Gramsci’s analyses around “common sense” are furthermore strongly related by him to the idea (which we saw that he draws from Marx), of the ideas constituting a “material force” under certain circumstances. Thus, a major feature of “common sense” that interests him is the compactness and solidity that its “ideas” display and the imperative character they have with respect to action.

So, if we want to link his analyses around “common sense” to what he says on “ideology”, we could say that the first one could be understood as a)an indicator of how much the various forms of consciousness have become ideologies, b) a substratum within the various ideologies containing not exactly ideas as such but rather ideas that resemble things in their “taken for granted-ness” c) a filter that all the elaborated and systematic systems of ideas have to encounter in their effort to “conquer” the masses of people and “become practice”.

To make some comparisons, in this respect, to Lukacs and Althusser later, we could say that Gramsci is close to what Althusser would later do, that is move the interest in the theorizing of “ideology” to the “lower” strata of consciousness. And he is far from Lukacs in the way he faces the “empirical conscousness” of the people, the “subaltern classes”, in his own terminology, since Gramsci stresses the heterogeneous and contradictory character of the “common sense”. It has also to be noted that this contradictory character, for him, is not just a matter of comparing among themselves ideas or taken for granted beliefs, but is it also a matter of comparing ideas with ideas that are “latent”, implicit within practice, within the actions of the people. So, he speaks of a possible conflict between an “explicit” and an “implicit” worldview contained in practices.

Concluding as to the innovative steps that Gramsci makes concerning the conception of ideology:

1. A crucial point in the understanding of the political function of ideology is the emphasis on the lower layers of consciousness and on the correlation between consciousness and practice.

A digression on this to the central concept for which Gramsci is so famous: “hegemony”, which denotes a form of domination where consent outbalances force, and “moral-intellectual leadership” prevails.

There is a question on the accurate relationship between “ideology” and “hegemony” in his thought. It seems that the latter contains the first as its basic dimension , hence also crucial to it is the ideological domination of a certain class, but the two are not identical. In any case, the ideological domination of a certain class for Gramsci is not only a matter of the propagation of certain ideas and their adoption on the part of the people, and even less it is not a matter of a conscious, explicit and coherent espousing of certain ideas. The consent that is secured by “hegemony” is rather sth more underground and has to do with what he focuses on, as we saw: the intervention in the lower strata of consciousness. This is confirmed in the second step he makes, that is

2)His strong questioning of the separation between the “material” and the “mental” in the understanding of ideology. This is evident in his insisting on the “material force” of ideas, which we saw in his analysis around “common sense”, but also in that he is the first one who underlines the importance of institutions and the material mechanisms in the establishment of a certain hegemony, hence also of ideological domination.

3) The questioning of the idea that all the ideological elements have a certain class stamp. Some scholars see him as the first one who understands ideology in terms of “discourse” (we have a text of him saying that within the ideological struggle one takes elements from his enemy and changes their meaning by integrating them in his own system of ideas)

4) The resolute expansion of the conception of politics and ideology, through the idea –inherently connected to his analyses around “hegemony”- that there is no field within culture which does not have an ideological-political dimension or function.

A few notes on how he sees that Marxism (in his language “the philosophy of praxis”) conducts its ideological critique, a critique that for him has to start from the “common sense” as its target. Here we have the idea that the emphasis should not be put on individual ideas and their content, but on their uncritical character and the degree of their coherence with other ideas. This is strongly related to his programmatic thesis that the “philosophy of praxis” struggles to establish a “radically novel hegemony”, within which the main aim is to “transform the mentality of the people”, namely to “raise `common sense’ to the level of philosophy”.

The link between this and his arguing for the superioriry of the “philosophy of praxis”: he posits it at the top of the hierarchy of forms of consciousness on the argument that this philosophy manifests a higher degree of critical and historical consciousness, and at the same time coherence and consistency.

However, we have his remarks that the “philosophy of praxis” has not avoided the danger of dogmatism. In this respect, we have the important awareness that Gramsci seems to display that this danger springs from the so crucial for Marxism effort to become “ideology”, or a movement that tries to “educate” the many. Implicit in his thinking is the awareness that inherent in this effort is the danger for the theory to fall into an “ideology” in the negative, for him, sense of the term, that is, as he says, “ a dogmatic system of eternal and absolute truths”, in betraying thus the spirit and the essence of this philosophy.

Assessing Gramsci: he opened up new roads in the theorizing of the problem of ideology, which are registered within a critical, and self-critical, “open” Marxism. However, we are left with various gaps, stemming from the fact that he did not systematize his various thoughts and analyses. Perhaps the most vulnerable point of his theory has to do with the way he connects the “organic” character of certain ideologies to their validity and rationality, and all this to the criterion of their “mass adhesion”.