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# Hegemony, Counter-hegemony, Anti-hegemony<sup>1</sup>

William K. Carroll University of Victoria

## Résumé

Cet article adopte une position de réalisme critique dans l'exploration des formes et des conditions changeantes de l'hégémonie et de la contre-hégémonie des époques « post-modernes », « néo-libérales » et « mondialistes ». Les projets et les pratiques hégémoniques à l'heure actuelle rendent communément acceptées des politiques axées sur le marché et une culture fragmentée, leur infusant une organisation de consentement qui fonctionne à la fois au niveau local et au niveau mondial. Mais ceci ne constitue qu'une *mince* hégémonie, une base fragile, écologiquement insoutenable, de cohésion sociale et de reproduction matérielle. Si le fondement de l'hégémonie contemporaine, même périlleux, est profond, la contre-hégémonie se doit d'explorer ce fondement. Cette critique semble révéler l'articulation de divers courants subalternes et démocratiques-progressifs en un bloc contre-hégémonique qui articule les dissensions dans le temps et dans l'espace. La contre-hégémonie doit tenir debout, affronter les enjeux de l'État ainsi que ceux qui préoccupent les sociétés civiles nationales et transnationales. Sa durabilité au-delà des conjonctures exige non seulement une vision éthique commune, mais un contexte politique approprié à la tâche. La discussion porte sur une gamme d'évolutions récentes pertinentes à ces enjeux. La conclusion de l'article est une critique des politiques de singularités dispersées anti-hégémoniques, dont la perspicacité doit être intégrée à une forme stratégiquement cohérente, surtout quant à la valeur de l'action directe et de la préfiguration.

## Abstract

This article takes a critical realist stance in exploring the changing conditions for and forms of hegemony and counter-hegemony in “postmodern”, “neoliberal”, “globalized” times. Current hegemonic practices and projects make common sense of a market-driven politics and a fragmented culture, infusing into them an organization of consent that operates both locally and globally. Yet this amounts only to a *thin* hegemony, a weak and ecologically unsustainable basis for social cohesion and material reproduction. If contemporary hegemony is deeply yet perilously grounded then counter-hegemony needs to address those grounds. This stricture points to the articulation of various subaltern and progressive-democratic currents into a counter-hegemonic bloc that organizes dissent across space and time. Counter-hegemony needs to walk on both legs, taking up state-centred issues as well as issues resident in national and transnational civil societies. Its durability across conjunctures requires not only a shared ethical vision but a political form appropriate to its tasks. A range of recent developments relevant to these issues is discussed. The article concludes with a critique of the anti-hegemonic politics of dispersed singularities, whose insights, particularly on the value of direct action and prefiguration, need to be integrated into a strategically coherent form.

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<sup>1</sup> Keynote Address to the Annual Meeting of the Society for Socialist Studies, York University, Toronto. June 2006. I thank Paul Kellogg and Bob Ratner for comments on an earlier draft.

## Introduction

Today, the question of hegemony — of organizing consent to the ruling relations of capitalism — looms larger than perhaps at any time since the 1930s, yet the challenges of constructing a political alternative to the rule of capital seem more daunting than ever. Amid the creeping fascism of the American imperial state, the deepening inequalities that consign billions to lives of permanent privation, and the deteriorating ecological conditions for the accoutrements of modern life, it would be easy to fall into a profound pessimism of both intellect and will. And yet these times seem full of possibilities for living differently — more democratically, more ecologically. If in this interregnum, there is a plethora of morbid symptoms, there is also the prospect of new life — new ways of life.

Here, I want to explore some of the bases and dynamics of hegemony and counter-hegemony in the current era. Probably the most influential contemporary version of ‘hegemony theory’ in the past couple of decades has been that of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), whose deconstruction of the orthodox Marxist meta-narrative has provided somewhat of an exit route from historical materialism. Yet the poststructuralist insight that discourse constitutes its subjects and objects comes at some cost. In absorbing what critical realists call the ‘intransitive’ structures of the world — the ones that exist regardless of how they might be characterized in discourse — into their transitive aspects, poststructuralism relativises knowledge as the product of so many incommensurable language games (Joseph, 2002: 219). Such ‘discourse reductionism’ (Assies, 1990: 57) has two disabling effects on critical theory and practice. It disables the critique of unjust and ecologically perilous conditions such as the capitalist appropriation of surplus value or the advent of rapid climate change, but it also rules out critique of the ideological mystification of such intransitive conditions. The descent into discourse, à la Laclau and Mouffe, has had a specific impact on the theorization of hegemony. As the process of articulation becomes more important than that which is articulated, hegemony and counter-hegemony appear as purely discursive matters, abstracted from political-economic context.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, just as Laclau and Mouffe were taking leave of Marxism, a new generation was beginning to place hegemony at the centre of a revitalized historical materialism, sensitive to the socio-historical relations that post-structuralism underplays yet committed to non-reductive forms of explanation. Elsewhere (Carroll, 1990) I have discussed some of the key works that in the 1980s enabled political economists to embrace Gramsci without disowning Marx.<sup>3</sup> Here, I want to take up more recent contributions, and widen

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to discount poststructuralism as a *method* of analytically subverting discourses and texts, including hegemonic ones. With Nancy Fraser (1995), I would submit that poststructuralism is best understood as a critical method, attuned to the constitution of meaning in textuality (Carroll, 2004). As *theory*, poststructuralism is hobbled by its inherent incapacity to make truth claims about a world that is known discursively but constituted both discursively and extra-discursively.

<sup>3</sup> Among the key contributors to this literature are Robert Cox (1987), Stephen Gill (1995), Bob Jessop (1983) and Kees van der Pijl (1984; 1998).

the lens beyond the issue of Canada's specific transition to neoliberalism, which was the focus of my earlier essay.

### **Hegemony: A Critical Realist Take**

One way to avoid the pitfalls of discourse reductionism is to conceptualize hegemony, with Jonathan Joseph, as a continual process of “both material cause and reproduced outcome” (Joseph, 2002: 162). In this critical realist, transformational model of practice, there is more to hegemony than meets the eye, or than might be gleaned from an analysis of discourse. Hegemony has ontological depth; it includes the hegemonic projects that arise within specific conjunctures but also takes in the more deeply structured *conditions of being* for those projects. The point here is that hegemony has an objective basis in material conditions. It is more than just an intersubjective relation between groups or a field of discursive relations, even more than the construction of a ruling bloc, since it entails “the reproduction of the underlying social structures that create the material conditions for such a bloc” (Joseph, 2002: 214-15).

On this interpretation, hegemony is integrally linked to capital accumulation – modern society's driving force – whose conditions always have to be socially secured.<sup>4</sup> In this deeper, structural sense, hegemony has to do with “the cohesion of the social system. It secures the reproduction of the mode of production and other basic structural processes...” (Joseph, 2002: 211). Hegemony is never more than an ongoing accomplishment; that is, the deep and surface aspects of hegemony are *contingently* articulated. Concrete hegemonic projects emerge out of the conditions of structural hegemony, and give them a particular inflection that “centres around different social groups and classes, the interests that they represent, and the political blocs and alliances that are constructed” (Joseph, 2002: 212).<sup>5</sup>

A critical realist take on hegemony offers leverage as we explore how recent transitions in contemporary capitalism have been implicated in the *changing conditions* for structural hegemony, and how emergent practices might be productively viewed as attempts to establish viable hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects in new, “postmodern”, “neoliberal” and “globalized” contexts.

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<sup>4</sup> In this analysis I focus on aspects of hegemony that are articulated with the structure and practices of capital in the early 21st century. I do not examine hegemony through a gender lens, nor do I take up the densely interwoven issues of race, ethnicity and postcolonialism. As Bob Ratner and I have argued elsewhere (Carroll and Ratner, 1994), capitalism is not the only historical totality (i.e. structure of social relations reproduced through practice) around which hegemony is constructed and contested. It is, however, the only such totality that, by its nature, totalizes human relations into its social forms, as in the commodification inherent in expanded reproduction, which presses toward the intensive colonization of lifeworlds and the extensive globalization of accumulation (Robinson, 2004). This totalizing character is one reason for the critical importance of capitalism in the formation of hegemony. Though hardly *singular* in its importance, capitalism is *integral* to struggles for hegemony; indeed, such struggles are strongly shaped by patterns of accumulation and class relations and by conflicting visions of capitalist and post-capitalist futures.

### Postmodern Fragmentation

Let us begin, briefly, with the postmodern. Following Frederic Jameson's (1984) lead, we can view the fragmented, depthless and ahistorical forms of postmodernism as "the cultural logic of late capitalism", a stage, articulated to the global spread of transnational, informational capital and its rapid colonization of lifeworlds, "when culture becomes in effect coextensive with the economy" (Anderson, 1998: 131). Contrary to the tradition of radical scholarship that reaches back to Frankfurt, the *plurality of power* within capitalism, its fragmented and polymorphous character, forms one of the most important bases for hegemony. Far from presiding over the totally administered society, capital does not take responsibility for every aspect or instance of domination and control in capitalist societies. Other forms of power – gendered, racialized, etc. – are typically articulated to capital in some way, yet they cannot be subsumed under it.

*The genius of capitalism is its simplicity of motive. As long as profit can be accumulated and maximized, other considerations are secondary. This gives capital great flexibility, allowing it to form alliances of convenience with other centers of power (Tetzlaff, 1991: 22).*

This formulation of David Tetzlaff's is apt for postmodern times. Bourgeois hegemony is not "sutured", it does not form a unified, dominant ideology. Instead, capitalism accommodates different cultural roles for different groups to play, and different myths or cultural pleasures to go with them; it "tells different stories in different places" (1991: 23); it organizes consent but not necessarily consensus. What is crucial for capital is not social cohesion per se, but commodity production and consumption. In fact, the pragmatically material project of capital can be realized by any combination of ideologies that instill compliance in the workforce while discouraging effective challenge to the system. As fragmentation becomes a cultural dominant, *consent without consensus* gains effectivity as a structural aspect of hegemony.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The critical realist approach to hegemony was anticipated by Bob Jessop, whose 1983 article introduced "hegemonic projects" and "accumulation strategies" as strategic-relational concepts that could establish meaningful links between the abstract capital-theoretical tendencies of the capitalist mode of production and the concrete modalities of social and economic struggle. For Jessop, accumulation and hegemony are most secure where there is a close correspondence between particular strategies and projects, cementing, in a historic bloc, "an organic relation between base and superstructure" (1983: 101) – as occurred in the "golden era" of the Fordist-Keynesian welfare state, a kind of corporatist project that "could guarantee the basic reproduction of social structures by co-opting sections of the working class, and granting certain concessions in return for consent" (Joseph, 2002: 212).

<sup>6</sup> As Tetzlaff puts it, "it is to capital's interest ... to keep its subject population as fragmented as possible. In avoiding challenge, it is also to capital's interest if disinterest in the nature of social relations is fostered, and if the workings of the social system remain as obscure as possible. To the extent that a cultural system can yield these results, and still provide motivations for production and consumption, it serves the maintenance of capitalist control" (1991: 29).

From this perspective, the hegemonic significance of postmodern cultural fragmentation lies in a “divide and conquer” effect sustained by two mechanisms:

- *ideological diversification*, the elaboration of non-commensurable subcultural discourses that disable subaltern groups from understanding one another and constructing solidarities, and
- *semiotic implosion*, the fascination with spectacular superficiality that in cleaving signifiers from referents “effectively abolishes any practical sense of the future” (Jameson, 1984: 85) and of a collective transformative project (Tetzlaff, 1991: 29-30).

More ground than figure, more passive revolution than active hegemonic project, postmodern fragmentation is nevertheless integral to contemporary hegemony. Rooted in the commodification of everyday life, it poses a challenge to oppositional movements intent on moving beyond the fragments of single-issue politics and multiculturalism that for the most part fit securely within the motif of ideological diversification. Conversely, self-limiting micro-political resistance would seem in these circumstances to reproduce one of the characteristic forms that hegemony takes today.

### **Neoliberal Insulation and Dispossession**

If postmodern fragmentation, with its mechanism of “divide and rule”, provides a background framework, neoliberal politics constitutes the explicit project within which hegemony has been recomposed in the past three decades. Here too, underlying political-economic mechanisms provide conditions for a distinctive form. We are all familiar with elements of neoliberalism – the priority of “sound money” and low inflation, the attacks on unions, the policies of fiscal retrenchment, flexible labour markets, deregulation and free trade. All these have amplified the impact of global market forces on working people and communities, thereby shifting the balance of class power toward capital (Teepel, 2000). Common to them is the concern to restore optimal conditions for the expanded reproduction of capital by removing or neutralizing the effectivity of social protections inscribed within the Keynesian Welfare State (KWS). The hegemonic mechanism at work here is a twofold *insulation through market liberalization*: insulating capital from regulations that impede profitability, and also insulating key state agencies from popular will – as with the autonomization of central banks and the creation of arrangements like NAFTA and WTO. This aspect of neoliberalism excludes dissident social forces from the field of policy formation, thereby insulating neoliberal states from the societies over which they preside while also elaborating a layer of transnationalized authority, with the aim of penetrating and “re-articulating them to global capital accumulation” (Amoore and Dodgson, 1997).

Insulation is a mechanism associated with the paradigm shift from the KWS to the competition state (Hirsch, 1997), whose economic role is to promote its territory as a site for investment and whose democratic mission is “protective” rather than compensatory: In politico-economic terms, protective democracy is distinguished by a strict separation of the economic and political spheres, with the former responding only to the logic of the marketplace, and the latter restricted in its rule to allowing that logic to proceed without interference (Neufeld, 2001: 102).

By deregulating capital and insisting on a strict separation between economic and political, insulation facilitates capital’s expanded reproduction in a tendentially global field. As a political paradigm, protective democracy has been projected from core to periphery, as a cornerstone of the new world order – whether through armed aggression against “rogue states” such as Iraq or more subtly through liberalizing conditionalities attached to IMF initiatives.

These examples, however, bring us to a second mechanism of the neoliberal project, analytically distinct yet empirically entangled with insulation, what David Harvey (2005a) calls *accumulation by dispossession*. The insulation of capital from democratic constraint is directed at promoting “business as usual” within liberalized markets – i.e., the expanded reproduction of capital. In contrast, accumulation by dispossession responds to capital’s ongoing crisis of over-accumulation by privatizing commonly-held assets (or rights to assets), freeing them up as new venues into which surplus capital can flow. Accumulation by dispossession is an increasingly central feature of global capitalism, with privatization being its signature piece.<sup>7</sup> Harvey has connected the dots between a wide range of instantiations – biopiracy and the wholesale commodification of nature, commercialization of culture and intellectual creativity, corporatization and privatization of public institutions and utilities– in short, the enclosure of the commons. As the crisis of overaccumulation has intensified since the 1970s, this mechanism has become a more central feature of neoliberal capitalism. By releasing assets to capital at extremely low cost, accumulation by dispossession opens new space for profitable activity, including speculation. But if this “privatization of everything” (Harvey, 2005b: 149) has made good sense from a short-term business standpoint, it also has created strong pressures, once set in motion, “to find more and more arenas, either at home or abroad, where privatization might be achieved” (158). Thus, the horror stories of cumulative privatization campaigns in Argentina and elsewhere, which initially brought massive inflows of over-accumulated capital and a boom in asset values, followed by collapse into general impoverishment and social chaos as capital fled the scene.

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<sup>7</sup> Harvey (2005a: 160-165) lists four components comprising accumulation by dispossession: privatization and commodification (particularly of public assets), financialization (which skims off value from the vulnerable within the global financial system), the management and manipulation of crises (particularly by the US Treasury-Wall Street-IMF complex) and state redistributions (which reverse the flow of funds that had occurred in the era of the Keynesian welfare state).

Insulation, the other mechanism that underwrites the neoliberal project, does not fare much better as a means of building social cohesion. Market liberalization may boost profitability in the short term, but it “will not produce a harmonious state in which everyone is better off” (Harvey, 2005b: 144). As the record of neoliberal globalization demonstrates, deregulation produces economic polarization and instabilities. Neoliberalism’s brutalizing ramifications render claims to hegemony perennially tenuous, and necessitate the formation of alliances with other social forces imbued with cultural power – as in the alliance of the Christian right and neoliberalism that is now at the centre of governments in the US and Canada. Yet these alliances tend to exclude large swathes of the population, reopening the question of legitimacy.

Against these weaknesses, however, consider neoliberalism’s strategic advantages:

- To the extent that market liberalization insulates capital from popular will, to the extent that “the economy” is imagined to be an autonomous rationalizing machine, protected by the state, counter-hegemonic politics crashes against a barrier of reification. If the state’s shift from a compensatory to a protective role is popularly accepted, government becomes discounted as the guardian of the public interest, and bears no responsibility for capitalism’s victims (Giroux, 2004: 130).
- To the extent that market liberalization and accumulation by dispossession succeed in re-establishing the market as both the centre of life and the sphere of freedom (bourgeois society’s highest value), *possessive individualism* becomes a hegemonic code of life. This point merits some further exploration.

Possessive individualism casts *freedom* as ownership of individual capacities, *society* as a set of individuals who inter-relate as owners of their capacities and of property they have accumulated, and the *state* as a rational device for protecting property (MacPherson, 1962). It validates protective democracy and the celebration of consumerism that fuels neoliberal capitalism while eroding collective solidarities. Once it becomes “common sense”, possessive individualism “makes virtually all community identities — and the collective actions deriving from them — difficult if not impossible to sustain.” (Neufeld, 2001: 101).

Even so, the hegemony of this version of liberalism has been purchased at the expense of ethical and intellectual depth. As John Schwarzmantel observes,

*what passes for liberalism in contemporary politics is a crude ideology of consumer choice, individual rights and an uncritical view of “market-driven politics”. ... [Liberalism] has largely abandoned its vision of the society of fully self-determining individuals. This means that liberalism while hegemonic has*



*given up its critical aspiration and exists in a much more depoliticized form (2005: 89).*

### **Globalization (From Above)**

The third aspect of hegemonic transition I want to consider here falls under the indistinct yet indispensable rubric of globalization. Globalization is the complex and emergent product of various practices and processes operating on many scales (Jessop, 2002:113). In the field of capital accumulation *per se*, Palloix's (1975) formulation of the internationalization of capital as a process that progressively implicates all the moments of the circuit of capital (commodity exchange, finance, and industrial production) still has considerable purchase as a basic framework (Robinson, 2004). It is not surprising that globalization in this sense has since the 1970s gone hand-in-hand with neoliberal political transformations (Teepie 2000). As capital's circuitry becomes more internationalized, the structural power of capital vis-à-vis agents enclosed within national states is amplified, along with the risks of crisis.<sup>8</sup>

The implications of globalization from above for the organization of consent are important. Densification of international capital circuits is primarily what underlies "globalization" as a meta-narrative that partially supplants the national narrative of the Fordist era. Both narratives flow linearly toward the territorial consolidation of a totality — the nation and the globe, respectively. But where the national narrative staged a collective subject whose unity was based on identity (the interpellation of a citizen/worker/mass consumer), "the global narrative displaces human subjectivity, dramatizing instead the integration of markets." (Medovoi, 2005: 169).

*'Globalization' offers a story in which the new world order will culminate, not in an undifferentiated whole, but in an endlessly differentiated circuit of exchangeability. It tells a story, not about our sameness, but about our fungibility (Medovoi 2005: 169)*

As meta-narrative, globalization finds its enabling conditions in the internationalization of capital and serves to inform and validate those conditions, including the creation of new arrangements such as the WTO.

Within this broad meta-narrative we can also discern a more specific trope, namely, globalization as a form of *hegemonic crisis management*, emerging with the 1980s Third World debt crisis and austerity programs. Here, again, the heightened mobility of internationalized capital, particularly of the fungible type, underpins the discourse. In the post-Bretton Woods financial regime, currency stability depends on speculators' ongoing evaluation of national economic policies. This effectively subordinates state

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<sup>8</sup> From a sample of 21 industrial economies and emerging market economies over 12 decades, Wade (2006: 118) reports that "the probability of a banking or currency crisis has substantially increased since the Bretton Woods era and is now more comparable to that of the interwar period."

policies to market rationality. In this guise, “‘globalization’ involves a structural (financial) imperative to conform to market relations, and to the political project of market rule (via the IMF, WTO)... “ (Patel and McMichael, 2004: 246; cf Harvey, 2005b: 134).

Hegemonic crisis management enacts the metanarrative of globalization, sometimes by resort to naked force. Like other elements of neoliberalism, the material basis for consent it provides is limited. Yet by displacing financial crises to weaker states, regions and currencies, it helps reproduce the illusion of stability and even continuing prosperity in countries of the centre.

Crisis management is by nature conjunctural. The more organic aspect of globalization from above is the technocratic project of *global governance* that has emanated since the mid-1990s from the United Nations and, more recently, the World Economic Forum as “the Davos option” (Dyer-Witheford, 2001:187). Initiated by the UN as a response to the growing awareness that neoliberalism had failed to consolidate a coherent mode of regulation, global governance’s potential as a hegemonic project lies in its compatibility with the deeper transformations of neoliberal globalization (Brand, 2005a: 158). It belongs not to the initial, Thatcherite phase of neoliberalism – the rolling back of the state – but to the phase that began in the 1990s, with the rolling out of new policies, as in New Labour’s Third Way (Munck, 2005).

Global governance recognizes the need to solve “world problems” such as economic instability, poverty and ecological destruction, cooperatively and in dialogue, by bringing together not only state actors but NGOs and private enterprises from civil society. Elevating protective democracy to the global level, global governance “secures the ‘post-Fordist’ frontier between politics and the economy” by according to the state the role of containing the negative effects of an unassailable economic globalization. Within this framework, the economy is the place of legitimate competition; politics is the place of cooperation (Brand, 2005a: 166). With its emphasis on solving problems in ways that promote competitiveness and capital utilization global governance privileges technocratic knowledge and marginalizes other perspectives (167-168). Ultimately, it acts to neutralize, normalize and legitimate “increasingly obscure forms of capitalist restructuring and expansion”, which tend to deepen and broaden neoliberal domination (Soederberg, 2006: 4).

What is most promising about global governance as a hegemonic project is the manner in which it articulates ‘world society’s’ general interest in political cooperation with each state’s ‘national interest’ in being the most competitive location compared to other countries. By rendering the ‘economic’ inviolable, global governance resolves, in discourse, the contradiction between political cooperation and economic competition. A

general interest in cooperative solutions to problems facing humanity is formulated in which capitalist competition is seen as “something more or less natural” (Brand, 2005a: 170). This is the discursive terrain of compromises now provided by global governance.

### **From Santiago to Baghdad: the Thinning of Hegemony**

The practices and projects I have touched on, schematized on page 34 in Table 1, are loosely articulated together and linked to deeper structures of transnational neoliberal capitalism, via the priority of the market. They make common sense of a market-driven politics and culture, a neoliberal way of life, and infuse into it an organization of consent that operates both locally and globally. Yet this is a deeply problematic way of life. The paradigm shift has accomplished only a *thin* hegemony, a weak basis for social cohesion in the meta-narrative of market-mediated system integration, an ethically debased “possessive individualism”, a postmodern culture that fragments and distracts but does not build active popular loyalties. The weaknesses were already evident, of course, in the destructive phase of neoliberalism, when Bob Jessop (1983) characterized Thatcherism as a “two nations” hegemonic project – intrinsically dividing the social formation into friends and enemies, and thereby creating a narrow base for a comparatively coercive political project.<sup>9</sup>

If anything, the hegemony of capital has thinned further since Jessop penned his reflections. Its key elements – postmodern fragmentation, neoliberalism, globalization – do not comprise a singular project so much as an *assemblage*. What unites these elements is, in the first place, their effectivity in instantiating and reproducing a certain form of capitalism in which the commodification of culture and lifeworld, the deregulation of markets and privatization of social assets, and the expanding transnational reach of accumulation together enable a lifestyle of affluence for the elect, and the semblance of that lifestyle for affluent segments of the working class in the global North. If “hegemony is established when power and control over social life are perceived as emanating from ‘self-government’ ... as opposed to an external source(s) such as the state...” (Chin and Mittelman, 2000: 32), this way of life establishes its hegemony around the self-governing possessive individual – whether the consumer who faces an ever-widening range of options or the investor whose rational choices optimize resource allocation. Self-government along these lines means choices mediated by a benign, global market rather than state-orchestrated programming.

The problem, however, is that the historic bloc, and the ecological base, for this assemblage is shrinking, which is another way of saying that transnational neoliberalism is verging toward organic crisis. Accumulation by dispossession exhausts both the human and natural substratum for industrialized life (Van der Pijl, 1998: 43-49). As disparities widen the state trades consent for coercion, disciplining the less-favoured nation, whether

<sup>9</sup> To sort out the distinction between this *thin* hegemony and domination *without* hegemony, Jessop suggested “...a continuum between an expansive hegemony (a ‘one nation’ project) through various forms of ‘passive revolution’ to an open ‘war of maneuver’ against the popular masses.” (1983: 104).

interpellated as welfare cheats, illegal migrants, old labour, or violent anarchists. For Joachim Hirsch, what issues from deregulation and privatization in the wake of globalization is not so much a thin hegemony but a “non-hegemonic situation” in which dominant states are less and less able to exercise hegemony because they lack the material means to do so (Brand, 2005b: 250). Transnational neoliberalism’s basic mechanisms do not support the wide ranging material concessions of the fordist-Keynesian era, even if postmodern fascination and multiculturalism have dispensed certain symbolic goods to subalterns (Carroll, 2003). Indeed, “the terror of neoliberalism” – the ethical hollowness, the brutality visited upon debtor states – is by now well documented (Giroux, 2004). As the asset bubbles of casino capitalism swell and burst, as global warming and the approach of peak oil expose ecological limits that neoliberalism seems incapable of seriously addressing, the three-decade journey from Santiago to Baghdad<sup>10</sup> seems to lose steam. It appears less an incremental process of transnational historic bloc formation and more a series of episodes in hegemonic crisis management, tinged with a strong dose of great-power imperialism. Neoliberal hegemony, to say the least, is far from secure. Since the mid-1990s the morbid symptoms of its organic crisis have come to include the US-centred new imperialism that threatens to topple the project of global governance (Soederberg, 2006), intensified global and local crises that often originate in the financialized sectors of capitalism, and multiform campaigns and movements of resistance under the banners of anti (or, better, alter) globalization and global justice. It is to the last of these that I turn now.

### **Counter-hegemony**

The term counter-hegemony seems misleadingly complementary to hegemony. In actuality, there is an asymmetry between the two, rooted in the different forms of power that are at stake. John Holloway, working within an autonomist framework inspired by Zapatismo, has written of the struggle to liberate power-to from power-over as “the struggle for the reassertion of social flow of doing, against its fragmentation and denial” (2005: 36). So long as power-over is sustained through an effective blending of persuasion and coercion, hegemony remains intact.

To distinguish practices that liberate power-to from practices that contribute to the replication of power-over, we must return momentarily to critical realism’s transformational model of social activity. If hegemony is deeply grounded beneath the fray of conjunctural politics, we need to distinguish between activity that merely alters a certain state of affairs without effecting any deeper transformation and activity that is transformative (Joseph, 2002: 214). It is the latter that holds the possibility of liberating power-to from power-over. To invoke Nancy Fraser’s (1995) distinction, remedies for social injustice that merely *affirm* a group’s status or entitlements within an existing order

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<sup>10</sup> From September 11, 1973, when General Pinochet seized power in Chile with American backing, subsequently becoming the first neoliberal head of state, to September 19, 2003, when Governor Paul Bremer’s edicts “mandated the construction of a perfected ‘neo-liberal state’ in Iraq” (Harvey, 2005b: 215).

must be distinguished from remedies that *transform* the world in ways that abolish underlying generative mechanisms of injustice.

Such transformation can only take place through concrete political initiatives. Counter-hegemony may portend deep transformation, but it gets its start on, and draws much of its vitality from, the immediate field of the conjunctural, in resistance to the agenda of the dominant hegemony (Hall, 1988). A good deal of counter-hegemonic struggle occurs in direct opposition to the aspects of capitalist hegemony we reviewed earlier – in the rejection of social and semiotic fragmentation, of neoliberal insulation and dispossession, of globalization from above. It is precisely through these oppositional politics that a global justice movement has, since the mid-1990s, taken shape and gained a sense of ethical purpose.

As important as the concreteness of conjunctural politics is, counter-hegemony cannot simply remain on the terrain of hegemony, contesting its issues within its discursive frames. It is not enough to “celebrate the fragments” in a politics of difference, if such celebration simply intensifies the problems of postmodern fragmentation; nor can “reclaiming the commons” be a *resumé* of resistance to neoliberalism. Like the trade-unionism of the fordist era, such politics buy too heavily into hegemonic forms; they seek solutions within the existing hegemony (cf. Russell, 1997; Kebede, 2005). The question is how to relate creatively to the immediate conjuncture while avoiding capture by the hegemonic discourses and practices that inform and organize that conjuncture – how to weld the present to the future, as Gramsci once put it.

### **Historic bloc, war of position**

If hegemony is deeply grounded then counter-hegemony needs to address those grounds. This stricture points to the *articulation* of various subaltern and progressive-democratic currents into a counter-hegemonic bloc that effectively organizes dissent across space and time.

Historic blocs are all about articulation, but which articulations matter? In Stuart Hall’s (1986: 53) conception, articulation is

*a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? ... The ‘unity’ which matters is a linkage between the articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but not necessarily, be connected.*

From a critical realist perspective the most promising articulations are those that mobilize social forces in ways that challenge the underlying bases for hegemony while building

bases for a radical alternative. In opposing an hegemony that fragments the social, that valorizes the anonymous market and possessive individual, that privileges ‘security’ over justice, movements need to rearticulate and transform, to build solidarities, including those spanning South and North. In a Gramscian problematic, a viable *counter*-hegemony draws together subaltern social forces around an alternative ethico-political conception of the world, constructing a common interest that transcends narrower interests situated in the defensive routines of various groups. Such counter-hegemony “has to adopt the organisational capacity to establish a rival historical bloc to the prevailing hegemony by sustaining a long war of position” (Morton, 2000: 261). In this perspective, historic bloc and war of position are dialectically linked at the organic level, representing respectively the synchronic and diachronic aspects of counter-hegemony (Carroll and Ratner, 2000). A war of position “opens space for new spatio-temporal totalities” (Joseph, 2002: 218); it creates the conditions under which a democratic culture and new social order can thrive.

As a radical politic, this approach emphasizes the need for counter-hegemonic movement *to walk on both legs*, taking up state-centred issues as well as issues resident in national and transnational civil societies.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, reclaiming the state – democratizing state practices in the wake of neoliberal globalization – is elemental to counter-hegemony today (Wainwright, 2003). Within this framework, states are neither privileged nor forsaken as sites of struggle and change, but state-centred politics is understood as one part of broader transformations (Brand, 2005b: 248).

Often romanticized as the world’s first post-modern movement, the Zapatistas actually exemplify what walking on two legs might look like in a world dominated by transnational neoliberalism. Their rejection of Leninist and social democratic strategies to take state power directly, their emphasis on the political struggle over the military struggle, their attention to dignity as an ethical principle are all obvious aspects of a creatively conducted war of position. The Zapatista’s “Other Campaign”, launched in 2005, engaged subversively with the electoral process to consolidate the anti-capitalist left. Instead of running candidates, the Other Campaign called for the enactment of a new national constitution that would bar privatization of public resources and other neo-liberal moves, and insure autonomy for Mexico’s 57 distinct indigenous peoples (Ross, 2005). The call for a new constitution is hardly a rejection of state-centred politics; rather, it is a refusal to be co-opted into the game of bourgeois statist politics. With their clever approach to the state and civil society, the Zapatistas provide clues as to how “to conduct politics with reference to the state without moving oneself in state forms and thus actually reproducing

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<sup>11</sup> For Gramsci’s formulation of this “dual perspective” – in which he famously invoked Machiavelli’s Centaur – see Gramsci (1971: 169-70). The editors of the first English edition of *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* characterize the dual perspective as “the dialectical unity of the moments of force and consent in political action” (Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey N. Smith, in Gramsci 1971: 169, note 70). I thank Bill Livant for the metaphor of walking on two legs.

existing relationships of domination” (Brand and Hirsch, 2004: 377).

### **Ethical vision and political form**

Significantly, an historic bloc is more than a mechanical assemblage of pragmatic alliances; it is an ensemble of relations and practices made durable through both ethical vision and political form. These issues have not been lost on observers of and participants in the global justice movement. Let me telegraph some of the key concerns, first ethical and then formal.

John Schwarzmantel has discerned an ethic of self-development that fuels the movement’s widespread cultivation of participatory forms such as lateral organization and affinity groups. The quest for a common vision always contains the danger of dogmatic closure, against which the best defense is inclusiveness:

*This new counter-ideology needs to be inclusive.... It must therefore draw on elements in different ideologies which encourage such inclusion on a democratic basis, and point out the distortions of past forms of ideological politics. This is where feminism and green politics have a role to play...as correctives to the rigidity and blind spots of past ideological politics.” (2005: 96).*

For Peter Waterman, an effective “globalization from below” requires a “dialogical ethic” in which “procedures allow for the possibility of developing a common discourse” among different and unequal partners (2000: 139). What is needed, according to Mark Neufeld, is “a kind of ethics of solidarity that acknowledges difference (and does not try to reduce it to something “merely contingent”)” but which simultaneously concerns itself with identifying the commonalities within differences ... “that make collective action both necessary and possible” (2001: 96).<sup>12</sup>

Nancy Fraser’s theorization of social justice politics in post-socialist and globalizing times is germane to this discussion. Her distinction between affirmative and transformative politics helps delineate the ethics that might inform a counter-hegemonic bloc from political interventions whose successes are typically won within a matrix of passive revolution. Fraser’s contribution to rethinking counter-hegemony has been made in two stages. She first considered how, in a “post-socialist” context, the cultural *politics of*

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<sup>12</sup> Although post-Marxists like Laclau and Mouffe have tended to attribute a latent authoritarianism to Gramsci’s notion of collective will, Sanbonmatsu points to “strong evidence that Gramsci envisioned not some ‘absolute’ incorporation of subordinated elements ... but merely a *practical* coherence, i.e. one able to achieve particular, concrete historical goals.” (2004: 178). Sanbonmatsu interprets Gramsci as having worked within a dialectic of unity and difference, evident both in his critique of Esperanto as a bourgeois universalist fantasy and in his claim that the modern prince “establishes its hegemony linguistically not by eradicating local differences and dialects, but rather by ‘translating’ its own vision into an intelligible vernacular -- into a political syntax to articulate organically to the actual, diverse conditions and lived experiences of the people in all their diversity” (Sanbonmatsu, 2004: 181). For a contemporary discussion of translation as a mode of global counter-hegemonic politics see Santos (2005).

*recognition* might be articulated with a material *politics of distribution*, in ways that promote transformation. The most promising combination is a socialist politics of redistribution and a deconstructive politics of recognition, which go beyond affirming existing subaltern needs and identities, to seek transformation of the mechanisms that generate inequality and disrespect. Counter-hegemonic politics thereby breaks from the reformist gestures of affirmation while combining struggles for ‘cultural recognition and social equality in forms that support rather than undermine one another’ (Fraser, 1995:69).

A decade later, Fraser has identified a third dimension of (in)justice, namely the state-centred *politics of representation*, which has been recently problematized as globalization drives “a widening wedge between state-territoriality and social effectivity” (2005: 83; see Table 2 on page 35). In a globalizing world, the Westphalian frame, which “partitions political space in ways that block many who are poor or despised from challenging the forces that oppress them”, is revealed to be a “powerful instrument of injustice” (Fraser, 2005: 78). The central political question becomes: “how can we integrate struggles against maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation within a *post-Westphalian* frame?” (Fraser, 2005: 79). For Fraser, a transformative politics of representation rejects the hegemonic arrogation to states and transnational elites of control over the framing of political representation. It embraces a dialogical conception of justice framed in terms of parity of participation and the “all-affected principle”.<sup>13</sup> Fraser holds that, owing to the “deep internal connections between democracy and justice” (2005: 85), there can be no redistribution or recognition – in a transformative sense – without representation (2005: 86).

Inclusive participation, dialogical ethics, an ethics of solidarity that acknowledges difference, the principled integration of transformative struggles – these provide a moral centre of gravity around which a counter-hegemonic bloc can converge in our era.

As intimated above, such a bloc derives its durability not only from a shared ethical vision but from a political *form* appropriate to its tasks. From the mid-19th century through much of the twentieth century, political parties and broader Internationals were the putative forms; indeed, Gramsci’s own conception of the modern prince was that of a political party. The key question as to the form that a counter-hegemonic bloc might take in contemporary times has been posed by John Sanbonmatsu:

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<sup>13</sup> Defined as parity of participation, “justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life. Overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent some people from participating on par with others, as full partners in social interaction” (Fraser, 2005: 73). The all-affected principle, which Fraser considers the most promising candidate to supersede the Keynesian-Westphalian frame, “holds that all those affected by a given social structure or institution have moral standing as subjects in relation to it” (2005: 82). When international feminists, development activists, environmentalists, trade unionists and Indigenous peoples make claims against the structures that harm them, “*even when the latter cannot be located in the space of places*”, they are invoking the all-affected principle (Fraser, 2005: 84).



*Can the now-dispersed forces of emancipation, having been forced by history to abandon the “skin” of socialism and the International, the Party, discover or invent a new form? A way to unite the many dispersed, confused, largely reactive elements struggling to right injustice and bring about a new civilization – before it is too late? (2004: 9).*

Sanbonmatsu’s name for the new collective subject is the “postmodern prince”. To be sure, such a gathering-up is a daunting task. In comparison with the well organized, if thin, transnational historic bloc that has formed around neoliberalism, with its strong presence in mainstream political parties, policy-planning groups and national and transnational state apparatuses (Gill, 1995; Carroll and Carson, 2003; Robinson, 2004), what I have been calling the global justice movement, and what Sanbonmatsu tentatively terms the global left, “is *gestaltlos* – ‘without form’” (2004: 11). Inventing a political form that is both ethically and strategically appropriate is a major challenge for those committed to transformative politics.

### **New Directions**

Sanbonmatsu may exaggerate somewhat in his diagnosis. One could say that the global left is not so much without form as it is without *singular* form – yet his point is well taken. Since the 1999 Battle in Seattle, the movement has shown itself to be capable of staging episodic wars of maneuver – most impressively in the weeks leading up to the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, when the largest political mobilization in world history occurred. Yet between such campaigns, the movement seems to fall into abeyance and perhaps loses momentum.

In part, this may reflect the changed conditions for struggle in postmodern and neoliberal times. Opposition to globalizing neoliberalism occurs in many local contexts, on a variety of scales and around diverse grievances – giving the movement an inchoate character not unlike the contingent and fragmentary forms taken by neoliberal accumulation. The trend among activists, according to David Harvey, is

*to look to the ad hoc but more flexible organizational forms that can be built within civil society to respond to such struggles. The whole field of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-globalization struggle has consequently been reconfigured and a very different political dynamic has been set in motion (2005b: 174).*

This reconfiguration is a necessary aspect of contemporary counter-hegemony. The labour-left politics of organized capitalism, predicated on the logic of expanded capitalist reproduction, cannot be simply transplanted into an era when accumulation by

dispossession provokes indigenous struggles for land, cyberactivist open-source initiatives, political campaigns against privatization, etc. These open a “political dynamic of social action across the whole spectrum of civil society” (Harvey, 2005b: 166, 168, 172), but they do not displace or even diminish the politics of labour. “Finding the organic link between these different movements is an urgent theoretical and practical task,” says Harvey (2005a: 203). “The divide-and-rule politics of ruling-class elites must be confronted with alliance politics on the left sympathetic to the recuperation of local powers of self-determination” (2005a: 203).

In underlining the importance of that organic link between the politics of labour and the project to reclaim commons, Harvey gives us the first of several convergences and new initiatives to be discussed in this penultimate section. Given that neoliberal insulation and dispossession have been instituted in great part to restore capitalist class power, revitalization of organized labour, together with its articulation with other movements, is a premise for any effective counter-hegemonic response.

As labour movements begin to recover from the neoliberal onslaught, as they transform and revitalize themselves into collective agencies suited to these times (Turner, 2005: 396; Frege and Kelly, 2004), a key challenge is to break out of the Westphalian frame within which unions have operated since the 1940s. It is tempting to envisage this as a *transnational networking* among union activists and leaders. What is of prime importance, however, is not the internationalization of the network but the internationalization of the *struggle* – “carrying on the fight (for example, over worktime) in each country and thereby reinforcing and creating the space for working class struggles in other countries” (Gindin, 1997: 157). More generally, counter-hegemonic globalization should not be reduced to networking. It often means pressing in local contexts for changes whose site-specific benefits open opportunities for activists elsewhere to make similar claims.

Just as challenging is the need to take labour politics beyond the economic framing that became hegemonic in the 20th century. If we recognize as workers all those who have nothing to sell but their labour power, many struggles to reclaim the commons, and many issues taken up by so-called new social movements, are not detached from class politics but expressive of *other needs* of workers (Lebowitz, 2003: 186). As Mike Lebowitz has emphasized in a masterful work, labour’s struggle against capital is in part a struggle within the human being herself:

*Given the worker’s own need for development, inherent in the situation of wage-labour is dissatisfaction with self, the inability to satisfy the needs generated within capitalism. As rebel, as restlessness, the worker struggles against capital and in the process transforms herself” (2003: 207).*

The counter-hegemonic moment of labour struggle is not the *affirmation* of the wage-worker's entitlements but the *transformation* of wage-labour, the liberation of power-to from power-over – the drive *beyond capital*, to a form of society capable of satisfying human needs for self-development.

The link between labour politics and struggles to reclaim the commons is deeply seated both in the opposition to neoliberal insulation and dispossession and in the multiplex character of workers' needs. For this reason, great potential exists for a convergence of agendas between revitalized labour movements and other popular struggles worldwide, even if the articulation between these forms of counter-hegemony is bound to be complex and contextually dependent. One of the most important of these convergences, momentarily visible at the Battle in Seattle as “Teamsters and Turtles” were “United At Last”, is that between labour and ecology. Without class politics, ecology gets framed as wilderness preservation and green consumerism, losing its critically transformative edge; without an ecological perspective, unions can be coopted into capital's unsustainable, grow-or-die logic, and reduced to interest groups chasing after ever-higher volumes of commodity consumption. As Laurie Adkin has written, “it is when the ‘environmentalist’ confronts the crisis of livelihood of the ‘worker,’ and when the ‘worker’ confronts the destructive impacts of her livelihood that alternatives to the hegemonic model begin to be not only thinkable, but necessary” (1992: 136).

Alongside the convergences of major anti-systemic movements, certain emerging fields of activism offer promising *articulation points* for counter-hegemony, and merit close attention. Among the most important is the politics of media democratization.<sup>14</sup> Corporate control of mass media has produced a democratic deficit of vast scope, which poses a great barrier to counter-hegemony – not only in the limits it places upon permissible discourse (Chomsky, 1989) but in the alienating and fragmenting impact that the commodification of communication has on communities and publics. The interests of all progressive movements converge on the need to recover a vibrant public sphere, making the struggle to democratize public communication a critical point of articulation in contemporary movement politics.

As Bob Hackett and I show in our study of media activism in three countries (Carroll and Hackett, 2006; Hackett and Carroll, 2006), media democrats have taken up the struggle in a plethora of contexts. They have framed political projects in different ways and have adopted a variety of strategies and organizational forms, from system-focused groups (e.g. Friends of Canadian Broadcasting) to lifeworld-oriented groups like IndyMedia and Adbusters. When we look at media activism ‘on the ground’ we find many of the rudiments of counter-hegemonic politics. Activists often combine in their praxis a system focus and a lifeworld focus. Many realize that the struggle to democratize communication

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<sup>14</sup> This paragraph and the next one draw upon material in Hackett and Carroll (2006: Chapter 11).

needs to proceed simultaneously on multiple fronts and in conjunction with other movements. Communicative democracy comprises a social vision – an ethics – that has been missing on the left. It requires equitable access to the means of communication, implying a pluralistic media system in which the voices of citizens and communities carry into a vibrant and diverse public sphere. In pursuing this social vision on several fronts including those of state, corporate media and lifeworld, media democrats build a nexus among movements, a place where strategies might converge across issue areas and movement identities.

What we can take from this brief discussion of media activism is the overwhelming importance to counter-hegemony of reclaiming or creating the means and forms of communication necessary for subaltern groups to find their voices and to organize both locally and globally. The most promising general initiative in this direction has been the World Social Forum (WSF), first convened in 2001, and the broader Forum Process that has taken root in many places worldwide in the past few years. The WSF is a clear sign of a transnational historic bloc in formation, a counter-hegemonic “open space”, the progressive-democratic antithesis to the World Economic Forum (Teivainen, 2004: 123; Wallerstein, 2005; Carroll, 2006). The question of *form* has been creatively addressed at the Forum; we have much to learn from these debates.

Particularly since it moved in 2004 to a decentralized, radically democratic mode of organizing its annual meeting, with participating organizations setting the agenda of activities, the WSF has become “a new kind of political space created by and helping to consolidate a transnational subaltern counterpublic” (Conway, 2004: 376; cf Fraser, 2005: 84). The WSF is ideologically diverse, but not to the point of incoherence (participation is effectively restricted to those opposed to neoliberalism and imperialism). In contrast to the world-wide protest symbolized by 1968, which entailed parallel movements, each bounded by national borders, the protest against neoliberalism that is at the core of the WSF is organized globally (Waterman, 2004: 60-61), around a non-doctrinal vision of social justice and ecological well being.

From its inception, the WSF has directly challenged the structural premises of contemporary hegemony we reviewed earlier. It comprises part of an ongoing war of position within global civil society (Smith, 2005; Carroll, 2006) – an organic process that complements and extends the episodic wars of maneuver that have disrupted elite summits since the 1990s. Striking directly at the level of meaning, its response to the central premise of neoliberal hegemony since Thatcher – “there is no alternative” – is “there are many alternatives” (Sen, 2004: 213; De Angelis, 2004). Crucially, its base in the South challenges the Eurocentrism that has been foundational to hegemony in the modern era (Said, 1978). In the dialogue between Southern subaltern and Northern oppositional

movements, “the articulation must be from the perspective of the subaltern in that the oppositional movements arising from within modernity must be critically aware of the eurocentrism of their knowledges” (Conway, 2007: 16). This work of *translation* – of building mutual intelligibility and post-Westphalian solidarity among diverse local and transnational social forces opposing neoliberalism and imperialism – is at the centre of the Forum process (Santos, 2005).

Yet there is a dilemma built into this process, between the “open meeting place” and the aspiration to take collective action. On the one hand, the WSF’s “open, free, horizontal structures” enable a prefigurative politics of participatory democracy that incubates political futures. To instrumentalize the Forum would be to sacrifice this aspect of counter-hegemony for tactical gains in the immediate conjuncture (Whitaker, 2004: 112-113). On the other hand, as the Forum process has developed, the perennial absence of a “Final Document” has led to criticisms that the WSF is little more than “one huge talking shop” (Keraghel and Sen, 2004: 487).

Whether the WSF can rise to the challenge of constituting itself as a *hybrid* of arena and actor, or at least manage the tension between the two, is unclear at this point,<sup>15</sup> but Hugo Chavez’s speech to the Forum this past January underlined the urgency of incorporating an agenda of action. Echoing the Consensus Manifesto of 2005, Chavez challenged the Forum to address the question of power:

*We must have a strategy of ‘counter-power.’ We, the social movements and political movements, must be able to move into spaces of power at the local, national and regional level (quoted in Bello and Malig, 2006).*

Indeed, the Bolivarian project within Venezuela, and the more recent Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), remind us that counter-hegemony walks on both legs. Remarkable changes are underway in Venezuela:

- the adoption in 1999 of a Constitution unprecedented in its commitment to citizen participation, democratic planning and “developing the creative potential of every human being and the full exercise of his or her personality in a democratic society” (Article 102, quoted in Lebowitz, 2005);
- the transformation of organized labour after the failed military coup of 2002 and

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<sup>15</sup> At the close of the 2005 Forum, 19 high-profile thinkers, including Tariq Ali, Samir Amin, Walden Bello and Immanuel Wallerstein, issued a 12-point “Consensus Manifesto” that would pull the WSF in the direction of a meta-movement – foregrounding the ends to which the WSF should direct its energy and the (state-centred) means for reaching them. In June 2006, the Forum announced a shift to a more praxis-based process of collaborative agenda-setting for the upcoming meeting in Nairobi. Its preparatory consultation was centred not on substantive themes but on “actions, campaigns and struggles in which organisations / networks / entities participating in the WSF process are engaged” (<http://consultation.wsf2007.org>).

failed “oil coup” of 2002-3, from a class-collaborationist instrument of the Washington Consensus to a movement committed to international solidarity and workers’ control of the means of production (Gindin, 2005);

- land reform both in rural settings (DeLong, 2005) and, through Urban Land Committees, in the cities (Holland, 2006); and
- creation of state-sanctioned “parallels” to gradually displace hegemonic institutions in finance, health, education, media etc. (Vera-Zavala, 2005) and, beginning in April 2006, of communal councils through which citizens can take over direct administration of policies and projects in response to needs and aspirations of local communities (Fuentes, 2006).<sup>16</sup>

Enabled by a favourable conjuncture that includes high petroleum prices, mutual aid with Cuba, a reawakening of the left throughout Latin America, and a weakening of American imperial power, the Bolivarian process may well portend the world’s first successful democratic-socialist revolution. In the transnational field, ALBA presents a state-centred aspect of historic-bloc formation no less important than the civil society-centred Forum process – a radical alternative to “free trade” that “raises the possibility and hope of development driven by the needs of the poor and the marginalized” (Kellogg, 2006: 2). From its initial base in a Cuba-Venezuela mutual-aid arrangement (e.g., Cuban physicians for Venezuelan oil), ALBA has expanded with a joint initiative focused on countries of the Caribbean (Petrocaribe, proposed in 2005) and with the addition of Bolivia as a third ALBA partner in April, 2006 (Kellogg, 2006: 7-8).

It goes without saying that the success of ALBA (or of the WSF) is not guaranteed. So far, the Bolivarian project has managed to walk on both legs, transforming both state and economy while enriching civil society. But whether the project’s main political-party component, the 5th Republic Movement (MVR), can break with traditional politics is unclear (Vera-Zavala 2005). And although ALBA offers a socially just alternative to transnational neoliberalism, without sustained pressure and participation from below it could degenerate into a regional variant of state capitalism (Kellogg, 2006:18).

The possibilities ALBA raises – the shifts from profit-driven free trade to mutual aid, from globalization from above via “global governance” to transnational cooperation driven by social needs – point up the crucial importance of going beyond *engagement* with states, to *democratize* state institutions and to put them into the service of creating another world.

### **Anti-hegemony**

The position I have outlined here partly overlaps and partly contrasts with an approach we

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<sup>16</sup> Scholarly analysis of the Bolivarian process is just beginning to catch up with praxis. See Figueroa (2006) and Gibbs (2006) for reasonably up-to-date studies.

might term “anti-hegemonic.” Counter-hegemonic politics aspires to build consensus around an emancipatory project – to go beyond the fragments of resistant subcultures and movements, to forge ‘political unity across cultural differences’ (Sanbonmatsu, 2004: 130), supporting an alternative social vision.

Anti-hegemony operates according to a different logic. It is skeptical of attempts to construct a general interest, to build unity. It trumpets a politics of dispersed singularities, discounting or even disavowing the need for consensus and coordinated political action (Carroll and Ratner 1994: 13). For Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the most influential contemporary thinkers of this persuasion, whose books have inspired a new generation of activists to rediscover Marx, postmodern globalization has replaced imperialism with Empire, an unbounded, post-industrial capitalism in which states are largely irrelevant and state-centred politics passé.

In *Empire*, the power of capital is everywhere, yet so is resistance to it. But resistance takes a “serpentine” form, “slithering silently” across fragmented post-modern landscapes (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 57-58). The multitude struggles, but its struggles have become “*all but incommunicable*” (54). As a diagnosis of the times, *Empire* was made almost instantly obsolescent shortly after its publication, as the US-led “war on terrorism” began to implement the statist Project for the New American Century while the World Social Forum began to gather up the fragments of a possible counter-hegemonic bloc.

In their sequel, *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri give some ground to the counter-hegemonic concern with articulation, as they reach for a way to conceptualize the multitude:

*The new global cycle of struggles is a mobilization of the common that takes the form of an open, distributed network, in which no center exerts control and all nodes express themselves freely (2004: 218).*

The multitude embodies democracy; it is “*living flesh that rules itself*” (2004: 100); but it is unclear how its local singularities culminate in a challenge to capital’s rule – which may be why Hardt and Negri close their sequel with the mythic and unconvincing scenario of a “strong event” that thrusts us “like an arrow” into the future (2004: 358).

A further difficulty arises in their analysis of the state. “*The state has been defeated and corporations now rule the earth!*” they exclaim in *Empire*, precluding struggles to transform social space using state institutions (2000: 307-308). Indeed, “democracy today takes the form of a subtraction, a flight, an exodus from sovereignty” (2004: 341). Compared to a war of position, exodus puts the forces favouring global justice at a strategic disadvantage. It forgets that

*if we ignore the state, it does not follow that it will ignore us. Resistance as exodus carries the promise that we can cultivate our own garden, that we can find a space where we can live despite capitalism. But capital today, vigorously aided by the state, is invading the gardens of the world and sowing them with genetically modified crops (Callinicos, 2006: 256).*

What the Bolivarian project, and particularly ALBA, show is that despite neoliberal attempts to insulate capital from democracy, states still matter, not as reified political containers from which we must escape but as social ensembles to be democratized in the construction of a democratic, transnational state/society complex. The curiously dualistic choice that Hardt and Negri (2004: 190-192, 211, 217) present to us – the stolid defeatism of old-style, state-centric leftism or a carnivalesque multitude in flight – manages to rule out the most viable political option.

This brings me finally to a particularly strong and clear statement of the anti-hegemonic position by Richard Day (2005). In *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, he seeks to recover the radical impulse of post-1968 French theory “by articulating how a non-reformist, non-revolutionary politics can in fact lead to progressive social change that responds to the needs and aspirations of disparate identities without attempting to subsume them under a common project” (2005: 10). Day submits that the answer to neoliberal hegemony is not counter-hegemony but a rejection of the logic of hegemony itself, a turn to direct action, non-branded strategies and tactics, and the creation of prefigurative change within communities formed around identities not yet normalized within the global system (2005: 8, 183).

Clearly, non-branded tactics such as the impedance of institutions through blockades and the construction of temporary autonomous zones can be valuable in the conduct of a war of maneuver, just as development of activist networks and of communities based on mutual aid contributes to a war of position by building capacity for another world. But I doubt that these tactics, and the broader practice of structural renewal (rendering the system redundant by withdrawing energy from its structures (Day, 2005: 124)), add up to a viable alternative to counter-hegemony. What Day underestimates is the totalizing dynamic of capital, against which the strategy of rendering existing social relations redundant can be no more than a retreat to self-limiting experiments contained and even engulfed by the commodification of everyday life. Further, since capital and wage labour only exist as antitheses of each other, the call to render the system redundant is self-contradictory, unless one absents oneself from class struggle. This is precisely what Day does, with his embrace of Baudrillard’s thesis on the postmodern masses: “the masses of the First World have chosen quiescence, and nothing we can do will change their behavior for the better” (Day, 2005: 126). This interpretation flags real elements of contemporary hegemony – postmodern fragmentation, possessive individualism – but instead of positing



them as contested terrain it reifies them into a prison from which only a few can escape. Proceeding from such profound pessimism of the will, anti-hegemony regresses to a micropolitical effort to “create more opportunities for more people to choose a life of autonomy over one of subservience” (2005: 13) – a lifestyle choice within the postmodern panoply, a niche claimed by non-masses with a taste for anarchism.

As with Hardt and Negri, part of that taste amounts to an aversion to anything that smacks of form, coherence and organization. Day invites his readers to “trust in non-unified, incoherent, non-hegemonic forces for social change” (2005: 155). Like Foucault before them, these advocates of anti-hegemony eschew the combination of organization, leadership and strategy that is indispensable in countering a dominant hegemony (Cocks, 1989: 74-75). Commenting on the troubled state of the left in the United States, John Sanbonmatsu suggests that what is missing from anti-hegemony

*is an effective leadership willing and able to organize the scattered and isolated movements of the powerless into a coherent whole. ... So long as many on the left continue to refuse leadership and to neglect a strategic orientation, i.e., a sense of a meaningful alternative to the present order, and the concrete objectives necessary to get there, social movements will continue to lurch from crisis to crisis (2004: 154).<sup>17</sup>*

This critique is not to deny the important insights that analyses such as Day’s provide. He is surely correct to reject both the fantasy of “total liberation ... once and for all” (2005: 154) and the exclusive focus on “hegemonic change via the state form” (2005: 176). He is just as surely correct to promote prefiguration as a crucial aspect of radical politics. Transformative justice politics require “that people be weaned from their attachment to current cultural constructions of their interests and identities” (Fraser, 1995: 91). Prefiguration, enabling people to live differently *now*, is how that weaning happens. But these are not excerpts from Gramsci’s symbolic death certificate; they are precisely the stuff of a Gramscian war of position.<sup>18</sup>

In this sense, anti-hegemony is not so much wrongheaded as it is incomplete. It hobbles on one leg, refusing strategy, leadership, organization, the state. Its insights, particularly on the value of direct action and prefiguration, need to be integrated into a strategically coherent form.

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<sup>17</sup> The importance of strategy and leadership follows directly from critical-realist depth ontology. Counter-hegemony entails “some notion of a leading and directing role which seeks to transform not just anything, but the most important social structures and relations. Hence the transformational model of social activity must be linked to some kind of [counter-]hegemonic project. It requires a strategic element that gives it purpose and direction” (Joseph 2002: 214). As Ross notes in an incisive analysis, what is problematic in anti-hegemonic politics “is not that leaders exist, but that they are denied. Such denial, twinned with an uncompromising ideological rejection of leadership *tout court*, results in leadership unbound by structures of accountability, and/or the castigation of those who take on necessary leadership functions” (2002: 294).

But which form? The past dozen years, since the Zapatistas declared war on NAFTA, have been a time of experimentation in, not rejection of, form. As formations like WSF emerge, the ethico-political frameworks that might guide construction of another world are concretized in practice, provoking further reflection and learning.<sup>19</sup> Participatory democracy, post-Westphalian solidarities, an ethics of unity in diversity – these emergent sensibilities suggest the feasibility of a convergence of struggles, in and around a political form that organically links South and North, that synthesizes justice with ecology and that creatively addresses both the deeply structured bases of contemporary hegemony and the imminent possibilities for going beyond not only neoliberalism but capital (Hart-Landsberg, 2006:10). The next left, the new international, must not only walk on both legs; it must be amphibious in the sense invoked by Derek Wall (2005: 178): “half in the dirty water of the present but seeking to move on to a new, unexplored territory.” What remains for us all to answer, in practice, is the question Gramsci (1977: 65) posed in 1919: “How can the present be welded to the future, so that while satisfying the urgent necessities of the one we may work effectively to create and ‘anticipate’ the other?”

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<sup>18</sup> Prefiguration was central to Gramsci’s conception of counter-hegemony. “More than any other Marxist of his time, Gramsci articulated a prefigurative conception of struggle that advanced a new model of public life – one that emphasized the *simultaneous* overturning of economic production relations, political decision-making, culture and social life, i.e., the transformation of the entire social division of labour under capitalism. Above all, a prefigurative movement meant that politics would be integrated into the everyday social existence of people struggling to change the world, so that the elitism, authoritarianism, and impersonal style typical of bureaucracy could be more effectively combated” (Boggs, 1976: 100).

<sup>19</sup> For penetrating reflections on this process, from intellectuals organic to it, see the ongoing series of articles by fellows of the Transnational Institute, at <http://www.tni.org/socforum/index.htm>.

Table 1: Elements of Hegemony in the Current Era

	Structural grounding (deep hegemony)	Hegemonic project // practice	Hegemonic effects
Postmodern Fragmentation	Commodification of everyday life; the post-modern as cultural dominant	Social fragmentation into style cultures and identity politics; semantic implosion; political disorganization and disorientation	Consent without consensus; opposition is hampered by élan, distraction and the evening down of politics
Neoliberalism A: Insulation via market liberalization	Deregulation, free trade, etc. as means of expanded reproduction; insulating capital from regulations that impede profitability, also insulating key transnational states agencies from popular will	Protective democracy and the competition state, strict demarcation of the political from a protected economic realm	Depoliticization of capitalist class power, redefinition of the national interest as institutional competitiveness Priority of the market disorganizes subaltern groups. Possessive individualism as a hegemonic code weakens collective identities and claims to social justice
Neoliberalism B: Accumulation by dispossession	Opening new venues for surplus capital via privatization of public assets, financialization, biopiracy, enclosure of the commons and other predatory acts	Privatization of the public interest, valorization of freedom as consumer choice and possessive individualism	Displacement of crisis impulses (and of the brunt of coercion) to the periphery
Capitalist globalization	Densification of international capital circuits, particularly financial, enhances structural power of capital.	Globalization as metanarrative, as hegemonic crisis management; the project of global governance	Human fungibility as a universal; global political cooperation within an economic field dominated by transnational capital

**Table 2: Three dimensions of contemporary justice politics  
(based on Fraser, 1995; 2005)**

<b>Type of injustice</b>	<b>Form of remedy</b>	
	<i>Affirmation within extant relations</i>	<i>Transformation of generative mechanisms</i>
<b>Recognition (status)</b>	Liberal pluralism (e.g. multiculturalism)	Deconstruction (e.g. queering identity)
<b>Redistribution (class)</b>	Liberal reallocation (e.g. KWS)	Restructure economic relations (e.g. socialism)
<b>Representation (state)</b>	Redraw state boundaries or create states (e.g. national liberation)	Change grammar of political representation (e.g. WSP as a transnational public sphere)

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