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## STRUCTURAL HEGEMONY<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The Political Conditions of the Left and the Question of Hegemony

One can learn from Antonio Gramsci that one combats economism, the reduction of culture, politics, and ideology to the economic<sup>2</sup>, »by developing the concept of hegemony« (Gramsci 1971, p. 165). But how should we develop it under our conditions? For several years now the number of people in West Germany studying Gramsci has increased. However, it would be an exaggeration to claim that therefore marxism has here as well »entered into a new phase: that of »gramscianism«, as Chantal Mouffe (1979, p. 1) has noted regarding marxist theory in some western countries. In any case, classical texts are not sufficient.

How, therefore, should we develop our understanding of the actually operating processes of hegemony in West Germany? Further, what practice is there for a theory of hegemony? We began by analyzing the embedding of the »block in power«, after the question concerning the stability of bourgeois domination had finally forced its way into our consciousness. The question about »hegemony and politics in West Germany« became pressing in light of the struggle between social-liberalism and right-populism that arose with Franz Josef Strauss' candidacy for the Chancelorship in 1980. Thus we began to develop hegemony as a theoretical

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<sup>2</sup> The practical consequences are decisive. Economism can lead to a quasi-religious »fatalistic finalism« (Gramsci 1971, 168). In politics, which must necessarily be developed hegemonically, »compromises« are important, yet an economistic motivation can stand in their way. A certain aversion to compromises is based on »the iron conviction that there exist objective laws of historical development similar in kind to natural laws« (ibid.). Furthermore, economism also misinterprets the economic sphere, which means

concept in the understanding of political relations and dynamics in our country.

But what then? What about hegemonic praxis on the left? We take as our point of departure the fact that there is still no organizing or orienting center of the left in West Germany in 1981. The labor unions, as the most immediate organization of the working-class, are bound up with social-liberal corporatism, that is the bargaining about wage and social-political questions in the triangle of employers, the state and the unions (cf. Jaeger 1980a). Politically, wage laborers are articulated above all through social democracy<sup>4</sup>. That means, however, that they are sublated (aufgehoben) in a »statist« politics, which transforms their class engagement in the social maintenance performances of the state. Politics is the concern of their representatives. The represented are passive. However, this system does provide them with a great deal. The »social net« that protects those who sell their labor-power from a fall into poverty is not ineffective and the level of consumption of goods within reach of the individual is not to be scorned. However, the economic crisis, whose form is conditioned by the Keynesian success at providing welfare, is now undermining this system. With growing unemployment the state's social funds shrink. Maybe the corporatist integration of the workers will dissolve. But what then? The question is directed to a left which is hardly ready with any answers.

Neither of the main organizations of the working class, the social democrats - the administrators of the bourgeois crisis, whose administrative methods are increasingly falling into crisis -, and the communists - identified with authoritarian state socialism -, operate as organizing centers of the left. Left activities therefore take place in a hegemonic vacuum, though not in a no-man's land. Many groups and individuals jostle about on a barren terrain, carrying on multiple and disconnected activities. All this takes place in a country whose bourgeoisie is in part especially effective and whose state has developed into a highly technical surveillance state. This is surely not a situation in which the question of the social

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objectivistically in a way that eliminates activity.

hegemony of the left appears to pose itself, as long as the »left« doesn't shrink to the »relative left« of the liberal-welfare state block.

Lukács foresaw the problematic and glittering role of us intellectuals, the laughable yet unavoidable presumption which follows from a situation which he describes in this way:

>Today there is little to expect from official politics. There is no organized democratic left and apparently will not be for a long time. Sudden explosions of public opinion [...] show how strong the latent oppositions are. Yet the reform attempts possess no center, no organization, no immediate power. That means that the function and weight of ideologues, above all of thoughtful writers, will become ever greater.< (Lukács 1966, pp. 24f)

In certain ways everything is inverted under such conditions. The political vacuum leads to an over-politicizing of cultural activities. Functions and claims that would be perceived in a politically organized fashion attach themselves to song writing and newspaper editing, to professors and cultural projects. For more than 10 years it has been a question of weakness on the political level and growing strength on the cultural level. A great cultural treasure went finally along with political impoverishment.

And how do we understand the »movements«? The Easter march movement against nuclear weapons at the end of the 1950s, out of which arose, among other things, the journal *Das Argument*, was followed by the »students movement«. The >Second women's movement< evolved within, and also against, the students movement. When the students movement proved itself to be essentially limited to the symbolic and thereby became exhausted, there arose a multiplicity of political and cultural projects, fighting against each other, initiatives to build parties, student projects of »reconstruction of the proletariat«, etc. A few years later the attempts to found new parties, which had all pursued a more or less anti-hegemonic and so

sectarian politics, fell into crisis. Alongside the marxist-leninist and maoist discourses new movements had emerged. First, there were the grass root initiatives, and then, in part nourished by it, the ecological movement. Finally, there was a constantly expanding peace movement, which was intertwined with, or intersected by, or simply co-existing with squatters, with the alternative scene, with its solidarity shops and meeting places and so on. For the first time there arose in this unfolding, multisided and decentered left culture two, competing, newspaper projects that offered themselves as mediators and media to the movements and thereby announced the ripening of a hegemonic field. Finally, there was the success on the political level: the first leaps over the 5 percent hurdle into state and city assemblies.

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How is this electoral success to be interpreted? And how the »movements«? It has become usual to debate the nature of the movements in terms of the concept of the »new social movements«. Touraine and others have woven this concept into the discourse of a »post-industrial society« and drawn it into competition with the »old« social movement, namely the worker's movement, in order to displace the latter (see for example Touraine 1978, p.19). Taking up this concept, we do not need to follow him in this respect. What differentiates the »new movements« from the worker's movement is, in any case, that their fundamental questions are not lodged immediately on the level of capitalist relations of production. For the »new movements«, questions of ways of life, of the social-cultural formation of sexual or age-specific identities and so on shift into the foreground. They should therefore be conceptualized as primarily social-cultural movements. Peace and the preservation of the natural foundations of our existence are to be sure questions which refer to the whole of existence, but the movements, which in respect to them have gotten underway so powerfully, are for the most part grounded on (differing) cultural positions. The remarkable situation has occurred in which after the shattering of so many left projects to build political parties a predominately cultural movement has

now made the leap into parliament. At any rate the movement's representatives have done so, though what they will achieve, or how the contradictory relation between a cultural movement and parliamentary representation will mold itself, remains an open question.

The political weakness, which is another name for the hegemonic vacuum, of the left continues. The West Berlin Alternative List (AL), which made it into the parliament in 1981, is perhaps a swallow, but that does not make it summer. It is a loose and inhomogeneous aggregate of predominately counter-cultural groupings that exist in contradiction to the laws of the political level.<sup>3</sup> For the time being, the AL resembles more a transient dispatch from the cultural level into the parliamentary sphere than »new »party of a new type«, something into which it might develop in accordance with the strategic analysis of Michael Jaeger (1980b). There was as well the »Socialist Conference« which developed out of an initiative to show solidarity with Rudolf Bahro, who, in light of a strategy I will return to below, has recently campaigned against its continuation as »socialist«.

After this admittedly incomplete and rough sketch of the situation we take up again the red thread from the beginning: How can we concretely develop the concept of hegemony given the conditions prevailing in the FRG during the 1980s? Gramsci's basic assumption saw the working class as the only possible agent of left hegemony or class hegemon of the left, and that this class therefore had to »work its way up« into the cultural and political levels. At this point the party and the intellectuals enter the scene. Gramsci, however, applies the concept of the intellectual subversively. As an »intellectual« one is active through the assumption of overlapping functions of the making of the social (*Vergesellschaftung sfunktionen*). Labor

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<sup>3</sup> The AL insists that no »resolutions« can be carried in the face of »essential minorities«. But can a party simply suspend its decisions at perhaps decisive points? Doesn't simply not acting mean that one is incapable of action? Doesn't this violate the regularities of the political sphere? The »Sozialistische Initiative« (a group of former SEW-members that cooperates with the AL), in spite of such doubts, confirmed its support for this structure of the AL in its electoral manifesto of 1981: »We find in it important forms of a solution for a new, pluralistic left party as an answer to dogmatically and

functionaries are for him intellectuals as well. The elaboration of a comprehensive cultural and political project takes hold only if it is rooted in the working class and in the whole »people« as far as this is no part of the dominating power block. »One cannot make politics [...] without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and the people-nation.« Only in that way »can the shared life be realized which alone is a historical force - with the creation of the historical block« (Gramsci 1971, p. 418).<sup>4</sup> For that end it is necessary to »link« the »elementary passions of the people« with a »superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated - i.e. knowledge« (ibid.). Mere syndicalism remains subordinate and hinders the workers in their attempt to raise themselves »to a phase of politico-ethical hegemony«(ibid., p. 160).

It is not evident at first glance how these thoughts of Gramsci on hegemony can be applied in our situation. Is a socialist »hegemonic apparatus« thinkable, a »dispositif d'hégémonie« (Sève 1980b, p. 74) that is not based on the hegemony of a worker's party? No politics can go forward in the absence of a hegemonic field. However, would not the concept of a »hegemony without a hegemon« be nonsense?

Here we will leave the political level again and turn to the cultural. We want to try to learn to understand the question of hegemony more clearly. The theoretical impulses for the following reflections, which are offered provisionally, were provided by the research work in the Project Ideology Theory (PIT), above all the investigation of the ideological practices of German Fascism (cf. PIT 1980). The practical impulses arose from experiences resulting from the organization of a left

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bureaucratically exhausted forms«.

<sup>4</sup> »Bloco storico« is the central concept of Gramsci's theory of hegemony (Kramer 1975, p. 107). This concept is originally »drawn from Sorek« (Gramsci 1967, p. 275). In Gramsci, it encompasses the connection between the economic base and the »two levels« of the superstructure, »which is the condition and relational form of a class alliance« (PIT 1972, p. 77). Political alliances on the other hand are processes which play themselves out only in the formal-political region of a historical block. On this issue, one can also consult the polemic of Serreni and Napolitano directed against Garaudy (1971), who reduces the notion of a block to that of an alliance (see Priester 1981, 81ff.). In Gramsci, the historical block is also »more comprehensive than the political block. In fact, the historical block can include several political blocks« (Gruppi 1977, 104). This distinction is enormously important for the analysis of political relations

publishing house and, above all, thoughts on the chances and significance of the People's University project, the »Volksuni« (*Volksuniversitaet*). Now, some elements stressed by Gramsci appear to be central constituents of this project. The axis of union member-scholar is crucial for the Volksuni. Does this tie have something to do with the »sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation« (Gramsci, compare above)? How do the other movements order themselves with respect to this axis? Does the Volksuni present a hegemonic structure? How is this project to be thought?

In our search for possible answers we will proceed indirectly and merely touch on many connections. This text demands going beyond it in order to »understand« it. It turns to the reader as a potential organic intellectual of the Volksuni.

## 2. Inner and Outer Bounds - The Cultural Apparatus

In Lenin's *What is to be Done* (CW 5, p. 468), there is a remark that can appear paradoxical to the first-time reader: »People are lacking - yet there is a mass of people.« How can what is there in masses be lacking? For Lenin the problem is thus: There is always »an increasing number of discontented people who desire to protest«, but the capacity is lacking »of organizin such a comprehensive [...] work that would employ all forces, even the most humble« (cf. *ibid.*, p.468).

For us, Lenin's proposition receives a second meaning. The workers, in general the »people«, appear in politics primarily as absent. What paralyzes them? We remember how Gulliver was bound up by the Lilliputians: they used his hair and thousands of fine threads. Thus they were able to tie down someone who for them was a giant. We know something about the threads that bind our people today. The strongest bond of this type was for a long time the expectation of having a share in

economic growth. In addition to that, there are the cultural effects of commodity aesthetics (cf. Haug 1987, pp. 31ff), this gigantic complex, which presents perhaps the most effective element of bourgeois propaganda. Habermas characterized the corresponding »way of life« as »ideology in its presently ruling form« (Habermas 1957, p. 53). An Italian sociologist describes the mode of functioning of commodity aesthetics as »privatizing disarticulation« (Ferrarot 1972, p.213). Today, Habermas speaks of the unity of two motivations that are crucial for the political-economic system, namely a »civil societal and familial-vocational privatism« (Habermas 1975, p.75). The civil societal privatism rests on political passivity while interested in »the steering and maintenance performances of the administrative system« (ibid.). The familial-vocational privatism combines an orientation to family and commodity consumption with an orientation to success and career.

Private people in this sense are there in masses. Should we reformulate Lenin's proposition in this fashion for our own uses? If we add the cultural penetration from the side of transnational corporations, do we understand the fettering of the giant populace? Or, in so thinking, do we succumb to the simplifications of the manipulation theory? Certainly, there is a gigantic machinery of dumbing down and yet there is nothing mechanical about dumbing down. There are two aspects to dumbing down. If the people, our collective Gulliver, is fascinated, this is not simply a passively realized effect. Their fascination contains an active element. Paul Willis, in his path-breaking book, *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, has investigated this dimension. The material he lays out shows the creative opposition of workers and their children in the formation of a complex counter culture. It becomes clear, however, that the being against, the resistance, is in no way proof against penetration by the ruling ideology. The »fun in resistance«, as the German edition is entitled, passes away amongst the investigated youth and therefore amongst the readers sympathetic to them, because it turns out

»that there is an element of self-damnation in the taking on of subordinate



roles in Western capitalism. However, this self-damnation is experienced, paradoxically, as true learning, affirmation, appropriation, and as a form of resistance.« (Willis 1977, p. 3)

The symbolic acts of resistance that are at first directed against school are simultaneously the forms in which the inevitability of particularly poor and futureless forms of wage labor are anticipated. Willis finds elements of self-damnation precisely in modes of amusement.

The fascination of the people/Gulliver would therefore be, in part, a self-fascination. We will call fascination the *inner* bond. It is a mere lay etymology - but the superficial linguistic similarity to the contrary, to the *outer* bond and subjugation, is striking: *fascinum* was a phallic symbol, used as amulet or charm, from which *fascinare*, »bewitch«; *fascis*, on the other hand, is the »bundle«, in particular, a fascis was a symbol carried by the lictors in ancient Rome, a bundle of twigs bound up with a thong, out of which projected an axe. The whip and twigs for »discipline« and the axe for beheading - these tools of repression symbolize the coercive violence of the state. As such a symbol, the Italian *fasci* became an emblem of fascism, and that which gave it its name.

In order to understand these inner and outer fetters, we must learn to understand the ways they work together. In Willis we find a further aspect of the fascination, the paralysis, and the lacking of those present in masses. To that end we must consider the relations of the different practices and groupings. We discover then an ensemble of links and articulations, structured through demarcations and cleavages, another kind of social net, a mesh of »one's own« and »alien« or even »hostile« identities and symbolic practices.

»Labor power is an important pivot of all because it is the main mode of active connection with the world: the way *par excellence* of articulating the innermost self with external reality.« (Willis 1977, p. 2)

It is a disconcerting discovery, with the children of workers studied by Willis, that

even *before* their entry into a life of wage labor, already during their time at school, one can see their future role as labor power anticipated. The orientation to bodily labor is already the axis of the school culture of resistance of the »Lads« (the self-description of the counter-cultural working class youth investigated by Willis). It is the mode in which their class location determines their symbolic practice: speech, clothing, and finally the interpretation and formation of sexual relations as well. And indeed the working body is articulated with the sexual body. The first relation of the body is to »bodily labor« of a rough and unskilled type, which has no meaning to the »Lads« except as a way of obtaining money and yet which binds them to the world and thereby to themselves. In that the »Lads« articulate this working body with their masculinity, a specific »machismo,« a cult of masculinity, results. In their sexual identity, they reject femininity as well as other forms of masculinity, which are less chauvinistic and therefore attacked as more or less »gay«. In their eyes intellectuals are on the one hand »those above« and on the other hand »unmanly«. They portray learning in school as something passive, in which one allows oneself to be penetrated. They constitute their own identity in opposition to those who pay attention or listen in school. They articulate the identity of those as »ear'oles« (ear holes, which is close to »ass holes« of course). Finally there is a racist demarcation deposited in this articulation of the working body with the sexual body against school-learning and intellectuality. Alongside the symbolic aggression, in which they are inexhaustively productive, there is fighting, through which they confirm their identity. The »ear'oles« and »blacks« are the preferred targets. Thus their identity is woven together in a sexist, anti-intellectual, and racist manner in the working body.

The sexist articulation of labor power can serve as an example for analysis.

Sexism/chauvinism is »in itself« not a class phenomenon. And yet, in the material displayed here, its articulation with the working body in the space of a counterculture is precisely the way in which the class situation determines the

whole. At the same time, we see other youth, coming from the same working class, the »ear'oles«, who assimilate their class location in other forms. It is strikingly shown in this way how inadequate a mechanically understood determinism is. The determinism functions structurally, it therefore in no way »produces« as such the concrete cultural practices and modes of articulation.

People are lacking, and yet there is a mass of people. We can now say something more about how what is lacking can be there in masses. One way in which the powers of the people can consume or lose themselves, or direct themselves against their owners, resides in the net of articulation which we have begun to analyze. The elements of this »social net« bind and stabilize one another reciprocally. The net of these social relations constitutes a cultural apparatus, an »external arrangement« a *disposing order* (cf. Haug 1987, p.180) - experimentally we speak of the cultural ordering of »masses«. Can the left intervene in this net? Can we loosen specific knots and tie new ones? Can we alter the design? Questions such as these are more common on the political than on the cultural level. They appear there as questions of alliances. Alliances, however, are entered into by political actors, by those superior centers of organizations exerting »leadership«. At least that is their immediately political meaning, and »alliance« should be maintained as a politico-theoretic category. Alliances play an enormous role in politics. We, however, have hitherto been proceeding on the cultural level, and this level is effective in preparing, carrying, or blocking the proceedings on the political level. This is manifest in the material gathered by Willis. The multiple articulation of the working body with sexism, racism, and anti-intellectualism certainly »signifies« the working class identity which, in its constitutive confrontations, simultaneously blocks the process of establishing solidarity with women and ethnic class comrades, as well as the acquisition of necessary knowledge. The political articulation necessary for a social capacity for action is blocked here by the cultural link. On the other hand, political alliances play themselves out in regions in which only the tip of the iceberg

is visible. Yet conscious interventions in the cultural level can only be developed from a political perspective. How is one to think this?

### 3. The »Magic Cube« - The Problem of Reordering

We will change terrain once again and ask: How is the »social net« of the left to be knit together? A hint is given by the formula with which the Spanish »Euro communists« articulated themselves: They wanted to work for *the unity of the forces of labor and culture.*<sup>5</sup> Those of us at *Das Argument* have added to this formula the element of »science«:<sup>6</sup> the unity of the forces of labor, science, and culture.

How is such a connection to be envisaged? And how do the new social movements relate themselves to it? The elements are already more or less arranged and so to speak »disposed of«. And it is a fact that many of the different forces of a possible left block reciprocally weaken or block one another. In part the new social movements have the tendency to disarticulate the workers' movement. The ordering of the critical forces on the political level gives the key to the explanation of the weaknesses of the left. The outer ordering corresponds to the inner ordering, as we could learn from Willis, whose Lads internally identify themselves in such a way that the fragmentation of the working class, above all the identity in opposition to women and ethnic minorities, is ordained.

In a certain respect it all takes place like a »Rubik's Cube Puzzle«. As is well known,

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<sup>5</sup> At the communist party conference in East Berlin in 1976 Santiago Carrillo declared that one must break with the view that the socialist transformation is the monopoly of an avant-garde. It is instead the task of the »totality of the forces of labor and culture«. The forms of its execution should not be grasped with the concept of dictatorship, rather, one must base oneself »on the recognition of political and ideological pluralism« (cited from *Neues Deutschland* 7/1/76).

<sup>6</sup> This addition is particularly important given the current disarticulation of socialism and science. To be sure, as far as a scientific socialism is concerned, we have not yet found the philosopher's stone. In the connection of workers and intellectuals, of socialist parties or states and science, we see as many errors and distortions as achievements. The left must once and for all learn from this that it may not aim at a homogeneous unity in the relation of its constituent elements, but rather at an articulated whole in which science has a place as little dominant as dominating.

that is a cube made up of 27 smaller cubes. When purchased the cube is so arranged that each of its six sides, made up of 9 squares, shows a specific color.

From the instructions for use:

»The game consists in mixing the colors by turning the smaller cubes along 3 axes and then returning the cube to its original state of 6 sides, each of one color.

There are 43,252,003,274,489,856,000 possibilities.

It can take hours, days, or weeks to solve the puzzle. Or it could simply become your life's work. ...But it must be done!«

This game has proven to be a truly (im-)mobilizing power. One saw »puzzle addicts« busy with it in the subway. It took on traits of a people's sport. *There were masses of people seeking a solution.*

The value of the puzzle-cube allegory is limited. In the *ordering* of potential elements the question of the »strengths and weaknesses« of the left is decided. How do we understand the endeavors and possibilities for reordering, for »rearticulating« the social and political forces? It is the »articulation« of these forces which constitutes a hegemonic structure. Again and again we are forced back to the question: How should we conceive a possible »left hegemony«? Gramsci's political representative of the working class as the hegemon, which for him was self-evident in the wake of Lenin, is not in reach in the actual capitalist centers. Gramsci's model of the party has even fallen into crisis in Italy, with its strong and independent party. Pietro Ingrao spoke in this sense of a »crisis of the mass party« and came to the conclusion that

»we also need a new political culture, a new relation between politics and culture« (1980, p. 580).

In opposition to party rule, to the »partiocracy«, Ingrao refers to the fact that the »protagonism of the masses« is at least programmatically anchored in the theory of Italian communism and that union autonomy is important. In addition, he has in

mind the notion of »a democratic network (*tesuto*) that extends beyond parliamentary institutions« (ibid.). The »significance of political workers' parties« (notice the plural!) is »in no way diminished« in the frame of such a concept.

»What, however, begins to totter, is that totalizing interpretation of the party as an organism that raises a claim to take up the entire spectrum of political experiences, if not indeed to have a monopoly on theory and ›truth«. The party does not thereby give up its task of working out a general program, a project for society. On the contrary, it sees its task in a very comprehensive sense, which means that it is not limited to its own ranks: it understands itself as a force for the promotion of a comprehensive creativity« (Ingrao 1981, p.34).

The difficulties begin with the transposition into politics. Ingrao, presumably for political reasons, does not address the blockages or resistances in his own ranks. It is also not clear how he understands the relation of the politics of his party to the new social movements. He does, however, address this question when he places, surprisingly, the »new« movements in a line with the »old« ones of the unions:

»The autonomy which the political party grants to the unions or the particular movements, as for example the women's movement, is therefore no concession, instead it is a conscious instrument for the construction of an alliance of social forces which is a match for the wealth of forms and complexities of the alterations lying before us.« (Ibid., p.34)

Is the notion of an »alliance of social forces,« within which each retains its autonomy, a formula that can lead to a more developed concept of hegemony? Doesn't the autonomy contradict the alliance? And above all, how should such a »dialectical« hegemony be achieved? In a seminar in Oaxaca, Mexico, where these reflections were up for discussion, Giacomo Marramao (PCI) observed:

»Naturally we want hegemony. But there are separated sectors, specialized languages, contradictions between different projects. How can it happen that they all work together?«

#### 4. Hegemony Without the Hegemon? - The Activation Apparatus

Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau have recently tried to think the concept of a socialist political articulation without the representation of a hegemonic position for the working class being »guaranteed a priori through the economic structure« (1981, pp. 21f). Their goal is a concept of the »differential articulation« of a multiplicity of social subjects. They suggest a break with the »metaphysical« discourse of the one »historical subject« and demand the recognition of a plurality of subjects. Nevertheless, they recognize »that the working class is a decisive force, without which there can be no socialism in Europe« (ibid.). Whether it can represent an »avant-garde« or a hegemon depends, however,

»on its capacity to develop a political project that can be recognized by other democratic subjects as fundamental for the realization of their own demands« (ibid., p. 21).

At this point, however, Marramao could pose again his question regarding the »how«. If we translate »differential articulation« with the notion of a connection of different forces, which are recognized as such in it and remain autonomous, how is it then imaginable to diminish the contradictions between the differing projects?

In the following I would like to attempt to develop the thought of a hegemonic structure without a classical hegemon. To that end, I will tentatively introduce the concept of *structural hegemony*. The practical import of this concept lies in widening the cultural and political capacities for action under our conditions. It is, perhaps, a timid question to ask how »weak« forces, despite their weakness, can still be politically active and effective. Indeed, the general value of this reflection is perhaps even more limited, because the experience, which we are trying to evaluate theoretically here, is won on the cultural level, not the political or economic level, and it is in addition restricted. We do not want to begin more presumptuously than our presuppositions allow. We shall attempt, therefore, using as an example the actual Volksuni, to theoretically grasp and generalize underlying possibilities. No outer stays could hold this project together if it had not set free an inner cohesion.

One can desire such a thing, but one can not produce it at will. It is the effect of an ordering. How should we comprehend this effect? I will introduce a second concept to that end and speak of an *activation apparatus*.

As an activation apparatus one should understand an arrangement or reordering of social forces such that the capacity for action of the individual forces is strengthened. The increase in forces thereby set free must be greater than the resistances which are opposed to the encroachment on the given constellation. If there were a reordering which did not meet with resistance, there would be an effect comparable to an explosion. The masses would turn into a critical mass for revolution. We gained some insight into what one could call the »microphysics« of the counter-culture from the material furnished by Willis. In any case, it should have become apparent that a so-to-speak technocratic approach out of some kind of revolutionary center would not be effective. In the case, for example, of the fundamentalist wing of the feminist movement, as with the Lads, the blocking of the reordering that could alter society is inscribed precisely in the resistances that have the potential to bring about that change. Therefore, a great deal has already been won if the »activation apparatus«, in which the contradictory forces come together, does not simply explode. We will see in addition, that the development of the concept of hegemony requires a break not only with economism, but also with every form of technocracy, even with the »revolutionary« form of it. To the degree in which such a re-articulation of elements and practices of the social and political movements can be found, the question of hegemony receives a new accent. The more each element owes its own increase to the increase of the others, the stronger the structural cohesion effect will be. That which helps the individual group does not solely belong to them and no single group can in isolation be effective. This would not rule out a leading role of some group, but it would also not presuppose it. However, the dominating role of some group in the sense of the comprehensive control of the others would be excluded.



The notion of an activation apparatus assumes that the issue goes deeper into the relevant forces than merely to the level of the leadership. It is effective only by setting free additional possibilities for action amongst those organized in a group. The structure of representative politics, which rests on the delegation of power and functions as representation, is effective in its social democratic form, which refers to the achievements of the »welfare state«, primarily as a passivation apparatus. Even the small remaining Marxist left within social democracy has not yet emancipated itself from this political structure, as can be seen in the case of the Herforder theses from the end of the 1970s, which are nevertheless very important politically. On the basis of an economic analysis a catalogue of demands is offered, a listing of interests deserving satisfaction in such a way that they could be directed, not without some illusions, to the state or be part of a left electoral program. Structurally, neither are the masses as actors nor the plurality of social »subjects« given sufficient weight. What is worth taking up from them is in general the concept of true politics, particularly the activating linkage of the possible left forces to a left block (see Elfferding 1981, pp. 203ff.).

The SPD left acted in a way that showed them to be fundamentally capable of at least elements of hegemony when they invited the representatives of a great many other tendencies to discuss their theses. The politics of any possibly hegemonic group must in any case take account of the reciprocal dependencies, which exist between it and the politics of other, even competing, groups. To the extent that a hegemonic field is effective as an activation mould, the external re-ordering of practices is effective internally as well. This feedback effect is especially important if the new ordering is to last.

##### 5. Hegemonial Power as an Effect of Hegemony

On the other hand, in the »classical« case of hegemony, it is perhaps also true that

hegemony does not simply proceed from a hegemon but that the latter is itself above all a product of hegemony. Therefore, »hegemony« is not a matter of a merely instrumental conduct of politics, or of tactics for the »production of legitimacy« (Weber). A politics can not maintain a merely instrumental relation to hegemony, rather it exists in orbits *around* and *within* hegemony. Hegemony is that which is fought about and the medium for this struggle. It is perhaps even the case that class constitution and hegemonial capacity determine one another; that a class, far from being a socio-economic given, constitutes itself by virtue of the same process that grounds its hegemonic force of attraction. What for all too long has been articulated as the concepts of »class-in-itself« vs. »class-for-itself«, wrongly ascribed to Marx, must be more concretely grasped. It is a question of whether a class is subordinate, or whether it has politically constituted itself, or »worked-up itself«, as Gramsci would say; whether it has fashioned its own intellectuals and knowledges. Here a further category of Gramsci becomes indispensable: *hegemonic apparatus*.<sup>7</sup> Whenever it functions as such, it makes ready a space and a medium into which various social subjects can place themselves. The class that had yet to constitute itself would be grasped concretely as a still unarticulated or heterogeneously articulated mass. On the other hand, the more or less self-articulated class unfolds its cultural »life« out of itself and maintains itself precisely thereby as a crystallization center for various autonomous cultural practices, for those »for which it is worth while to live, to be organized, to have time« (Bloch 1918, p. 9). Even opposing classes could not completely evade such forces of

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<sup>7</sup> While until 1926 »hegemony« had »indicated mainly an alternative strategy for the proletariat (hegemony of the proletariat)«, »the first Prison Notebook completed a shift in terrain: hegemony, specified by the new concept of a hegemonic apparatus, concerns first of all the practices of the dominating class« (Buci-Glucksmann 1975, p. 63). This concept is thus new in the Quaderni, and it is soon »supplemented through that of the ideological class structure« (ibid., 64). »Hegemony, the hegemonic apparatus, secures a theory of the effectiveness of ideology and its material reality« (ibid., 65). »Hegemonic apparatus« turns into, according to Buci-Glucksmann, the guiding concept of a new investigation into superstructure, and finally to an extension of the concept of the state. Althusser (1977, 108ff.) develops his concept of »ideological state apparatuses« from that, but gazes down from above onto society according to a rigid functionalistic schema (see PIT 1979, 182), while Gramsci develops the concept »from the bottom up«. It would be worthwhile considering how »hegemonic apparatus« compares to Engels' category of »ideological powers« (cf. MEW 21, 302; PIT 1979, 19, and 179ff.)

attraction.

Hegemony is not something external to hegemonic subjects, which they might be able to use for their own ends; rather they »stick« *in* hegemony, are transformed by a hegemonic process, and are constituted as such subjects only now. In this sense one could say that hegemonic *effects* have no »subjects«, but are effects with many subjects. Hegemonic *processes*, however, can have consciously organized subjects. Hegemonic subject-effects mediate new acting power and consistence, which are only achievable in such a space. Perhaps this is a formula for hegemonic stability: Hegemonic-effects = Subject-effects = Power effects. Each hegemonic structure could then be described as productive of power (or powers) and as distributive of power. The hegemonic distribution of power would not be simply the delegation of power from »peripheral« positions into some »center«. In general, one must dissolve the equation power = domination. One can describe domination as the disempowerment of the dominated and the concentration of power with the dominant. Power to dominate is power disempower and consequently to repress. Power is concretized in *capacity to act* (*Handlungsfähigkeit*), a central concept of Klaus Holzkamp's Critical Psychology. Correspondingly, the question needs to be posed in concrete terms: whether power realizes itself as capacity to act for domination or for liberating action (even if it is restricted to *cultural* capacity to act »from below«).

## 6. Political Concepts of »Unity«

The dividing line between the hegemonic power increase of a »hegemon« and the power to dominate doesn't proceed congruently with the demarcation of a »democratic socialism« form a »dictatorship of the proletariat«. Brecht presents - using to be sure other concepts - the power which accrued to Lenin during the Russian revolution after 1917 as an effect of hegemony, in contrast to Stalin's predominantly repressive power. Indeed, Lenin's notion of the »dictatorship of the

proletariat« cannot be understood in opposition to the concept of hegemony.<sup>8</sup> Brecht struggled with language in order to express the specificity of Lenin's power, and yet his account seems to have remained a captive to the rationalism of a model of argumentative discourse. At first he attempts to transform the concept of »conviction« (*Ueberzeugung*) from one that designates a given condition into a concept of a process and an endeavor.

»In order to speak of democracy (*Volksherrschaft*), one must give a new meaning to the word »conviction«. It must signify: the convincing of the people. Democracy means rule of arguments.« (GW 12, p.530)

Now he applies the transformed concept to characterize the contrast between Lenin's and Stalin's kind and use of power:

»At the time of the great revolution, said Me-ti, Mi-en-leh [Lenin] and his friends captured power to the degree that they convinced the people. The commands of Mi-en-leh were abridged convincings [Ueberzeugungen]. Mi-en-leh could not say, the superiority of his foes forced him to command. They forced him to convince.

Ni-en (Stalin) had fewer foes and commanded.«

One must cleanse »conviction« of the notion of »persuasion«, with its manipulative overtones. Conviction, in the last resort, has an effect to the degree that one »convincing oneself«. This takes place in a field of articulations of experiences, goals etc., in a discursive net. To argue means to move around in such a field, to make distinctions, or establish commonness. Self-convincing in turn concerns the constitution of the subject. Conviction, like argumentation, moves in a network of articulations. These include power and the distribution of power. Their knotting together is what ideological struggles are about. They result in hegemonically relevant effects. (For example, »sectarian« discourse defines itself by its anti-hegemonic effects.) Power can be understood as articulated forces, powerlessness

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<sup>8</sup> Annegret Kramer stresses that for Gramsci, »the repressive state apparatus« is »the necessary condition and guarantee for the existence and functioning of the hegemonic apparatus,« since hegemony is never »total« (see Kramer 1975, 94; Gramsci 1967, 412).

as disarticulated forces. (In place of »articulated« one could also say: bound together and directed; in stead of »disarticulated«: splintered, undirected, or directed against one another and so exhausted.) The conviction that forms power in Brecht's sense can be conceptualized along these lines.

Lenin understood in his political practice the »convincing of people« as the development of their capacity for action. Although he is himself a »convinced« atheist, he understands that in this respect the »unity of opinions« is unnecessary:

»Unity in this really revolutionary struggle of the oppressed class for the creation of a paradise on earth is more important to us than unity of proletarian opinion on paradise in heaven.« (CW 10, p.87)<sup>9</sup>

The opposite model offers a slogan, which allowed the communists to be drawn into isolation during their left-sectarian and so anti-hegemonic phase: *First clarity - then unity!* A distant and faint echo of this slogan can still be heard in the report by the SEW's newspaper *Wahrheit* on the Volksuniversitaet:

»One misses a founded world-view at the basis of the Volksuniversitaet«(*Wahrheit*, 6/3/81, p. 8)

Does the Volksuni present a type of unity without clarity? It constructs itself, nevertheless, on the foundation of strategic analyses and theorizings which rest fundamentally on the investigation of the possibilities to extend the capacity for action of the left, the workers' movement, and socialism in our country. A second proposition reveals the practical meaning of the citation. What is intended is that *another* strategic basis is fundamental than that of the SEW. The lack of a »founded

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<sup>9</sup> José Carlos Mariátegui, whose intellectual and political significance could be compared to that of his contemporaries Mao and Gramsci (see Womack 1980, 171), goes even further than Lenin. In his famous »Seven Attempts to Interpret Peruvian Actuality« (1928, German 1985), the fifth factor is the »religious factor.« He assumes that one must break with the atheistic-rationalistic dismissal of religious phenomena as mystifications. In fact, he seeks in the indigenous religion the element of the »earthly realm« in the representations of the realm of heaven. He attempts to uncover its pre-state roots. The overarching hegemonic elements of Incan theology could not resist catholicism, but the pre-state communitarian elements have lasted into the present. He proves catholicism to be the colonizing, in contrast to merely conquering element. In short, he analyses hegemonic conditions and effects in the perspective of a socialist hegemony which links differences.

fundament« is explicated in the following terms:

»the individual departments [of the Volksuni] would decide autonomously on the focal points« (ibid.).

The quoted article reveals an interpretation of the question of power which is bound up with an organizational form of command and control from above. This interpretation stands under the suspicion of understanding by »conviction« less the »convincing of the people« than the willingness to give assent on the part of the convinced or simply acclamation. A corresponding motto could run: *What we cannot control we shall fight*. To be sure, that requires power, and where power does not rest on the repressive organs of the state, how else could it arise in the long run than as an effect of hegemony? One cannot get rid of the question of hegemony except at the cost of losing it.

We can perhaps elucidate this problem by considering a reproach that the journal *konsequent* (also SEW) has raised against the »Projekt Ideologie-Theorie«:

»a democratic movement and not the working class is the most important to PIT« (*konsequent* 2/1980, 95).

What does it mean to oppose working-class and democratic movement and order them hierarchically according to »importance«? In *konsequent*, »democratic movement« is politically articulated while »working-class« is economically articulated (which is already too narrow, see above). Doesn't this contain in the end the question of the hierarchy of importance of the economic and the political? Does *konsequent* charge that PIT considers politics more important than economics? Conflicts such as this have a long tradition. Bucharin attacked Lenin in these terms long ago, to which Lenin replied:

»Politics must take primacy over economics. To argue otherwise is to forget the ABC of marxism.« (CW 32, p.83)

The opposition assumed above is as nonsensical as, or so we claim, one between

nourishment and food. »Working class« would be an empty phrase if it were not politically articulated and thereby constituted. Its campaigns may not remain limited to narrow class interests, but must »proceed from the whole people« (Lenin, CW 5, pp. 341f.).

Lenin delineates the *politics* of the working class around the

»focus in which the vital interests of political education of the proletariat coincide with the vital interests of social development as a whole, of the entire people, that is, of all the democratic elements« (CW 5, pp. 341f.).

Centrally at stake in these efforts is, according to Lenin, »the hegemony in the political struggle« (ibid., p.341). Hegemony constitutes itself in the *focus* of the differing interests of all popular-democratic elements, that is, in a field on which these »meet«. Lenin's answer does not suffice for our purposes, but to fall back behind Lenin would set back the development of new solutions. Let us consider the succession of Lenin's insights: The working class must develop a politics. This politics must be capable of exercising hegemony. It becomes capable of hegemony through the articulation of the democratic movement. We come upon questions here that we can not deal with at this time. For example, there is the question of the relation, filled with tensions, of the working class and the socialist project, a relation which has always been represented in a much too simplistic fashion.

Rudolf Bahro appeals to another pattern of unity, which is opposed in decisive ways to a hegemonic structure of unity. He projects a »solid phalanx« of christians and marxists, united against a common enemy that he calls »positivism«.

»And we will only defeat it, when we are able to so fuse into one concept the best elements of our emancipatory designs, which is more than a dialog and more than an alliance, that the quality of the concrete social utopia as much as the transcending political faith is achieved.« (Bahro 1981)

What he envisages here is the notion of a »grand coalition« beyond the opposition of left and right. Despite its coalition-like character, this formation, as Bahro

stressed in a public debate in Mexico, »is not pluralistic«, in explicit opposition to the model I am sketching here of structural hegemony. How are we to understand this coalition that embraces left and right and yet is not pluralistic? Along with pluralism, Bahro also dismisses liberality: »I don't know to what extent radical liberals can be part of this.«

Bahro thinks of unity in terms of *fusion*. Fusion means melting together. Again, there is only *one* subject, homogeneous and dominating. Its conviction is a matter of *faith*, and its formation that of a *phalanx* (this expressed in a Spanish speaking country, i.e., in a language in which the fascists called themselves *falangistas*, »phalanxists«). It is worthwhile recalling in the face of Bahro the formula with which years ago the French Union of the Left (*union de gauche*) articulated its unity: *Union, not Fusion!* Fusion is the opposite of hegemonic unity. Therefore, in a hegemonic field, a politics of fusion actually generates splits (fission). Laclau's concept of »differential articulation« acquires the practical significance that self-differentiation does not mean self-splitting. Only in relation to the project of a fusion into one subject do the differences in social subjects become grounds for generating cleavages. Here the rule holds: fusion = fission. On the other hand, the unity of a hegemonic structure can be articulated as *convergence in difference*. This kind of construction of unity does not rest on the exclusion of those questions that indicate fault-lines.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Each political alliance, each instance of working together politically, needs a hegemonic field, that is a field of possible coherence. At the same time, it must take account of the fissures and faults that traverse this field. »Anti-communism« and a »critique of the Soviets« are names for two such fissures, which are quite distinct (see Gollwitzer 1980). Josef Schleifstein, leader of the Institut fuer marxistische Studien und Forschungen (IMSF, Frankfurt/M), which is tied to the DKP, attempts to take account of such generally ignored fissures. He advocates »a maximum amount of cooperation and methodical, coordinated activity of the forces of the left in the widest sense of the term« (Schleifstein 1978, 21). But what are these »forces of the left in the widest sense of the term«? Are they defined as the elements of a possible left union? And how comprehensive can these be? Does that not depend on the hegemonic structure, the question of the hegemon, the tolerance for contradiction and so on? It is understood that these remarks are not objections, rather they are questions that demand answers. For example, Schleifstein proposes to bracket the question of the evaluation of Soviet socialism, which might disturb an alliance, and also the fundamental question in our perspective about the relation of democracy and socialism (in order to thereby bracket out the mentioned split of the critique of the Soviets and anti-sovietism). He thus



## 7. The Volksuni Paradigm

We can make things easier for ourselves by turning once again, and this time more precisely, to the *Volksuni* project. It is established on the cultural level, that is, constituted within civil society, not within political society.

This project does not obey the same laws as a political party. The ever present interplay of hegemony and coercion,<sup>11</sup> of directing influence and domination, of free consensus and subordination to the dictates of necessity, is here predominately accented towards freedom, or at any rate is more so than in all other dimensions of social life. Generalizations, which proceed from cultural practices and problems of cultural hegemony, could thus lead to dangerous illusions<sup>12</sup> if they were applied in an unreflective fashion to problems of economics or party politics. What singles out cultural practices is that in them subjects posit themselves as ends-in-themselves (*Selbstzweck*). This is what we mean when we speak of autonomous

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overlooks that a hegemonic structure is the decisive way and means of posing the question of democracy and socialism. One could say that in a certain way the unfolding of hegemonic structures on the left always contains at the same time a symbolic and experimental exercise of socialist relations in the middle of capitalism. Therefore, the demand to »bracket-out« stands in opposition to the expansion of the hegemonic field which demands a »politics of bracketing-in«.

<sup>11</sup> The leading newspaper of the German bourgeoisie puts it like this: »The ultima ratio of every government are the armed forces.« (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Aug. 11, 1978, p. 1 [Editorial])

18 . <sup>12</sup> »The ultima ratio of every government are the armed forces.« (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Aug. 11, 1978, p. 1 [Editorial])

If one mistakes the cultural level for the whole, one can join Heinrich Heine in saying:

The French and the Russians rule the land,  
The British rule the sea;  
But in the realms of dreams we own unchallenged mastery.  
Here we become one mighty state, Here, in dreams, we are crowned - While other peoples build  
their realms Upon the level ground...

A cultural formation would turn into a »realm of dreams« if it flattered itself that it could exercise social hegemony without any connection to a political project and without its economic foundation. However, it is also the case that no social hegemony can form itself without cultural hegemony. No control of the economic land or the political sea would last in the long run without the addition of the »realm of dreams.« - »What spirit made its own is superfluous as force« (Hegel).

practices (*Selbstzweckpraxen*) (see Haug 1979, p.36; PIT 1979, p.184). The Volksuni institutionalizes on the cultural level

»the possibility of the autonomous articulation of different social movements« (*Volksuni-Programmbuch* 1981)

»It offers to the different groupings and movements possibilities for articulation and participation. [...] And this procedure alters the participants.« (Ibid.)

The Volksuni can thus be grasped as a cultural activation apparatus. Its structure is, disregarding its loose and elastic consistency, rather complex, in that it links together in specific ways spheres, that are normally separated, or more precisely »regional« groupings. To claim, as was done above, that the axis labor - science (concretely: union member - scholar) is central is strictly speaking insufficient. Other movements, such as the women's or the ecological or the peace movement, articulate themselves »transversely« to this axis. Women are also wage-laborers and scholars. The ordering of the movements of the workers, critical science, and women can be grasped as »transverse articulations«. Such an order proves to be a hegemonic structure to the degree that it expands the capacity for action of the individuals. To the degree that individuals convince themselves practically of this expansion an empowerment, their agreement to this agglomeration of differing spheres of autonomy increases, and thereby their solidarity as well. In fact, the continuing autonomy of the workers, women, and so on in this ordering is a necessary condition for its persistence. In the Marxist tradition, one often speaks of autonomy as being a matter of »relative« autonomy, which certainly has its methodological sense. However, within a left hegemonic structure and in the cultural sphere, a merely »relative autonomy« would be a hindrance. We are also acquainted with this phenomenon in the domain of party politics in the relation of the left parties to their women and youth. They are kept on a leash. Of course, some leashes are longer than others, and some are removable or allow more room for movement. In a cultural activation apparatus, however, the real capacity for

action must be larger inside it than outside it, not smaller. Consequently, what is needed is just autonomy, without further ado.

This possibility is not completely illusionary, since the experience of autonomy and the experienced interaction generates internal modifications amongst the participants. To the degree that this proves to be the case, a structural hegemony without a hegemon becomes effective. This does not mean that the working class becomes an optional, indeed disposable reference point (as Gorz 1980 claims). However, what makes the perspective constructed on the basis of the working class standpoint hegemonic is the relation of the working class to science and democratic emancipation. Hegemonic means simply that a structure now arises which grants the optimal conditions for action to the various democratic subjects. Lenin's metaphor of a focus is helpful in this regard. It is not the working class standpoint as such, but the focal point of the articulation which alters the elements that is decisive for the formation of a new politics.

One form in which the project of the Volksuni has preserved itself is the enthusiasm mobilized amongst the organizers by the task of establishing spheres of action for a plurality of groups and tendencies. In addition to which there is already cooperation with representatives of other groups in the organization. Radical protestants met radical catholics for the first time on this occasion. In the encounter with socialist feminists and the alternative culture, the articulation of the class position of the workers, which does not automatically determine a way of life, is altered. Relations of dominance internal to the respective formations are displaced. - In the middle of the new-fashioned relations, fissures continue to exist. Miracles do not take place, but clearly something is brewing.

Perhaps one can say that the Volksuni constitutes, in a preliminary and unstable form, a cultural type of a people's union of the left (which should not be confused with a »people's front«). It is not formally socialist, but through the form of the

self-socialization of various popular-democratic groups, and only through them, it is in fact socialist in content. The position of the workers and the relation of the Volksuni to the working class standpoint can not be described in traditional conceptual terms. One half of the governing board consists of workers, primarily shop stewards, and the other half of scholars and authors (more or less all are union members). The new social movements are present in that both scholars and workers are »multiply articulated« by belonging at the same time to this or that political or cultural tendency. With respect to the composition of the governing body, there is not much more to say than that workers and scholars, besides different orientations, have strong positions, but that the whole ordering has (and has fulfilled) the goal of guaranteeing the presence of a multiplicity of different subjects and of hindering a persistent and mere majority rule through the balancing out of antagonisms. There is no party-political hegemony.

»Who the directing force will be cannot be determined beforehand or be manipulated. [...] That must come about as a result of what one or another group in each case [...] has contributed, of convincing knowledge and achievements. Actually, only at the end and in hindsight does it become apparent who the directing force is. In the individual phases of the long struggle for a socialist society one or the other was the directing force by virtue of their clarity of vision, proven strategy, readiness for sacrifice and cooperation.« (Gollwitzer 1981)

To be sure, this requires an amendment. In all readiness to sacrifice and cooperate, what is decisive is the strategic ordering of the cooperation, the juxtaposition of the movements, the multi-centered activation structure, in short, an activating apparatus of structural hegemony. This plural formation can not be reduced to the standpoint of the working class, but it can be developed on it. The same can be said about socialism. There can be no socialism that would be reducible to the working class. However, socialism can be developed out of the standpoint of the working class, as the articulation that reaches far beyond the latter. Lenin provided for a kind of division of power even in the socialist state in the form of an autonomous space for unions. He declared that the first task of the unions is »to

protect the workers from their state« and as a complementary function »to get them to protect our [he means the socialist] state« (CW 32, p. 25). If socialism were reducible to the standpoint of the working class, it would be superfluous. Socialism as well must be thought as an activation apparatus with a plurality of subjects, as their productive ordering in a socialist perspective. This ordering can only be developed out of - and perhaps also in consequence of - the standpoint of the working class, but it reaches far beyond it, falls quickly into tension with it, allows the workers a further development, amplifies their standpoint – or enters in contradiction with it. Just as the articulation of forces is decisive, so is the »internal« multiple articulation of the individuals in the specific groups. The individuals are »over-determined« or »multiply articulated« (for example, union member and woman) and this frees the relations from an otherwise hopeless reductionistic mechanism. What overcomes the mechanism of the rigid being-for-itself of the individual force is its productive ordering, the unleashing connection, to put it paradoxically. The different social and cultural movements are ignited by the great problems of our time. The left can acquire its capacity for action to the degree that it can so articulate this large field of problems that the various solutions are bound up with one another. The effect of such an ordering can perhaps be grasped as structural hegemony.

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