

# **GRAMSCIAN CONSTELLATIONS. HEGEMONY AND THE REALISATION OF NEW WAYS OF PRODUCTION AND LIVING**

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## **1. A FRAGMENTED WHOLE – THE PRISON NOTEBOOKS**

Antonio Gramsci was arrested in 1926 upon instigation by the fascist regime in Italy. During the process before the Special Court for State Security, the procurator declared: “We must prevent this brain from functioning for the next 20 years!” In fact, Gramsci never regained his liberty. At the end of 1934, he is of course released on probation; the reason, however, is his already bad state of health. He spends the final period of his life in hospital and dies in 1937 from a brain haemorrhage. Nevertheless the procurator’s goal was not reached. Gramsci’s extremely productive brain was not prevented from functioning by prison. On 10 years of jail, it rather generates 1000s of pages in notes – the *Prison Notebooks*.

Irony of history: without incarceration, Gramsci would probably have remained what he was before, an eminent political personality, publicist in the most diverse organs of the rising workers’ movements, such as the *Grido del Popolo* (Call of the People), *Avanti* or *L’Ordine Nuovo* (New Order), moreover, co-founder and, from 1925 up to his arrest, chairman of the Communist party of Italy. A more or less historical personality, just like his friend and later CPI chairman Palmiro Togliatti, Enrico Berlinguer, or Bebel, Liebknecht, Thorez, Marchais or Carrillo and many others. The enforced separation of theory from practice, however, led precisely to the working-out of a theoretical political work that could unfold historical effectiveness far beyond the historical moment, whose originality inspires ever again, whose approaches are extremely useful for the comprehension of current conditions - that literally begs for interventionist action and practice. Last but not least, Gramsci titles his approach himself with the notion of ‘philosophy of practice’, which is a cover word for Marxism and criticism of political economy, but at the same time takes position against atrophied and rigid forms of Marxist, mainly Marxist-Leninist thinking.

Following Peter Weiss, one can characterise the thrust of the prison notebooks:

*absence of constraint and dogmatism - the line of Luxemburg-Gramsci [as] prerequisite [for the] clarification of historical mistakes – [for] living science, rejection of any illusions, idealism, mystifications –*

Gramsci explains his work on the Prison Notebooks less from a political and theoretical vantage point than as a matter of mere survival: in self-defence against the danger of becoming intellectually dull in the monotony of daily prison life, he wanted to deal “systematically with a topic that would absorb me and focus my inner life towards a centre.” (quot.fr. *Pri* 1, 25). The Notebooks were not written to be published. They rather reflect the production process of critical knowledge and the production relations under which they were born.

The Prison Notebooks are, therefore, also bulky. Their fragmentary character with over 2061 pieces of mosaic makes a systematic access more difficult. Therefore, the first editions by Togliatti in Italy (beginning after 1948), but also later ones by Riechers (1967) in West Germany tried to thematically put together individual passages of text in order to facilitate the access to Gramsci’s work, and to suggest, simultaneously, also a kind of *oeuvre* or system of thinking. The composition of pieces of text while leaving out others, largely without making this apparent, was always also accompanied by a manipulation of

Gramsci – in very different ways: thus he was either celebrated as a precursor of autonomy, as a Leninist at the same time, and then also fought on the same grounds; others considered him an anti-Marxist and culturalist, again others as humanist and idealist liberal, or conversely, as dogmatic materialist, and then later as anti-dogmatic and pacemaker of Eurocommunism. We can already see that Gramsci's work refuses itself to simple thinking in drawer-like categories.

With the complete publication of the *Prison Notebooks*<sup>1</sup>, however, not the one or the other thing is picked out and integrated into the respectively own edifices of thought – “*here now the whole cake is served, not only the raisins*” (Haug 1991, 12). That one tastes better, however, it lies heavier in the stomach, is not precisely easy to consume. By contrast, this fragmentary text makes clear the character of exploration opposed to any kind of dogmatism – we find ourselves so to say in a laboratory, receive an insight into the genealogy of a new thinking that starts over and over again, checks, revises, continues to be developed further, and allows ever new connections. Equally new is the method of association and articulation, probably the real method of the *Prison Notebooks* in order to make a complexly articulated whole of social relations conceivable in theoretical terms.

And terms are developed *en gros*: cultural hegemony, traditional vs. organic intellectuals, passive revolution, history of subalterns, historical block, war of position and movement, everyday thinking, philosophy of practice, civil society and integral state, historical compromise etc. etc. – notions that in part diffused far beyond the inner circles of the Left into everyday language. The history of reception is long, subject to different cycles, almost in a 10 year rhythm – from Latin America up to India, from diverse revolutionary as well as reformist movements in (especially Southern) Europe (including the German SPD in the beginning of the 1980s), by way of the neoconservatives and the neoliberals in the USA or France, who oriented their own practice with the help of Gramscian notions to the winning of cultural hegemony, or passing by way of Cultural Studies, Anglo-Saxon Neo-Gramscianism up to new social movements oriented towards self-organisation like the Zapatistas. Theoretical debate and interventionist practice are linked in that respect in ever new ways; however, they don't allow themselves to be separated from one another as easily either as they do in many other approaches.

The fragmented opens room for plurality, however, in no way in the liberal sense of an unlinked next-to-one-another, but always from the perspective of the subalterns, of overcoming of the contrast between the rulers and the ruled, the led and the leaders, also of domination and rule (compare, for instance, Gramsci's entry in *Pri*, vol. 7, 1714). The links between the fragmentary are facilitated by a number of already mentioned guiding notions, without pressing the latter ones into congealed definitions. The notions have to prove their validity again and again against the movement of social relations. Hereby, Gramsci underlines what already Marx defended as principle: “We do not confront the world in a doctrinaire way with a new principle: Here is the truth, kneel down before it! We develop new principles for the world out of the world's own principles.” (MEW 1, 345)

## 2. GRAMSCIAN CONSTELLATIONS

Gramsci was forced to try a re-foundation of Marxism in the moment of a historical break. The background was a dual one: the defeat of the Left and the imposition of a new mode of production and living. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a similar historical break took place whose eruptions are still clearly to be felt and break forth ever again in violent ways. Gramsci's approach is marked by the organic link between the two elements of the historical break of that time in his analysis – that constitutes the Gramscian constellation which we have to face again, even if quite differently. There are two elements of this constellation:

1. Gramsci was faced with the following situation: on the one hand, defeat of a previously rapidly growing Left in the face of the fascist challenge; on the other hand, ossification of the revolutionary development in the Soviet Union after Lenin's death and the establishment of Stalinism. Today it is the double (or triple) defeat of the so-called real-existing socialism (state socialism) as well as real-existing social democratic-

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<sup>1</sup> The German edition of 1991-2002, edited by Wolfgang Fritz Haug and Klaus Bochmann, later also by Peter Jehle, follows the Italian edition of 1975 by Valentino Gerratana, however, it makes important corrections to the latter. Cited here as *Pri*.

reformist Keynesianism – and along with that also the remaining, more critical movements were torn into the abyss. Of course, this offered the chance to dissolve rigidities, to make a historical-critical recording, now that the paralyzing opposition between East and West with its different forms of oppression and marginalisation of critical thinking was broken up. But in the moment of the historical break, critical thought seemed to withdraw.

2. Gramsci and the Left of the 1920s were not only confronted with political (counter) revolutions (fascism), but with the emergence of a completely new mode of production and living, of Americanism and Fordism – a revolution without revolution, at the same time restoration, by not only conserving bourgeois rule, but developing it – Gramsci coined for that the notion of “passive revolution” (*Pri* 1, 102). Today it is high-tech capitalism and neoliberalism which have triggered this revolution-restoration. Therefore, nothing else than a renewal of critical thinking is needed, beyond the old convictions, not against the background of the old, presumably already understood, but departing from the quality of the new.

Of course, the “conditions of political action” since the time of Gramsci have changed “radically”, to that extent his insights cannot be immediately transferred to the current situation (Haug 1991, 13). Yet, even if it was “just the completely different situation of revolution in the way of mass production of Fordism that determined Gramsci’s analysis: what remains are the ways of asking questions, of articulation, of analysis.” (F. Haug 1998)

### 3. HEGEMONY, CONSTRAINT AND CONSENSUS

One of the central questions Gramsci explored was why after the October revolution of 1917, a revolutionary transformation did not also occur in the other parts of Europe. In distinction to Russia, it was not enough there to seize state power by an act of violence in the moment of a profound economic crisis. Because in developed bourgeois-capitalist societies, behind the state power apparatus, there stands a further line of defence yet more difficult to surmount: “in progressive states”, Gramsci writes, “civil society” has “developed into a very complex... and resistant structure” (*Pri* 7, 1589). “There can and must [therefore] be a political [*and cultural*] hegemony before getting into government, and one should not only count on the power and the material strength one gets from government itself.” (*Pri* 1, 102)

Gramsci early breaks with widespread reductionist interpretations of the basis and superstructure schema, as they are suggested misleadingly in the preface to *The criticism of political economy* by Marx himself (HCDM 2, 35 ff.).<sup>2</sup> In the same text, Marx clarifies, however, that structural contradictions of the capitalist mode of production are finally fought out in “ideological forms, in which people become conscious of this conflict” (MEW 13,9). That way, it becomes clear to Gramsci that the separation between politics, ideology, culture and economy, between basis and superstructure etc. is only a relative one, the different elements of society are rather intertwined with each other in multiple ways, as moments of the “unity of process of the real” – as he calls it – structure and superstructures must be understood “as inherently connected and necessarily related to one another and in mutual interaction” (*Pri* 6, 1308). The assumption of the abstract dominance of a certain structure over other structures is not compatible with this conception. The economy is not determining politics or culture; the latter are always already contained in the constitution of a certain economy. That means, a certain form of the economy (over)determines a certain form of the *politico-cultural and vice-versa*.

Yet, what does hegemony mean after all? In everyday language, the notion is typically set equal with ‘predominance’, mainly in the area of international politics. But already a look at its significance in the old Greek shows that more is at issue: ‘being in front, lead, go ahead’. It is not simply a form of rule, subjecting the individuals from ‘above’, against their will. Hegemony for Gramsci rather includes the active consent of subalterns to their subjugation: constraint *and* consensus. A social group or class becomes

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<sup>2</sup> The whole of production relations “forms the economic structure of society, the real basis, on which there arises a juridical and political superstructure and to which there correspond certain social forms of consciousness” (MEW 13, 9). Marx does not speak here of “reflect”, “deduce” or similar things, also not of “determine” or even “determination”, but (in a strict regulation-theoretical sense) of “correspond” (compare W.F. Haug 2001a, 39).

capable of hegemony only if it succeeds in stepping beyond the narrow domain of its own interests, thus from a corporate-particularistic phase into an ethico-political phase in which it takes over a progressive function for the whole society – hence the moment of leading or going ahead. Such an understanding, however, is directed sharply against elitist avant-garde ideas. Because in such a hegemonic project, the needs and interests also of the subjected subjects must have the space to redefine themselves, so that the project is wished and actively striven for by the subjects. Without the active element of consent, hegemony would be reduced to constraint and violence. Correspondingly, hegemony is not only “the capacity of one class or an alliance” to “present their project as that of the whole society” – to do as if – and then to push it through (Lipietz 1998, 160; compare MEW 3, 47). Of course, deceit, lie, manipulation are indispensable elements of rule – for an encompassing hegemony, however, they are not enough. A hegemonic project is rather a form of ‘passive revolution’, that means a real “*process of the generalisation of interests in an unstable equilibrium of compromise*” (Demirovic 1992, 154, emph. M.C.). The subaltern groups develop a real interest, expect real advantages that cannot in any way be reduced to a form of self-deceit – otherwise, the hegemony would not be stable.

Hegemony therefore is always a political and cultural one, but also always an economic one: “it has its material basis in the decisive function which the hegemonic group exercises in the decisive core of economic activity” (*Pri 3*, 499). The resources for validating the different interests within the hegemonic project are distributed unequally in favour of the bourgeoisie: “The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of intellectual production, so that thereby, generally speaking (*on average*), the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.” (MEW 3, 46) Hegemony to Gramsci means correspondingly “that the ruling group will come to an agreement with the general interests of the subordinated groups in concrete ways and that the life of the state can be understood as a constant formation and overcoming of instable equilibria [...], of equilibria, where the interests of the ruling groups overweigh, but only up to a certain point, that means not up to the point of a narrow, economic-cooperative interest” (*Pri 7*, 1584). The leading group “in other words, does not impose its interests in a pure form, but, on the one hand, it penetrates that of the other fractions by way of generalisation and polarisation, on the other hand, by way of the same procedure of generalisation, it incorporates their interests” (Demirovic 1987, 64). However, within certain limits, it determines the premises and limits upon which the respective compromise of the diverse fractions rests. The ruling group will, therefore, make compromises and sacrifices of a “corporative-economic kind”, “but there is also no shadow of a doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise can’t concern the essential” (*Pri 7*, 1567).

The notion of hegemony is not reducible to the respective political block in power, but defined more comprehensively. The notion of a power block comprises “a unity marked by internal contradictions between *politically ruling* classes and fractions” (Poulantzas 1974, 239), meaning the so-called “political class”, influential capital groups, trade unions leaders and also media and science in their role of organic intellectuals, communicators or populists (PR people). The power block, therefore, represents one side of the contradiction between rulers and ruled, while a so-called ‘historical block’ represents the contradictory unity among the ruled and the rulers.

To Gramsci, it is decisive to make clear that in a ‘historical block’ functioning as the hegemon (*Pri 6*, H. 10.I, § 12), as the articulation of the many different practices and interests in a compromise, ‘rulers’ just like ‘ruled’, ‘leaders’ just like ‘followers’, ‘representatives’ just like the ‘represented’ are included. The notion of hegemony tries to make clear how we all participate everyday in the reproduction of rule, and this at the level of economy, politics, cultural matters, gender relations, the state, civil society. In such a “historical block”, “socio-economic content and ethico-political form [...] become identical” (1251) – meaning no separation between basis and superstructure. Gramsci worked out the omnipresence of power relations, long before Foucault, for instance, who worked this out brilliantly, however, losing out of sight the relation between rule and hegemony, between oppression and consent. With view to the integration of the individual into the reproduction of hegemony, Gramsci then transferred the notion of historical block also to the relation of individuals to themselves, as a form of leading their lives, and the always incomplete identity formation, with which they – meaning we – try to make the complex and contradictory social relations coherent and in that way liveable (*Pri 6*, 1341 f.; comparable to ‘self-government’, but more complex). It is thus a matter of the understanding of a mode of production *and* living in the wider sense.

Since it is an articulation of very different, partly contradictory discourses and interests, the unity or coherence of the social block of hegemony, however, remains in itself contradictory and in movement. Although Gramsci in part suggests it himself, hegemony does not mean “to eliminate the contradictions, but to give them a form under certain conditions” (Demirovic 1987, 63). To give them a form, means to make them workable. Such a notion of hegemony, therefore, does not ask for the stability of a certain order but rather for the determining developmental direction of dealing with contradictions. If the management of contradictions does not work (across smaller crises leading to an organic crisis), counter-hegemonic projects will appear; the result will be the disarticulation of an outworn hegemonic project and with it the dissolution of the constellation of social forces united in the historical block (*Pri* 5, 1051). Hegemony is thus an open concept, no closed totality from which there is no escape, but transformable because of its inner contradiction by social practice.

In such a moment, in which the consensus becomes shaky, the element of coercion, ever-present, but acting in the background emerges more strongly to prevent the process of dissolution or to make possible, by contrast, the imposition of a new hegemonic project. That means that based on the “consensus of the majority”, potential and real force is employed against those that do not recognise hegemony or resist it. That is, hegemony in Gramsci’s understanding is “armoured with coercion” (*Pri* 4, 783) and is in no way the result of a friendly and fair and rule-free “eternal discourse” (Habermas).

#### 4. POLITICAL SOCIETY, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND INTEGRAL STATE

By working out an active consensus, at the same the instruments by which it is “imposed” and secured are elaborated (*Pri* 7, 1637). The moments of coercion are represented by the state in the narrower sense. It does not constitute an autonomous subject or even a merely purposefully rational association in this respect, but a form of institutionalisation or “material congealing” of social relations (Poulantzas 1978, 119) that becomes independent to a certain degree and therefore develops relative autonomy face to society – but it is in no way only the state of the ruling class (as in old Marxism-Leninism), but it also does not represent any general social interest, as for instance in Hegel, at most an imagined general interest. As a result of social relations, the form of the state itself is contradictory and internally divided in many forms. The contradictions among the fractions of the block in power “in the interior of the state assume the form of internal contradictions between the various ... (state) apparatus” (123). To the extent that the relation of forces shift within society, the structure of the state can also be changed. With Gramsci, nothing is static or eternal, nothing good or bad, the latter depends on the concrete form or articulation in a specific historical constellation.

Accordingly, for Gramsci, the state can also incorporate more than the repressive side. This is because the maximal “efficiency” of the legislator is reached, when coercion steps back behind the moments of consensus, or respectively coercion corresponds to the “‘spontaneous’ consensus of the masses” (*Pri* 7, 1637). That means, the notion of the state is not to be reduced to its function of social control; it always has to fulfil ideological functions and to guarantee social cohesion also. Ideology, in that context, precisely does not mean ‘false consciousness’, but a world-view organised *from ‘above’* that itself becomes a reorganising social force. A “form of rationalisation”, in which social reality receives new definitions (Hauser 1996, 501). Ideology, therefore, means a reality of *verkehrte* – in German with the double meaning of *upside-down* and *wrong* – social relations that penetrate everyday thinking, thereby becoming part of “objective truth” (Marx, MEW 3, 533).

Gramsci in this context understands the state also as an ‘educator’, adapting the individuals to new social demands, on the one hand by repression, on the other hand, by the opening up of opportunity spaces and the development of individuals as social beings (*Pri* 7, 1548 f.). This relation between coercion and development becomes especially clear, for instance, in the introduction of general education. For Gramsci, politics therefore are always a kind of pedagogical relation (*Pri* 6, 1335), without evaluating in a normative way whether this is good and reasonable or bad and repressive. It is always first a matter of analysis, also when we speak, for instance, of a pedagogy for the continuation of capitalist exploitation or even for a fascist cultural revolution. Such a pedagogical relation is not thought from the ‘top’ to the ‘bottom’, as for instance in the French enlightenment. After all, the conditions form people, however, they can change them in their daily practice, it so happens that – to speak with Marx – that the “educator must be educated

himself" (MEW 3, 534).

The concerning struggles in no way affect only the state in the narrower sense. Behind the state, there appears a "robust structure of civil society" (*Pri 4*, 874). It includes all discourses and institutions from school, universities, by way of diverse forms of associations, as well as the so-called private organisations, the associations of the economy, the trade unions, interest associations of car drivers, environmentalists, parents, consumers etc. – a thick web of institutions (of hegemonic apparatuses as Gramsci calls them) for the "common elaboration" (1512) of cultural and economic life. In public quarrel they struggle for a consensus what is socially accepted. In uncouneted discourses by teachers, judges, psychiatrists, journalists, scientists etc., a specific knowledge is produced that defines and norms which discourses are legitimate and which not. In these discourses that at the same time constitute specific public spheres, which in the mass media again need to pass by a normalising 'funnel', social conformity is produced. The private hegemonic apparatus are, therefore, far more than "transmission belts" (as Lenin called them, LW, 31, 5); they are rather a complex whole of institutions, ideologies, and practices. As a 'public space', as civil society, they are the venue for the struggle for hegemony.

By way of the concept of civil society as embattled space unfolding in between economy and state, Gramsci turns against any form of reductionist economism and at the same time against political voluntarism, as well as apolitical culturalism. The (methodical) division of political and civil society is only a relative one; he always deals with analysing broader social articulations. "What is called 'public opinion' is connected most closely with political hegemony; it is after all the connecting point between 'civil society' and 'political society', between consensus and violence." (*Pri 4*, 916 f.) Civil society is not a space for peaceful togetherness; it is (politically) organised along lines of power and rule. For its political projects and measures, the state launches public campaigns, he organises elements of civil society, he intervenes in discourses. On the one hand, the consensus also at the level of civil society is secured by elements of coercion, on the other hand, the organisation of the active consensus is not restricted to civil society, it is rather also a constitutive element of the state. This close, "organic" relation (*Pri 9*, 2194 f.) between politics and ideology is revealed by Gramsci's notion of the integral (or extended) state which he seizes as "political society + civil society, meaning hegemony armoured with coercion" (783). His perspective is not that of a violent destruction of this connection or relation, but the "absorption of the state into civil society".

## 5. AMERICANISM AND FORDISM AS NEW MODE OF PRODUCTION AND LIVING

The impression that Gramsci by his emphasis on the political and cultural is neglecting the economic comes from a slanted perception that is probably owed to the selected volumes that often eclipsed the economic passages. When others were still speculating about "imperialism as the highest state of capitalism", Gramsci in his studies on Americanism and Fordism already saw a new capitalist mode of production and living emerge. The foundation for the new hegemony to him is the progressive function of Fordism in the "rationalisation of production and work" (*Pri 9*, 2085) – without neglecting the destructive sides of this process (similar to the way Marx had done this two generations before). It was clear to him at that point: "Hegemony is born in the factory." (2069)

Basically central was the introduction of a Taylorist work organisation (meaning strict separation between the conception of the work processes and standardised execution with far-reaching division of labour), linked with the transfer of producer knowledge to the means of production (by way of mechanisation) – in other words, assembly line production and extreme division of labour result in enormous advances in productivity (2086); exemplary in the automobile factories of Henry Ford – hence Fordism. These extremely monotonous and intensive, hence physically and psychically taxing labour forms were introduced by the combination of coercion and consensus: by "skilfully combining coercion (destruction of worker and trade union system on a territorial basis) with conviction (high wages, various social benefits, ideological propaganda and extremely clever politics)" (2069). Especially the above-average wages played an important role in that: They were supposed to achieve the "psycho-physical adaptation to the new industrial structure" (2069) in order to maintain the work force worn out by intensive exploitation (2092).

That also means for Gramsci that “the new work methods were inseparably linked with a certain way of living, thinking and experience of life” (2086). Deep-reaching revolution of social production among other things leads to the dissolution of traditional social milieus, family structures and forms of subsistence. The *roaring twenties* supply an eloquent picture of this disintegration, but the new freedoms linked to that are a thorn in the eye to industrials and conservative groups. The wage is squandered on alcohol, amusement and whoring around – which ultimately narrows the performance of the work force in the factory, if they do not stay away from work completely.

Therefore, it becomes necessary that the worker spends his and her money “rationally”; so as to renew his nervous and muscular capacity for work. New forms of private ways of life are generalised by way of civil society and state morality campaigns – the key words are Puritanism and prohibition. The goal is that the “working human should not spend his nervous energy on the cramped and unorganised search for sexual fulfilment” (530f). This requires the “instatement of housewives who mind the discipline, sane way of life, health and good nourishment of the family, in other words the question of consumption, and are active accordingly” (F. Haug 2001, 772) – that way it comes to the emergence of a new female personality, including an ideological and moral overstress on female virtues that simultaneously amount to an acquiescence by women to the subordination under male dominance and unpaid exploitation of their workforce. The small family concentrated on consumption of goods and reproduction of its labour force with the husband as full-time breadwinner for the family becomes the predominant form of relationship and life – movie industry and light fiction reproduce the romanticised image of the happy small family.

The consumerist circle ensures that the reproduction of labour force itself becomes part of the maximisation of profits – as demand for goods and services. The reproduction of the working class becomes a direct support for capital valorisation. It was possible only by this development of mass consumption to realise the extremely improved productivity of mass production in greater than ever rates of growth.

In that context, the functioning of the new mode of production is dependent “on a certain political, moral and legal superstructure” (*Pri* 6, 1465f, comp *Pri* 9, 2079). The disintegration of the old milieus and heightened psycho-physical requirements compound the individual risks, for instance, in the case of sickness, unemployment and old age. It becomes necessary to introduce collective social security systems, meaning the build-up of a social and welfare state. It is not only a means to sustain the labour force physically, but is also a decisive means for stabilising mass consumption.

Gramsci considers American culture and Fordist production as carriers of a new hegemony that organises the reinforced subjection of workers and their way of life under the capital relations, but together with a real improvement of the immediate life situation of the subordinated. Simultaneously, by way of the rationalisation of production and conduct of life as well as through the limits and contradictions arising from rationalisation, conditions for the development of resistance are created ever again (comp. for instance 2090 ff.).

Again, for Gramsci, the organisation of consensus and hegemony is not a peaceful process. Not only coercion – open force and war are its accompaniments. After all, Americanism first had to impose itself against competing models of a backlog Fordism in its fascist and Soviet variants. “Whether America with the merciless weight of its economic production will force Europe to a revolution of its all-too traditional socio-economic formations” (2098), to Gramsci was still an undecided question: Can “Americanism form a historical ‘era’” or does it only “represent the molecular accumulation of elements that are destined to call forth an ‘explosion’.” (2063). He could not know that it first required the explosion to trigger the epochal triumph that made Europe and large parts of the world absorb and adapt the American mode of production and living.

## **6. TRANSNATIONAL INFORMATION-TECHNOLOGICAL MODE OF PRODUCTION AND NEOLIBERALISM**

By way of the categories developed by Gramsci, one can learn a lot for the understanding of the revolutions in the last 30 years. We may safely state that under the neoliberal hegemony, there has been

established transnationally a new mode of production and living. The neoliberal production of ideology functions here as the organising element of a crisis-ridden transformation of all social relations which can of course only be mentioned briefly at this point (comp. Candeias 2004/2007).

Mediated by way of social struggles, transnational capitalist class fractions emerge, politically intertwined and sharing some common interests with groups of leading international politicians and parts of subordinated power groups, building a transnational power block, institutionalised in a thick web of international organisations such as IMF, WTO, G8, WEF, EU or NAFTA and in the restructuring of state governance on different levels. This convergence of ruling interests lead to ever more far-reaching liberalisation and to a sustained shifts of power relations to the detriment of rather national or regional bound forces. Closely linked to that is the imposition of a global financial capitalism that together with the ideology of shareholder value pushes capitalist interests strongly back into the centre of politics, thereby setting free enormous funds for speculation but also for investment into the renewal and global extension of production.

The establishment of flexibly integrated transnational networks of production combines the advantages of a competitive and at the same time complementary differentiation of forms of production and labour. At the same time, the close intertwining of the individual, fragmented production sites following the *fast in time* principle enhances the vulnerability of production and opens potential for the organisation of counter power. Yet, the information and computer industries are pioneers of a local-global network formation (Lüthje 1998, 561f.). Exemplary for that is Silicon Valley: As prototype of interregional network and cluster formation, it is simultaneously the centre of global production systems where top corporations determine technological key standards by which they exercise a strict control of fragmented production processes (given relative autonomy of the respective locations). Similar processes are operating, for instance, in the automobile industry (Revelli 1999, 62 f.). This is a contradictory process, since the centralism of production planning counteracts the often proclaimed work organisational autonomy at the local level. The factory, formerly the place where the working class used to constitute by physical presence, on the basis of the high-technological mode of production experiences its fragmented globalisation – from the *maquiladoras* up to the ‘glassy factory’ (Volkswagen), from the informal female home workers up to modern tele-workers (Candeias/Huws 2003). Without being able to know what dimensions this fragmentation would assume in the future, Gramsci coined for this the notion of the “dispersed factory” (*Pri* 7, 925). The dissolution and globally fragmented new constitution of the collective worker (*Pri* 5, 1124) weakens its power. Their outdated nation-state organisational forms get under pressure. The constant reconstruction of the work force by waves of *in- and outsourcing* and restructuring guarantees an improved control of the work force and of possible counter-movements. A precarisation of work – supported by complementary state measures – develops thereby establishing a broad low-wage sector, while the worker elites register high income increases.

At the same time, the capitalist restructuring of the relation between productive forces and relations of production sets an end to the Fordist “trained gorilla” (*Pri* 7, 1499f), wages more strongly on productive intelligence, informal know-how, creativity and even emotionality of the immediate producers. This altered positioning of knowledge and subjectivity, is linked to an extended relative autonomy of the workers in the labour process. The higher the degree of scientification (*Verwissenschaftlichung*) of activities, the harder it becomes to ensure a direct control over the labour process. The precise course of activities is no longer set from outside, but left to a large extent to the direct producers themselves; so far as the entrepreneurial goal is achieved. The involvement of the worker’s knowledge generally makes the activities more interesting and diverse. However: due to capitalist imperatives autonomy is limited to activities favourable for the competitiveness of the corporation. This forces employees to internalise flexibility, efficiency, and entrepreneurial thinking. The real subjection of work to capital reaches a historically and qualitatively new stage. By the way of expanded and at the same time limited autonomy capital delegates the exploitation of labour to the active subject himself towards ›self-exploitation‹ – in Gramscian terms the creation of a new flexible “type of worker and man”.

Who cannot stand the pressure of competition and conformism – which extends into everyday life, into the families, free time, sports etc. – has the possibility to recover its psycho-physical fitness by a whole range of therapies. Wage and free time are spent increasingly to the benefit of individual work capability, employability, in brief, in favour of economic exploitation; ever more time and money is spent on fitness, wellness and last but not least psychotherapy or other, more esoteric offers. There prevails an almost



conformist pressure to be a non-conformist (Barfuss 2003) – a kind of high-technological mode of everyday life with a need for self-marketization, for being creative and unique, but in the limits of what is generally accepted and demanded in order to keep up one's position in the struggle for the rare jobs (even if it is only 'partial part-time') and social respect.

The level of self-exploitation and autonomy is an object of everyday struggles. Since the knowledge of the employees has become indispensable in the high-technological mode of production, there is a certain need for negotiated integration and extended participation. In the light of weakened collective interest representation and sharpened competition for jobs, it is possible, however, to limit the amount of integration to the individual level. There reigns a kind of 'competition by way of (partly enforced) competition'. In part, neo-Taylorist forms of labour organisation are introduced and integration is restricted increasingly to workers with central positions within the production process. The fear for the job decomposes collective resistance.

Despite individualisation and work pressure, stress and unilateral flexibility, these new forms of work for large parts of employees present not only negatively as a loss of security or of common (workers') identity, especially for the younger generation this corresponds to a liberation from decade-long, never changing, monotonous labour and standardised ways of life, to a multiplicity of life-styles or, experience of *patchwork* identities. Especially the highly-educated in their own self-understanding no longer feel like employees, let alone workers, but rather as self-responsible independent individuals, which incorporated entrepreneurial thinking, able to represent their interests by themselves. Not only the coveted specialists experience the concomitant tension between larger personal autonomy and increased uncertainty *also* as an enrichment. Expanded autonomy, re-qualification, creativity and dismantling of hierarchies, meaning the ›humanisation of work‹, are integrated into the neoliberal reorganisation and flexibilisation of production.

Gender relations as well are dusted and reorganised. One of the core issues of the (second) women's movements was the criticism of the gendered division of labour, the forcing of women into patriarchal matrimonial relations where they were – for the most part – excluded from (full-time) employment and, being dependent on the male family breadwinner, relegated to the realm of the private. Now this becomes obsolete in a strange way precisely through the neoliberal reconstruction of labour relations and welfare state (in more detail Candeias 2004, 209ff). Female labour becomes self-evident at the same time as jobs become scarce and competition increases because of structural unemployment. In opposition to the paternalist state and familiar relations of (Western) Fordism, the market passes on the responsibility to the women themselves, linked to the promise that personal activity and willingness to perform can potentially lead to success. Individually, this is of course possible and is demonstrated by media overrepresentation of successful women ranging from the federal chancelleroess by way of the family minister with show-case family and successful women entrepreneurs all the way to TV anchor women and courageous female detective superintendents. Thus the consent of large part of the women to neoliberal transformation of society, of gender relations and individualisation of labour relations is organised, simultaneously decomposing women's movement. Collective forms of organisation for pushing through the realisation of their interests are hardly pursued even by women themselves, perceived mostly as old-fashioned and hostile to men.

In order to offer their whole labour power on the market, a female labourer is required, that is – following Marx – not only free to sell her labour power and free from means of production, but also free from the necessary reproductive work to be done (*›dreifach freie Lohnarbeiterin‹*, Brensell/Habermann 2001). Successful career woman could emancipate from old forms of family by falling back on cheap female – often illegalised – migrant labour power for domestic work. In this way, "global care chains" develop (Hochschild 2001). In the whole informal sector new hierarchies and differences between gender are reproduced and intensified by class divisions and ethnic or national ascriptions. In the peripheries by contrast – by way of the hyper-exploitation especially of female labour –, with the growing capital intensity within highly qualified production and service jobs new middle classes emerge. The result is a complex overlap between an altered national division of labour in the course of scientification flexibilisation of work and a revolution of the gendered division of labour as well as a re-combination of the global collective worker in the framework of the international division of labour.

The "psycho-physical equilibrium" (*Pri 9*, 2087) is stabilised by an intensified culture of the market and

forms of self-realisation by way of consumption of a wonderful global world of commodity aesthetics. Ever new sectors are object of valorisation and commodity-aesthetics, from everyday life, through public services, health and education, body and genes and the psyche up to the natural environment. Since market-form exchange relations increasingly concern the sphere of immediate life needs, it is not surprising if personal relations and feelings therefore assume a tendency "of adapting to the exchange of goods" (F.Haug 1994, 107).

Yet, the impersonal domination of the market promises new freedoms. Quite correctly, the 68 movement and the women's movement criticised the suppressing sides of a paternalist and patriarchal welfare state that pressed the free development of the individuals into a straight-jacket of standardised modes of living. The neoliberal movement picked up this criticism, turned it around and radicalised it. It presents social crisis tendencies as consequences of "over-regulation", as general crises of state control, that is to be met with down-sizing and deregulating the state. Against the tutelage by welfare state, neoliberals set the emphatic discourse of individual freedom that – articulated differently – is also emphasised from the left; here the reactionary impulse of the neoliberals met with the emancipative aspiration of the left, but already in the context of altered relations of force. Subsequently, former 68ers, greens and social democrats themselves became driving forces of an orientation towards self-responsibility and de-étatisation. The old Keynesian-Fordist form of regulation to intervene in a correcting or compensating way, where market forces fail, is replaced by forms of de- and re-regulation in which the control functions of the state meet with the optimisation functions of the economy and unite to a force pushing into the same direction. As opposed to classical control forms, this is later named the model of the 'activating state' that elevates competitiveness to its primary goal and subordinates the realisation of social rights to the disciplining constraints of global competition. It is a matter of reducing claims on the welfare state, unjustified benefits and 'demoralising' ways of behaviour by way of a reorientation towards self-responsibility and national community – as Gramsci expressed this – to adapt "the morality of the broadest popular masses to the requirements of the constant development of the economic apparatus of production, consequently also to work out physically new types of man as well. Yet, how every single individual will manage to integrate into the collective man, and how the educative pressure on the individual is exercised, so that their consensus and cooperation is achieved" – this combination of consensus and coercion is a discursive one of rights and duties (*Pri* 7, 1544), or more prosaically 'challenge and promote' in the framework of the reconstruction of the social and educational systems to the needs of a new social mode of production and reproduction in the course of the neoliberal workfare or respectively transnational competitive states.

The shift in the constellation of forces and power linked to all these changes, is the basis for a new social compromise of the 'new centre' and for the integration of formerly oppositional groups. The social block of neoliberalism can rely, despite its anti-social politics, on active and passive approval, because it picks up the interests of subordinated groups, but, however, reversing their goals. Many demands, for instance, of the workers, the women's or the 68 movement have been realised in the new mode of production and living, but in neoliberal forms. Therefore neoliberal hegemony is not a *merely "destructive force"* (Bourdieu 1998, 110) or a "conservative restoration" (Bischoff et al. 1998, 9), but a passive revolution in the Gramscian sense and certainly develops *productive forces*: the retraction of extreme (Taylorist) division of labour in production can liberate the worker from monotony, new forms of production can integrate their knowledge, computerisation and automation can relieve us of hard physical labour; the internationalisation of culture and commodity supply can prevent us from national narrow-mindedness, de-étatisation can save us from paternalistic tutelage and promote individuality and new collective forms. Picking up demands of the women's movement, for instance, neoliberalism 'liberates' the housewives from patriarchal family relations and forces them to prove themselves on the labour market. Nevertheless, the fruits of all these forces are much more unequally distributed than ever before since the end of the Second World War, going along with destruction of subsistence economies, generating hyper-exploitation in the periphery and a generalised culture of insecurity and precariousness in the centres.

The corresponding more narrow social basis and lower coherence of the neoliberal historical block at the same time conveys greater significance to coercion, turns war and violence into necessary tools for harnessing crises. The processing of social conflicts runs here by way of the re-articulation of the ruling project from conservative-liberal neoliberalism, then social-democratic to authoritarian neoliberalism (in more detail Candeias 2004, 328 ff.). But finally – again speaking with Gramsci – the congealing of contradictions produces cracks in the hegemonic apparatuses, "similar to cracks that have already appeared in the porcelain that still holds, but will forcibly break up at these very cracks" (Haug 1998, 86).

These fissures need to be expanded.

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