, and show how the indeterminacy of the social and the articulatory logic which follows from it, allows the question of the relation between hegemony and democracy to be posed in new terms.

Notes to Chapter 3

C. Taylor, *Hegel*, Cambridge 1975, p. 23 and, in general, chapter 1.

Hölderlin, *Hyperion Fragment*, quoted in C. Taylor, p. 35.

A. Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Hildesheim 1964 (first edition 1840).

L. Althusser, *For Marx*, London 1969, p. 203.

Ibid., p. 206 (footnote).

As can be observed, our critique coincides on some points with that of the Hindess and Hirst school in England. We do, however, have some fundamental disagreements with their approach, to which we will refer later in the text.

E. Balibar, 'Sur la dialectique historique. (Quelques remarques critiques à propos de *Lire le Capital*)', in *Cinq études du matérialisme historique*, Paris 1984.

B. Hindess and P. Hirst, *Pre-capitalist Modes of Production*, London 1975; B. Hindess and P. Hirst, *Mode Production and Social Formation*, London 1977; A. Cutler, B. Hindess, P. Hirst and A. Hussein, *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today*, London 1977, 2 vols.

Cutler et al., vol. 1, p. 222.

P. Hirst and P. Wooley, *Social Relations and Human Attributes*, London 1982, p. 134.

M. Foucault, *Archaeology Knowledge*, London 1972, pp. 31-39.

E. Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, Miami 1971, pp. 47-8.

In an insightful study on the limits of Foucault's archaeological method, B. Brown and M. Cousins ('The linguistic fault: the case of Foucault's archaeology', *Economy and Society*, August 1980, vol. 9, no. 3) state: '(Foucault) makes no distribution of phenomena into two classes of being, Discourse and the Non-Discursive. For him the question is always the identity of particular discursive formations. What falls outside a particular discursive formation merely falls outside it. It does not thereby join the ranks of a general form of being, the Non-Discursive.' This is undoubtedly true regarding a possible 'distribution of phenomena into two classes of being', that is, with regard to a discourse that would establish regional divisions within a totality. But this does not eliminate the problem concerning the form of conceiving the discursive. The acceptance of non-discursive entities does not merely have a topographical relevance; it also modifies the concept of discourse.

M. Foucault, pp. 53-4. H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, in their book on Foucault (*Michel Foucault. Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago 1982, pp. 65-6), realize the potential importance of this passage, but reject it rather hastily in favour of a conception of institutions as 'non-discursive'.

What is strictly implied here, is the very concept of 'formation'. The problem can be formulated, in its most general form, as follows: if what characterizes a formation is regularity in dispersion, how then is it possible to determine the limits of

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that formation? Let us suppose that there is a discursive entity or difference which is exterior to the formation, but which is absolutely regular in this exteriority. If the sole criterion at stake is dispersion, how is it possible to establish the 'exteriority' of that difference? The first question to be decided must, in that case, be whether or not the determination of the limits depends upon a concept of 'formation' which super-imposes itself on the archaeological fact. If we accept the first possibility, we are simply introducing an entity of the same type as those which had been methodologically excluded at the beginning — 'oeuvre', 'tradition', et cetera. If we accept the second possibility, it is clear that within the archaeological material itself, there must exist certain logics which produce effects of totality capable of constructing the limits, and thus of constituting the formation. As we will argue further on in the text, this is the role fulfilled by the logics of equivalence.

Starting from phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty conceived the project of an existential phenomenology as the attempt to overcome the dualism between 'in-itself' and 'for-itself', and to set up a terrain which would allow the overcoming of oppositions considered insurmountable by a philosophy such as that of Sartre. The *phenois* thus conceived as the point where the link is established between 'the thing' and 'the mind', and perception as a more primary founding level than the Cogito. The limits of the conception of meaning inherent in every phenomenology, insofar as it is based on the irreducibility of 'the lived', must not make us forget that in some of its formulations — and particularly in the work of Merleau-Ponty — we find some of the most radical attempts to break with the essentialism inherent in every form of dualism.

L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical*, Oxford 1983, p. 3.

Ibid., p. 5.

To the objection of a certain type of Marxism, which argues that such a view of the primacy of the discursive would call 'materialism' into question, we would simply suggest a glimpse through the texts of Marx. And in particular *Capital*: not only the famous passage about the bee and the architect at the beginning of the chapter on the labour process, but also the whole analysis of the value form, where the very logic of the process of commodity production — the foundation of capitalist accumulation — is pre-

sented as a strictly social logic which only imposes itself through establishing a relation of equivalence among materially distinct objects. From the first page it is stated — as a comment on the assertion of Barbon: "Things have an intrinsic virtue" (this is Barbon's special term for use-value) "which in all places have the same virtue; as the loadstone to attract iron" (op. cit. p. 6). The magnet's property of attracting iron only became useful once it had led to the discovery of magnetic polarity.'

With this 'exterior' we are not reintroducing the category of the extra-discursive. The exterior is constituted by other discourses. It is the discursive nature of this exterior which creates the conditions of vulnerability of every discourse, as nothing finally protects it against the deformation and destabilization of its system of differences by other discursive articulations which act from outside it.

J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, London 1978, p. 280.

A number of recent works have extended this conception concerning the impossibility of saturation and, therefore, of the ultimate internal intelligibility of every relational system, to the very system traditionally presented as a model of a pure structural logic: that is, language. F. Gadet and M. Pécheux, for example, have pointed out concerning Saussure: 'Regarding the theories which isolate the poetic as a location of special effects, from language as a whole, the work of Saussure . . . makes the poetic a slipping inherent to every language: what Saussure has established is not a

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property of Saturnian verse, nor even of poetry, but a property of language itself (*La langue introuvable*, Paris 1981, p. 57). Cf. F. Gadet, 'La double faille', *Actes du Colloque de Sociolinguistique de Rouen*, 1978; C. Normand, 'L'arbitraire du signe comme phénomène de déplacement', *Dialectiques*, 1972, no. 1-2; J.C. Milner, *L'amour de la langue*, Paris 1978.

Cf. what we said before regarding Benveniste's critique of Saussure.

Cf. M. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, London 1970.

Cf. with regard to this B. Brewster, 'Fetishism in *Capital and Reading Capital*', *Economy and Society*, 1976, vol. 5, no. 3; and

P. Hirst, 'Althusser and the Theory of Ideology', *Economy and Society*, 1976, vol. 5, no. 4.

Cf. *ibid.*

The ambiguity arising from the use of 'Man' to refer at the same time to 'human being' and 'male member of the species' is symptomatic of the discursive ambiguities which we are attempting to show.

E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, London 1978. We should not, however, jump to the conclusion that Thompson has simply misread Althusser. The problem is considerably more complex, for if Thompson proposed a false alternative by opposing a 'humanism' based on the postulate of a human essence and an anti-humanism founded on the negation of the latter, it is equally true that Althusser's approach to humanism leaves little room for anything other than its relegation to the field of ideology. For, if history has an intelligible structure given by the succession of modes of production, and if it is this structure which is accessible to a 'scientific' practice, this can only be accompanied by a notion of 'humanism' as something constituted on the plane of ideology — a plane which, though not conceived as false consciousness, is ontologically different and subordinate to a mechanism of social reproduction established by the logic of the mode of production. The way out of the blind alley to which these two essentialisms — constituted around 'Man' and 'mode of production' — lead, is the dissolution of the differentiation of planes wherein the appearance/reality distinction is founded. In that case, humanist discourses have a status which is neither privileged a priori nor subordinated to other discourses.

m//, 1978, no. 1, editorial note.

Cf. C. Mouffe, 'The Sex/Gender System and the Discursive Construction of Women's Subordination', in S. Hänenin and L. Paldan, eds., *Rethinking Ideology: A Marxist Debate*, Berlin 1983. A historical introduction to feminist politics from this viewpoint can be found in Sally Alexander, 'Women, Class and Sexual Difference', *History Workshop* 17, Spring 1984. On the more general question of sexual politics, see Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, London 1981.

This concept has been developed by Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in R.R. Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, New York/London 1975, pp. 157-210.

This aspect is not totally ignored by the editors of *m/f*. Thus, P. Adams and J. Minson state: 'there are certain forms of "all-purpose" responsibility which cover a multitude of social relations - that persons are held "responsible" in general, in a multiplicity of evaluations (being held "irresponsible" in the negative pole). But however diffuse this all-purpose responsibility appears to be it is nonetheless still subject to the satisfaction of definite social conditions and "all-purpose" responsibility must be construed as a heterogeneous bundle of statuses'. 'The "Subject" of Feminism', *m/f*, 1978, no. 2, p. 53.

A Cutler et al., vol. 1. p.236-237.

L. Colletti, 'Marxism and the Dialectic', *New Left Review*, September/October 1975, no. 93, pp. 3-29; and *Tramonto dell'ideologia*, pp. 87-161.

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Kant summarizes in the following four principles the characteristics of real opposition in its difference with contradiction. 'In the first place, the determinations which oppose each other must be found in the same subject: if we, in effect, pose that a determination is in one thing, and another determination, whatever it may be, is in another thing, a real opposition does not follow. Secondly: in a real opposition one of the opposed determinations cannot ever be the contradictory contrary of the other, as in that case the contrast would be of a logical nature, and as we saw earlier, impossible. Thirdly: a determination cannot ever negate anything different from

that which is posed by the other, as in the latter there would not be any opposition whatsoever. Fourthly: if they are in contrast neither of them can be negative, as in the latter case neither of them would pose something that was annulled by the other. It is because of this that in every real opposition both predicates must be positive, but in such a manner that in their union within the same subject the consequences reciprocally annul each other. Thus, in the case of those things which are considered each the negative of the other, when they combine in the same subject, the result is zero. (I. Kant, 'Il concetto delle quantità negative', in *Scritti*, Bari 1953, pp. 268-9). The positivity of its two terms is thus the defining characteristic of real opposition.

It is interesting to point out that Hans Kelsen, in his polemic with Max Adler, clearly perceived the need to move outside the exclusive alternative real opposition/ contradiction in characterizing antagonisms belonging to the social world. Cf. with regard to this the summary of Kelsen's position in R. Racinaro, 'Hans Kelsen e il dibattito su democrazia e parlamentarismo negli anni Venti-Trenta', Introduction to H. Kelsen, *Socialismo e Stato. ricerca sulla teoria politica del marxismo*, Bari 1978, pp. cxxii-cxxv.

R. Edgley, 'Dialectic: the Contradictions of Colletti', *Critique*, 1977, no. 7.

J. Elster, *Logic and Society: Contradictions and Possible Worlds*, Chichester 1978.

'What is Dialectic?', in *Conjectures and Refutations*, London, 1969, p. 312-335.

On this point, our opinion differs with that expressed by one of the authors of this book in an earlier work, in which the concept of antagonism is assimilated to that of contradiction (E. Laclau, 'Populist Rupture and Discourse', *Screen Education*, Spring 1980). In rethinking our earlier position, the critical commentaries made by Emilio De Ipola in a number of conversations, have proved most useful.

Concerning the various ways of **approaching** the problem of relative autonomy of the State in different contemporary Marxist theorizations, see B. Jessop, *The Capitalist State*, New York and London 1982.

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4. Hegemony and Radical Democracy

In November 1937, in exile in New York, Arthur Rosenberg was concluding his reflections upon contemporary European history since the French Revolution.' These reflections, which brought to a close his life as a militant intellectual, were centred upon a fundamental theme: the relationship between socialism and democracy, or, better, the failure of attempts to constitute organic forms of unity between the two. This double failure — of democracy and of socialism — appeared to him as a process of progressive estrangement, dominated by a radical break. Initially 'democracy', conceived as a field of popular action, is the great protagonist in the historic confrontations which dominate the life of Europe between 1789 and 1848.

It is the 'people' (in the sense of *plebs* rather than *populus*), the barely organized and differentiated masses, who dominate the barricades of 1789 and 1848, the Chartist agitation in England and the Mazzinian and Garibaldian mobilizations in Italy. Later comes the major break constituted by the long reaction of the 1850s; and when this comes to an end and popular protest is renewed, the protagonists have changed. It will be the unions or nascent social-democratic parties, first in Germany and England and then in the rest of Europe, which establish themselves with increasing solidity in the last third of the century.

This break has frequently been interpreted as the transition to a moment of higher political rationality on the part of the dominated sectors: in the first half of the century the amorphous character of 'democracy', its lack of roots in the economic bases of society, made it essentially vulnerable and unstable, and prevented it from constituting itself into a steadfast and permanent trench in the struggle against the established order. Only with the disintegration of this amorphous 'people', and its replacement with the solid social base of the working class, would popular movements achieve the maturity that allowed them to undertake a long-term struggle against the

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dominant classes. Nevertheless, this mythical transition to a higher stage of social maturity resulting from industrialization, and to a higher level of political efficacy in which the anarchic outbursts of the 'people' would be replaced by the rationality and solidity of class politics, could only appear as a bad joke to Rosenberg, who wrote his book while Spain burned, Hitler was preparing for the *Anschluss*, and Mussolini was invading Ethiopia. For Rosenberg, this closing up along class lines constituted on the contrary the great historical sin of the European labour movement. The workers' inability to constitute the 'people' as an historical agent was for him the essential fault of social democracy, and the Ariadne's thread which allowed him to unravel the whole of the tortuous political process which began in 1860. The constitution of a unified popu-

lar pole, far from becoming more simple, grew increasingly difficult as the growing complexity and institutionalization of capitalist society — the 'trenches and fortifications of civil society' of which Gramsci spoke — led to the corporatization and separation of those sectors which should ideally have been united 'among the people'. This process of growing social complexity was already in evidence between 1789 and 1848:

The task of democracy in 1789 consisted of leading in a unitary manner the struggle of the dependent peasantry against the land-owning nobility and the struggle of the poor citizens against capital. At this time this was much easier than it would be in 1848. In effect, between the two periods the industrial proletariat, for all that the greater part of it was still working in small-scale industry, had grown so much in importance that it made every political problem culminate in the confrontation between proletarian and capitalist . . . This required on the part of the democratic party an exceptional tactical skill in order to achieve convergence between the workers' movement and that of the peasants. If it wished to pass over the heads of the peasant owners to reach the mass of small tenants and labourers, it required tactics which were absolutely realistic and complex into the bargain. Thus the task of social democracy fifty years after Robespierre had become increasingly difficult, while at the same time the democrats were less intellectually capable of resolving the problems.'

And of course, the growing difficulty of constituting a popular anti-system pole had only increased after 1848. In reality, Rosenberg was seeking to orient himself upon a new terrain, dominated by a

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radical mutation of which he was only half conscious: the decline of a form of politics for which the division of the social into two antagonistic camps is *an original and immutable datum, prior to all hegemonic construction,* and the transition towards a new situation, characterized by the essential instability of political spaces, in which the very identity of the forces in struggle is submitted to constant shifts, and calls for an incessant process of redefinition. In other words, in a manner at once far-sighted and hesitant, Rosenberg is describing to us the process of generalization of the hegemonic form of politics — which imposes itself as a condition for the emergence of every collective identity once articulatory practices have succeeded in determining the very principle of social division — and showing us at the same time the vanity of the aspiration that the 'class struggle' should constitute itself, *in an automatic and a priori manner*, in the foundation of this principle.

In all rigour, the opposition people/ancien régime was the last moment in which the antagonistic limits between two forms of society presented themselves — with the qualification noted — in the form of clear and empirically *given* lines of demarcation. From then on the demarcating line between the internal and the external, the dividing line from which the antagonism was constituted in the form of two opposing systems of equivalences, became increasingly fragile and ambiguous, and its construction came to be the crucial problem of politics. That is to say, from then on there was no politics without hegemony. This permits us to understand the specificity of Marx's intervention: his reflection took place in a moment at which the division of the political space in terms of the dichotomy people/ancien régime seemed to have exhausted its productivity, and was in any case incapable of constructing a vision of the political which would recapture the complexity and the plurality peculiar to the social in industrial societies. Marx seeks, then, to think the primary fact of social division on the basis of a new principle: the confrontation between classes. The new principle, however, is undermined from the start by a radical insufficiency, arising from the fact that class opposition is incapable of dividing the totality of the social body into two antagonistic camps, of reproducing itself *automatically* as a line of demarcation in the political sphere. It is for this reason that the affirmation of the class struggle as the fundamental principle of political division always had to be accompanied by supplementary hypotheses which relegated its full applicability to the future: historical-sociological hypotheses — the simplification of the social structure, which would lead to the coincidence of real political

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struggles and struggles between the classes as agents constituted at the level of relations of production; hypotheses regarding the consciousness of the agents — the transition from the class in itself to the class for itself. What is important, in any case, is that this change introduced by Marxism into the political principle of social division maintains unaltered an essential component of the Jacobin imaginary: the postulation of *one* foundational moment of rupture, and of *a unique space in* which the political is constituted. Only the temporal dimension has changed, as this division, at once social and political, into two camps is relegated to the future, at the same time that we are provided with a set of sociological hypotheses regarding the process which would lead to it.

In this chapter we shall defend the thesis that it is this moment of continuity between the Jacobin and the Marxist political imaginary which has to be put in question by the project for a radical democracy. The rejection of privileged points of rupture and the confluence of struggles into a unified political space, and the acceptance, on the contrary, of the plurality and indeterminacy of the social, seem to us the two fundamental bases from which a new political imaginary can be constructed, radically libertarian and infinitely more ambitious in its objectives than that of the classic left. This demands, in the first place, a description of the historical terrain in which it emerged, which is the field of what we shall call the 'democratic revolution'.

The Democratic Revolution

The theoretical problematic which we have presented excludes not only the concentration of social conflict on a priori privileged agents, but also reference to *any general* principle or substratum of an anthropological nature which, at the same time that it unified the different subject positions, would assign a character of inevitability to resistance against the diverse forms of subordination. There is therefore nothing inevitable or natural in the different struggles against power, and it is necessary to explain in each case the reasons for their emergence and the different modulations they may adopt. The struggle against subordination cannot be the result of the situation of subordination itself. Although we can affirm, with Foucault, that wherever there is power there is resistance, it must also be recognized that the forms of resistance may be extremely varied. Only in certain cases do these forms of resistance take on a political character

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and become struggles directed towards putting an end to relations of subordination as such. If throughout the centuries there have been multiple forms of resistance by women against male domination, it is only under certain conditions and specific forms that a feminist movement which demands equality (equality before the law in the first place, and subsequently in other areas) has been able to emerge. Clearly, when we speak here of the 'political' character of these struggles, we do not do so in the restricted sense of demands which are situated at the level of parties and of the State. What we are referring to is a type of action whose objective is the transformation of a social relation which constructs a subject in a relationship of subordination. Certain contemporary feminist practices, for example, tend to transform the relationship between masculinity and femininity without passing in *any way* through parties or the State. Of course, we are not seeking to deny that certain practices require the intervention of the political in its restricted sense. What we wish to point out is that politics as a practice of creation, reproduction and transformation of social relations cannot be located at a determinate level of the social, as the problem of the political is the problem of the institution of the social, that is, of the definition and articulation of social relations in a field crisscrossed with antagonisms.

Our central problem is to identify the discursive conditions for the emergence of a collective action, directed towards struggling against inequalities and challenging relations of subordination. We might also say that our task is to identify the conditions in which a relation of subordination becomes a relation of oppression, and thereby constitutes itself into the site of an antagonism. We enter here onto a terrain constituted by numerous terminological shifts which have ended by establishing a synonymy between 'subordination', 'oppression', and 'domination'. The base which makes this synonymy possible is, as is evident, the anthropological assumption of a 'human nature' and of a unified subject: if we can determine *a priori* the essence of a subject, every relation of subordination which denies it automatically becomes a relation of oppression. But if we reject this essentialist perspective, we need to differentiate 'subordination' from 'op-

pression' and explain the precise conditions in which subordination becomes oppressive. We shall understand by a *relation of subordination* that in which an agent is subjected to the decisions of another — an employee with respect to an employer, for example, or in certain forms of family organization the woman with respect to the man, and so on. We shall call *relations of oppression*, in contrast,

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those relations of subordination which have transformed themselves into sites of antagonisms. Finally, we shall call *relations of domination* the set of those relations of subordination which are considered as illegitimate from the perspective, or in the judgement, of a social agent external to them, and which, as a consequence, may or may not coincide with the relations of oppression actually existing in a determinate social formation. The problem is, therefore, to explain how relations of oppression are constituted out of relations of subordination. It is clear why relations of subordination, considered in themselves, cannot be antagonistic relations: a relation of subordination establishes, simply, a set of differential positions between social agents, and we already know that a system of differences which constructs each social identity as *positivity* not only cannot be antagonistic, but would bring about the ideal conditions for the elimination of all antagonisms — we would be faced with a sutured social space, from which every equivalence would be excluded. It is only to the extent that the positive differential character of the subordinated subject position is subverted that the antagonism can emerge. 'Serf', 'slave', and so on, do not designate in themselves antagonistic positions; it is only in the terms of a different discursive formation, such as 'the rights inherent to every human being', that the differential positivity of these categories can be subverted and the subordination constructed as oppression. This means that there is no relation of oppression without the presence of a discursive 'exterior' from which the discourse of subordination can be interrupted.' The logic of equivalence in this sense displaces the effects of some discourses towards others. If, as was the case with women until the seventeenth century, the ensemble of discourses which constructed them as subjects fixed them purely and simply in a subordinated position, feminism as a movement of struggle against women's subordination could not emerge. Our thesis is that it is only from the moment when the democratic discourse becomes available to articulate the different forms of resistance to subordination that the conditions will exist to make possible the struggle against different types of inequality. In the case of women we may cite as an example the role played in England by Mary Wollstonecraft, whose book *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 1792, determined the birth of feminism through the use made in it of the democratic discourse, which was thus displaced from the field of political equality between citizens to the field of equality between the sexes.

But in order to be mobilized in this way, the democratic principle

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of liberty and equality first had to impose itself as the new matrix of the social imaginary; or, in our terminology, to constitute a fundamental nodal point in the construction of the political. This decisive mutation in the political imaginary of Western societies took place two hundred years ago and can be defined in these terms: the logic of equivalence was transformed into the fundamental instrument of production of the social. It is to designate this mutation that, taking an expression from de Tocqueville, we shall speak of 'democratic revolution'. With this we shall designate the end of a society of a hierarchic and inegalitarian type, ruled by a theological-political logic in which the social order had its foundation in divine will. The social body was conceived of as a whole in which individuals appeared fixed in differential positions. For as long as such a holistic mode of institution of the social predominated, politics could not be more than the repetition of hierarchical relations which reproduced the same type of subordinated subject. The key moment in the beginnings of the democratic revolution can be found in the French Revolution since, as Francois Furet has indicated, its affirmation of the absolute power of its people introduced something truly new at the level of the social imaginary. It is there, according to Furet, that the true discontinuity is located: in the establishment of a new legitimacy, in the invention of democratic culture: 'The French Revolution is

not a transition, it is an origin, and the phantom of an origin. What is unique about it is what constitutes its historical interest, and, what is more, it is this "unique" element that has become universal: the first experience of democracy.' If, as Hannah Arendt has said, 'it was the French and not the American Revolution that set the world on fire,' it is because it was the first to found itself on no other legitimacy than the people. It thus initiated what Claude Lefort has shown to be a new mode of institution of the social. This break with the ancien régime, symbolized by the Declaration of the Rights of Man, would provide the discursive conditions which made it possible to propose the different forms of inequality as illegitimate and anti-natural, and thus make them equivalent as forms of oppression. Here lay the profound subversive power of the democratic discourse, which would allow the spread of equality and liberty into increasingly wider domains and therefore act as a fermenting agent upon the different forms of struggle against subordination. Many workers' struggles in the nineteenth century constructed their demands discursively on the basis of struggles for political liberty. In the case of English Chartism, for instance, the studies of Gareth Stedman Jones' have revealed the fundamental role of the ideas of

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English radicalism, profoundly influenced by the French Revolution, in the constitution of the movement and the determining of its objectives.' (Hence the central role of the demand for universal suffrage, of which little account is taken by interpretations of Chartism as a phenomenon of a fundamentally social character, an expression of the class consciousness of the new industrial proletariat.)

From the critique of political inequality there is effected, through the different socialist discourses, a displacement towards the critique of economic inequality, which leads to the putting in question of other forms of subordination and the demanding of new rights. The socialist demands should therefore be seen as a moment internal to the democratic revolution, and only intelligible on the basis of the equivalential logic which the latter establishes. And the irradiation effects multiply in a growing variety of directions. In the case of feminism, it was a question of gaining access for women first to political rights; later to economic equality; and, with contemporary feminism, to equality in the domain of sexuality. As de Tocqueville pointed out: 'It is impossible to believe that equality will not finally penetrate as much into the political world as into other domains. It is not possible to conceive of men as eternally unequal among themselves on one point, and equal on others; at a certain moment, they will come to be equal on all points.'⁸

In every case it is the impossibility of constituting relations of subordination as a closed system of differences — an impossibility implying the *externality* of the subordinator and subordinated identities to each other, rather than their absorption into the system through their positions — which lies at the base of the relation of oppression. It is instructive, in this respect, to consider the transformations experienced by the antagonistic potential of workers' struggles. There were without a doubt *radically* anti-capitalist struggles in the nineteenth century, but they were not struggles of the proletariat — if by 'proletariat' we understand the type of worker produced by the development of capitalism, rather than the artisans whose qualifications and modes of life were threatened by the establishment of the capitalist system of production. The strongly antagonistic character of the struggles of these 'reactionary radicals' — in Craig Calhoun's phrase — their calling into question of the whole of the capitalist system, are explained by the fact that these struggles expressed resistance to the destruction of artisanal identities and the whole set of social, cultural and political forms which went with them. From that stemmed the total rejection of the

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new relations of production which capitalism was in the process of implanting; the complete externality existing between two systems of social organization generated the division of social space into two camps, which, as we know, is the condition for every antagonism. Calhoun, in his critique of E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, has shown convincingly that a heterogeneous set of social groups are there grouped under the label 'working class', without sufficient recognition of the profound difference between 'old' and 'new' workers in their objectives and their forms of mobilization. According to Calhoun, 'the former fought on the basis of strong community foundations but against the preponderant forces of eco-

conomic change. The latter fought on a weaker social basis but within the emergent industrial order. This distinction militates strongly against a notion of the continuous development and increasing radicalization of the working class.'

It is towards the middle of the nineteenth century in Britain, and towards the end of the century in the rest of Europe, that there emerges a labour movement which can be strictly considered a product of capitalism; but this labour movement tends to call less and less into question capitalist relations of production as such — these having by then solidly implanted — and concentrates on the struggle for the transformation of relations *in* production. Those struggles which the Marxist tradition would term 'reformist', and consider as a backward step with respect to previous social struggles, correspond more in reality to the mode adopted by the mobilizations of the industrial proletariat than do the more radical earlier struggles. The relations of subordination between workers and capitalists are thus to a certain extent absorbed as legitimate differential positions in a unified discursive space.

If we turn our attention to another period of radical mobilizations by workers — that of the workers' council movements in Italy and Germany at the end of the First World War — we see that they too have at their base an overdetermined set of circumstances: the collapse of the social order following the war, the militarization of the factories, the beginnings of Taylorization, the transformation of the role of skilled workers in production. All of these conditions were linked either to an organic crisis which reduced the hegemonic capacity of the logics of difference, or to transformations which called into question traditional forms of worker identity. We should not forget, for example, the central role played in these struggles by skilled workers, a role which is generally recognized but explained in different ways.¹⁰ For some it is a question of the defence of skills

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against the already present danger of Taylorization. For others it is the experience that these workers had acquired during the war which made them think of the possibilities of self-organization of the process of production and pressed them to a confrontation with their employers. In either case, however, it is the defence of a certain identity which the workers had acquired (their skills or their organizational functions in production) which leads them to rebel. We can therefore establish a parallel with the 'radical reactionaries' we mentioned above, as they too were defending a type of identity under threat.

It would be wrong, however, to understand this externality of power in a purely 'stagist' sense, as if the fact of belonging to a phase in the process of being transcended were the necessary condition for radicalism in a struggle; if this were the case, such radicalism would be characteristic only of defensive struggles. If the 'anachronistic' struggles which we mentioned above illustrate well the externality of power which is a condition of every antagonism, certain social transformations can, in contrast, constitute new forms of radical subjectivity on the basis of discursively constructing as an external imposition — and therefore as forms of oppression — relations of subordination which until that moment had not been questioned. This is the point at which the equivalential displacement peculiar to the democratic imaginary comes into play. The image of radical struggles as things from the past is perfectly unrealistic. It derives in good part from the neo-capitalist euphoria of the two decades after the Second World War, which appeared to offer an unlimited capacity for transformist absorption on the part of the system, and showed a linear tendency towards a homogeneous society in which every antagonistic potential would be dissolved, and each collective identity fixed in a system of differences. We shall try, on the contrary, to show that the complexity and the frequently contradictory aspects of this process of expansion, as the very act of satisfying a wide range of social demands during the apogée of the Welfare State, far from assuring the indefinite integration of the dominant hegemonic formations, frequently laid bare the arbitrary character of a whole set of relations of subordination. Thus the terrain has been created which makes possible a new extension of egalitarian equivalences, and thereby the expansion of the democratic revolution in new directions. It is in this terrain that there have arisen those new forms of political identity which, in recent debates, have frequently been grouped under the name of 'new social movements'. We should therefore study the democratic potential and the ambiguities

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of these movements, as well as the historical context in which they have emerged.

Democratic Revolution and New Antagonisms

The equivalential displacement between distinct subject positions — which is a condition for the emergence of an antagonism — may thus present itself in two fundamental variants. Firstly, it may be a question of relations of subordination already in existence which, thanks to a displacement of the democratic imaginary, are re-articulated as relations of oppression. To take the case of feminism once again, it is because women as women are denied a right which the democratic ideology recognizes in principle for all citizens that there appears a fissure in the construction of the subordinated feminine subject from which an antagonism may arise. It is also the case with the ethnic minorities who demand their civil rights. But the antagonism can also arise in other circumstances — for example, when acquired rights are being called into question, or when social relations which had not been constructed under the form of subordination begin to be so under the impact of certain social transformations. In this case it is because it is negated by practices and discourses bearing new forms of inequality that a subject position can become the site of an antagonism. But in every case what allows the forms of resistance to assume the character of collective struggles is the existence of an external discourse which impedes the stabilization of subordination as difference.

The unsatisfactory term 'new social movements' groups together a series of highly diverse struggles: urban, ecological, anti-authoritarian, anti-institutional, feminist, anti-racist, ethnic, regional or that of sexual minorities. The common denominator of all of them would be their differentiation from workers' struggles, considered as 'class' struggles. It is pointless to insist upon the problematic nature of this latter notion: it amalgamates a series of very different struggles at the level of the relations of production, which are set apart from the 'new antagonisms' for reasons that display all too clearly the persistence of a discourse founded upon the privileged status of 'classes'. What interests us about these new social movements, then, is not the idea of arbitrarily grouping them into a category opposed to that of class, but the *novel* role they play in articulating that rapid diffusion of social conflictuality to more and more numerous relations which is characteristic today of advanced

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industrial societies. This is what we shall seek to analyse through the theoretical problematic presented above, which leads us to conceive these movements as an extension of the democratic revolution to a whole new series of social relations. As for their novelty, that is conferred upon them by the fact that they call into question new forms of subordination. We should distinguish two aspects of this relation of continuity/discontinuity. The aspect of continuity basically involves the fact that the conversion of liberal-democratic ideology into the 'common sense' of Western societies laid the foundation for that progressive challenge to the hierarchical principle which Tocqueville called the 'equalization of conditions'. It is the permanence of this egalitarian imaginary which permits us to establish a continuity between the struggles of the nineteenth century against the inequalities bequeathed by the ancien régime and the social movements of the present. But from a second point of view we can speak of discontinuity, as a good proportion of the new political subjects have been constituted through their antagonistic relationship to recent forms of subordination, derived from the implanting and expansion of capitalist relations of production and the growing intervention of the state. It is to these new relations of subordination and to the antagonisms constituted within them that we shall now address ourselves.

It was in the context of the reorganization which took place after the Second World War that a series of changes occurred at the level of social relations and a new hegemonic formation was consolidated. The latter articulated modifications at the level of the labour process, the form of state and the dominant modes of cultural diffusion which were to bring about a profound transformation in the existing forms of social intercourse. If we examine the problem from an economic point of view, the decisive change is what Michel Aglietta has termed the transition from an extensive to an intensive regime of accumulation. The latter is characterized by the spread of capitalist relations of production to the whole set of social relations, and the subordination of the latter to the logic of production for profit. According to Aglietta the fundamental moment of this transition is the introduction of Fordism, which he describes as 'the principle of an articulation between process of production and mode of consumption'. More specifically, it is the articulation between a

labour process organized around the semi-automatic production line, and a mode of consumption characterized by the individual acquisition of commodities produced on a large scale for private consumption. This penetration of capitalist relations of production, initiated at the

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beginning of the century and stepped up from the 1940s on, was to transform society into a vast market in which new 'needs' were ceaselessly created, and in which more and more of the products of human labour were turned into commodities. This 'commodification' of social life destroyed previous social relations, replacing them with commodity relations through which the logic of capitalist accumulation penetrated into increasingly numerous spheres. Today it is not only as a seller of labour-power that the individual is subordinated to capital, but also through his or her incorporation into a multitude of other social relations: culture, free time, illness, education, sex and even death. There is practically no domain of individual or collective life which escapes capitalist relations.

But this 'consumer society' has not led to the end of ideology, as Daniel Bell announced, nor to the creation of a one-dimensional man, as Marcuse feared. On the contrary, numerous new struggles have expressed resistance against the new forms of subordination, and this from within the very heart of the new society. Thus it is that the waste of natural resources, the pollution and destruction of the environment, the consequences of productivism have given birth to the ecology movement. Other struggles, which Manuel Castells terms 'urban',¹² express diverse forms of resistance to the capitalist occupation of social space. The general urbanization which has accompanied economic growth, the transfer of the popular classes to the urban periphery or their relegation to the decaying inner cities, and the general lack of collective goods and services have caused a series of new problems which affect the organization of the whole of social life outside work. Hence the multiplicity of social relations from which antagonisms and struggles may originate: habitat, consumption, various services can all constitute terrains for the struggle against inequalities and the claiming of new rights.

These new demands must also be set within the context of the Keynesian Welfare State, the constitution of which has been another fundamental fact of the post-war period. It is without doubt an ambiguous and complex phenomenon, for if on the one hand this new type of state was necessary in order to perform a series of functions required by the new capitalist regime of accumulation, it is also the result of what Bowles and Gintis have called 'the post-World War accord between capital and labour'," and the result, therefore, of struggles against changes in the social relations generated by capitalism. It is, for example, the destruction of the networks of traditional solidarity of a community or family type (based, let us not forget, on the subordination of women) which **has** forced the

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state to intervene in diverse 'social services' for the sick, the un-employed, the old, and so on. Elsewhere, under pressure from workers' struggles, the state has intervened to assure a new labour policy (minimum wage, length of the working day, accident and unemployment insurance, and the social wage). If we can accept with Benjamin Coriat¹⁴ that this state-plan intervenes in the reproduction of the labour force in order to subordinate it to the needs of capital, thanks to the practice of the collective contract and the negotiated agreements which link rises in wages to those in productivity, it is no less the case that these are gains which have brought real and important benefits to the workers.

But this intervention by the state at ever broader levels of social reproduction has been accompanied by a growing bureaucratization of its practices which has come to constitute, along with commodification, one of the fundamental sources of inequalities and conflicts. In all the domains in which the state has intervened, a politicization of social relations is at the base of numerous new antagonisms. This double transformation of social relations, resulting from the expansion of capitalist relations of production and of the new bureaucratic-state forms, is found in different combinations in all the advanced industrial countries. Their effects are generally mutually reinforcing, although this is not always so. Claus Offe has indicated, for example, how the provision by the state of services linked to the social wage can have ef-

fects which go in the direction of 'decommodification'.¹⁵ This latter phenomenon may adversely affect the interests of capitalist accumulation, to the extent that a range of activities which could be sources of profit begin to be provided by the public sector. For Offe this phenomenon, linked to that of the 'deproletarianization' arising out of the various payments which allow workers to survive without being obliged to sell their labour-power at any price, is an important factor in the present crisis in the capitalist economies. But what crucially concerns us here is to trace the consequences of this bureaucratization underlying new antagonisms. The important fact is the imposition of multiple forms of vigilance and regulation in social relations which had previously been conceived as forming part of the private domain. This shifting of the line of demarcation between the 'public' and the 'private' has ambiguous effects. On the one hand, it serves to reveal the political character (in the broad sense) of social relations, and the fact that these are always the result of modes of institution that give them their form and meaning; on the other, given the bureaucratic character of state intervention, this creation of 'public spaces' is

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carried out not in the form of a true democratization, but through the imposition of new forms of subordination. It is here that we have to look for the terrain on which numerous struggles emerge against bureaucratic forms of state power. This should not blind us, however, to numerous other aspects which point in the opposite direction, and which give the Welfare State its characteristic ambiguity: the emergence of a new type of right designated as 'positive liberties' has also profoundly transformed the dominant common sense, lending legitimacy to a whole series of demands for economic equality and insistence upon new social rights. Movements such as the 'Welfare Rights Movement' in the United States, studied by Piven and Cloward,¹⁶ are an example of this extension of the demands directed at the state, once its responsibility for the welfare of citizens is accepted. It is the notion of citizenship itself which has been transformed with the social state, as 'social rights' are now attributed to the citizen. As a consequence, the categories of 'justice', 'liberty', 'equity', and 'equality' have been redefined and liberal-democratic discourse has been profoundly modified by this broadening of the sphere of rights.

One cannot understand the present expansion of the field of social conflictuality and the consequent emergence of new political subjects without situating both in the context of the commodification and bureaucratization of social relations on the one hand, and the reformulation of the liberal-democratic ideology — resulting from the expansion of struggles for equality — on the other. For this reason we have proposed that this proliferation of antagonisms and calling into question of relations of subordination should be considered as a moment of deepening of the democratic revolution. This has also been stimulated by the third important aspect in the mutation of social relations which has characterized the hegemonic formation of the post-war period: namely, the new cultural forms linked to the expansion of the means of mass communication. These were to make possible a new mass culture which would profoundly shake traditional identities. Once again, the effects here are ambiguous, as along with the undeniable effects of massification and uniformization, this media-based culture also contains powerful elements for the subversion of inequalities: the dominant discourses in consumer society present it as social progress and the **advance** of democracy, to the extent that it allows the vast majority of the population access to an ever-increasing range of goods. Now, while Baudrillard is right to say that we are 'ever further away from an equality vis-à-vis the object'," the reigning **appearance of equality**

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and the cultural democratization which is the inevitable consequence of the action of the media permit the questioning of privileges based upon older forms of status. Interpellated as equals in their capacity as consumers, ever more numerous groups are impelled to reject the real inequalities which continue to exist. This 'democratic consumer culture' has undoubtedly stimulated the emergence of new struggles which have played an important part in the rejection of old forms of subordination, as was the case in the United States with the struggle of the black movement for civil rights. The phenomenon of the young is particularly interesting, and it is no cause for wonder that they should constitute a new axis for the emergence of antago-

nisms. In order to create new necessities, they are increasingly constructed as a specific category of consumer, which stimulates them to seek a financial autonomy that society is in no condition to give them. On the contrary, the economic crisis and unemployment make their situation difficult indeed. If we add to this the disintegration of the family cell and its growing reduction to pure functions of consumption, along with the absence of social forms of integration of these 'new subjects' who have received the impact of the general question-ing of existing hierarchies, we easily understand the different forms which the rebellion of the young has adopted in industrial societies.

The fact that these 'new antagonisms' are the expression of forms of resistance to the commodification, bureaucratization and increasing homogenization of social life itself explains why they should frequently manifest themselves through a proliferation of particularisms, and crystallize into a demand for autonomy itself. It is also for this reason that there is an identifiable tendency towards the valorization of 'differences' and the creation of new identities which tend to privilege 'cultural' criteria (clothes, music, language, regional traditions, and so on). Insofar as of the two great themes of the democratic imaginary — equality and liberty — it was that of equality which was traditionally predominant, the demands for autonomy bestow an increasingly central role upon liberty. For this reason many of these forms of resistance are made manifest not in the form of collective struggles, but through an increasingly affirmed individualism. (The Left, of course, is ill prepared to take into account these struggles, which even today it tends to dismiss as 'liberal'. Hence the danger that they may be articulated by a dis-course of the Right, of the defence of privileges.) But in any case, and whatever the political orientation through which the antagonism crystallizes (this will depend upon the chains of equivalence which construct it), *the form of the antagonism as such is identical in all cases.*

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That is to say, it always consists in the construction of a social identity — of an overdetermined subject position — on the basis of the equivalence between a set of elements or values which expel or externalize those others to which they are opposed. Once again, we find ourselves confronting the *division* of social space.

The last in time of these 'new social movements', and without doubt one of the most active at the present moment, is the peace movement. It appears to us that it falls perfectly into the theoretical framework which we have put forward. With the expansion of what E.Y. Thompson has called the 'logic of exterminism', a growing number of people feel that the most basic of all rights, that of life, has been called into question. In addition, the deployment in numerous countries of foreign nuclear weapons whose use is not under national control, generates new demands rooted in the extension to the field of national defence of the principles of democratic control which citizens have the right to exercise in the political field. Discourse concerning defence policy — traditionally the enclosed preserve of restricted military and political elites — is thus subverted as the democratic principle of control lodges itself at its heart.

The central idea which we have defended thus far is that the new struggles — and the radicalization of older struggles such as those of women or ethnic minorities — should be understood from the double perspective of the transformation of social relations characteristic of the new hegemonic formation of the post-war period, and of the effects of the displacement into new areas of social life of the egalitarian imaginary constituted around the liberal-democratic dis-course. It is this which has provided the framework necessary for the questioning of the different relations of subordination and the demanding of new rights. That the democratic imaginary has played a fundamental role in the eruption of new demands since the 1960s, is perfectly well understood by the American neo-conservatives, who denounce the 'excess of democracy' and the wave of 'egalitarianism' which in their view caused an overload in the political systems of the West. Samuel Huntington, in his report to the Trilateral Commission in 1975, argued that the struggles in the United States in the 1960s for greater equality and participation had provoked a 'democratic surge' which had made society 'ungovernable'. He concluded that 'the strength of the democratic ideal poses a problem for the governability of democracy.'⁸ The increasingly numerous demands for real equality have led society, according to the neo-conservatives, to the edge of the 'egalitarian precipice'. This is where they see the origins of the double transformation which, in their

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opinion, the idea of equality has undergone: it has passed from equality of opportunity to equality of results, and from equality between individuals to equality between groups. Daniel Bell considers that this 'new egalitarianism' puts in jeopardy the true ideal of equality, whose objective cannot be equality of results, but a 'just meritocracy'.¹⁹ The present crisis is, then, seen as the result of a 'crisis of values', the consequence of the development of an 'adversary culture' and of the 'cultural contradictions of capitalism'.

Thus far we have presented the emergence of new antagonisms and political subjects as linked to the expansion and generalization of the democratic revolution. In reality, it can also be seen as a prolongation of various other areas of political effects which we have come across frequently throughout our analysis. In particular, the proliferation of these antagonisms makes us see in a new light the problem of the fragmentation of the 'unitary' subjects of the social struggles with which Marxism found itself confronted in the wake of its first crisis, at the end of the last century. All the discussion on strategies for recomposition of working-class unity, seen in perspective, is nothing other than the first act of a recognition — reluctant, it is true — of the plurality of the social, and the unsutured character of all political identity. If we read *sous rature* the texts of Rosa Luxemburg, Labriola, and of Kautsky himself, we shall see that this unassimilable moment of plurality is in one way or another present in their discourse, undermining the coherence of their categories. It is clear that this multiformity was not necessarily a negative moment of fragmentation or the reflection of an artificial division resulting from the logic of capitalism, as the theorists of the Second International thought, but the very terrain which made *possible a* deepening of the democratic revolution. As we shall see, this deepening is revealed even in the ambiguities and difficulties which every practice of articulation and recomposition has to face. Renunciation of the category of subject as a unitary, transparent and sutured entity opens the way to the recognition of the specificity of the antagonisms constituted on the basis of different subject positions, and, hence, the possibility of the deepening of a pluralist and democratic conception. The critique of the category of unified subject, and the recognition of the discursive dispersion within which every subject position is constituted, therefore involve some-thing more than the enunciation of a general theoretical position: they are the *sine qua non* for thinking the multiplicity out of which antagonisms emerge in societies in which the democratic revolution **has** crossed a certain threshold. This gives us a theoretical terrain on

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the basis of which the notion of *radical and plural democracy* — which will be central to our argument from this point on — finds the first conditions under which it can be apprehended. Only if it is accepted that the subject positions cannot be led back to a positive and unitary founding principle — only then can pluralism be considered radical. Pluralism is *radical* only to the extent that each term of this plurality of identities finds within itself the principle of its own validity, without this having to be sought in a transcendent or underlying positive ground for the hierarchy of meaning of them all and the source and guarantee of their legitimacy. And this radical pluralism is *democratic* to the extent that the autoconstitutivity of each one of its terms is the result of displacements of the egalitarian imaginary. Hence, the project for a radical and plural democracy, *in a primary sense*, is nothing other than the struggle for a maximum autonomization of spheres on the basis of the generalization of the equivalential-egalitarian logic.

This approach permits us to redimension and do justice to workers' struggles themselves, whose character is distorted when they are contrasted *en bloc* to the struggles of the 'new political subjects'. Once the conception of the working class as a 'universal class' is rejected, it becomes possible to recognize the plurality of the antagonisms which take place in the field of what is arbitrarily grouped under the label of 'workers' struggles', and the inestimable importance of the great majority of them for the deepening of the democratic process. Workers' struggles have been numerous, and have assumed an extraordinary variety of forms as a function of transformations in the role of the state, the trade-union practices of different categories of workers, the antagonisms within and outside the factories, and the existing hegemonic equilibria. An excellent example is afforded us by the so-called 'new workers' struggles', which took place in France and in Italy at the end of the 1960s. They show well how the forms of struggles within the factory depend upon a discursive context much vaster than that of simple relations of production. The evident influence of the

struggles and slogans of the student movement; the central role played by young workers, whose culture was radically different from that of their older col-leagues; the importance of immigrants in France and southerners in Italy — all this reveals to us that the other social relations in which workers are enrolled will determine the manner in which they react inside the factory, and that as a result the plurality of these relations cannot be magically erased to constitute *a single* working class. Nor, then, can workers' demands be reduced to a unique antagonism

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whose nature is ontologically different from that of other social and political subjects.

Thus far we have spoken of a multiplicity of antagonisms whose effects, converging and overdetermined, are registered within the framework of what we have called the 'democratic revolution'. At this point it is necessary, nevertheless, to make it clear that the democratic revolution is simply the terrain upon which there operates a logic of displacement supported by an egalitarian imaginary, but that it does not predetermine the *direction* in which this imaginary will operate. If this direction were predetermined we should simply have constructed a new teleology — we would be on a terrain similar to that of Bernstein's *Entwicklung*. But in that case there would be no room at all for a hegemonic practice. The reason why it is not thus, and why no teleology can account for social articulations, is that the discursive compass of the democratic revolution opens the way for political logics as diverse as right-wing populism and totalitarianism on the one hand, and a radical democracy on the other. Therefore, if we wish to construct the hegemonic articulations which allow us to set ourselves in the direction of the latter, we must understand in all their radical heterogeneity the range of possibilities which are opened in the terrain of democracy itself.

It cannot be doubted that the proliferation of new antagonisms and of 'new rights' is leading to a crisis of the hegemonic formation of the post-war period. But the form in which this crisis will be overcome is far from being predetermined, as the manner in which rights will be defined and the forms which struggle against subordination will adopt are not unequivocally established. We are faced here with a true polysemia. Feminism or ecology, for example, exist in multiple forms, which depend upon the manner in which the antagonism is discursively constituted. Thus we have a radical feminism which attacks men as such; a feminism of difference which seeks to revalorize 'femininity'; and a Marxist feminism for which the fundamental enemy is capitalism, considered as linked indissolubly to patriarchy. There are therefore a plurality of discursive forms of constructing an antagonism on the basis of the different modes of women's subordination. Ecology, in the same way, may be anti-capitalist, anti-industrialist, authoritarian, libertarian, social-list, reactionary, and so on. The forms of articulation of an antagonism, therefore, far from being predetermined, are the result of a hegemonic struggle. This affirmation has important consequences, as it implies that these new struggles do not necessarily have a progressive character, and that it is therefore an error to think, as

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many do, that they spontaneously take their place in the context of left-wing politics. Many have devoted themselves since the 1960s to the search for a new privileged revolutionary subject which might come to replace the working class, with the latter seen as having failed in its historical mission of emancipation. The ecological movements, the student movements, feminism and the marginal masses have been the most popular candidates for the carrying out of this new role. But it is clear that such an approach does not escape the traditional problematic, but simply displaces it. There is no *unique* privileged position from which a uniform continuity of effects will follow, concluding with the transformation of society as a whole. All struggles, whether those of workers or other political subjects, left to themselves, have a partial character, and can be articulated to very different discourses. It is this articulation which gives them their character, not the place from which they come. There is therefore no subject — nor, further, any 'necessity' — which is absolutely radical and irrecoverable by the dominant order, and which constitutes an absolutely guaranteed point of departure for a total transformation. (Equally, there is nothing which permanently assures the stability of an established order.) It is in relation to this point that we consider that certain highly interesting analyses such as those of Alain Touraine and André Gorz, do not go far enough in their break with the traditional problematic.²⁰ Gorz, for example, given that he attributes to the 'non-class of non-workers' the

privilege which he denies to the proletariat, really does no more than invert the Marxist position. It is still the location at the level of relations of production which is determining, even when, as in Gorz's case, the revolutionary subject is defined by the *absence* of that insertion. As for Touraine, his search for the social movement which can play in the 'programmed society' the role which was played by the working class in industrial society indicates clearly that he too does not question the idea of the uniqueness of the social force which can bring about a radical change in a determinate society.

That the forms of resistance to new forms of subordination are polysemic and can perfectly well be articulated into an anti-democratic discourse, is clearly demonstrated by the advances of the 'new right' in recent years. Its novelty lies in its successful articulation to neo-liberal discourse of a series of democratic resistances to the transformation of social relations. Popular support for the Reagan and Thatcher projects of dismantling the Welfare State is explained by the fact that they have succeeded in mobilizing against the latter a whole series of resistances to the bureaucratic character of the new

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forms of state organization. That the chains of equivalence which each hegemonic articulation constitutes can be of greatly differing natures is patently demonstrated by this neo-conservative discourse: the antagonisms constituted around bureaucratization are articulated in the defence of the traditional inequalities of sex and race. The defence of acquired rights founded on white, male supremacy which feeds the conservative reaction thereby broadens the area of its hegemonic effects. An antagonism is thus constructed between two poles: the 'people', which includes all those who defend the traditional values and freedom of enterprise; and their adversaries: the state and all the subversives (feminists, blacks, young people and 'permissives' of every type). An attempt is thus made to construct a new historic bloc in which a plurality of economic, social and cultural aspects are articulated. Stuart Hall has pointed out, for example, how Thatcherite populism 'combines the resonant themes of organic Toryism — nation, family, duty, authority, standards, traditionalism — with the aggressive themes of a revived neo-liberalism — self-interest, competitive individualism, antistatism.'^Z In the case of the United States; Allen Hunter shows that the **attack** of the New Right on the Welfare State is the point at which the cultural and economic critiques come together. Both affirm that the state interferes 'with the economic and ethical features of the market in the name of a specious egalitarianism. They also attack welfare liberalism for creating state intervention in the private lives of the people and the moral structure of society in such areas as the socialization of children and the relation between the sexes.'"

It is precisely this polysemic character of every antagonism which makes its meaning dependent upon a hegemonic articulation to the extent that, as we have seen, the terrain of hegemonic practices is constituted out of the fundamental ambiguity of the social, the impossibility of establishing in a definitive manner the meaning of any struggle, whether considered in isolation or through its fixing in a relational system. As we have said, there are hegemonic practices because this radical unfixity makes it impossible to consider the political struggle as a game in which the identity of the opposing forces is constituted from the start. This means that any politics with hegemonic aspirations can never consider itself as *repetition*, as taking place in a space delimiting a pure internality, but must always mobilize itself on a plurality of planes. If the meaning of each struggle is not given from the start, this means that it is fixed — partially — only to the extent that the struggle moves outside itself and, through chains of equivalence, links itself structurally to other

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struggles. Every antagonism, left free to itself, is a floating signifier, a 'wild' antagonism which does not predetermine the form in which it can be articulated to other elements in a social formation. This permits us to establish the radical difference between the current social struggles and those which took place before the democratic revolution. The latter always took place in the context of the denial of *given and relatively stable identities; as a result, the frontiers of the antagonism were plainly visible and did not require to be con-*

structured — the hegemonic dimension of politics was consequently absent. But in the present industrial societies, the very proliferation of widely differing points of rupture, the precarious character of all social identity, lead also to a blurring of the frontiers. In consequence, the constructed character of the demarcating lines is made more evident by the greater instability of the latter, and the displacement of the frontiers and internal divisions of the social become more radical. It is in this field and from this perspective that the neo-conservative project acquires all its hegemonic dimensions.

The Anti-Democratic Offensive

What the neo-conservative or neo-liberal 'new right' calls into question is the type of articulation which has led democratic liberalism to justify the intervention of the state in the struggle against inequalities, and the installation of the Welfare State. The critique of this transformation is not a recent development. As long ago as 1944, in *The Road to Serfdom*, Hayek launched a violent attack on the interventionist state and the various forms of economic planning that were being implemented at the time. He announced that the Western societies were in the process of becoming collectivist, and thus taking off in the direction of totalitarianism. According to him, the threshold of collectivism is passed at the moment in which the law, instead of being a means of controlling the administration, is utilized by it in order to attribute new powers to itself, and to facilitate the expansion of the bureaucracy. From this point on it is inevitable that the power of the law will decline, while that of the bureaucracy increases. In reality, what is at issue through this neo-liberal critique is the very articulation between liberalism and democracy which was performed during the course of the nineteenth century.²³ This 'democratization' of liberalism, which was the result of multiple struggles, would eventually have a profound impact upon the form in which the very idea of liberty was conceived. From

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the traditional liberal definition of Locke — 'liberty is to be free from restraint and violence from others' — we had passed with John Stuart Mill to the acceptance of 'political' liberty and democratic participation as an important component of liberty. More recently, in social-democratic discourse, liberty has come to mean the 'capacity' to make certain choices and to keep open a series of real alternatives. It is thus that poverty, lack of education, and great disparities in the conditions of life are today considered offences against liberty.

It is this transformation which neo-liberalism wishes to question. Hayek is, without doubt, the one who has devoted himself most strenuously to reformulating the principles of liberalism in order to combat those shifts of meaning which have permitted the broadening and deepening of liberties. He proposes to reaffirm the 'true' nature of liberalism as the doctrine which seeks to reduce to the minimum the powers of the state, in order to maximize the central political objective: individual liberty. This comes once again to be defined negatively as 'that condition of men in which coercion of some by others is reduced as much as possible in society'.²⁴ Political liberty is ostensibly excluded from this definition. According to Hayek, 'democracy (is) essentially a means, a utilitarian device for safeguarding internal peace and individual freedom.'²⁵ This attempt to return to the traditional conception of liberty, which characterizes it as non-interference with the right of unlimited appropriation and with the mechanisms of the capitalist market economy, exerts itself to discredit every 'positive' conception of liberty as being potentially totalitarian. It affirms that a liberal political order can only exist in the framework of a capitalist free market economy. In *Capitalism and Freedom* Milton Friedman declares that this is the only type of social organization which respects the principle of individual liberty, as it constitutes the only economic system capable of coordinating the activities of a great number of people without recourse to coercion. All state intervention, except in connection with matters that cannot be regulated through the market, is considered as an attack on individual liberty. The notion of social or redistributive justice, insofar as it is invoked to justify intervention by the state, is one of the favourite targets of the neo-liberals. According to Hayek, it is a notion which is completely unintelligible in a liberal society, as 'in such a system in which each is allowed to use his knowledge for his own purposes the concept of "social justice" is necessarily empty and meaningless, because in it nobody's will can determine the relative incomes of the different people, or prevent that they be

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partly dependent on accident.²⁶

From a 'libertarian' perspective Robert Nozick has equally questioned the idea that there can exist such a thing as a distributive justice which the state should provide.²⁷ In his view, the sole function of the state compatible with liberty is that of protecting what legitimately belongs to us, while it does not have the right to establish taxes which go beyond what is required for the development of policing activities. In contrast to the American ultraliberarians, who reject all state intervention,²⁸ Nozick justifies the existence of the minimal state — that is to say, law and order. But a state which went beyond that would be unjustifiable, as in that case it would violate the rights of individuals. In any case, Nozick claims, there would not be anything available which could be legally distributed by the state, as everything that existed would be possessed by individuals or be under their legitimate control.

Another way of attacking the subversive effects of the articulation between liberalism and democracy is, in the manner of the neoconservatives, to redefine the notion of democracy itself in such a way as to restrict its field of application and limit political participation to an ever narrower area. Thus Brzezinski proposes to 'increasingly separate the political system from society and to begin to conceive the two as separate entities.'²⁹ The objective is to remove public decisions more and more from political control, and to make them the exclusive responsibility of experts. In such a case the effect would be a depoliticization of fundamental decisions, at the economic level as well as at social and political levels. Such a society, in his view, would be democratic 'in a libertarian sense; democratic not in terms of exercising fundamental choices concerning policy-making but in the sense of maintaining certain areas of autonomy for individual self-expression'.³⁰ Although the democratic ideal is not openly attacked, an attempt is made to empty it of all substance and to propose a new definition of democracy which in fact would serve to legitimize a regime in which political participation might be virtually non-existent.

In France, among the theoreticians of the new right, there has been a far more audacious and frontal critique of democracy. Thus its principal spokesman, Alain de Benoist, declares openly that the French Revolution marked one of the fundamental stages of degeneration of Western civilization — a degeneration which began with Christianity, the 'Bolshevism of Antiquity'. He further argues that it is the spirit itself of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man which has to be rejected. Skilfully recapturing a series of libertarian themes

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from the movement of 1968, Alain de Benoist considers that in attributing a fundamental role to universal suffrage, democracy places all individuals on the same level and fails to recognize the important differences among them. Thence derives a uniformization and massification of the citizenry, upon whom is imposed a single norm which shows the necessarily totalitarian character of democracy. In the face of the chain of equivalences equality = identity = totalitarianism, the new right proclaims the 'right to difference', and affirms the sequence difference = inequality = liberty. De Benoist writes: 'I call "right-wing" the attitude which considers the *diversity* of the world, and hence inequalities, as a good, and the progressive homogenization of the world, favoured and brought about by the bimillennarian discourse of the totalitarian ideology, as an evil.'³¹

It would be an error to underestimate the importance of these attempts to redefine notions such as 'liberty', 'equality', 'justice' and 'democracy'. The traditional dogmatism of the Left, which attributed secondary importance to problems at the centre of political philosophy, based itself upon the 'superstructural' character of such problems. In the end, the Left interested itself only in a limited range of issues linked to the infrastructure and the subjects constituted within it, while the whole of the vast field of culture and the

definition of reality built upon the basis of it, the whole effort of hegemonic rearticulation of the diverse discursive formations, was left free for the initiative of the right. And, in effect, if the whole of the liberal-democratic conception of the state, as associated with the Right, was simply seen as the superstructural form of bourgeois domination, it was difficult — without falling into crass opportunism — to consider a different attitude possible. However, once we have abandoned the base/superstructure distinction, and rejected the view that there are privileged points from which an emancipatory political practice can be launched, it is clear that the constitution of a hegemonic left alternative can only come from a complex process of convergence and political construction, to which none of the hegemonic articulations constructed in any area of social reality can be of indifference. The form in which liberty, equality, democracy and justice are defined at the level of political philosophy may have important consequences at a variety of other levels of discourse, and contribute decisively to shaping the common sense of the masses. Naturally, these irradiation effects cannot be considered as the simple adoption of a philosophical point of view at the level of 'ideas', but should rather be seen as a more complex set of discursive-

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hegemonic operations embracing a variety of aspects, both institutional and ideological, through which certain 'themes' are trans-formed into nodal points of a discursive formation (i.e. of a historic bloc). If neo-liberal ideas have acquired an unquestionable political resonance, it is because they have permitted the articulation of resistances to the growing bureaucratization of social relations to which we referred earlier. Thus the new conservatism has succeeded in presenting its programme of dismantling the Welfare State as a defence of individual liberty against the oppressor state. But in order for a philosophy to become 'organic ideology', certain analogies must exist between the type of subject which it constructs and the subject positions which are constituted at the level of other social relations. If the theme of individual liberty can be mobilized so effectively, it is also because, despite its articulation with the democratic imaginary, liberalism has continued to retain as a matrix of production of the individual what Macpherson called 'possessive individualism'. This latter constructs the rights of individuals as existing before society, and often in opposition to it. To the extent that more and more numerous subjects demanded these rights in the framework of the democratic revolution, it was inevitable that the matrix of possessive individualism would be broken, as the rights of some came into collision with the rights of others. It is in this context of crisis of democratic liberalism that it is necessary to locate the offensive which seeks to dissolve the subversive potential of the articulations between liberalism and democracy, reaffirming the centrality of liberalism as the defence of individual liberty against all interference from the state and in opposition to the democratic component, which is founded upon equal rights and popular sovereignty. But this effort to restrict the terrain of democratic struggle, and to preserve the inequalities existing in a number of social relations, demands the defence of a hierarchical and anti-egalitarian principle which had been endangered by liberalism itself. This is why the liberals increasingly resort to a set of themes from conservative philosophy, in which they find the necessary ingredients to justify inequality. We are thus witnessing the emergence of a new hegemonic project, that of liberal-conservative discourse, which seeks to articulate the neo-liberal defence of the free market economy with the profoundly anti-egalitarian cultural and social traditionalism of conservatism.

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Radical Democracy: Alternative for a New Left

The conservative reaction thus has a clearly hegemonic character. It seeks a profound transformation of the terms of political discourse and the creation of a new 'definition of reality', which under the cover of the defence of 'individual liberty' would legitimize in-equalities and restore the hierarchical relations which the struggles of previous decades had destroyed. What is at stake here is in fact the creation of a new historic bloc. Converted into organic ideology, liberal-conservatism would construct a new hegemonic articulation through a system of equivalences which would unify multiple subject positions around an individualist

definition of rights and a negative conception of liberty. We are once again faced, then, with the displacement of the frontier of the social. A series of subject positions which were accepted as *legitimate differences* in the hegemonic formation corresponding to the Welfare State are expelled from the field of social positivity and construed as negativity — the parasites on social security (Mrs Thatcher's 'scroungers'), the inefficiency associated with union privileges, and state subsidies, and so on.

It is clear, therefore, that a left alternative can *only* consist of the construction of a different system of equivalents, which establishes social division on a new basis. In the face of the project for the reconstruction of a hierarchic society, the alternative of the Left should consist of locating itself fully in the field of the democratic revolution and expanding the chains of equivalents between the different struggles against oppression. *The task of the Left therefore cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy.* We shall explain the dimensions of this task in the following pages, but the very fact that it is possible arises out of the fact that the *meaning* of liberal discourse on individual rights is not definitively fixed; and just as this unfixity permits their articulation with elements of conservative discourse, it also permits different forms of articulation and redefinition which accentuate the democratic moment. That is to say, as with any other social element, the elements making up the liberal discourse never appear as crystallized, and may be the field of hegemonic struggle. It is not in the abandonment of the democratic terrain but, on the contrary, in the extension of the field of democratic struggles to the whole of civil society and the state, that the possibility resides for a hegemonic strategy of the Left. It is nevertheless important to understand the radical extent of the changes

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which are necessary in the political imaginary of the Left, if it wishes to succeed in founding a political practice fully located in the field of the democratic revolution and conscious of the depth and variety of the hegemonic articulations which the present conjuncture requires. The fundamental obstacle in this task is the one to which we have been drawing attention from the beginning of this book: essentialist apriorism, the conviction that the social is sutured at some point, from which it is possible to fix the meaning of any event independently of any articulatory practice. This has led to a failure to understand the constant displacement of the nodal points structuring a social formation, and to an organization of discourse in terms of a logic of 'a priori privileged points' which seriously limits the Left's capacity for action and political analysis. This logic of privileged points has operated in a variety of directions. From the point of view of the determining of the fundamental antagonisms, the basic obstacle, as we have seen, has been *classism*: that is to say, the idea that the working class represents the privileged agent in which the fundamental impulse of social change resides — without perceiving that the very orientation of the working class depends upon a political balance of forces and the radicalization of a plurality of democratic struggles which are decided in good part *outside* the class itself. From the point of view of the *social levels* at which the possibility of implementing changes is concentrated, the fundamental obstacles have been *statism* — the idea that the expansion of the role of the state is the panacea for all problems; and *economism* (particularly in its technocratic version) — the idea that from a successful economic strategy there necessarily follows a continuity of political effects which can be clearly specified.

But if we look for the ultimate core of this essentialist fixity, we shall find it in the fundamental nodal point which **has** galvanized the political imagination of the Left: the classic concept of 'revolution', cast in the Jacobin mould. Of course, there would be nothing in the concept of 'revolution' to which objection could be made if we understood by it the overdetermination of a set of struggles in a point of political rupture, from which there follow a variety of effects spread across the whole of the fabric of society. If this were all that was involved, there is no doubt that in many cases the violent overthrow of a repressive regime is the condition of every democratic advance. But the classic concept of revolution implied much more than this: it implied the *foundational* character of the revolutionary act, the institution of a point of concentration of power from which society could be 'rationally' reorganized. This is the perspec-

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rive which is incompatible with the plurality and the opening which a radical democracy requires. Once again radicalizing certain of Gramsci's concepts, we find the theoretical instruments which allow us to redimension the revolutionary act itself. The concept of a 'war of position' implies precisely the *process* character of every radical transformation — the revolutionary act is, simply, an internal moment of this process. The multiplication of political spaces and the preventing of the concentration of power in one point are, then, preconditions of every truly democratic transformation of society. The classic conception of socialism supposed that the disappearance of private ownership of the means of production would set up a chain of effects which, over a whole historical epoch, would lead to the extinction of all forms of subordination. Today we know that this is not so. *There are not*, for example, necessary links between anti-sexism and anti-capitalism, and a unity between the two can only be the result of a hegemonic articulation. It follows that it is only possible to construct this articulation on the basis of separate struggles, which only exercise their equivalential and overdetermining effects in *certain* spheres of the social. This requires the autonomization of the spheres of struggle and the multiplication of political spaces, which is incompatible with the concentration of power and knowledge that classic Jacobinism and its different socialist variants imply. Of course, every project for radical democracy implies a socialist dimension, as it is necessary to put an end to capitalist relations of production, which are at the root of numerous relations of subordination; but socialism is *one* of the components of a project for radical democracy, not vice versa. For this very reason, when one speaks of the socialization of the means of production as one element in the strategy for a radical and plural democracy, one must insist that this cannot mean only workers' self-management, as what is at stake is true participation by all subjects in decisions about what is to be produced, how it is to be produced, and the forms in which the product is to be distributed. Only in such conditions can there be *social appropriation* of production. To reduce the issue to a problem of workers' self-management is to ignore the fact that the workers' 'interests' can be constructed in such a way that they do not take account of ecological demands or demands of other groups which, without being producers, are affected by decisions taken in the field of production."

From the point of view of a hegemonic politics, then, the crucial limitation of the traditional left perspective is that it attempts to determine *a priori* agents of change, levels of effectiveness in the field

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of the social, and privileged points and moments of rupture. All these obstacles come together into a common core, which is the refusal to abandon the assumption of a sutured society. Once this is discarded, however, there arises a whole set of new problems which we should now tackle. These may be summarized in three questions which we shall address in turn: 1) How do we determine the *surfaces of emergence* and the *forms of articulation* of the antagonisms which a project for radical democracy should embrace? 2) To what extent is the pluralism proper to a radical democracy compatible with the effects of equivalence which, as we have seen, are characteristic of every hegemonic articulation? 3) To what extent is the logic implicit in the displacements of the democratic imaginary sufficient to define an *hegemonic project*?

On the first point it is evident that, just as the apriorism implicit in a topography of the social has proved untenable, so it is impossible to define *a priori* the surfaces on which antagonisms will be constituted. Thus, although several left politics may be conceived and specified in certain contexts, there is not *one* politics of the Left whose *contents can* be determined in isolation from all contextual reference. It is for this reason that all attempts to proceed to such determination *a priori* have necessarily been unilateral and arbitrary, with no validity in a great number of circumstances. The exploding of the uniqueness of meaning of the political — which is linked to the phenomena of combined and uneven development — dissolves every possibility of fixing the signified in terms of a division between left and right. Say we try to define an ultimate content of the left which underlies all the contexts in which the word has been used: we shall never find one which

does not present exceptions. We are exactly in the field of Wittgenstein's language games: the closest we can get is to find 'family resemblances'. Let us examine a few examples. In recent years much has been talked about the need to deepen the line of separation between state and civil society. It is not difficult to realize, however, that this proposal does not furnish the Left with any theory of the surface of emergence of antagonisms which can be generalized beyond a limited number of situations. It would appear to imply that every form of domination is incarnated in the state. But it is clear that civil society is also the seat of numerous relations of oppression, and, in consequence, of antagonisms and democratic struggles. With a greater or lesser clarity in their results, theories such as Althusser's analysis of 'ideological state apparatuses' sought to create a conceptual framework with which to think these phenomena of dis-placement in the field of domination. In the case of the feminist

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struggle, the state is an important means for effecting an advance, frequently *against* civil society, in legislation which combats sexism. In numerous underdeveloped countries the expansion of the functions of the central state is a means of establishing a frontier in the struggle against extreme forms of exploitation by landowning oligarchies. Furthermore, the state is not a homogeneous medium, separated from civil society by a ditch, but an uneven set of branches and functions, only relatively integrated by the hegemonic practices which take place within it. Above all, it should not be forgotten that the state can be the seat of numerous democratic antagonisms, to the extent that a set of functions within it — professional or technical, for example — can enter into relations of antagonism with centres of power, within the state itself, which seek to restrict and deform them. None of this means to say, of course, that in certain cases the division between state and civil society *cannot* constitute the fundamental political line of demarcation: this is what happens when the state has been transformed into a bureaucratic excrescence imposed by force upon the rest of society, as in Eastern Europe, or in the Nicaragua of the Somozas, which was a dictatorship sustained by a military apparatus. At any event, it is clearly impossible to identify either the state or civil society *a priori* as *the* surface of emergence of democratic antagonisms. The same can be said when it is a question of determining the positive or negative character, from the point of view of the politics of the Left, of certain organizational forms. Let us consider, for example, the 'party' form. The party as a political institution can, in certain circumstances, be an instance of bureaucratic crystallization which acts as a brake upon mass movements; but in others it can be the organizer of dispersed and politically virgin masses, and can thus serve as an instrument for the expansion and deepening of democratic struggles. The important point is that inasmuch as the field of 'society in general' has disappeared as a valid framework of political analysis, there has also disappeared the possibility of establishing *a general* theory of politics on the basis of topographic categories — that is to say, of categories which fix in a permanent manner the meaning of certain contents as differences which can be located within a relational complex.

The conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that it is im-possible to specify *a priori* surfaces of emergence of antagonisms, as there is no surface which is not constantly subverted by the over-determining effects of others, and because there is, in consequence, a constant displacement of the social logics characteristic of certain spheres towards other spheres. This is, among other things, the

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'demonstration effect' that we have seen in operation in the case of the democratic revolution. A democratic struggle can autonomize a certain space within which it develops, and produce effects of equivalence with other struggles in a different political space. It is to this plurality of the social that the project for a radical democracy is linked, and the possibility of it emanates directly from the decentred character of the social agents, from the discursive plurality which constitutes them as subjects, and from the displacements which take place within that plurality. The original forms of democratic thought were linked to *a* and *unified* conception of human nature, and, to that extent, they tended to constitute a single space within which that nature would have to manifest the effects of its radical liberty and equality: it was thus that there was consti-

tuted a public space linked to the idea of citizenship. The public/private distinction constituted the separation between a space in which differences were erased through the universal equivalence of citizens, and a plurality of private spaces in which the full force of those differences was maintained. It is at this point that the over-determination of effects linked to the democratic revolution begins to displace the line of demarcation between the public and the private and to *politicize* social relations; that is, to multiply the spaces in which the new logics of equivalence dissolve the differential positivity of the social: this is the long process which stretches from the workers' struggles of the nineteenth century to the struggle of women, diverse racial and sexual minorities, and diverse marginal groups, and the new anti-institutional struggles in the present century. Thus what has been exploded is the idea and the reality itself of a unique space of constitution of the political. What we are witnessing is a politicization far more radical than any we have known in the past, because it tends to dissolve the distinction between the public and the private, not in terms of the encroachment on the private by a unified public space, but in terms of a proliferation of radically new and different political spaces. We are con-fronted with the emergence of a *plurality of subjects*, whose forms of constitution and diversity it is only possible to think if we relinquish the category of 'subject' as a unified and unifying essence.

Is this plurality of the political not in contradiction, however, with the unification resulting from the equivalential effects which, as we know, are the condition of antagonisms? Or, in other words, is there not an incompatibility between the proliferation of political spaces proper to a radical democracy and the construction of collective identities on the basis of the logic of equivalence? Once again, we are

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faced here with the apparent dichotomy autonomy/hegemony, to which we have already referred in the previous chapter, and whose political implications and effects we should now consider. Let us consider the question from two perspectives: a) from the point of view of the *terrain* on which the dichotomy can present itself as exclusive; and b) from the point of view of the possibility and the historical conditions of the emergence of that terrain of exclusion.

Let us begin, then, by considering the terrain of the incompatibility between equivalential effects and autonomy. First, the logic of equivalence. We have already indicated that, inasmuch as antagonism arises not only in the dichotomized space which constitutes it but also in the field of a plurality of the social which always over-flows that space, it is only by coming out of itself and hegemonizing external elements that the identity of the two poles of the antagonism is consolidated. The strengthening of specific democratic struggles requires, therefore, the expansion of chains of equivalence which extend to other struggles. The equivalential articulation between anti-racism, anti-sexism and anti-capitalism, for example, requires a hegemonic construction which, in certain circumstances, may be the condition for the consolidation of each one of these struggles. The logic of equivalence, then, taken to its ultimate consequences, would imply the dissolution of the autonomy of the spaces in which each one of these struggles is constituted; not necessarily because any of them become subordinated to others, but because they have all become, strictly speaking, equivalent symbols of a unique and indivisible struggle. The antagonism would thus have achieved the conditions of total transparency, to the extent that all unevenness had been eliminated, and the differential specificity of the spaces in which each of the democratic struggles was constituted had been dissolved. Second, the logic of autonomy. Each of these struggles retains its differential specificity with respect to the others. The political spaces in which each of them is constituted are different and unable to communicate with each other. But it is easily seen that this *apparently* libertarian logic is only sustained on the basis of a new closure. For if each struggle transforms the moment of its specificity into an absolute principle of identity, the set of these struggles can only be conceived of as an *absolute system of differences*, and this system can only be thought as a closed totality. That is to say, the transparency of the social has simply been transferred from the uniqueness and intelligibility of a system of equivalences to the uniqueness and intelligibility of a system of differences. But in both cases we are dealing with discourses which seek, through their categories, to

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dominate the social as *a totality*. In both cases, therefore, the moment of totality ceases to be *a horizon* and becomes *afoundation*. It is only in this rational and homogeneous space that the logic of equivalence and the

logic of autonomy are contradictory, because it is only there that social identities are presented as *already* acquired and fixed, and it is only there, therefore, that two *ultimately* contradictory social logics find a terrain in which these *ultimate* effects can develop fully. But as, by definition, this ultimate moment never arrives, the in-compatibility between equivalence and autonomy disappears. The status of each changes: it is no longer a case *offoundations* of the social order, but of *social logics*, which intervene to different degrees in the constitution of every social identity, and which partially limit their mutual effects. From this we can deduce a basic precondition for a radically libertarian conception of politics: the refusal to dominate — intellectually or politically — every presumed 'ultimate foundation' of the social. Every conception which seeks to base itself on a knowledge of this foundation finds itself faced, sooner or later, with the Rousseauian paradox according to which men should be obliged to be free.

This change in the status of certain concepts, which transforms into social logics what were previously foundations, allows us to understand the variety of dimensions on which a democratic politics is based. It allows us, first of all, to identify with precision the meaning and the limits of what we may call the 'principle of democratic equivalence'. We are able to specify the meaning because it becomes clear that the mere displacement of the egalitarian imaginary is not sufficient to produce a transformation in the identity of the groups upon which this displacement operates. On the basis of the principle of equality, a corporatively constituted group can demand its rights to equality with other groups, but to the extent that the demands of various groups are different and in many cases incompatible among themselves, this does not lead to any real equivalence between the various democratic demands. In all those cases in which the problematic of possessive individualism is maintained as the matrix of production of the identity of the different groups, this result is inevitable. For there to be a 'democratic equivalence' something else is necessary: the construction of a new 'common sense' which changes the identity of the different groups, in such a way that the demands of each group are articulated equivalentially with those of the others — in Marx's words, 'that the free development of each should be the condition for the free development of all'. That is, equivalence is always hegemonic insofar as it

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does not simply establish an 'alliance' between given interests, but modifies the very identity of the forces engaging in that alliance. For the defence of the interests of the workers not to be made at the expense of the rights of women, immigrants or consumers, it is necessary to establish an equivalence between these different struggles. It is only on this condition that struggles against power become truly democratic, and that the demanding of rights is not carried out on the basis of an individualistic problematic, but in the context of respect for the rights to equality of other subordinated groups. But if this is the meaning of the principle of democratic equivalence, its limits are also clear. This total equivalence never exists; every equivalence is penetrated by a constitutive precariousness, derived from the unevenness of the social. To this extent, the precariousness of every equivalence demands that it be complemented/limited by the logic of autonomy. It is for this reason that the demand for *equality* is not sufficient, but needs to be balanced by the demand for *liberty*, which leads us to speak of a radical and *plural* democracy. A radical and non-plural democracy would be one which constituted *one* single space of equality on the basis of the unlimited operation of the logic of equivalence, and did not recognize the irreducible moment of the plurality of spaces. This principle of the separation of spaces is the basis of the demand for liberty. It is within it that the principle of pluralism resides and that the project for a plural democracy can link up with the logic of liberalism. It is not liberalism as such which should be called into question, for as an ethical principle which defends the liberty of the individual to fulfil his or her human capacities, it is more valid today than ever. But if this dimension of liberty is constitutive of every democratic and emancipatory project, it should not lead us, in reaction to certain 'holistic' excesses, to return purely and simply to the defence of 'bourgeois' individualism. What is involved is the production of *another* individual, an individual who is no longer constructed out of the matrix of possessive individualism. The idea of 'natural' rights prior to society — and, indeed, the whole of the false dichotomy individual/society — should be abandoned, and replaced by another manner of posing the problem of rights. It is never possible for individual rights to be defined in isolation, but only in the context of social relations

which define determinate subject positions. As a consequence, it will always be a question of rights which involve other subjects who participate in the same social relation. It is in this sense that the notion of 'democratic rights' must be understood, as these are rights which can only be exercised collectively, and which

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suppose the existence of equal rights for others. The spaces constitutive of the different social relations may vary enormously, according to whether the relations involved are those of production, of citizenship, of neighbourhood, of couples, and so on. The forms of democracy should therefore also be plural, inasmuch as they have to be adapted to the social spaces in question — direct democracy cannot be the only organizational form, as it is only applicable to reduced social spaces.

It is necessary, therefore, to broaden the domain of the exercise of democratic rights beyond the limited traditional field of 'citizen-ship'. As regards the extension of democratic rights from the classic 'political' domain to that of the economy, this is the terrain of the specifically anti-capitalist struggle. Against those champions of economic liberalism who affirm that the economy is the domain of the 'private', the seat of natural rights, and that the criteria of democracy have no reason to be applied within it, socialist theory defends the right of the social agent to equality and to participation as a producer and not only as a citizen. Some advances have been made in this direction by theorists of the pluralist school such as Dahl and Lindblom," who today recognize that to speak of the economy as the domain of the private in the era of multinational corporations is senseless, and that it is therefore necessary to accept certain forms of worker participation in the running of enterprises. Our perspective is certainly very different, as it is the very idea that there can be a natural domain of the 'private' which we wish to question. The distinctions public/private, civil society/political society are only the result of a certain type of hegemonic articulation, and their limits vary in accordance with the existing relations of forces at a given moment. For example, it is clear that neo-conservative discourse today is exerting itself to restrict the domain of the political and to reaffirm the field of the private in the face of the reduction to which this has been submitted in recent decades under the impact of the different democratic struggles.

Let us take up again at this point our argument regarding the mutual and necessary limitations between equivalence and autonomy. The conception of a plurality of political spaces is in-compatible with the logic of equivalence only on the assumption of a closed system. But once this assumption is abandoned, it is not possible to derive from the proliferation of spaces and the ultimate indeterminacy of the social the impossibility of a society signifying itself — and thus thinking itself — as a totality, or the incompatibility of this totalizing moment with the project for a radical demo-

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cracy. The construction of a political space with equivalential effects is not only not incompatible with democratic struggle, but is in many cases a requirement for it. The construction of a chain of democratic equivalences in the face of the neo-conservative offensive, for example, is one of the conditions of the struggle of the Left for hegemony in the present circumstances. The incompatibility therefore does not lie in equivalence as a social logic. It arises only from the moment at which this space of equivalences ceases to be considered as *one* political space among others and comes to be seen as the centre, which subordinates and organizes all other spaces. It arises, that is, in the case where there takes place not only the construction of equivalents at a certain level of the social, but also the transformation of this level into a unifying principle, which reduces the others to differential moments internal to itself. We see then, paradoxically, that it is the very logic of openness and of the democratic subversion of differences which creates, in the societies of today, the possibility of a closure far more radical than in the past: to the extent that the resistance of traditional systems of differences is broken, and indeterminacy and ambiguity turn more elements of society into 'floating signifiers', the possibility arises of attempting to institute a centre which radically eliminates the logic of autonomy and reconstitutes around itself the totality of the social body. If in the nineteenth century the limits of every attempt at radical democracy were found in the survival of old forms of subordination

across broad areas of social relations, at the present those limits are given by a new possibility which arises in the very terrain of democracy: the logic of totalitarianism.

Claude Lefort has shown how the 'democratic revolution', as a new terrain which supposes a profound mutation at the symbolic level, implies a new form of institution of the social. In earlier societies, organized in accordance with a theological-political logic, power was incorporated in the person of the prince, who was the representative of God — that is to say, of sovereign justice and sovereign reason. Society was thought as a body, the hierarchy of whose members rested upon the principle of unconditional order. According to Lefort, the radical difference which democratic society introduces is that the site of power becomes an empty space; the reference to a transcendent guarantor disappears, and with it the representation of the substantial unity of society. As a consequence a split occurs between the instances of power, knowledge, and the law, and their foundations are no longer assured. The possibility is thus opened up of an unending process of questioning: 'no law

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which can be fixed, whose dictates are not subject to contest, or whose foundations cannot be called into question; in sum, no representation of a centre of society: unity is no longer able to erase social division. Democracy inaugurates the experience of a society which cannot be apprehended or controlled, in which the people will be proclaimed sovereign, but in which its identity will never be definitively given, but will remain latent.³⁴ It is in this context, according to Lefort, that the possibility must be understood of the emergence of totalitarianism, which consists of an attempt to re-establish the unity which democracy has shattered between the loci of power, law and knowledge. Once all references to extra-social powers have been abolished through the democratic revolution, a purely social power can emerge, presenting itself as total and extracting from itself alone the principle of law and the principle of knowledge. With totalitarianism, rather than designating a vacant site, power seeks to make itself material in an organ which assumes itself to be the representative of a *unitary* people. Under the pretext of achieving the unity of the people, the social division made visible by the logic of democracy is thereupon denied. This denial constitutes the centre of the logic of totalitarianism, and it is effected in a double movement: 'the annulment of the signs of the division of the state and society, and of those of the internal division of society. These imply the annulment of the differentiation of instances which govern the constitution of political society. There are no longer ultimate criteria of the law, nor ultimate criteria of knowledge, which are separate from power.'³⁵

If we examine them in the light of our problematic, it is possible to link these analyses to what we have characterized as the field of hegemonic practices. It is because there are no more assured foundations arising out of a transcendent order, because there is no longer a centre which binds together power, law and knowledge, that it becomes possible and necessary to unify certain political spaces through hegemonic articulations. But these articulations will always be partial and subject to being contested, as there is no longer a supreme guarantor. Every attempt to establish a definitive suture and to deny the radically open character of the social which the logic of democracy institutes, leads to what Lefort designates as 'totalitarianism'; that is to say, to a logic of construction of the political which consists of establishing a point of departure from which society can be perfectly mastered and known. That this is a *political logic* and not a type of social organization is proved by the fact that it cannot be ascribed to a particular political orientation: it may be the result of a politics of the left', according to which every antagonism

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may be eliminated and society rendered completely transparent, or the result of an authoritarian fixing of the social order in hierarchies established by the state, as in the case of fascism. But in both cases the state raises itself to the status of the sole possessor of the truth of the social order, whether in the name of the proletariat or of the nation, and seeks to control all the networks of sociability. In the face of the radical indeterminacy which democracy opens up, this involves an attempt to reimpose an absolute centre, and to re-establish the closure which will thus restore unity.

But if there is no doubt that one of the dangers which threatens democracy is the totalitarian attempt to pass beyond the constitutive character of antagonism and deny plurality in order to restore unity, there is also a symmetrically opposite danger of a lack of all reference to this unity. For, even though impossible, this remains a horizon which, given the absence of articulation between social relations, is necessary in order to prevent an implosion of the social and an absence of any common point of reference. This unravelling of the social fabric caused by the destruction of the symbolic framework is another form of the **disappearance** of the political. In contrast to the danger of totalitarianism, which imposes immutable articulations in an authoritarian manner, the problem here is the absence of those articulations which allow the establishment of meanings common to the different social subjects. Between the logic of complete identity and that of pure difference, the experience of democracy should consist of the recognition of the multiplicity of social logics along with the necessity of their articulation. But this articulation should be constantly re-created and renegotiated, and there is no final point at which a balance will be definitively achieved.

This leads us to our third question, that of the relationship between democratic logic and hegemonic project. It is evident from everything we have said so far that the logic of democracy cannot be sufficient for the formulation of any hegemonic project. This is because the logic of democracy is simply the equivalential displacement of the egalitarian imaginary to ever more extensive social relations, and, as such, it is only a logic of the elimination of relations of subordination and of inequalities. The logic of democracy is not a logic of the positivity of the social, and it is therefore incapable of founding a nodal point of any kind around which the social fabric can be reconstituted. But if the subversive moment of the logic of democracy and the positive moment of the institution of the social are no longer unified by any anthropological foundation which transforms them into the fronts and reverse sides of a single process,

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it follows clearly that every possible form of unity between the two is contingent, and is therefore itself the result of a process of articulation. This being the case, no hegemonic project can be based exclusively on a democratic logic, but must also consist of a set of proposals for the positive organization of the social. If the demands of a subordinated group are presented purely as negative demands subversive of a certain order, without being linked to any viable project for the reconstruction of specific areas of society, their capacity to act hegemonically will be excluded from the outset. This is the difference between what might be called a 'strategy of opposition' and a 'strategy of construction of a new order'. In the case of the first, the element of negation of a certain social or political order predominates, but this element of negativity is not accompanied by any real attempt to establish different nodal points from which a process of different and positive reconstruction of the social fabric could be instituted — and as a result the strategy is condemned to marginality. This is the case with the different versions of 'enclave politics', whether ideological or corporative. In the case of the strategy of construction of a new order, in contrast, the element of social positivity predominates, but this very fact creates an unstable balance and a constant tension with the subversive logic of democracy. A situation of hegemony would be one in which the management of the positivity of the social and the articulation of the diverse democratic demands had achieved a maximum of integration — the opposite situation, in which social negativity brings about the dis-integration of every stable system of differences, would correspond to an organic crisis. This allows us to see the sense in which we can speak of the project for a radical democracy as an alternative for the Left. This cannot consist of the affirmation, from positions of marginality, of a set of anti-system demands; on the contrary, it must base itself upon the search for a point of equilibrium between a maximum advance for the democratic revolution in a broad range of spheres, and the capacity for the hegemonic direction and positive reconstruction of these spheres on the part of subordinated groups.

Every hegemonic position is based, therefore, on an unstable equilibrium: construction starts from negativity, but is only consolidated to the extent that it succeeds in constituting the positivity of the social. These two moments are not theoretically articulated: they outline the space of a contradictory tension which constitutes the specificity of the different political conjunctures. (As we have seen, the contradictory character of these two moments does not imply a contradiction in our argument, as, from a logical point of

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view, the coexistence of two different and contradictory social logics, existing in the form of a mutual limitation of their effects, is perfectly possible). But if this plurality of social logics is characteristic of a tension, it also requires a plurality of spaces in which they are to be constituted. In the case of the strategy of construction of a new order, the changes which it is possible to introduce in social positivity will depend not only on the more or less democratic character of the forces which pursue that strategy, but also upon a set of structural limits established by other logics — at the level of state apparatuses, the economy, and so on. Here it is important not to fall into the different forms of utopianism which seek to ignore the variety of spaces which constitute those structural limits, or of apoliticism, which reject the traditional field of the political in view of the limited character of the changes which it is possible to implement from within it. But it is also of the greatest importance not to seek to limit the field of the political to the management of social positivity, and to accept only those changes which it is possible to implement at present, rejecting every charge of negativity which goes beyond them. In recent years there has been much talk, for example, of the need for a 'laicization of politics'. If by this one understands a critique of the essentialism of the traditional Left, which proceeded with absolute categories of the type 'the Party', 'the Class', or 'the Revolution', one would not dissent. But frequently such 'laicization' has meant something very different: the total expulsion of utopia from the field of the political. Now, without 'utopia', without the possibility of negating an order beyond the point that we are able to threaten it, there is no possibility at all of the constitution of a radical imaginary — whether democratic or of any other type. The presence of this imaginary as a set of symbolic meanings which totalize as negativity a certain social order is absolutely essential for the constitution of all left-wing thought. We have already indicated that the hegemonic forms of politics always suppose an unstable equilibrium between this imaginary and the management of social positivity; but this tension, which is one of the forms in which the impossibility of a transparent society is manifested, should be affirmed and defended. Every radical democratic politics should avoid the two extremes represented by the totalitarian myth of the Ideal City, and the positivist pragmatism of reformists without a project.

This moment of tension, of openness, which gives the social its essentially incomplete and precarious character, is what every project for radical democracy should set out to institutionalize. The

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institutional diversity and complexity which characterizes a democratic society should be conceived of in a very different manner from the diversification of functions proper to a complex bureaucratic system. In the latter it is always exclusively a question of the management of the social as positivity, and every diversification takes place, in consequence, within a rationality which dominates the whole set of spheres and functions. The Hegelian conception of the bureaucracy as a universal class is the perfect theoretical crystallization of this perspective. It has been transferred to the sociological plane in so far as the diversification of levels within the social — following a functionalist, structuralist or any other similar perspective — is linked to a conception of each of these levels as constituting moments of an intelligible totality which dominates them and gives them their meaning. But in the case of the pluralism proper to a radical democracy, *diversification* has been transformed into a *diversity*, as each of these diverse elements and levels is no longer the expression of a totality which transcends it. The multiplication of spaces and the institutional diversification which accompanies it no longer consist of a rational unfolding of functions, nor do they obey a subterranean logic which constitutes the rational principle of all change, but they express exactly the opposite: through the irreducible character of this diversity and plurality, society constructs the image and the management of its own impossibility. The compromise, the precarious character of every arrangement, the antagonism, are the primary facts, and it is only within this instability that the moment of positivity and its management take place. The advancing of a project for radical democracy means, therefore, forcing the myth of a rational and transparent society to recede progressively to the horizon of the social. This becomes a 'non-place', the symbol of its own impossibility.

But, for this very reason, the possibility of a *unified discourse* of the Left is also erased. If the various subject positions and the diverse antagonisms and points of rupture constitute *a* and not a *diversification*, it is clear that they cannot be led back to a point from which they could all be embraced and explained by a single dis-course. Discursive *discontinuity* becomes primary and constitutive. The discourse of radical de-

mocracy is no longer the discourse of the universal; the epistemological niche from which 'universal' classes and subjects spoke has been eradicated, and it has been replaced by a polyphony of voices, each of which constructs its own irreducible discursive identity. This point is decisive: there is no radical and plural democracy without renouncing the discourse of the universal

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and its implicit assumption of a privileged point of access to 'the truth', which can be reached only by a limited number of subjects. In political terms this means that just as there are no surfaces which are privileged *a priori* for the emergence of antagonisms, nor are there discursive regions which the programme of a radical democracy should exclude *a priori* as possible spheres of struggle. Juridical institutions, the educational system, labour relations, the discourses of the resistance of marginal populations construct original and irreducible forms of social protest, and thereby contribute all the discursive complexity and richness on which the programme of a radical democracy should be founded. The classic discourse of socialism was of a very different type: it was a discourse of the universal, which transformed certain social categories into depositories of political and epistemological privileges; it was an *a priori* discourse concerning differential levels of effectiveness within the social — and as such it reduced the field of the discursive surfaces on which it considered that it was possible and legitimate to operate; it was, finally, a discourse concerning the privileged points from which historical changes were set in motion — the Revolution, the General Strike, or 'evolution' as a unifying category of the cumulative and irreversible character of partial advances. Every project for radical democracy necessarily includes, as we have said, the socialist dimension — that is to say, the abolition of capitalist relations of production; but it rejects the idea that from this abolition there necessarily follows the elimination of the other inequalities. In consequence, the de-centring and autonomy of the different discourses and struggles, the multiplication of antagonisms and the construction of a plurality of spaces within which they can affirm themselves and develop, are the conditions *sine qua non* of the possibility that the different components of the classic ideal of socialism — which should, no doubt, be extended and reformulated — can be achieved. And as we have argued **abundantly** in these pages, this plurality of spaces does not deny, but rather requires, the overdetermination of its effects at certain levels and the consequent hegemonic articulation between them.

Let us come to a conclusion. This book has been constructed around the vicissitudes of the concept of hegemony, of the new logic of the social implicit within it, and of the 'epistemological obstacles' which, from Lenin to Gramsci, prevented a comprehension of its radical political and theoretical potential. It is only when the open, unsutured character of the social is fully accepted, when the essentialism of the totality and of the elements is rejected, that this

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potential becomes clearly visible and 'hegemony' can come to constitute a fundamental tool for political analysis on the left. These conditions arise originally in the field of what we have termed the 'democratic revolution', but they are only maximized in all their deconstructive effects in the project for a radical democracy, or, in other words, in a form of politics which is founded not upon dogmatic postulation of any 'essence of the social', but, on the contrary, on affirmation of the contingency and ambiguity of every 'essence', and on the constitutive character of social division and antagonism. Affirmation of a 'ground' which lives only by negating its fundamental character; of an 'order' which exists only as a partial limiting of disorder; of a 'meaning' which is constructed only as excess and paradox in the face of meaninglessness — in other words, the field of the political as the space for a game which is never 'zero-sum', because the rules and the players are never fully explicit. This game, which eludes the concept, does at least have a name: hegemony.

A. Rosenberg, *Democrazia e socialismo. Storia politica degli ultimi centocinquanti anni* (1789-1937), Bari 1971. Ibid., p. 119.

Strictly considered, this affirmation is of course exaggerated. The realignment of forces during the French Revolution also required hegemonic operations, and implied certain changes of alliances: think of episodes such as the Vendée. It is only from a historical perspective, and in comparison with the complexity of the hegemonic articulations which characterize subsequent phases of European history, that one can argue for the relative stability of the framework of basic divisions and oppositions in the course of the French Revolution.

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This articulation has been analysed by C.B. Macpherson in *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*, Oxford 1977.

F. Hayek, *The Constitution Liberty*, Chicago 1960, p. 11.

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Cf. R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, New York 1974.

For a presentation of their position consult M.N. Rothbard, *Fora New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*, New York 1973.

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Apart from the fact that our reflexion is located in a very different theoretical problematic, our emphasis on the need to articulate a plurality of forms of democracy corresponding to a multiplicity of subject positions distinguishes our approach from that of the theorists of 'participatory democracy' with whom we nevertheless share many important concerns. On 'participatory democracy', see C.B. Macpherson, op. cit. chapter 5 and C. Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Cambridge, England, 1970.

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