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CRITICAL KEYWORDS IN LITERARY AND CULTURAL THEORY

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gender has, in turn, drawn the critic's attention to other equally urgent lines of inquiry.

Recent feminist theory . . . [has] gone some way toward redressing the obfuscation of bodies, realizing that . . . to focus on the constructed or symbolic meanings of self identity, is to recast the Cartesian³ privilege of mind over body. Here, gender is construed as a psychological or mental interpretation of physical or material realities, or as an active or voluntary choice of traits that were previously seen as prescribed by our bodily nature. But if the emphasis of gender over sex alleviated the problem of determinism, by conceiving gender as malleable and changeable, rather than as resulting from our inherent and unchanging natures, it created new problems. It papered over, rather than thinking through, the relationship between sex and gender.

Tina Chanter (2001: 12)

Questions for further consideration

1. What agency, might we hypothesize, does the subject acquire if gender is considered as a culturally determined 'apparatus of production', rather than being merely an inscription?
2. If Teresa Ebert's assertion that 'patriarchy is a material practice through which gender is naturalized' is correct, how do we (a) determine the modalities of that naturalization, and (b) read 'patriarchy' as, itself, a mystified because naturalized gendered position?
3. Consider the ways in which the unease generated by gender's slipperiness is a sign of the potentially affirmative or productive force of gender mobility. What other disturbances might the mutability of gender effect from within normative cultural models?

Explanatory and bibliographical notes

1. *Essentialism* generally refers to a belief that there are 'real essences', such as human nature, or that sexuality is given, is 'natural' or intrinsic, rather than learned, acquired or otherwise socially or culturally constructed behaviour. An essentialist view of culture would subscribe to the position that particular values, beliefs or habits belong to the essence of that culture: for example, the idea that freedom is an American value, or, as in the eighteenth century, that the term 'Oriental' was in some manner synonymous with sensuousness or barbarity. At once ludicrous *and* highly dangerous in its more common manifestations, essentialist thought takes seriously notions such as people of African origin being good at sports, the Chinese being good at mathematics, or Jews having heightened financial acumen.

2. Judith Butler (b.1956-): *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990); *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993); *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997).
3. 'Cartesian' refers to the work of René Descartes (b.1596-d.1650): *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*, trans. and Introduction by Desmond M. Clarke. (London: Penguin, 1998). Specifically, this adjective is commonly employed to refer to the mind/body dualism by which Descartes comprehends the nature of Being. In a citation on the 'subject' by Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen (below; in the entry on 'Subject/ivity'), the phrase 'Cartesian Cogito' refers to Descartes's well-known axiom, *Cogito ergo sum*: I think, therefore I am.

Further reading

- Butler, Judith (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge).
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HEGEMONY

Hegemony emerges in its now commonly accepted sense from the writings of Antonio Gramsci. It refers to the cultural, political and intellectual processes related to dominant economic practices and activity within a given society by which domination of one class is achieved over another (or others). This is effected chiefly, though by no means exclusively, through non-coercive means, such as the dissemination of forms of knowledge, which constitutes and constructs socially normative subject positions, through institutionally authorized means and discourses such as those of education, the law, journalism and the media, religion, or, in a more diffuse manner, through the very idea of a normative or dominant culture itself.

- (1) The education system; (2) newspapers; (3) artistic writers and popular writers; (4) the theatre and sound films; (5) radio; (6) public meetings of all kinds, including religious ones; (7) the relations of 'conversation' between the more educated and less educated strata of the population . . . (8) the local dialects . . . Since the process of formation, spread and development of

Unified national language occurs through a whole complex of molecular processes, it helps to be aware of the entire process as a whole in order to be able to intervene actively in it with the best possible results . . . if the intervention is 'rational', it will be organically tied to tradition, and this is of no small importance to the economy of culture . . . Every time the question of language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words to reorganize the cultural hegemony.

Antonio Gramsci (1988: 356-7)

Social control is achieved in part via ruling hegemonic groups or what Gramsci terms collectively 'civil society', as a result of those groups deploying knowledge, information and ideologically situated 'values' so as to convince subaltern groups of the ethical or moral truth of such views or systems of organization.

Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium be formed – in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for though hegemony is ethico-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity.

Antonio Gramsci (1988: 211-12)

Gramsci stresses hegemony as dynamic (what he calls a 'continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria'), the process and development of political social control in the domination of certain groups by others, rather than emphasizing more static social and economic relationships.

What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and the 'political society' or 'the State'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the 'State' and 'juridical' government.

Antonio Gramsci (1971: 12)

Rather than merely positing a critique of ruling-class interests, hegemonic analysis for Gramsci would stress forms of interaction between social groups and classes. The so-called 'post-Marxist' work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe¹ has engaged in a radical rethinking and extension of Gramsci's articulation. Here, Laclau and Mouffe trace a brief history of the notion:

even in its humble origin in Russian Social Democracy, where it is called upon to cover a limited area of political effects, the concept of 'hegemony' already alludes to a kind of *contingent* intervention required by the crisis or collapse of what would have been a 'normal' historical development. Later, with Leninism,² it is a keystone in the new form of political calculation required by the contingent 'concrete situations' in which the class struggle occurs in the age of imperialism. Finally, with Gramsci, the term acquires a new type of centrality that transcends its tactical or strategic uses: 'hegemony' becomes the key concept in understanding the very unity existing in a concrete social formation. Each of these extensions of the term, however, was accompanied by an expansion of what we could provisionally call a 'logic of the contingent'.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985: 7)

Clearly, as radical political praxis and its discourse develop, so an understanding of the history of the concept is necessary as the concept becomes both more nuanced and more significant in any effective critique of social structure. This 'history' is also remarked elsewhere.

Lenin saw imperialism as a structural stage in the evolution of the modern state. He imagined a necessary and linear historical progression from the first forms of the modern European state to the nation-state and then to the imperialist state. At each stage in this development the state had to invent new means of constructing popular consensus, and thus the imperialist state had to find a way to incorporate the multitude and its spontaneous forms of class struggle within its ideological state structures; it had to transform the multitude into a people. This analysis is the initial political articulation of the concept of hegemony that would later become central to Gramsci's thought.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000: 232-3)

At this juncture, it might be useful to state the salient features of hegemony. As a useful summary, it can be said that

hegemony is the formulation and elaboration of a conception of the world that has been transformed into the accepted and 'normal' ensemble of

ideas and beliefs that interpret and define the world. Such a process is immediately political, for such a transformation cannot be accomplished without the people viewed as a social force. Hegemony is thus, in a very real and concrete sense, the moment of philosophy as politics and the moment of politics as philosophy . . . if hegemony is constituted by the unity of politics and philosophy, then it must also follow that hegemony implies the unity of philosophy and history, for 'concrete action' and the 'transformation of reality' (which are the object of politics) presuppose a social reality and a conception of the world that are anchored within 'time and space' . . . to Gramsci history is the history of *egemonia* [hegemony] – that is, the history of the unity of philosophy and politics, thought and action.

Benedetto Fontana (1993: 20–1)

In this sense, all history is understood as a series of successive, though not necessarily progressive, social, cultural and ideological structures determining historical reality. Furthermore,

hegemony is defined by Gramsci as intellectual and moral leadership . . . whose principal constituting elements are consent and persuasion. A social group or class can be said to assume a hegemonic role to the extent that it articulates and proliferates throughout society cultural and ideological belief systems whose teachings are accepted as universally valid by the general population. Ideology, culture, philosophy, and their 'organizers' – the intellectuals – are thus intrinsic to the notion of hegemony. Since, to Gramsci, reality is perceived, and knowledge is acquired, through moral, cultural, and ideological 'prisms' or 'filters' by means of which society acquires form and meaning, hegemony necessarily implies the creation of a particular structure of knowledge and a particular system of values . . . Hegemony is thus conceived as the vehicle whereby the dominant social groups establish a system of 'permanent consent' that legitimates a prevailing social order by encompassing a complex network of mutually reinforcing and interwoven ideas affirmed and articulated by intellectuals.

Benedetto Fontana (1993: 140–1)

Yet, it should not be thought that the notion of hegemony can be comprehended as operating in some more or less coherent or uncontested fashion.

Nonetheless, the entire construction rests upon an ultimately incoherent conception, which is unable fully to overcome the dualism of classical Marxism. For Gramsci, even though the diverse social elements have a merely relational identity – achieved through articulatory practices – there must always be a *single* unifying principle in every hegemonic

formation, and this can only be a fundamental class. Thus two principles of the social order – the unicity of the unifying principle, and its necessary class character – are not the contingent result of hegemonic struggle, but the necessary structural framework within which every struggle occurs. Class hegemony is not a wholly practical result of struggle, but has an ultimate ontological foundation. The economic base may not assure the ultimate victory of the working class, since this depends upon its capacity for hegemonic leadership. However, a failure in the hegemony of the working class can only be followed by a reconstitution of bourgeois hegemony, so that in the end, political struggle is still a zero-sum game among classes. This is the inner essentialist core which continues to be present in Gramsci's thought, setting a limit to the deconstructive logic of hegemony.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985: 69)

It might be suggested that hegemonic maintenance relies on and requires strategic incoherence and disorganization for its efficacy. Laclau and Mouffe clearly seek to engage with Gramsci in a manner that opens the latter's valuable comprehension of social formation to a more mobile conceptualization – what is termed here the 'deconstructive logic of hegemony' – one which, while not seeking to reduce the contradictions at work, none the less makes available a more widespread and therefore efficacious understanding of hegemony, at least in principle, in radical ways, connecting both to material and 'textual' or discursive praxes.

Working to extend Gramsci's elaboration of the concept of hegemony, Laclau sees hegemony not as the imposition of a pre-given set of ideas but as 'something that emerges from the political interaction of groups'; it is not simply the domination by an elite, but instead is a process of ongoing struggle that constitutes the social. Hegemonic struggle requires the identification of what Laclau calls 'floating signifiers', those signifiers that are open to continual contestation and articulation to radically different political projects. 'Democracy', in his view, is a key example of a floating signifier – its meaning essentially ambiguous as a consequence of its history and widespread circulation. To hegemonize a content for 'democracy' would require a fixing (always provisional) of its meaning. Indeed, the open nature of the social and the very possibility of hegemonic struggle stem from the impossibility of total fixity. As Laclau reminds us, it is 'urgent' that progressive intellectuals understand the logic of hegemony and the nature of hegemonic struggle (which the neoconservative right has mastered so well in recent years), and that they develop their own hegemonic strategies.

Lynn Worsham and Gary A. Olson (1999: 130)

As this citation makes apparent, the work of Laclau and Mouffe does not amount to a 'retreat' into linguistic formalism or excess, as has been claimed, but there takes place a necessary recognition of the extent to which social power is a fluid, textual phenomenon. In fact, as a result of this recognition, we can remark that

Hegemony is . . . a broader category than ideology: it *includes* ideology, but is not reducible to it. A ruling group or class may secure consent to its power by ideological means; but it may also do so by, say, altering the tax system in ways favourable to groups whose support it needs, or creating a layer of relatively affluent, and thus somewhat politically quiescent, workers. Or hegemony may take political rather than economic forms: the parliamentary system in Western democracies is a crucial aspect of such power, since it fosters the illusion of self-government on the part of the populace.

. . .

Hegemony, then, is not just some successful kind of ideology, but may be discriminated into its various ideological, cultural, political and economic aspects . . . hegemony is also carried in cultural, political and economic forms – in non-discursive practices as well as in rhetorical utterances.

Terry Eagleton (1991: 112–13)

Hegemony is thus at work in both linguistic and textual structures and also, importantly, in and through concrete institutions and the lived relations of individuals and groups of people within societies. For the reasons outlined immediately above, it may also be stated that

the question of hegemony is always the question of a new cultural order. Hegemony is not a state of grace which is installed forever. It's not a formation which incorporates everybody. The notion of a 'historical bloc' is precisely different from that of a pacified, homogeneous, ruling class.

It entails a quite different conception of how social forces and movements, in their diversity, can be articulated into a set of strategic alliances.

Stuart Hall (1988: 170)

And, if irreducible to ideology, hegemony, in its far-reaching effects, is also irreducible to culture, even though its work comprehends both:

'hegemony' goes beyond 'culture' . . . in its insistence on relating the 'whole social process' to specific distributions of power and influence . . .

Gramsci . . . introduced the necessary recognition of dominance and subordination [in class-based society] in what has . . . to be recognized as a whole process.

It is in just this recognition of the *wholeness* of the process that the concept of 'hegemony' goes beyond 'ideology'.

Raymond Williams (1977: 108–9)

Hegemony therefore escapes any finite definition precisely because it is so comprehensive, so all-encompassing in its political processes. To recap, therefore,

Hegemony is . . . a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living . . . It is a lived system of meanings and values – constitutive and constituting – which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult to move, in most areas of their lives . . . its forms of domination and subordination correspond . . . closely to the normal processes of social organization and control in developed societies . . .

Raymond Williams (1977: 110)

How might we think this in relation to the experience of politics? A practical expression of this is found in the following citation:

Gramsci's concept of hegemony (the securing of consent) allows us to see Thatcherism for what it was: a project to change the way in which people live out social and political conflict.

Michèle Barrett (1999: 163)

Thatcherism understood as a hegemonic force allows us to understand structural interrelation, thereby effectively initiating a demystification implicit in the privileging of any single figure such as Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Regan, George W. Bush or Tony Blair, all of whom are only privileged agents within, and supportive of, the hegemonic process. The singular example of Thatcherism is, in conclusion, developed here by Stuart Hall.

Thatcherism was a project to engage, to contest that project [of welfare social democracy], and, wherever possible, to dismantle it and to put something new in place. It entered the political field in a historic contest, not just for power, but for popular authority, for hegemony.

Stuart Hall (1988: 166)

Questions for further consideration

1. In light of the comment by Ernesto Laclau, in what ways might one understand the 'logic of hegemony' as 'deconstructive'?
2. Consider the ways in which 'New Labour' (in Great Britain) is a hegemonic project aimed at transforming society. In what ways has 'New Labour' sought to bring about a new cultural order?
3. To what extent might the success of hegemonic power (a) be said to rest on contradiction and overdetermination, and (b) be understood as involving a rejection of contradictions?

Explanatory and bibliographical notes

1. Ernesto Laclau (b.1935–) and Chantal Mouffe (b.1943–): Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985); Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996); Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993).
2. *Leninism* is named after Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (b.1870–d.1924): *What is to be Done?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963); *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of the Revolution* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965); *The State and Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1932). Emerging from within Marxism and due in large part to the theoretical writings of Lenin, Leninism is concerned primarily with the active seizure of power on the part of the proletariat rather than relying on a more purely Marxist conceptualization of the inevitable coming to consciousness of the working classes.

Further reading

- Fontana, Benedetto (1993), *Hegemony and Power: On the Relation between Gramsci and Machiavelli* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press).
- Gramsci, Antonio (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart).
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HYPERREALITY

As its prefix suggests, the notion of *hyperreality* indicates that which is over and above, in excess of reality, something which is more real than the real. As a critical term employed extensively in the humanities, hyperreality is associated with the work of Jean Baudrillard, defined succinctly by him as 'the meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another, reproductive medium, such as photography'. The real disappears, vanishes from perception, through representational forms. It is not simply that a representation, such as a photographic image, is 'meticulous' or accurate but that it comes to be more real than the reality represented, assuming a power and value all its own.

Reality itself founders in hyperrealism . . . From medium to medium, the real is volatilized, becoming an allegory of death. But it is also, in a sense, reinforced through its own destruction. It becomes *reality for its own sake*, the fetishism of the lost object: no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal.

Jean Baudrillard (1988: 145)

The representation of the real assumes a reality of its own, and thereby achieves a fetishistic condition, no longer simply being the sign of the concrete real.

What Jean Baudrillard has dubbed the 'hyperreal' world of simulations means we have become seduced by images that are signs of nothing but themselves. Because such images now precede their referents – Baudrillard calls it 'the precession of simulacra' – they can no longer be understood in terms of the panopticon¹ or the spectacle, concepts that imply a prior intentionality using visual means for other ends, such as the maintenance of power or the perpetuation of capitalism. We are no longer even in front of a mirror, but rather stare with fascination at a screen reflecting nothing outside it.

Martin Jay (1994: 544)

Indeed, to the extent that the hyperreal sign has become increasingly abstract, it is hard to see how the symbol or figure in question is, any longer, a representation of anything existing in the world.

Hyperrealism is only beyond representation because it functions entirely within the realm of simulation . . . hyperrealism is an integral part of a coded reality, which it perpetuates without modifying.

Jean Baudrillard (1988: 146)