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*Our Mandate*

This journal represents an attempt to explore issues, ideas, and problems that lie at the intersection between the academic disciplines of social science and the body of thought and political practice that has constituted Marxism over the last 150 years. New Proposals is a journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry that is dedicated to the radical transformation of the contemporary world order. We see our role as providing a platform for research, commentary, and debate of the highest scholarly quality that contributes to the struggle to create a more just and humane world, in which the systematic and continuous exploitation, oppression, and fratricidal struggles that characterize the contemporary sociopolitical order no longer exist.

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*Cover:* No Olympics on Stolen native Land, Vancouver 2010. Jamie Cooper photograph.

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## Contents

### Introduction

- Retrospection and Hope in a Democratic Socialist Alternative 5  
*Charles R. Menzies*

### Featured Article

- Social Movements and Counter-Hegemony: 7  
Lessons from the Field  
*William K. Carroll and R. S. Ratner*

### Comments and Arguments

- Base, Superstructure, Aesthetic Level: further notes on a theory 23  
*Gary Tedman*

### Articles

- Learning a Lesson: An Anarchist's Defense of Marxism Based Socialism 29  
*Arpad Kovacs*
- Sports Commentators and Late Monopoly Capitalist Indoctrination 35  
in the United States  
*Kirk Packwood*
- LOHAS and the Indigo Dollar: Growing the Spiritual Economy 48  
*Joseph Gelfer*



## *Introduction*

# Retrospection and Hope in a Democratic Socialist Alternative

Charles R. Menzies

*New Proposals Editorial Collective*

In the face of continued global crisis we need to be able to look somewhere to find real, meaningful hope in a way out. Our political leaders continue to remain entrapped within a world wherein only market solutions have any currency.

Here in British Columbia (BC) our political leaders are, true to form, lost in arguments over taxation – the consensus being no tax is good. We have watched the unimaginable take place. Activists that motivated the types of social movements Carroll and Ratner discuss in our feature article are now forging anti-tax alliances with people they once led protests against. Famed social commentator and former 1980's student activist Bill Tieleman (<http://billtieleman.blogspot.com>) has become the co-leader of a populist anti-tax movement with deep roots in the Tea Party-like homegrown BC conservative movement. Who is his partner in protest? Bill Vander Zalm, a former Social Credit Party premier in BC who was forced to resign in 1991 for mixing his private business with public affairs. Strange bedfellows indeed in this old-fashioned campaign for smaller government and reduced taxes. It's hard to find hope in this mix.

Carroll and Ratner's paper shows that despite the antics of individuals there are collective solutions that can have real effect in shaping a better world. I am drawn to calling their analysis incisive – penetrating, clear and sharp. It's what the times call for. Effective organization for the future needs to understand our past experiences.

Carroll and Ratner's analysis focuses upon three decades of research into counter-hegemonic movements in BC. Why should activists and theorists in other parts of the world care about what happens here, on the Canadian 'left coast' of North America? Our population is relatively small in terms of the land mass and our immediate neighbours to the south (such as Washington and California). Four and a half million people live within the 950,000 km<sup>2</sup> (365,000 sq mi) area that makes up BC (an area bigger than the nation of France). Even though BC is a preferred tourist destination of outdoors enthusiasts, we aren't really noted for the arts and letters. But BC has been on the forefront of a century of innovation and struggle in the ongoing contest between Labour and Capital.

BC's politics, often maligned in the rest of Canada for its 'wackiness,' has been structured by a clear political polarization almost from the beginnings of representative democracy in the 1870s. Bloody and aggressive labour conflicts flared up in the early resource extraction industries of mining, forestry, and fisheries. In the years leading up to World War I union leaders were shot on the docks in Vancouver and hunted down at gunpoint in the wilds surrounding mines on Vancouver Island. Wildcat strikes were common throughout much of BC's labour history and militant socialist and communist unions persisted long after their demise in other parts of North America well into the 1970s and early 1980s.

BC also has the dubious honor of being one of

the first places in the world to try and implement the new liberal agenda of downsizing government and cutting debts in the early 1980s under the provincial leadership of Bill Bennett and the Social Credit Party of BC (Menziez, *New Proposals* 3(2):43-44). Bennett's attack on working class conditions of life and work was met with a major push back by organized labour and community organizations. This social movement is the starting point for Carroll and Ratner's analysis. In the face of labour and progressive defeats their article documents a way in which effective counter-hegemonic struggles can be organized and won.

BC may be a hinterland on the margins of global capitalist production. But perhaps it is this very fact of marginality that makes it possible for the emergence of effective and progressive social movements that can and have threatened the viability of global capital. As Carroll and Ratner show us it is possible to "find common ground in an ethical-political project that unifies oppositional cultures around a democratic socialist alternative to capital's injustices and ecological calamities" (this issue p. 20).

## Social Movements and Counter-Hegemony: Lessons from the Field

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**ABSTRACT:** The urban centre of Vancouver, British Columbia has been a fecund research site for the study of capital, state, and social movement relations over the past three decades. In this article, we summarize the findings of our research program spanning that politically volatile period, and we reflect on the formidable, but not insuperable, obstacles to challenging the authority of global capital. We conclude that a 'transformative politics' articulated through a neo-Gramscian approach and rooted in a generative 'globalization-from-below' is the most promising basis for counter-hegemony today.

**Keywords:** social movements; counter-hegemony; Gramsci; civil society; neoliberalism; historic bloc; war of position; social democracy; organic intellectuals

In an era when some academic sociologists have declared an end to class (Pakulski and Waters 1996), when others have argued that movement politics is now centred around "symbolic challenges" rather than material needs (Melucci 1996), and when still others declare the death of transformative politics that attempt to bring disparate currents into mutual alignment (Day 2005), the cultural authority of Marxism, and of the broad left, is under suspicion. For historical materialism, the emergence of "new social movements" has brought the challenge of mapping these diverse forms of popular struggle into a theoretical space defined primarily by classes and states. For the left, the challenge has been to move beyond the now doubtful projects of Leninism and social democracy, and beyond the fragments of multiform oppositional politics that the new movements have activated, toward a more durable unity-in-diversity that respects difference while building support for a

radical alternative to capitalist modernity. In addressing these challenges, within the domain of empirical sociology, we have found Antonio Gramsci to be a particularly helpful theorist. This paper condenses and reflects on some of our findings from studies of social movements in the last three decades.

Gramsci's great achievement was to bring to Marxism a language of politics that recognizes that the state is more than an apparatus of coercion, that the classes that compose historic blocs are not determined solely by the relations of production, and that popular forces and currents are often decisive in giving shape and form to the moralities by which we live. Rejecting the economistic orthodoxies of his time, Gramsci's open Marxism was a 'philosophy of praxis,' an affirmation that the social world is *constituted* by human practice. For Gramsci, the analytical imperative to transcend economism was fueled by a practical need for subordinate groups to move beyond

a defensive understanding of their immediate interests, to create their own *hegemonic* conception of the 'general interest,' capable of guiding a transformative politics. Gramsci famously emphasized the growing importance of civil society as a site distinct from state and capitalist production, on which an expanding array of social and political identities are forged and social struggles organized – a site for political mobilization and coalition formation (Urry 1981). With this in mind, Gramsci developed the concept of **historic bloc** to indicate the way in which a class 'combines the leadership of a bloc of social forces in civil society with its leadership in the sphere of production' (Simon 1982:86).

For the bourgeoisie, one of capitalism's two fundamental classes, hegemony is never more than a contingent accomplishment, secured by the efforts of vast, dispersed networks of organic intellectuals – in administration, law, culture and politics – whose business it is to organize the productivities, moralities, identities, and desires of subalterns, thereby constructing a relatively durable bloc of alliances reaching into civil society which are sustained via material and symbolic concessions that are often state-mediated. Gramsci likened the cultural power of the bourgeoisie in the West to a formidable system of earthworks and trenches, obliging the left to conduct a **war of position** within civil society – to gain ground through processes of moral-intellectual reform that prepare subordinate groups for self-governance by creating post-capitalist sensibilities and values, practical democratic capacities, and a belief in the possibility of a radically transformed future.

It is precisely in this sense that hegemony can be understood to cut both ways. It signifies the *organization of consent* – the practices and forms in which loyalty to bourgeois leadership in economics, politics, and culture is secured – but also the possibility of *organizing dissent* (Carroll 1997), and ultimately of constructing a counter-hegemonic bloc around labour and its allies.

In a research program beginning in the 1980s and continuing through the first decade of this century, we have spoken directly with hundreds of activists in a great range of social movements, in order to gain a sense of the prospects for building counter-

hegemony in these times. Our working assumption has been that contemporary social movements are, *prima facie*, agents of counter-hegemony in their organized dissent to the existing order. Within a Gramscian problematic, the central diagnostic question is whether and how such movements might be recognizable as counter-hegemonic "in a more proactive, visionary sense" (Carroll and Ratner 1994:6). With this in mind, our research has emphasized the broad question of **counter-hegemonic historic-bloc formation**, a question that brings in its train the strategic issue of the **conduct of a war of position** through which the balance of cultural power in civil society can be shifted and space won for radical alternatives, unifying dissenting groups into a system of alliances capable of contesting bourgeois hegemony. This paper takes stock of our work to date.

### **e Dissolution and Formation of Historic Blocs**

The temporal context for our research has been an era in which the organic crisis of fordist-Keynesian regulation, dating from the 1970s, provoked various neoliberal initiatives aimed both at dissolving the historic bloc that had organized consent in the post-war boom era and at constructing a new historic bloc around the economic nucleus furnished by a new wave of capitalist globalization and post-industrial accumulation. In this period, what Gill (1995a) has called a transnational historic bloc, composed of leading globalizing capitalists, incipient institutions of global governance such as the Trilateral Commission, and various organic intellectuals active internationally in political, cultural and economic fields, began to take shape, as the project of "globalization from above" sought to discipline local populations to new accumulation norms represented as non-negotiable ("There is no alternative," claimed Margaret Thatcher), while offering the allure of cosmopolitan consumer choice and increased affluence for abstract individuals possessed of a morally worthy attitude of entrepreneurship. The relative success of neoliberal interventions in reorganizing consent around a restructured economic nucleus and a different pattern of class and popular alliances has been highly site-specific, and always qualified by problematical

features of neoliberalism: the “free market” requires a “strong state” to enforce its formal rationality in the face of unmet needs and aspirations, hence coercion can come to overshadow persuasion as the visible form of state power (Gamble 1988); the decline of class compromise and social reform renders the hegemonic bloc quite thin, as formerly integrated groups (organized labour, clients of the welfare state) become available for more radical oppositional politics (Cox 1987); the disintegrating impact of market relations and periodic crises on communal social relations can lead to popular discontent with the anti-democratic and brutalizing character of full-blooded capitalism (Gill 1995b).

The spatial context of our research has been British Columbia, Canada – particularly the large urban centre of greater Vancouver – a political jurisdiction which has had “a sharper left-right focus than any other part of English-speaking North America” (Blake 1996:67) in which putative control of the provincial state veered from a neoliberal party intent on dissolving the fordist-Keynesian bloc in the 1980s<sup>1</sup> to a social-democratic party which throughout the 1990s attempted to reconcile the conflicting claims of labour, capital and a variety of new social movements (NSMs)<sup>2</sup> and back to a consolidated party of the right in the first decade of the new century.<sup>3</sup>

The story begins in the spring of 1983. In a context of a deep and protracted economic recession in which the collapse of world demand for resource products combined with labour-shedding transformations at the point of production to produce unemployment levels above 15%, a newly-elected Social Credit government brought forward a Thatcherite program of deficit reduction through austerity, the withdrawal of trade-union rights for state employees, and the weakening of safeguards for human rights. The austerity program signaled an abandonment of the project of class compromise and social reform, providing a conjunctural basis of unity between organized labour and a wide array of popular-democratic forces that included the radical left and NSMs. The Vancouver-

based left was quick to respond, assembling a broad alliance of organized labour with community grass roots groups under the banner of the Solidarity Coalition. But despite a series of escalating strikes, the Coalition collapsed when its core labour groups opportunistically accepted a settlement that met their own demands for job security, but left unmet the social and human rights agendas of the various community groups. Thus, the 1983 Solidarity Coalition, that began by allying the social proletariat of state employees with the clientele of the Keynesian Welfare State and with the radical left and NSMs, proved little more than a defensive mobilization that was betrayed by the tactical goal of its core constituents in labour’s efforts to preserve remnants of a Fordist historic bloc that had already been disavowed by capital (Carroll and Ratner 1989).<sup>4</sup>

Our subsequent research, focusing on the period of social-democratic provincial administration in the 1990s, has involved in-depth interviews with several hundred movement activists mainly in labour, feminist, environmental, anti-poverty, disability, peace, sexual liberation, and aboriginal groups.<sup>5</sup> In our analysis of transcripts from interviews conducted in the early 1990s, we began by focusing on the reputed divide between labour and NSMs, which in the wake of the failed coalition-building of 1983 might well have grown wider. Unions are often regarded as bereft of transformative potential and mired in bureaucratic economism, and conversely, NSMs are often thought

4 The 1983 campaign illustrated the problem of alliance-building on the left in the absence of a counter-hegemonic principle. The basis of unity in the coalition was limited to the realm of contingency, paving the way for the state’s cynical manipulation of weaknesses in the broad-based alliance and permitting a reconstituted class dominance.

This rearticulation of labour’s interests in corporative terms meant that working-class struggle remained, at best, within the limits of ‘passive revolution’ and the consequent disillusionment of the community groups deepened the existing distrust of organized labour for having demobilized the post-Fordist historic bloc in its formative stages. When, in 1987, the provincial government made further attempts to bring labour relations under more authoritarian control, spurring another defensive mobilization capped by threats of a general strike, organized labour acknowledged the limitations of its episodic ‘wars of movement’ and undertook a strategy of dialoguing with community groups in order to create the foundation for an eventual shift in the balance of cultural and social forces. Whether this effort would be well-received by community groups, in the aftermath of Solidarity, was the cardinal question, one on which the formation of a ‘new historic bloc’ of dependable allies plainly hinged.

5 For descriptions of the methods used in these studies see Carroll and Ratner (1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1998 and 1999).

1 The Social Credit governments headed by William Bennett (1975-1986) and William van der Zalm (1986-1991).

2 The New Democratic governments headed by Michael Harcourt (1991-1996) and Glen Clark (1996-1999).

3 The Liberal government headed by Gordon Campbell (2001- )

to ignore structural issues in their valorization of identity politics; yet we found that both labour and NSM activists favoured fostering cooperative relations across diverse movements and saw labour playing an important role in that process (Carroll and Ratner 1995). Aside from a striking difference between them in their political party activism,<sup>6</sup> our findings gave evidence of a labour movement increasingly open to popular struggles, sensitive to the needs of diverse and marginalized constituencies, and tactically prepared, if not psychologically predisposed, to yield a leading role in whatever new articulatory process might form. Considerable networking was already occurring between many of the labour and NSM activists, as well as indications that unions had begun to join forces with NSMs in various coalition practices and strategies. Our findings, then, gave some basis for guarded optimism about prospects for a new historic bloc combining 'old' and 'new' social movements. Labour activists clearly had some investment in building solidaristic ties to other movements on an equitable if cautiously implemented basis. In their diverse reflections they resonated with the concerns for difference, autonomy, and cultural politics characteristically ascribed to NSM activists.

In two other respects – 'master framing' and 'cross-movement networking' – we noted strong commonalities and grounds for political cohesion amongst the various activists we interviewed, where the theoretically prescribed differences between labour and NSM activists would have predicted otherwise.

The system of alliances that constitutes an historic bloc requires that constituent groups reach a shared understanding of the sources and nature of injustice. Such shared understandings or "master frames" move beyond single-issue politics to integrate the specific agendas of diverse movements into central interpretive frameworks, and lend coherence to movement politics by providing a moral-intellectual basis for solidarity. We found that three master frames were particularly prevalent in activists' accounts of power and domination – a liberal frame (emphasizing individual freedom, rights and enfranchisement), an identity-politics frame, and a political-economy

frame. For the sample as a whole, the 'political economy' frame was by far the most prevalent, and appeared to serve as a common interpretive scheme for most activists across the entire spectrum of movements in our sample. Most of the activists we interviewed continue to understand domination and injustice as structural, systemic, and materially grounded. While the concern for "identity politics" enriches and partly transforms movement discourses by calling attention to fields and sites of struggle not punctuated by the political-economy frame, most of the activists shared an interpretive frame that views power as materially grounded in capital and the state, enabling activists in diverse movements to speak a common language in framing their political initiatives (Carroll and Ratner 1996a).

Further to the task of coordinating action between the various social movements, we mapped out the network of cross-movement activism created by "cosmopolitan" activists who participate in multiple movement organization spanning diverse cultural-political fields, as in the trade unionist who is also active in an environmental group. Among our key findings were that the cross-movement activists understood injustice within a political-economic frame, and that movements in which political economy framing predominated – labour, peace, feminism, and the urban/anti-poverty sector – tended not only to supply most of the cross-movement ties, but to be tied to each other as well, forming a loose political bloc. A political economy framing of injustice seems to provide a language in which activists from different movements can communicate and perhaps find common ground, elevating single-issue and local contexts into more comprehensive critiques of power and more expansive forms of action. For these 'cosmopolitan' activists, cross-movement ties serve as media for reaching or maintaining consensual viewpoints on injustice spanning sectoral boundaries.<sup>7</sup> To a large extent, the network that knits movements into an incipient bloc emanates from the agency of these core activists, who may be thought to wear the Gramscian mantle of 'organic intellectuals' as con-

<sup>6</sup> NSM activists generally shun electoralism at any level beyond the local.

<sup>7</sup> Twenty-six cosmopolitan networkers in our sample carried over 50% of all the cross-movement ties that linked 155 of our respondents into a network.

ductors and organizers of the progressive movement sector. Virtually all of these activists shared the political-economic understanding of injustice.

at three-quarters of our respondents understood injustice in political-economic terms, while nearly half of them were “cosmopolitan” in their pattern of activism, calls into question the claim that social criticism has “split into myriad local critical analyses mirroring the social fragmentation of the left” (Seidman 1992:51). On the contrary, the adoption of a political-economy frame by cross-movement activists suggests that wider participation fosters more holistic political views, leading to recognition of commonalities that cut across different movements, so that activists from diverse constituencies are better able to grasp the interconnectedness of resistance struggles (Carroll and Ratner 1996b).

As an important caveat to the above, however, we found, in studying the experience of the first national coalition of social movements in Canada – the Action Canada Network – that shared political sensibilities among networking activists may not suffice to effectively challenge the ‘corporate agenda.’

The Action Canada Network (ACN) was founded in 1987 under the name of the Pro-Canada Network as a broad-based grouping of national organizations and provincial coalitions working for social justice and the defense of Canadian sovereignty, with the specific mandate of opposing the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement and later, the North American Free Trade Agreement. The advent of coalition politics on a national scale was, in part, a response to the waning executive powers of the nation-state, added to the growing realization that sectoral solutions to societal problems could not adequately address the deleterious impacts of the global economy. The British Columbia chapter of ACN was formed in 1991, presenting a second chance opportunity for a counter-hegemonic project that might, in retrospect, atone for the failures of the earlier Solidarity Coalition, but, more importantly, halt the passage of the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement and build an authentic democratic political culture. However, the national electoral victories of the Progressive Conservatives in 1988 and the Liberals in 1993, resulting in the respective passage of the FTA

and then NAFTA, drove the ACN, nationally and locally (in B.C.) into a moribund state, reinforcing the perception that since nation-states were heeling to transnational corporations (TNCs), remedies could not be sought on a strictly domestic plane – a more global strategy was required, one capable of enlarging the historic bloc by reframing ACN along more internationalist lines and around a unifying principle or vision that could last beyond the shifting alliances and episodic responses that tended to short-circuit the ‘war of position’ that was necessary to nurture the elements of social change.

With the decline of the ACN, the role of reactivating widespread opposition to the ‘corporate agenda’ was informally transferred to the Council of Canadians, a citizens’ organization founded in 1985. Initially focused on a left-nationalist project intent on protecting Canadian sovereignty through opposition to the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, the Council soon countenanced the tentacular powers of the TNCs and the collusive role of the institutions of ‘global governance; consequently, it extended its citizens’ agenda to an international level, cooperating with citizens’ organizations in other countries in successful campaigns to thwart passage of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (1998) and seriously disrupt meetings of the World Trade Organization in Seattle (1999).

Since then, the Council has been a tenacious advocate for progressive policies across Canada, striving to prevent corporate profits from trumping the public interest over vital issues such as bulk water exports, sustainable development, climate change, public transit, and food security. In its short history, the Council has been a conspicuous participant in various International and Global Days of Action, Alternative People’s Summits, and most recently, the protests against the G8 and G20 economic summits held in Toronto (Coburn 2010:215-18). It remains to be seen whether the Council’s consultative approach with members, activists, and coalition partners, can continue to mobilize a new historic bloc linking regional, national, and international social movement groups, though its impressive successes amidst the growing forces of an imperious market economy makes it clear that, henceforth, the struggle against

capitalist hegemony must be waged on both local and global fronts.

### **The Conduct of a War of Position**

As implied in the Gramscian elocution – ‘new historic bloc’ – the purpose in constructing a new alignment of class and popular forces is to challenge the dominion of the leading class across the state institutional networks and within the looser domains of civil society. For Gramsci, this entailed a strategic ‘war of position’ spanning successive conjunctures and shifting the balance of forces through interventions at various sites, particularly within the intellectual and moral realms of civil society.

One marker of success in the war of position is the achievement of a shared social vision for an alternative future (Purcell 2009). Among the diverse group of activists we interviewed in the early 1990s, there was some evidence of such a vision. When asked what kind of society they were striving for in their activism, nearly half of them described a “caring society” characterized by mutual respect and tolerance and by values such as compassion, fairness, and sharing; but while this vision of a caring society resonated across most movements and particularly among feminist, gay/lesbian and peace activists, few environmentalists subscribed to it, and by the same token few non-environmental activists subscribed to the ecological vision that most environmentalists endorsed. The fissure between the social-justice vision and the ecological vision points to a well-known and highly consequential weakness in the political culture of the contemporary left, to a breached flank in its war of position. To offer an ethical-political vision sufficiently robust to challenge capital’s domination of people and nature, humanistic concerns for social justice need to be welded to ecological concerns for stewardship and sustainability. Failure to bridge this difference has furnished an object lesson in the divide-and-conquer tactics of bourgeois passive revolution, as business groups have mobilized working-class identities behind anti-ecological campaigns with the lure of short-term jobs, while middle-class environmentalists have been indifferent to the livelihood concerns of workers and communities (Doyle et al 1997; Foster 1993).

To forge an alternative hegemony, counter-hegemonic movements must wed justice with ecology: “social groups that aspire to hegemony increasingly have to demonstrate their ability to pose solutions to a variety of issues related to nature and the environment” (Ekers and Mann 2009:289). This means, among other things, going beyond the politics of resistance, *into prefiguration*, i.e., developing “alternative forms of production and reproduction or alternative conceptions of nature-society relations” (Karriem 2009:318). Recent developments in Canada do suggest a tentative move in this direction, on multiple levels. In Victoria, a Transition Towns initiative has been gaining membership since 2009 and now has working groups focusing on a wide range of justice and ecology issues (<http://transitionvictoria.ning.com/>). In May 2010, a BC-based degrowth movement, with a strong critique of capitalist growth and an equally strong commitment to social justice, was launched in Vancouver (O’Keefe 2010), bringing a counter-hegemonic movement already influential in Quebec into British Columbia. A month earlier, on 22 April 2010, the Ottawa-based Polaris Institute announced the formation of a national Green Environmental Network (GEN), an alliance of many of the country’s leading ecology groups, labour unions and social justice organizations, “uniting around a common cause of building a green economy in Canada” (Clarke 2010). GEN was founded on the premise that “the economic model in this country has to be fundamentally transformed if Canada is going to measure up to the ecological challenges of our times” (Clarke 2010). Its vision statement, however, sees the “private sector” playing a key role in building the green economy, under the leadership of governments and publicly owned institutions (<http://www.greeneconomy.net.ca/>) – a transition strategy that could easily devolve into an elite-engineered passive revolution involving relatively minor regulatory adjustments to “business as usual,” along the lines sketched by Luke (2006).

In our more detailed examination of selected groups, we explored some of the challenges of carrying out a war of position as they relate to the building of oppositional cultures and the pursuit of media strategies suited to convey counter-hegemonic messages to wider publics. A fundamental

challenge to movements conducting a war of position is *to develop their counter-hegemonic capacities so that an oppositional culture can be sustained against the colonizing and marginalizing moves of capital and state*. Whether that challenge is met depends upon how creatively movement groups pursue three analytically distinct tasks: community-building, meeting the needs of constituents, and mobilizing and engaging in collective action. The dilemma is that all three tasks can be pursued by a given group in ways that either tie constituents to, or wean them from, hegemonic constructions of their interests and identities. Ideally, movement groups achieve some degree of practical efficacy in carrying out each task while framing their interests in ways that resonate with other movement struggles and avoid ‘system’ cooptation or marginalization. How effectively movement groups manage these critical tasks is in turn related to how they conceive their political project – whether as a ‘cultural politics of recognition’ in which injustice is seen as rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication, or as a ‘material politics of redistribution’ in which injustice is located in political-economic structures. In addition to this recognition/redistribution axis, Nancy Fraser (1995) identifies two basic forms of intervention for remedying either type of injustice – ‘ameliorative’ and ‘transformative’ – the first referring to ameliorative corrections to injustices that leave intact the prevailing structures of power, and the second to interventions that aim at restructuring the underlying generative framework. The challenge for movement groups is to determine how they can pursue their three domain tasks in ways that lead beyond mere affirmation of their existing material needs and cultural identities, towards actual transformation of the structural mechanisms that generate inequality (‘maldistribution’) and disrespect (‘misrecognition’; see Table 1, below). Such counter-hegemonic politics break from reformist gestures of affirmation. They combine struggles for “cultural recognition and social equality in forms that support rather than undermine one another” (Fraser 1995:69).

By way of exploring the intricacies of this process we focused on three groups from our research sample that occupy fairly clear locations on the continuum

of cultural and material politics: the Centre, a gay-lesbian/bisexual community centre which vigorously contests the biases of conventional society and mainly pursues a project of recognition; End Legislated Poverty, the province’s largest anti-poverty organization with ties to labour and the traditional left, and oriented around redistributive politics; and the B.C. Coalition of People with Disabilities, which struggles to valorize and transform a precarious identity and to gain tangible improvements in the lives of disabled people, thus addressing issues of both recognition and redistribution.<sup>8</sup> Without recounting the detailed findings based upon our in-depth interviews with activists in each group (Carroll and Ratner 2001), some summary observations can be drawn about the organizational dilemmas that vitiate efforts to sustain oppositional cultures under the hegemonic constraints of neoliberalism.

In brief, the Centre (TC), faced with a needy and diverse clientele, placed its emphasis on the provision of specific services and on mitigating the effects of homophobia and related forms of disrespect for sexual minorities. Despite a premium on community-building as a means of increasing the self-esteem of its members, its diverse but socially isolated clientele perpetually subverted claims to any overarching identity that might be politically affirmed. At the same time, its small cadre of relatively affluent members has been attracted to the ameliorative benefits of ‘mainstreaming,’ leaving TC without the resources either to address the pressing needs of its new constituents or the ability to engage in the deconstructive cultural politics that might reverse the forms of misrecognition suffered by its more discriminated clientele. End Legislated Poverty (ELP), with its overriding commitment to redistributive social justice claims, subordinated need-provision to its central project of political mobilization in issuing challenges of a transformative nature to the dominant order. While pursuing concrete ameliorative goals in its advocacy

<sup>8</sup> End Legislated Poverty began its work under that name in 1985 and continues to serve the indigent Vancouver community. The B.C. Coalition of People with Disabilities was founded in 1976, changing its name from the B.C. Coalition of the Disabled in 1990 to get rid of the reifying negative label. The Centre was first established in 1979, changing its name to QMUNITY in 2009, giving unabashed and full compass to its diverse (LGBT) “queer” clientele.

of an augmented welfare state and in its critique of “poor-bashing,” ELP activists have been more inclined to view their group as addressing the radical emancipatory needs of its constituency rather than the immediate needs for subsistence. The paradox for ELP is that the community-building effort required to sustain the long-term struggle essential to the pursuit of transformative goals is hard to accomplish with a demoralized clientele often preoccupied with sheer survival; moreover, ELP’s reliance on government funding to support its programs and modest staffing requirements places it in a supplicatory position – dreading cut-offs and anxious about exposing its dependent clientele to unacceptable levels of political risk. For the B.C. Coalition for People with Disabilities (CPD), disability has been a bivalent issue, calling up politics of both recognition and redistribution. Although CPD activists have projected a transformative agenda that would undo the basis for the abled/disabled distinction, their political action has focused primarily on lobbying for the affirmative goals of increased rights and entitlements, while also engaging in service-oriented work to improve the efficiency of social service delivery for constituents. This latter commitment strengthened members’ attachment to CPD, and thus enhanced community building, but the organization’s reliance on an issue-oriented lobbying strategy tended to lose ground in the context of ideologically spurred fiscal retrenchments, prompting reconsideration of its ‘pragmatic’ affirmative politics approach.<sup>9</sup>

In sum, with the advance of neoliberalism, all three groups found themselves deeply compromised in their efforts to wage an efficacious ‘war of position’ given the desperate neediness of their constituents, the seductions of ‘mainstreaming,’ and the public disapprobation (‘backlash’) fuelled by government and media recriminations. It is no coincidence, therefore, that TC and CPD grew to regret their heavy investment in affirmative politics, while ELP sought

ways to accelerate its transformative stance. Their combined experiences in the late 1990s underscored that a counter-hegemonic war of position requires a political synergy of aims across the three task domains that constitute oppositional culture so that affirmative and transformative goals can be pursued in ways that lead to short-term material and assimilative gains as well as to the long-term disarticulation of systemic hegemony.

One potentially invaluable resource for movements in pursuing their material and cultural politics is the mass media, given their prevalence as key sites of political contention in advanced capitalist societies. Conducting a war of position is obviously facilitated by strategic use of the media for counter-hegemonic purposes; consequently, we examined how three groups drawn from our research sample have developed media strategies as aspects of their specific political projects (Carroll and Ratner 1999). Alongside the ‘recognition’ project of the Centre and the ‘redistribution’ project of End Legislated Poverty, we studied the practices of Greenpeace (its Vancouver branch), a high-profile international NGO which, in our view, represents a third kind of political project that we classify as a ‘secular politics of salvation.’ Greenpeace’s problematic is conceived not in terms of ‘social injustice’ per se, but rather in terms of planetary survival – i.e., the nexus between humanity and nature. We compared the three cases, again using Fraser’s (1995) ‘affirmative’ and ‘transformative’ categories, as well as Gamson and Wolfsfeld’s (1993) model of movements and media as interacting systems in which ‘asymmetrical dependency’ between social movements and mass media renders movements highly dependent on media for mobilizing their constituents, validating their existence as politically important collective actors, and enlarging the scope of conflict in order to draw in third parties and shift the balance of forces in a direction favourable to a movement’s interests. At the same time, movements ought not be conceived as passive victims of mass media strategy, but can, to some degree, use the media to advance their own goals within a broader war of position.

Summarizing here how each of the three groups fared in developing their media strategies, Greenpeace

9 All three groups contend with many of the same problems and limited resources that they faced at their inception. The Centre succeeded, to some extent, in mitigating the stigma of ‘queer identity’ through various celebratory spectacles (e.g., the annual Pride Day and parade) and human rights legislation, but ELP and the BCCPD are challenged by growing caseloads and forced budgetary restrictions in the current period of economic downturn.

was ostensibly the most successful of the three groups in manipulating mass media communication outlets for its own ends. The modus operandi of Greenpeace can be likened to a 'politics of signification' – engaging in often spectacular but non-violent direct actions of civil disobedience geared to attract media attention to the group's framing of environmental issues. While these visual stunts have served Greenpeace well in a mediatized 'war of manoeuvre' – earning it media standing and group validation, as well as mobilizing financial resources from an otherwise passive conscience constituency – its actions have often been journalistically packaged as 'infotainment', predictably eroding public sympathy for Greenpeace campaigns and curtailing possibilities for an expanded war of position on the causes of ecological crises and their harmful consequences. Cognizant of the media's asymmetric power to select and frame what is newsworthy, and aware that media stunts can be trivialized if disconnected from long-term educative strategies needed to anchor a transformative politics of salvation, in the mid-1990s Greenpeace embarked on a new strategy of displacing media corporations from the central position they had occupied in mass communications. The group increasingly used the Internet to bypass mass media, thereby reducing media dependency and eliminating asymmetry by ensuring that preferred frames reach an ever-broadening population of web-browsers.

The scientific and cultural education component of Greenpeace's program became integral to its global war of position, although a decade on one can still query whether this informational networking strategy effectively complements Greenpeace's dramatic media tactics, saving the latter from the tepid fate of media ritualization.

Compared with Greenpeace, The Centre's 'recognition' project was far less dependent on media coverage, though its relationship with the media was extremely asymmetrical. Since its alternative/multicultural approach ruled out 'wars of manoeuvre' – media splashes or otherwise – its press releases were generally ignored by mainstream outlets. With little marketable copy to gain from The Centre, the media was by turns negligent and sensationalistic toward it. While The Centre was content to engage

in a low-profile 'war of position,' building some sense of community and seeking to represent its sexually diverse constituency in a morally positive light through well-targeted programs of popular education and alternative media, such a multicultural politics had its limitations. In narrowing its political horizons and tempering its actions to avoid hostilities with heterosexist (and intermittently homophobic) mainstream media, The Centre was able to wage only a very circumscribed 'war of position,' one that is consonant with the dominant institutions and confines struggle within the limits of 'passive revolution'. Given its apolitical mandate to affirm rather than deconstruct hegemonic conceptions of sexual identity, and its cautious avoidance of conspicuous public actions that might provoke 'backlash,' The Centre may have made itself even more vulnerable to the uncharitable mercies of the mass media, thus reinforcing one of the key bulwarks inhibiting even this alternative-based war of position.

Compared with The Centre, End Legislated Poverty adopted a more pro-active media strategy focused on popular education and periodic collective actions. Committed to a transformative coalition politics of class struggle, ELP strove to reach out beyond its immediate constituency of "the poor," ideally requiring a level of media support precluded by its trenchant critique of capital and the elected legislators of poverty. Like The Centre, and in contrast to Greenpeace's deft command of mainstream media attention, ELP had only a peripheral media standing and therefore came to rely upon alternative and local media – neighbourhood or regional newspapers, its own monthly paper, and cable channels – in order to construct a more overt politicized identity grounded in 'community' and direct experiences of privation. At times ELP has courted the mass media to magnify specific campaigns and protests, but it remains wary of media "poor-nography" with its denigrating frames of "welfare cheats" and "deserving poor." Indeed, given its radical transformative agenda, ELP has been nearly always on the brink of deviantization by the mainstream media, especially when its counter-hegemonic actions are perceived as truly threatening to the media's own corporate sponsors.

In sum, the experiences of these three groups

indicate that the mass media offer, at best, unpredictable support to movements engaged in counter-hegemonic politics. When organized dissent is given coverage, media accounts are usually commercially motivated and liable to reconstructions that mock or demonize the groups on which they report. No small wonder that mainstream journalists – agents of the hegemon – are unlikely to lend credence to counter-hegemonic struggles. Barring the improbable accession to editorial control of mainstream media by sympathetic (or merely neutral) purveyors of social reality, the mass media certainly cannot be expected, of their own accord, to reduce either asymmetry or partiality in the movement/media relation, especially with regard to transformative agendas, notwithstanding any and all claims of journalistic “objectivity.” Where movement agendas are more modestly restricted to affirmative goals, the mainstream media are more apt to present such issues to wide audiences, although here too, the media is prone to exercise censorship depending upon the existing scope of ideological tolerance and the fiscal capacity to support social change. The ascendance of neoliberalism gives little comfort in that regard. One possible recourse for movements has been to produce their own alternative media, a strategy sometimes adopted but often limited by a lack of sufficient resources and by the practical restriction of alternative media to specific target populations, making this tactic effective only for affirmatively oriented groups, not for those seeking broader changes that require a wider base of support.

Perhaps the most hopeful prospect in the field of media relations for a viable counter-hegemony lies in the proliferation of the Internet, which presents interesting possibilities for movements pursuing various political projects to circumvent dependence on mass media by developing openly accessible interactive communication networks at relatively low cost. Such a strategy not only bypasses the mass media; it converts mass audiences into more engaged communicative agents and reaches beyond the regional and national markets which typically delimit media audiences. These and other practices that democratize media may be crucial preconditions for transformative politics in a globalized world (Carroll and

Hackett 2006). Indeed, the rapid growth of transnational corporations makes it virtually imperative that movement struggles now be internationalized since waging wars of position on sequestered fronts can no longer slow down the unfettered mobility of capital. An increased awareness of the interconnections of movement struggles and a global convergence of strategies centered on the motif of ‘resistance to capital’ (Rustin 1988), and facilitated by the new untrammelled technologies of mass communication, may well be the foundation for a revisited socialism in these allegedly post-socialist times.

Ironically, the political party most ideologically aligned with socialism is an unlikely instigator of any socialist renaissance in British Columbia. The opportunity to reconcile the tasks of state management and social democratization was afforded the B.C. New Democratic Party in its two electoral victories in the decade of the 1990s. Our in-depth interviews with state officials from six key ministries and NDP members of the legislative assembly at the end of this period revealed the difficulties experienced by the BC NDP government in its efforts to mobilize progressive social policies in the face of business imperatives, an entrenched civil service bureaucracy, and the often single-minded purposefulness of its own social movement allies.<sup>10</sup> Whether it was the ‘brokerage pragmatism’ of the Michael Harcourt government, or the bold class rhetoric initially trumpeted by Glen Clark, neither approach could resolve the problem of sustaining a coalition of labour-left and the ‘new social movements’ while heeding the functional requirements of a capitalist system. Consequently, the NDP’s decade in government led neither to a dominant position in parliament nor to the embedding of social democratic policies and reforms able to fundamentally challenge the power of capital. Both NDP administrations ended on a puerile note, with the two premiers enmeshed in media-blown scandal – overall, a disappointing run of social democratic governance that ushered in a resounding electoral victory by a united right-wing ensemble.

Nor did the NDP display much political fortitude in its oppositional role during the subsequent decade

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed account of our findings, see Carroll and Ratner (2005a, 2007).

of rule by the Liberal government, with its market-centered social vision. Between the government's accumulation of windfall revenues from the private sector during the pre-2008 economic boom, and the NDP's timorous posture of civility on the chance of enhancing the party's centrist appeal, political activism was quieted and public wealth incrementally passed into private hands. However, the soaring costs involved in mounting the 2010 Winter Olympics, combined with the effects of a sharp recession, has set the stage for Liberal stringencies, probable new waves of resistance, and inevitable calls for alternative social visions capable of molding the elusive 'new historic bloc.' At this point, the electoralist predispositions of NDP stalwarts – trained on recapturing the traditional centre of the political spectrum – suggest that they are not poised to foment this transformation.

## Conclusions

This article reports work spanning three decades, which applies most immediately to the specific situation in a part of Canada. Nevertheless, we can venture to offer some conclusions that may have wider applicability in the consideration of counter-hegemony today.

With regard to the question of historic blocs, we must acknowledge the paradoxical character of neoliberalism's remarkable successes in the last three decades. The consolidation, from above, of a transnational historic bloc championing neoliberalism, and the success of neoliberalism in converting human relations into market relations, in immiserating vast sections of a growing proletariat (North and South), and in hollowing out much of the nation-state-centred politics through which the left won concessions in the era of organized capitalism, were by the turn of the century, incontrovertible. The left, in Leninist form, had largely collapsed, along with the demise of most socialist states; the social-democratic left had become in great part neoliberalized with the recognition that few policy levers remained for implementing progressive reforms in what for capital is increasingly a "borderless world" (Carroll and Ratner 2005b). As Michael Burawoy (1985) presciently observed a quarter century ago, there are interesting, if harrowing, parallels between the

neoliberal regime of hegemonic despotism, in which unprecedented mobility gives capital decisive structural power at the level of communities and states, and the Satanic mills of the mid-nineteenth century, when submission at the point of production was largely guaranteed by the Hobson's choice between wage labour and pauperism.

Yet neoliberalism's victory – the rational tyranny of the global market – unavoidably reinvigorated opposition from below, which, like neoliberalism itself, threw off the national castings of fordist-Keynesian class compromises and began to pose its politics in a global field (Carroll 2007). One of the remarkable implications of neoliberalism has been to vindicate a class dialectic that post-modern fashion reputedly consigned to the dustbin of history. As the neoliberal historic bloc has taken shape, particularly in the form of its peak governance bodies such as the G8, OECD, IMF and WTO, a growing collection of counter-hegemonic movements began to shadow its activities, making effective use of both a global mass media and a rapidly developing Internet alternative media to challenge the authority of global capital.

These participants in such momentous campaigns as the Battle in Seattle (1999) hailed from many places and movements, but clearly shared the same political-economic framing of injustice we found among various activists in Vancouver. These networks linking these activists and their organizations not only span across movements but are increasingly transnational, as is the understanding of the forms of domination against which activists are struggling (Della Porta et al 2006).

In contemplating the conditions of possibility for an expansive counter-hegemonic bloc, developments in nationally organized labour movements seem propitious, but conceptualizing the crucial nexus between economic nucleus and the popular-democratic requires that we think beyond immediate forms of class organization and politics. The reality of the 20th century was universalization of the capital-labour relation: in the advanced capitalist North and tendentially in the South, the vast majority was proletarianized (Berberoglu 2009). Yet the global working class is an extremely diverse and fractured formation; therefore, the strategic alignment of

labour, across national borders, though crucial, does not mean that there is one form in which such transnational solidarity might thrive (Rahman and Langford 2010). Equally important, particularly in the North, is the growth of social unionism, a sign that labour perspectives are reaching into popular-democratic fields, and vice versa.

Of course, recognition that the capital-labour relation can only be undone through the *collective* agency of capitalism's fundamental subaltern class does not imply that "class struggle" – with its resonances of working-class identity politics – can suffice as a unifying counter-hegemonic trope. Given the diverse ethical-political claims that fuel contemporary movement politics, a broader more inclusive construction is more fitting, such as the "resistance to capital" political-economy theme suggested by our research. But if "class" is no longer central in counter-hegemonic discourse, or if labour no longer qualifies as its singular spearhead, then the question is whether labour, with its disproportionate resources, is prepared to play a shared collaborative role rather than arrogate to itself the leading role in upcoming struggles. Certainly our research suggests that any continuing imperiousness on the part of labour would seriously damage the potential for the formation of a new historic bloc. Moreover, the organic intellectuals of the left who coordinate future struggles should qualify to undertake this task not by virtue of their particular class background or even by direct experience of oppression, but by their cosmopolitan political-economy understanding of the roots of contemporary social conflict, as our study of cross-movement activism suggests.

As to the conduct of the war of position, here the challenge for social movements is to create and occupy new spaces for alternative identities, moralities, and ways of life, thereby activating a long-term process of building a counter-hegemonic bloc through popular education, consciousness-raising, community development, self-reliance, etc. These kinds of sustained initiatives could, in combination, move beyond the defensive mobilizations of protests to what Williams (2008) has aptly termed a counter-hegemonic generative politics that supports a new ethical hegemony, marked by social visions of renewed community and

a "caring" society that recognizes the internal relation that links humanity and nature. Yet the task of developing counter-hegemonic capacities so that oppositional cultures can be sustained against the colonizing and marginalizing moves of capital and state is an immensely difficult one: it calls for a politics that is transformative and that engages the cultural media and state structures in ways that contest the system's hegemony. Attempts to devise effective strategies raise complex questions about whether "identity politics" and "material politics" are at all divisible and how they might be effectively linked, whether the short-term gains of affirmative remedies to injustice obviate the possibilities for transformative change, restricting progressive politics to the dubious benefits of passive revolution. The utility of the Internet in furthering a war of position poses the question of whether it can assist as a means of linking local, regional, national, and international groups into a functional historic bloc. War-of-manoeuvre campaigns such as the defeat of the MAI (1998) and the Battle in Seattle (1999) underline the effectiveness of cross-movement and cross-national communicative practices, but as the hiatus in alter-globalization politics following the declaration in 2001 of a 'War on Terror' (and accompanying criminalization of dissent) showed, such campaigns may catalyze but cannot in themselves construct a transnational historic bloc. Although problems of coordination and resourcing will prove massive in building and sustaining such a bloc across specific conjunctures and beyond the predominantly anglophone, advanced capitalist centre of the world system, the recent emergence of progressive governments in South America offers a model of revolutionary praxis and hope.

These are some of the considerations that stem from our research and are pertinent in thinking about how to wrest control of the globalization process from its neoliberal paladins. In the years of neoliberalism's ascent, the dramatic weakening of the mediatory role exercised by governments between capital and labour rendered the left strategy of defending a nationalist stance more or less obsolete. Yet like other social structures of capital accumulation, neoliberalism's own successes sowed the seeds of its crisis. In economic terms, as David McNally

(2009) has shown, the crisis of neoliberalism was already evident in the Asian financial meltdown of 1997. The ensuing decade inflated a bubble economy that burst in the autumn of 2008, putting neoliberalism's own deregulatory logic into question and also undermining premises of what Agnew (2005), following Gramsci (1971), has termed Americanism, as endlessly expanding, credit-driven consumption came unstuck in global capitalism's heartland. But this organic crisis has involved more than economic failings and associated crisis management strategies such as the corporate bail-outs and stimulus spending packages of 2008-2009. Integral to it have been the challenges from below, from the Zapatista's declaration of war against neoliberalism in 1994 through the Battle in Seattle and the various incarnations of Social Forums, to recent general strikes in Greece and France in resistance to a new wave of post-crisis austerity: in each instance, a critical, collective response from below to the privations and indignities that are neoliberalism's legacy. Such campaigns and wars of position challenge the hegemony of neoliberal globalization and work against the ideological effects of the commodification of everyday life, gesturing however incompletely to another possible world.

In sum, we see an important link between the defensive coalitions of the 1980s and early 1990s and the bloc that began to emerge more visibly by the mid-1990s. In Canada and elsewhere, after decades of class collaboration during the post-war boom, formations like the Solidarity Coalition of 1983 and the Action Canada Network of the early 1990s began a process of rebuilding a popular oppositional bloc, initially united around the state-centred defense of social citizenship rights associated with the Keynesian welfare state. But it is only with the consolidation of neoliberalism that radical, internationalist claims have begun to take hold, as movements repudiate the state-centred politics of class-compromise and passive revolution.

The failures, or at best strictly circumscribed gains, of popular movements and coalitions that take national and subnational political fields as their operational horizons make it clear that globalization from below is the only viable basis for counter-hegemonic politics today. The formation of a transnational bloc, however, cannot be reduced to a single formula or agency, but

has a character reminiscent of Che Guevara's call to create multiple Viet Nams in an international field of struggle whose strategic end is "the real liberation of all peoples" (Guevara 1967(1969:159)). Media-savvy shadowing of the bourgeoisie's attempts at transnational governance, whether at the WTO's meetings or elsewhere, simply provides a particularly visible example; most initiatives will take a less dramatic form, as in the practice of solidarity with progressive regimes such as Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela and the mounting of local actions whose political significance is strategized in a global field. As Gramsci recognized, in such politics "the line of development is towards internationalism, but the point of departure is 'national'.... Yet the perspective is international and cannot be otherwise" (1971:240).

Ultimately, to pose counter-hegemonic politics in a global field requires us to expand our sense of justice beyond the recognition/redistribution distinction, discussed earlier, in two ways: to incorporate on the one hand what Fraser (2005) has more recently termed the question of representation, and on the other, what we have termed the question of ecological salvation. Fraser holds that recent globalization has driven "a widening wedge between state-territoriality and social effectivity," thereby problematizing the state-centred *politics of representation* in which human communities are inscribed within nation-states (2005:83). 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", has been shown to be a "powerful instrument of injustice" (Fraser 2005:78). For counter-hegemonic politics, the key question is: "how can we integrate struggles against maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation within a *post*-Westphalian frame?" (Fraser 2005:79). As with the politics of recognition and redistribution, mis-representation can be remedied through a *reformation* (replicating the state form, with its inherent exclusionary practices, while validating the sovereignty of a subaltern group, as in national liberation), or *transformation*. A transformative politics of representation rejects the hegemonic arrogation to states and transnational elites of control over the framing of political representation. Fraser

Table 1: Four dimensions of contemporary justice politics (based on Fraser 1995; 2005; Carroll and Ratner 1999)

Type of injustice	Form of remedy	
	<i>Adaptation</i> within extant relations	<i>Transformation</i> of generative mechanisms
<i>Recognition</i> (status)	Liberal pluralism (e.g. multiculturalism)	Deconstruction (e.g. queering identity)
<i>Redistribution</i> (class)	Liberal reallocation (e.g. KWS)	Restructure economic relations (e.g. socialism)
<i>Representation</i> (state)	Redraw state boundaries or create states (e.g. national liberation)	Change grammar of political representation (e.g. WSF as a transnational public sphere)
<i>Salvation</i> (humanity-nature)	Technological fixes, regulatory practices (e.g. alt energy; carbon taxes and trading)	Transcending the growth economy (e.g., Cochabamba Protocol, degrowth)

offers the World Social Forum, with its emphasis on constructing a transnational public sphere, as the key example. She holds, further, 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). It is transformative remedies, in all three instances, that point in the direction of counter-hegemony, rather than that of co-optative reform.

What has become increasingly apparent is that these three forms of social justice intersect with a raft of injustices and survival concerns stemming from ecological and climate crises – which as we noted in our analysis of Greenpeace (1999) – can also be remedied in a *adaptive* and *transformative* ways. The former remedy attempts to mitigate the impact of capitalism’s ecological overshoot<sup>11</sup> through technological fixes and regulatory policies that leave unchanged the grow-or-die logic of capital that generates ecological predation (Luke 2006). The latter remedy strives to reconstruct the humanity-nature relation along truly sustainable lines that place human flourishing and grassroots democratic control at the centre, as in the recent Cochabamba protocol (Angus 2010; Albritton 2007). The challenge for counter-hegemonic politics is to foster oppositional cultures and political forms that give life to the transformative

possibilities in these four analytically distinct fields, both at a quotidian level and in strategic engagement with state and capital (see Table 1).

In adopting a neo-Gramscian approach today, our task is to reformulate Gramsci’s ideas so that they are applicable in the global context. Among issues identified here, this means recognizing that the strategic alignment of counter-hegemonic forces must reach well beyond national groupings (indeed, the national and sectoral interest is now always problematic); that the war of position is unlikely to be conducted through the agency of a monolithic and statist political party but rather by coalitions (including parties) that create new political agents and forms in civil society; that the class reductionism implicit in the assumption of a “working class” identitarian core to the historic bloc is no longer tenable amidst the plethora of diverse subjectivities and discourses; and that the organizers of dissent need not originate from or represent a “class,” but rather find common ground in an ethical-political project that unifies oppositional cultures around a democratic socialist alternative to capital’s injustices and ecological calamities.

<sup>11</sup> Overshoot refers to the tendency for humanity’s ecological footprint to outstrip the carrying capacity of the biosphere to maintain complex living systems. See Rees and Wackernagel (1996).

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## Base, Superstructure, Aesthetic Level: further notes on a theory

Gary Tedman

Today (June 2006, when I began writing this) there are 52,100 mentions on the internet if you search the term 'aesthetic level' using quote marks (if no quotes you get 16,600,000). Usually these are phrases people are using to describe a different way of apprehending something from the *rational*, such as in this question I found asked of an artist "Is it important to you that people see the concept behind the work or are you happy for them to enjoy it merely on an aesthetic level?"

So, it is already a concept that is being used, although usually in a fairly intuitive manner.

In past work I have tried to apply the term in a more concrete way by placing art within a Marxian 'aesthetic level,' in a similar sense as Althusser used the concept of levels and practices, chiefly because the traditional Marxian described relation between Base and Superstructure seemed to me to either 'jump' too quickly from the one to the other, or was 'squashed together' in theory without much mediation. In this work I proposed (see *Rethinking Marxism* 11/4; 16/1, 16/4, also Singh *RM*16/2) that this concept allows us to approach the object of our enquiry (art) *after* having given it its proper grounds, i.e. the aesthetic level, which is defined on the basis of a materialist aesthetic. A well-founded Marxist theory of art is important, need I say, because on it hinges many aspects of technique, or 'artistry,' in revolutionary practice.

This essay is a return to this subject to reiterate it in what is hopefully a simpler and more direct way, as well as updating certain aspects of the research.

A materialist aesthetic, to put it schematically, is a sensual aesthetic, embedded in the world, and the human senses sense the world in a way that corresponds to the physics of this world and our bodies. We assume here that the senses mediate the 'external' world to the mind. This mediation is not a trifling matter and cannot be null or 'transparent' in its effects. As material systems the senses cannot be 'passive receptors' (a favourite idea of behaviourism).

An aesthetic theory must come before art theory, which is to be based on it. Most bourgeois theories of art are based on a denegated aesthetic theory, i.e. one that remains unaccountable or mystical ("...there's no accounting for taste"). Marxist art theories also often leave this aside, hence they are at best 'in lieu' of a foundational aesthetic theory.

Base and Superstructure is, in Marxist theory, a metaphor for the way society is architected, with the economic Base at the bottom, and the cultural Superstructure at the top. The Superstructure 'arises' upon the Base. One tenet of materialism (the Marxist theory of knowledge, or epistemology) is that the economic Base determines the character of any social Superstructure. The metaphor derives of course from Marx in "The German Ideology." Louis Althusser (not alone) added the concept of levels and practices to this architecture, which is perhaps implicit in the original schema. A *level* can have a *practice* associated with it, e.g. economic practice (production of goods).

These levels look like this: the economic Base at

the bottom, the foundation or infrastructure, with the ideological level and then the political level rising above it, thus the Superstructure, all in that order. The political level refers to action in time for change. (All the other levels in a sense therefore occur within the political. Although we need not concern ourselves with this further, this metaphor can become both more complex and less descriptive if we start to see it as a *topology*).

I have submitted the thesis that the concept of an aesthetic level needs to be added to the Base and Superstructure paradigm in order to take account of certain things that seem to have been left relatively untouched by Marxism so far. Perhaps not by Marx himself, but in the later history of Marxism: such as human feeling, sensibility, custom, tradition, taboo, habit, ritual, sexuality, and action (leaving aside those Marxists who have approached this subject from a slightly different, more psychological angle, such as Marcuse).

This aesthetic level of practice is 'nearer' (so to speak) to the Base than the ideological and political levels; this is because the aesthetic is also the realm of necessity and human needs: the human body needs certain things in order to live and remain human. Our senses are attuned by evolution to the processes necessary to fulfil these needs and probably our emotions are, in part, too. This level can thus be understood as a representative of materialism in social theory. Philosophically, materialism has it that existence comes before thought: we *are*, therefore we *can* think.

Of course, the Economic Base has always been considered by most Marxists to be the 'material base,' but I think this is inaccurate if left by itself (and leads to 'Economism') because much of the Base is made up of, or structured by, purely conventional rules. While these rules have a material effectivity certainly, they are not the same kind of laws as, for instance, the physical laws of motion. The materialist element of the economic is represented by the realm of human necessity. An economic structure is needed to fulfil material human needs, which are themselves determined biologically. The Base derives its 'baseness,' however, not from this alone, but from the fact that its organisation shapes the rest of human

society. Mediation with the rest of nature (as a part of it) is always sensual and experiential (aesthetic). Human beings are social beings, and this mediation is organised socially at the economic level. We need to eat, drink, have shelter. So the economy is fundamental in the way it organizes the fulfilment of these material needs but here there is a close intertwining of the levels.

So we get this structure:

- d) Political level
- c) Ideological level
- b) Aesthetic level
- a) Economic level

a+b = infrastructure, c+d = superstructure

In everyday life the aesthetic level can be witnessed, I suggest, in the 'affective practices' of human subjects, their emotional interpersonal relationships. A great deal of this, by default, is unconscious communication (we might here refer to Freud's small number of works addressing group psychopathology), or perhaps we might say 'subliminal'. We might also note that the classic Marxist notion of class, as such, implicitly requires unconscious affective communication to account for class characteristics (like so called 'crowd behaviour'), unless we opt for the overtly Hegelian interpretation of the Marxian understanding of classes, as the 'subject/object of history.'

I have argued that 'Aesthetic State Apparatuses' are the 'official' representatives of this level of human activity by, and in, the State.

The State is generally considered, in its classic Marxist sense, an organ of the ruling class for the suppression of the exploited class. It keeps the status quo of class power intact. It has changed its form along with historical changes in the Base: from slavery, through feudal, to capitalist modes of production. It is a kind of integument, a 'shell,' keeping things in place, by persuasion, and by force in the last instance.

The State can be described as a way of securing the reproduction of the existing conditions and relations of production, in time.

Thus, an Art College is an ASA (in this sense), while a School is an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA,

in Althusser's sense). The hospital and the family are also ASAs as they both deal, in slightly different but related ways, with the human body and the affections.

This new schema now allows us to ask that hoary and recalcitrant question 'what is art?' again but in a more precise way, because it refers art theory back to this material *level* of human experience and not to an unaccountable and denegated domain (to an aesthetic of 'the beautiful' or 'the sublime' or some such). The question then becomes: What is the function of art *on the aesthetic level of practice?* What does it (or can it) *produce* on this level?

The function of the art ASA is simple in this understanding: it is to *mediate* the transactions, the 'traffic,' between Superstructure and Base. But by definition this mediation is not 'ideological' mediation, it is not the 'flow or exchange of ideas,' it is a different kind of traffic, it is sensual mediation, if you like: it is the *technique* of ideological mediation, or how ideology is transferred or transacted.

To clarify: Ideology, to have any effect, must be manifested. It must take a form and in that form have an effect. Ideology as a system of pure bodiless ideas does not exist and so can have no effect. The way ideology has an effect is through sensual mediation. All advertisers for commercial products in capitalism know this very well: to 'put something across' it must be packaged 'aesthetically.' Artists in the art ASAs learn how to mediate ideology aesthetically.

But in fact, and this is very important, there can be no ideology without an aesthetic (we can make the distinction in theory between theory and practice, but in practice they are united). For materialism the aesthetic in fact comes first, before ideas, and it is the ideas which, 'after the event,' seek to justify actions, to legitimize 'what is.'

Given the existence of art ASAs, we can make a similar claim as Althusser does about ideology and ISAs: art (also) takes part in *reproducing the already existing conditions of production.*

What is reproduction? We already know what production is: we must produce (food, water, shelter, and the circulation of these goods, etc.) to survive. Any society, in order to maintain its existence, must re-produce its own conditions of existence, in time (Althusser explained this very clearly). This repro-

duction entails, also, the reproduction of the human subject itself. It must 'know how to act' in society. This means the human subject must be orientated, gendered, trained, educated, and if necessary, repressed.

Therefore, the aesthetic level reproduces (in contrast to other aspects of culture), through art (specially designed aesthetic referents), the *feelings* and *sensibilities* of social normality in the subject, i.e. so it *feels* that how we live is how we *ought* to live.

To properly function on the aesthetic level a work of art must, therefore, *do something*, it must act as an *agent* (this agency is often left out by Marxist theories of art, where an artwork is explained 'fully' by its context in production): it must *change* something or *reinforce* something in the subject. It is perhaps obvious that what an artwork acts upon is *human sense*. An artwork is the product of specific expertise to be effective on the human senses. But this is not just or only for the moment of the experience itself, but so that it permeates and lodges in the memory for some time in the future, perhaps for a long time. It is in this way that I suggest art takes part in the reproduction of our *feelings*.

How do our feelings change? We must accept they usually do not. Our affections, traditions, habits, rituals, dispositions, and so on, do not alter overnight. Most culture (e.g. pop culture) simply reinforces or sublimates the feelings (including alienation) that are already held by the contending classes in class conflict. Feelings might change within a limited range, but only so far. That is, except at special, unusual times, such as times of social revolution.

If, therefore, art (and all its sub-categories) can be said to mediate the Superstructure with the Base via the aesthetic level, there will be, generally, two ways that it can do this: immediately and 'mediately.'

Talking narrowly about art as such, we can assume pretty safely that graphic design and advertising deals with the more immediate aspects of art, i.e. advertising and propaganda messages. This kind of art and design at best maintains the status quo and could be said to be also often repressive in function. But 'fine art' or so called 'high art' is distinct from this. The kind of reproduction that fine art takes part in is not immediate (though certainly the practices 'bleed into' each other), because it operates in and for

the longer term, hence artworks live in the museum.

The fine art product and its reproduction on the aesthetic level, in this sense special, it is a kind of mediation designed for the future and so for a future kind of human sensibility. It is projective, and, as such, highly political (remember, politics is time); its kind of *interpellation*, to employ the Althusserian term, is projective.

But there is an important complication to this mediation, in that this aesthetic level reproduction cannot be a simple 'one-to-one' process. People do not simply reflect their actual lived conditions of existence in their subjectivity; they rather 'refract' them. Apart from the psychological subtleties of this, which we cannot remark on much here, there is the factor of social alienation from the relations of production. Alienation is a factor to do with feelings of being estranged from production due to exploitation, and separated from the social value that can be derived from creative labour, and, as is presumed, certain natural characteristics of our species. Our feelings may be, as it were, pre-shaped by alienation, which is firstly or spontaneously (in any case) *active*, i.e. we firstly *feel*/alienated from our labour.

How does the art ASA deal with this active social phenomenon of alienation? We must place this question in the context of our contemporary knowledge of unconscious desire, the activity of the psychology of the group (or class), and possibly of a group unconscious and unconscious communication. This is a big and complex subject that I must pass by here rather too quickly, but we can note that artists are made aware of alienation all through their higher education; in fact, talented artists are rooted out precisely for their ability to 'divine' in this area (though this is rarely admitted as an exact knowledge of the practice, it is denegated).

Artists are professionally trained to produce artworks. The typical type of artwork today is a narrative or story (with perhaps some fancy high tech added). But while an artwork's narrative may be understood to be one thing, its *form*, i.e. that sensual element which is 'added' by the expertise of the ASA, (with its special knowledge of alienation), may be something quite different. For instance, the narrative may be an easy to grasp 'common sense' ideological tale which

is grasped readily by its viewer. But the aesthetic knowledge consists in understanding the *way* the artwork acts upon our feelings through its materials and techniques – sensually. The effect of such materials and techniques on the viewer may be subliminal or entirely unconscious, of course.

The State employs aesthetic expertise in the ASAs to mediate ideology: i.e. through 'the media' (e.g. broadcast media, print media, 'the Press'), which 'mediates' the social levels with its advanced technology and techniques. These technologies, and techniques, are not neutral. They are always 'sided.' For instance, forms of illusion, of myths and drugs, of kitsch, are the main staple of bourgeois State artistic interpellation.

So, it is not only a question of how any particular narrative supports or does not support a political standpoint (a theory in which art acts like mere 'clapping' at something it likes), it is also a question of *how* (and how well) it mediates its message. While Marshall McLuhan said 'the medium is the message', we realise that the medium is not necessarily a message, but this does not stop it from having an effect/affect. So abstract art has as much activity as any other kind, and indeed all art is abstract in this respect and must be regarded as such, since the material element is the abstract element, the technique and form, and the narrative element usually an illusion (which of course is quite useful to an aesthetic of myths and drugs).

So, what is art? Art *is the process of the reproduction of the aesthetic level of human practice*. Our sensibilities exist in a matrix of largely unconscious interpersonal communication, and this is ultimately – in the cycle of its production and consumption, its 'working up' and refinement for use – conditioned by art. The art ASAs are assigned the political task (amongst its other mandate to provide the material knowledge of its practice – the two often quietly but viciously conflict within the institutions) of refining the otherwise inchoate and spontaneous feelings of alienation, of workers or bourgeois, usually to sublimate and/or glorify that alienation (in its aesthetics), which then 'react back' on those spontaneous feelings, and so onto their origin, so to speak, as a kind of diabolical dovetailing. Such products therefore seem occasion-

ally 'so right,' so 'fitting' and 'appealing' but are also 'beyond words'.

I think it goes without saying that this is important for anyone interested in the problem of radical artistic policy and strategy, right down to the apparent minutiae of decisions about how to artfully 'market' political positions. As well as being crucial to a fuller understanding of history as such, it is a way to understand the political function of form and technique in art and culture beyond a simple notion of narrated elitism/anti-elitism. It also provides a platform for a new radical kind of art history. And of course given this it is important to understandings of class struggle, of its strategy and tactics.

Perhaps it will be better here to provide a brief and schematic example of how one could apply the above concepts to an actual significant art historical period (an interpretation that can lead to a different strategy for practice).

I submit that an aesthetic level 'eruption' (to be metaphorical) took place in the nineteen-sixties, focused in the events of Paris 1968. I suggest that this was a kind of historical re-emergence, a kind of delayed reaction, of the same effects which led to the forming of the Soviet Avant Garde around the time of the Russian Revolution of 1917 (the latter I have written on separately in more detail, which I hope to publish soon), and other forms of European modernism, in fashion, attitudes, design and manners as well as art, during the early 1920s. At this time, around 1968, the situation of the social levels (in the Base and Superstructure relations) with respect to each other was undergoing a change. The 'gap' that had grown between the levels, i.e. the 'lagging' of the aesthetic level, was closing. Participants in the 1968 revolts, particularly in France, were intent upon dragging the aesthetic level (in particular) to where it 'should' be, i.e. to a position adequate to their post-war sensibilities and (often ideologically vague) aspirations. It was a movement that, however, could no longer surface in the same way in the Soviet Union, where it had been born.

In this movement, it was not the case that artists were the primary focus of this 'forwardness,' I admit. But the period is notable for worldwide uprisings of, let's say, a non-traditional character. For instance

they involved integrations of student with workers' protests and had a definite cultural and 'artful' slant (I thank the reviewer of this text for pointing out the Hot Autumn in Italy and the Cordobazo of Argentina, 1969) but artists and art students were I think representative of its dramatic shifting into the broader domain, as in fashion, i.e. through Pop Art, Op Art and so on, the so-called sexual revolution, the strengthening of feminism, the attacks on family and religion, and the liberation from (and unfortunately into) forms of narcosis.

What I think epitomize the specific uniqueness of these events were the art college protests. The 'Hornsey affair' was a particularly poignant case. The 1968 London Hornsey art college work-ins and protests had a creativity which had reverberations on later workers' struggles in Britain (though these have been relatively neglected since). The events at Hornsey have been documented and have local and more specific origins that have to be included, but I think it is not feasible to dismiss them as a mere logistical grievance by local art students (as some sociologists do). At the relation of, say Hornsey to Paris in May 1968, and to the broader workers' struggles of the period, and then to 1920s struggles, is empirically tenuous seems obvious, but we are here being far more concrete than when we use the descriptive notion of a 'zeitgeist,' though it would still be true to say that a confluence of ideas was around at the time across many diverse parts of the world. Why?

I submit that this represented a revolt mostly *on the aesthetic level*, in that it was restricted or limited in certain ways to this level. In 1968 the 'artistic lessons' of the previous years, since 1900 and since the advent of the Soviet (in particular) and European avant garde, finally burst through the old aesthetic-sensual integument, which remained more-or-less intact in the SU (for reasons of class struggle that we cannot go into here), to become a part of a new general sensibility of everyday 'western' life, one which is still having its effects today.

For sure, the notion of 'backwardness' and 'forwardness' in history that I have used above is unsustainable; history has no essence that it must conform to, no spiritual guidance, and no pre-

ordained proper 'state of play.' Yet still we can see in this, I think, effects that are 'as if' history were delayed or rushing ahead of itself. So what is going on? I defer to Lenin/Althusser and the theory of uneven historical development. Given that we can note the uneven effectivity of the different levels, we can see that in the class struggle they either are in a condition of relative harmony or stasis, or they contradict and clash with each other. The aesthetic level might be described as a kind of 'cement' which bonds them together as a relative unity in time: it *consolidates* the levels through feelings, through sensibility, through art, fashion, custom, tradition, and ritual in the way that it 'reacts back' upon the Base. We might talk of 'backwardness' if by this we mean a level seems, to our political analysis, to be withholding an event with which it could 'catch up' with the other levels, perhaps to provide social consolidation, or we might say a level is advanced in certain respects relative to the others in the way that it is superficially sophisticated yet lacking in sustaining substance, so it is likely to 'fall back.' Any 'median' in this would also have to be considered as not static but changing.

Some caveats: I must make it plain that I am not suggesting this theory is an alternative to class struggle. Simply that it fills a gap in the determinants in this struggle. Nor (of course) do I wish to demote the economy from its foundational position in the

theory (as if I could!). Inevitably I lay the emphasis more here on aesthetics, but it is the class struggle, which is founded in economic contradiction, which is always the generator of the struggle. And of course ordinary everyday human activity involves all the levels present at once in practice. We are just making theoretical distinctions. These nevertheless have explanatory power because they refer to different effective forces within the total of experience.

The working classes, its representatives and fellow travellers *feel* differently about life than the bourgeoisie and already have a different position and way of acting that reveals this difference; it would be good if its ideology matched and could refine and extend this position – Marxist theory provides the tools for doing this. But revolutionary practice requires artistry, and it needs to be able to recognise aesthetics based in alienation for what it is to get this right. The neglect of formal technique and the overemphasis on 'message' or 'content' leads to an idealist attitude no matter how much materialism is proclaimed in theory and has, I think, some terribly disabling effects when translated into actions: such as on simple things like how to put across communist ideas. Take the attitude of repetitive browbeating didacticism that often seems to crop up: "it's not what you say, but the way you say it," may be an old motto but it's still a good one.













## Sports Commentators and Late Monopoly Capitalist Indoctrination in the United States

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**ABSTRACT:** This ideological study describes how sports commentary 'layered' on top of team sporting events serves as a late monopoly capitalist mass indoctrination method in the United States of America. Despite a general consensus to the contrary, popular team sporting events which employ sports commentators are not politically, economically, or socially neutral events. The mass media and semi-monopolistic oligarchic corporate structures use sports commentators to politically charge sporting events in order to subtly program the viewing population to accept late monopoly capitalist ideological tenets and norms, including the illusion that social mobility, wealth, status, and power are open to all who choose to compete and are victorious over their peers within a fair and level competitive playing field which represents the "free" marketplace. In an ideological distortion of fundamental material reality, late monopoly capitalistic norms and ideas are superimposed over events occurring on the field of play or in the news to teach viewers how they should act and what they should believe. Late monopoly capitalist indoctrination embedded within modern sports commentary and the news is particularly effective because of its subtle nature.

**Keywords:** ideology, media, augmented social reality, Gramscianism, commentators, sports, sports commentary, indoctrination

Conflict theory postulates that the socioeconomic structure of the United States of America is arranged in a hierarchical pyramidal formation whose apex consists of a loosely associated elite class of wealthy and powerful individuals, firms, and institutions, being supported by and siphoning power and wealth from the disproportionately exploited working middle and lower classes below (Mills 2000 [1956]). In order for the current inequitable system to be maintained in a relatively stable (and hence profitable) state, it is necessary for the elite to engage in practices that politically and economically nullify the majority of working citizens while adopting, discrediting, or eliminating the relatively few who

recognize the nature of the established social order and who are unwilling to submit to established late capitalistic norms and rules.

Likewise, Marxist ideologues such as Ernest Mandel (Mandel 1978) believe that the United States has entered the historical phase of "late capitalism," in which multinational corporations, led by a wealthy and powerful elite, collaborate with national governments to globalize capitalism in order to take economic advantage of the labor and resources of underdeveloped nations for the sake of continued economic growth in core capitalistic nations such as the United States of America (Wallerstein 1981). Encoded within the label of "late capitalism" is the

inherently historical and deterministic notion that capitalism is destined to collapse or be transformed from within into a new socio-political-economic system due to the contradictions inherent in the dialectical interplay between the capitalist and working classes.

In classical Marxism, this new system would be the dictatorship of the proletariat, a necessary precursor to a future utopian worldwide communist state. Other neo-Marxists, including Immanuel Wallerstein, believe that the transformation of the world capitalist system is already underway, though they believe it is impossible to know what kind of new world socio-economic-political system will replace late capitalism until the transformation is complete. Wallerstein warns the idealistic that “History is on no one’s side. Each of us can affect the future, but we do not and cannot know how others will act to affect it, too” (Wallerstein 2002). Speaking of the ultra-militaristic and conservative right of the political spectrum, the very same social elements underlying the socio-economic-political system under consideration in this paper, Wallerstein tells us that “they are working hard to build backing for... a new system as bad as – or worse than – the present one” (Wallerstein 2002).

According to Mandel, the late capitalistic stage in which the capitalist core nations now exist grew out of “monopoly capitalism.” Late capitalism retains many traits common to the monopoly capitalist stage, but expands these traits on a global scale into undeveloped nations. A particularly important ideological element common to monopolistic or oligarchic economic systems determined to hold or expand their economic power is the projection of the concept that a “free market” exists in which significant social mobility is not only possible but easily attainable. The elite want the masses to believe that whoever works hard and follows the rules has a reasonable chance of making themselves a success. However, though social and economic mobility do exist within monopolistic and late capitalist societies, the deck is so heavily stacked in favour of the powerful and the privileged that in practice only a very small percentage of the relatively powerless are able to realize significant economic or social mobility. Economic and social mobility on a minor scale is attainable within late

capitalism – but significant social mobility and the power, wealth, and status that come with the highest levels of achievement remain concentrated in the hands of a global elite. Furthermore, the means by which significant mobility may be realized are concealed under many layers of distorting ideology serving the conservative purpose of deceiving those who seek to realize extreme upward social or economic mobility. Extreme social mobility is possible even within inherently monopolistic systems, but the attainment of such mobility becomes very difficult when almost all of the structural elements of society and interpersonal interaction are laced with deceit stemming from ideological projections protecting the dominance and status of the elite class.

This paper attempts to demonstrate by discussing the ideological manipulations prevalent in modern sport and the news that true free and open social or economic marketplaces do not exist in the present era. Capitalists project the illusion that free competition exists because the open and free market ideology serves the purpose of consolidating power in the hands of those who already have it.

Members of the lower classes (the relatively powerless or the role players on sports teams) who attempt to compete in the social or economic marketplaces (the sports playing field) against the capitalist class (the powerful or sports superstars) must learn to resist or bypass the rules inherent in the system that is in place if they want a reasonable chance of attaining significant social mobility. People who “play by the rules” projected into the minds of the masses through late monopoly capitalist institutions, whether these be role players on sports teams or workers on the assembly line, are very unlikely to achieve significant social mobility, precisely because the “rules” which are presented as unquestionable “truths,” are in fact ideological creations and projections of late capitalist oligarchic economic structures whose purpose is to maintain social stability, not to encourage social mobility.

Achieving significant social mobility in late monopoly capitalism is dependant upon a willingness to work outside of the system or to break the established rules through direct resistance to unfair and oppressive norms embedded within social institutions such as sports and everyday social interactions with

people programmed by late monopoly capitalistic ideology. Everyday personal interactions are significantly influenced by the norms, ideas, and behaviours embedded within social entertainment and training spectacles such as sports. As this paper will attempt to demonstrate, despite the common belief that the sporting field of play is an “open market” representing free and fair competition, very little is fair or truly competitive about professional or collegiate sports. Popular sporting systems operate in accordance with principals projected by the norms, values, and principals prevalent within monopoly capitalist oligarchic economic structures. As Lenny Flank writes, “the highest stage of capitalist development is that of economic imperialism. In this stage, capital is fully centralized into monopolistic corporations which do away with the competition associated with earlier capitalism” (2007: locations 663-84).

### **Marxist/ Marxist-Leninist/Gramscian Ideological Theory**

The conservative capitalist element residing at or near the top of the American socioeconomic and political power hierarchy disseminates subtle but potent ideology aimed at the average American in order to manage or influence individual and collective perceptions and actions to bring them into line with capitalist norms and expectations. In this paper, the concept of “ideology” is used in its neo-Gramscian sense, denoting a system of partially or entirely false or deceptive beliefs created and disseminated by the ruling class and internalized by an oppressed population serving to support, justify, and protect the powerful in their exploitation of consumers.

According to Antonio Gramsci, the original meaning of ideology or “ideo + logy” was the “investigation of the origin of ideas” (Gramsci 1971:375). Marxists, Leninists, neo-Marxists, and neo-Gramscians use the term “ideology” to refer to the body of beliefs and perceptions produced by the dialectical relationship between the “base” and “superstructure” of a human society. According to Marx, the base of a society is its economic structure or its relations of production, while the superstructure consists of the social, political, religious, philosophic, and intellectual life that arises from the underlying

economic base “to which correspond definite forms of consciousness” (Marx 1977).

In regard to ideology, Marx wrote that the “mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (Marx 1977). While some earlier Marxist theorists took “the distinction between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ mentioned by Marx ... literally; the economic base directly determines the ideological superstructure, and ideology has no impact on human affairs...” (Flank 2007: locations 2390-2412), neo-Gramscians and Leninists tend to relate to ideology on a more dialectic level in which the base affects the superstructure and manipulations of the superstructure of a society can change the form of the base. In other words, people can influence the base of a society by manipulating their thoughts or perceptions or manipulating the institutions and social structures that project ideology into the population. Ideology is important to the neo-Gramscian because “To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is psychological; they organize human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.” (Gramsci 1971:377).

Furthermore, Marxist understandings of the meaning of the term ideology differ considerably from the general public’s understanding and popular use of the term. When the term ideology is used by a non-Marxist, it is usually understood in a limited sense to mean “an interconnected system of ideas (often political in nature)” and nothing more.

Neo-Gramscian understanding of the importance of ideological manipulation is inexorably intertwined with the concept of cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony refers to the dominance of a culturally diverse society by one social class and its sociocultural norms, regardless of the desires or interests of dominated social classes. “The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance” (Marx

1932). The institutions and media of the ruling class which form the social apparatus within which all citizens must operate project the ideas, philosophies, and norms of the ruling class as unquestionable and unchangeable universal truths. "In essence, the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie can be viewed as a sort of 'secular religion,' in which existing social structures and relationships are deified and treated as an inescapable and unalterable part of reality" (Flank 2007: locations 2536-56).

The ideas, philosophies, and norms which the ruling-class project into the rest of society are those that serve the best interests of the ruling class. Being saturated from all angles by the ideas and norms of the ruling class and lacking alternate sources of information and supportive institutional structures to transmit and reproduce those alternative ideas, members of the dominated classes subtly internalize the norms, ideas, and philosophies of the ruling class as their own. Thus, members of dominated classes who have internalized the ideologies of the ruling class very often act against their own best interests without realizing they are so doing, because they have internalized a "false consciousness," or manipulated perception of the world based on the ideas programmed into their minds by the ruling class.

One of the primary means by which a ruling class protects its power and status in a capitalist society is by encouraging the creation of false consciousness within the minds of the members of oppressed classes through a widespread projection of conservative ideologies through capitalist dominated social institutions embedded within social zones. In this way, members of oppressed classes tend to police themselves to conform to the desires of the ruling class. In capitalist societies, the government usually does not need to compel the population to accept capitalism by force. Oppressed populations accept the hegemony of the ruling class of their own free, but significantly manipulated choice.

Gramsci believed that it was necessary to wage a cultural struggle or war of position in the public sphere in order to overcome the false mindset held by the vast majority of exploited people protecting the ruling class and its interests. A war of position in the cultural arena involves establishing a counter-hege-

mony of institutions and social structures supporting the ideas and norms of oppressed peoples who have developed "class consciousness." Class consciousness is none other than the realization that society is divided into social classes dominated by a ruling class and the use of that understanding to act in one's own best class interests.

If neo-Gramscian ideological theory has validity, we would expect to find potent but subtle and concealed ideological transmissions meant to influence the thoughts and actions of the masses at precisely those sociocultural locations where the mass media meets popular culture. As Marx wrote, "The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it" (Marx 1932). Powerful media interests meet mass culture within the realm of popular televised team sporting events. As is predicted by Marxist ideological theory, in a significant number of cases sports commentators do appear to be serving as veiled mouthpieces of late monopoly capitalist-oriented ideology. Therefore, it is the opinion of this author that televised sporting events in America serve as a concealed but primary school of mass political indoctrination teaching late monopoly capitalist ideology and norms supporting an inequitable sociocultural hierarchy.

The notion that sport in the Western world serves to legitimize, support, and reproduce the capitalist system has been explored by a number of radical scholars (Hoch 1972; Meggysey 1970; Oliver 1971; Scott 1971). Perhaps Christopher Lasch summarized the radical position best when he wrote that "sport is a 'mirror reflection' of society which indoctrinates the young with the dominant values..." and an "agency of social repression, fostering the authoritarian interests of the dominant culture... their inculcation perpetuates the 'false consciousness' of the masses" (Lasch 1977:28). Paul Hoch declared that Western sports "undergird monopoly capitalism, militarism, racism, sexism, competitiveness, sexual repression, and the counterrevolution" (Novak 1976:215).

Criticism of sport in capitalistic nations is by no means limited to Western social radicals. The

communist world recognized the socially degenerative potential of Western sport as early as the 1920s, when “the Soviet Union largely opted out of the western system of international sport, condemning it as inherently capitalistic and exploitative” (Keys 2003:414).

Sport in the Western world has been accused of providing a foundation for male dominance (Sabo and Runfula 1980; Felshin 1974). Female athletes who struggle to transform the male-centric nature of many sports face numerous inequalities related to the “funding of programs, facilities and equipment, coaching, medical and training facilities and staff, travel, number of sports activities provided, scholarships, and media coverage” (Coakley 1978).

Christopher Lasch believed that pure sport was not so much the problem as was its secularization, “its subjection to some ulterior purpose, such as profit-making, patriotism, moral training, or the pursuit of health” (Lasch 1977:2).

In addition, it has been argued that sports are a socially acceptable mechanism used to train capitalist citizens to accept and glorify aggression and warlike behavior toward designated rivals. Richard Sipes presented evidence that the tendencies for warlike behavior and aggression may be learned cultural patterns (1973) taught within the sporting arena.

The distinction between a “team sport” and an “individualistic sport” is very important for the purposes of this particular paper. This study focused specifically on two “team sports” – basketball and football. For the purposes of this paper, team sports are defined as “sports in which individual expression of personal talent is extremely dependent upon being allowed to receive the ball.” In basketball and football, not only does a player have to be allowed onto the field of play by a coach with dictatorial powers, but an individual player cannot score without being allowed to have access to the basketball or the football. Sports in which individual players are capable of demonstrating their skills regardless of whether or not they are allowed the ball, such as baseball, are, in the context of this paper, defined as “individualistic” sports and not necessarily subject to all of the findings described herein.

Within individualistic-oriented athletic events,

sports commentators lose much of their power to define the skills or lack thereof of individual players in a deceiving manner. The batting average of a baseball player is determined by how many hits are made. No one has to pass a baseball player “the ball” before that player is allowed to express their batting skills. In team sports, however, sports commentators can and often do label players at a level well below their actual ability and pass this information on as unalterable truth in order to disempower players who are so labelled. This unfortunate situation corresponds well with many zones of the sociocultural arena outside of the sporting world where a group, or powerful members of a group, decide who will be allowed the opportunity to demonstrate their personal skills and who will not. Much can be learned by examining the social interactions and political manipulations inherent in sport in a capitalist society.

For the purposes of this study, a “sports commentator” is any individual assigned the role of translating for an audience the events occurring within a sporting event. Therefore, the “sports commentator” label includes commentators, sportscasters, sports radio talk show hosts, and even sideline reporters. Why is it important to analyze the sports commentator? Because a significant portion of the United States population watches sports regularly, maintains a passing interest in sports, plays sports, or wears clothing bearing the insignia of various sports teams. As Nancy Berge wrote, “sport is part and parcel of our everyday life. The evidence of this is clear in the ties between sport and other institutions” (1981:346).

With so much of the typical American’s time focused on sport, it would seem very likely that sporting events significantly influence the perceptions of the average American. If sporting events significantly influence the perception of the typical American, does it not seem eminently reasonable that the ruling class would take an interest in manipulating sporting events to promote ideology that supports late monopoly capitalistic norms on which the socioeconomic and political stability of the current system depend?

The sports commentator is the designated, socially and commercially authorized translator of a sporting event for an audience. Major (and minor)

networks have decided that sporting events should not be viewed in their natural, uncommented state. Audiences have come to expect and probably desire sports commentators, but why were commentators “attached” to sporting events which originally had no commentators? Why did and why do people accept the presence of a phenomenal “translator” of a game when the game itself is played without a “translator”? What does the presence of commentators in general suggest about the “translation” of raw reality into forms determined by the powerful to be suitable for mass audiences?

With few exceptions, a commentator is assigned to every televised sporting event. Not only is a commentator assigned to every game, but almost every event within a particular game is “commented upon” by a commentator or a sportscaster. Few actions are allowed to occur on the field of play “uncommented upon.” Whether the audience realizes it is the case or not (as this study will demonstrate, most people do not recognize the political purposes of the sports commentator), a commentator acts as a filter distorting the raw content of a sporting event in accordance with verbal declarations made regarding events occurring on the field of play. But what is the essential nature of the verbal declarations made? Are verbal translations of sporting events primarily personal observations, political (ideological) observations, or a combination of personal and political observations?

I propose that verbal translations of sporting events are a combination of personal and political observation, making the ideological portion of sports commentary harder to recognize for what it is and more effective at transmitting ideology due to its concealed nature.

### **e Case Study**

One hundred randomly selected college students in the greater Seattle, Washington region were asked to explain in their own words the essential purpose of the sports commentator. The comments printed below are generally representative of the answers I received and can be assumed to be fairly representative of the opinion held by the typical American college student regarding sports commentators.

“The sports commentator is there to like... I don't know... make the game more exciting.”

“The commentator teaches the audience the best way a game should be played.”

“A commentator makes sure the audience doesn't miss anything that's going on down on the field.”

It seems reasonable to assume that, in comparison with the average American, educated college students would be particularly sensitive to any real or perceived connection between politics, ideology, and popular sport, but not one of one hundred students asked mentioned a possible connection between sports and political indoctrination, even when I brought up the issue in informal conversation after my study questions had been asked. If college students are any indicator of the general population's awareness of the merging of politics and sport, then the vast majority of Americans do not perceive sports and politics to be interrelated at all. But when sports and sporting events are so deeply ingrained into American society and culture, and society and culture effect politics, how could sports and sporting events not be tied to political and ideological matters?

Regardless of common (mis)perceptions of the nature of sports and televised sporting events and the commentators who translate sporting content to a viewing audience, a high percentage of verbal declarations made by sports commentators could be judged to be overtly or subtly political in nature. Not only were televised sporting events found to be saturated with thinly veiled political and ideological commentary, but almost all of the politically-oriented comments made were strongly conservative in nature. That is, the ideology that is being transmitted by sports commentators appears to be supporting conservative late monopoly capitalistic norms at the expense of any other possible way of viewing events occurring on a “field of play.” Tellingly, sports commentary that would be considered liberal or leftist was almost entirely absent from the television sports commentary sampled. As Jean-Marie Brohm writes, “All of the values of the capitalist jungle are played out in sport: virility, fascistic male chauvinism, racism, sexism, etc.” (1978:15), yet the legitimacy of these values is never questioned.

## Capitalist Ideology Embedded within Sports Commentary

Conservative political ideology supporting late monopoly capitalism embedded within sports commentary found within this analysis tends to fall within a few definable categories. Most importantly, the majority of the conservative ideology embedded within sports commentary could be categorized as being related to the glorification and maintenance of extreme social stratification based on held or achieved power and the idea that the sports playing field is a fair and level ground in which fair and level competition determines who rises to the top. The people at the top tend to support extreme social stasis in order to protect their positions and this desire is reflected in conservative ideology found within sports commentary which is then disseminated to the masses who are, for the most part, working directly or indirectly in the service of the elite. Though the support of extremely rigid social stratification is the overarching category under which most political sports commentary falls, within this overarching category numerous sub-categories were found which will be briefly defined in the Specific Evidence portion of the paper.

Practical tactics determined to be commonly employed by sports commentators to effectively transmit conservative capitalist ideology include direct ideological transmission, subtle ideological transmission, linguistic code switching, and the use of revisionist history. It is evident that in a majority of cases sports commentators not only support the notion that a natural and inevitable social hierarchy exists and is eminently desirable within sports and sporting events, they help to create and maintain that hierarchy as well. By analogy, viewers tend to internalize the possibility that whenever possible, significant aspects of society outside of sports should conform to the model promoted within sporting events as well. Though commentators seldom directly connect supporting commentary for conservative social hierarchies within capitalist-oriented sporting events to aspects of society outside of sporting events (though they were found to make such direct connections on occasion), the viewing audience is subtly taught by example and phenomenal analogy that extreme social stratification is a necessary and eminently desirable

sociocultural model. In the same way that a basketball “star” like LeBron James or Kobe Bryant should take the majority of shots in a basketball game for his team, the CEO of a major corporation should make most of the important decisions for a business, the President should make most of the important decisions for the United States, and rich, powerful, and high status individuals should make most of the decisions for poor, relatively powerless, and lower to middle-status people. The idea that people should strive to compete in the free market (which does not really exist) in order to determine their social standing is transmitted and internalized by the audience in the same way.

Sports commentators are subtly indoctrinating American audiences to accept the extremely conservative political viewpoint that high ranking individuals should be treated better than lower status individuals and deferred to whenever possible and that a free market and significant social mobility based on free and fair competition are prevalent in American society. More specifically, direct evidence was found that demonstrates that sports commentators give sports “stars” a disproportionate amount of attention, treat sports “stars” with undue deference and respect, and seldom question sports “stars” for decisions they make, even if the decisions made appear to be poor decisions, while constantly questioning the actions and decisions of lower status players, even if those decisions were correct decisions which led to beneficial outcomes for their respective teams. When lower-status players succeed on the court or emulate “star” players with their actions and achievements, sports commentators often attempt to “explain away,” or label as meaningless, the actions and achievements of the lower status players.

Popular sporting events are commonly used as late monopoly capitalist-oriented political theatre. Particular plays are commented upon in order to teach social lessons to the mass viewing audience about the need to maintain extreme and rigid social hierarchies.

It is so even in the face of direct evidence that the people at the top are making incorrect decisions or that the people at the bottom are ready and capable of moving up. At the same time sports commentators promote the false idea that free and fair competition

is being used to determine who holds the highest position on the “field of play.”

The situation prevalent within sport in the United States is very much akin to the neo-Gramscian notion that the working classes are being taught to internalize the ideology of the late monopoly capitalist class despite the fact that the norms and values being taught are not in the subordinate classes’ own interests. The masses are taught to believe that a free market exists and that competition and hard work within that market will undoubtedly lead to extreme social mobility and power. Yet a truly free market or open and fair competition does not exist on the “field of play” or in greater society.

While sports commentators praise powerful sports stars and the actions and decisions they make (whether correct or incorrect), comments made in regard to lower status players subtly but powerfully imply that lower status individuals should be degraded subtly and directly as a matter of course, labelled as “role players” instead of as individuals or people with potential, constantly reminded to “play their role,” and frequently taught the need to accept the authority and command of higher status individuals such as sports “stars” and dictatorial coaches.

### **The Subtle Nature of Sports Indoctrination**

Political indoctrination attendant to sports commentary is subtle in nature. Unless an individual is looking for ideology embedded within sports commentary, they are not likely to come to the conclusion that ideology is embedded within sports commentary. “Again, it should be stressed that this process of hegemony is not merely a system of overt propaganda, in which the media deliberately disseminates false information in order to mislead people. The process is much more subtle than that; it works, not by forcing others to adopt a particular point of view, but by limiting all potential outlooks to those consistent with current social relationships...” (Flank 2007: locations 2515-36). That the ideology embedded in sports commentary is subtle should not come as a surprise, for in an unequal society in which predation of the misinformed is encouraged it would not be in the best interests of the powerful to betray attempts to

control the perceptions of the powerless. When and if the exploited become capable of seeing through the veil of obscurant ideology embedded within popular sports, class consciousness may begin to develop. With newly developed class consciousness as a foundation, the masses (or individuals from within the masses) may begin to resist their exploitation at the hands of the late monopoly capitalists. Effective ideological transmission often needs to be subtle in order to bypass the conscious and rational defenses of the human mind in order to effectively control thought and action from a subconscious level.

Some might think it preposterous to claim that sports commentators are part of an organized conspiracy constructed by the powerful with the aim of keeping audiences aligned with late monopoly capitalist ideology and the political and economic systems that support the elite. However, organized conspiracy is not necessary when late monopoly capitalist goals are considered. The quest for extreme profit and power at any cost to consumers has become standard operating procedure within many capitalist corporations. Corporations seeking to realize extreme profits and power would create and support oppressive ideologies as a byproduct of standard business practices, even if such ideologies were not consciously created in a conspiratorial manner. The greed of powerful corporations and people is all that is needed to create and transmit an effective monopoly capitalist-oriented ideology at a national level. Marx wrote that “many times, the intellectuals who help to justify bourgeois social relationships are not even consciously aware that they are doing so – they may believe that their line of thought is completely independent of existing social structures, yet by accepting certain portions of the existing intellectual paradigm as ‘given,’ the effect of their intellectual activity is to support the existing social order (Flank 2007: locations 2493-2515).

Sports commentators would not necessarily need to be consciously aware of the nature of the ideology embedded within comments made. An individual’s social class or status is very capable of creating significant portions of that individual’s perceptions and style of interaction with the social world. Holding, or desiring to hold, the social position of “sports commentator” may predispose an unaware individual

toward transmitting capitalist ideology to an audience, because the role of “sports commentator” is a primary position where late monopoly capitalist ideology can, and in fact is expected to be, transmitted to the American masses.

### Specific Evidence

Over 104 National Basketball Association (NBA), National Football League, and high school televised sporting events were analyzed over a period of six months with an eye toward isolating ideologically oriented speech for further consideration. Sixty of the games were broadcast by major networks, while 44 of the games examined were broadcast by smaller cable TV networks. As noted, the study sample included basketball and football games only.

The primary findings of the study included specific evidence suggesting that:

- Sports commentators alter their linguistic code based on the perceived status of the player being talked about
- Commentators talk significantly more about “star” players than about “non-star” players
- Commentators talk about other “star” players in games which do not even include the “star” being talked about rather than talk about the playing of non-star players in the games they are announcing
- Commentators favorably compare “stars” in the game being viewed with other “stars” on other teams not currently playing
- Commentators talk about high status individuals in the crowd, or “stars” from outside of sports attending a sporting event

Linguistic code switching was found to be very prevalent in the sample. An excellent example of the type of linguistic code switching commonly employed by sports commentators occurred during a Cleveland Cavaliers at Orlando Magic NBA league game when the commentator’s focus was on three separate individuals playing for the Cleveland Cavaliers. One individual being talked about was LeBron James, a very high status individual or “superstar” in the NBA.

The other two individuals were “role players” allowed by the coach to come off the bench to participate in the game for a limited period of time. When the

commentator talked about the “star” player, he always referred to him by his personal name, LeBron James. But when two relatively unknown “bench players,” or “role players,” entered the game, the commentator did not refer to the players by their personal names. Rather, the commentator referred to the two players as “a couple of big bodies.” After giving the two “role players” a collective, derogatory, and disempowering label, the commentator then proceeded to clearly define the expected roles of the “two big bodies” for the audience. Specifically, the commentator informed the audience that “big bodies weren’t going to get you a ton of points, but they were solid big men who were going to get some rebounds and put-backs.”

When judged through the discerning lens of neo-Gramscian ideological theory, was the commentator merely helping the audience to understand the intricacies of the game, or was the commentator forcing disempowering labels upon two “bench players” while indoctrinating the audience via example in the ways of predatory capitalist exploitation of the lower classes? It seems likely that a significant number of viewers probably accepted the commentator’s comments as objectively true rather than used their own individual perception to judge the value and worth of the two “role players” who had been so graciously allowed to enter the game by a dictatorial coach. In this context, it seems very clear that the sports “star” is representative of the late monopoly capitalist, while the “role players” were being symbolically equated with the oppressed classes.

Before the two “big bodies” were even allowed to demonstrate what skills or potential they may or may not have had, the commentator had already refused to use the “bench players” given names, assigned the “bench players” the disempowering labels of “big men” and “big bodies,” lumped two distinctive individuals under one collective label, and “educated” the vast viewing audience on what the two “role players” were and were not capable of doing.

But how could the commentator possibly know what the two “role players” were and were not capable of doing? The commentator was clearly implying that conditions in the present are completely determined by conditions in the past. However, according to neo-Gramscian ideological theory, events in the past are

themselves misrepresented owing to the ideological filter overlain over all social institutions including sporting events and sports media presentations, which are social institutions of the late monopoly capitalist class that create and project ideological manipulations as a matter of course. The commentator was verbally denying the possibility that a “role player” was capable of accomplishing as much as a “star,” precisely because a “role player” was not a “star.” But since both “role player” and “star” are labels forced upon players without their consent, the distorting and controlling nature of the commentator’s comments become clear. A label does not necessarily equate well with reality, yet commentators act as though the labels that they create are direct re-presentations of an unchanging and unalterable underlying state. The sports commentator in the first example was doing nothing short of verbally denying the possibility of social mobility within a hierarchical sociocultural system without taking into account the potential of the players being labelled – yet the field of play (in this case the basketball court) is commonly believed to be a free and level determining grounds in which social mobility can be realized.

One could argue that the commentator was only expressing his opinion on the value of “role players” based on previous experience and accumulated statistics. But in addition to the fact that the same commentators almost always repeated their tendency to negatively label non-star players in every conceivable circumstance, an argument could be made that perhaps “role players” have relatively poor stats not because they lack the skills to obtain better stats, but precisely because a dictatorial coach and perhaps other players on the team and the media had labelled them as “role players,” limited their playing time, and designed plays in which only the “star” players would be allowed to accumulate the very stats by which the label “star” and all of its disproportionate benefits could be earned. In the very same way, late monopoly capitalism teaches oppressed populations that the people who hold positions of significant power in the United States do so because they are more “talented” than the average person. Yet is this really the case? Do people who hold positions of extreme power in the United States hold those positions because of their

talent, or because of their willingness and ability to use oppression, exploitation, and deceit to hold down potential competition? Is the United States being led by the most talented, or the most oppressive?

Are role players “role players” because of their essential nature as supposedly inferior players or are they “role players” because they have been forcibly labelled as such? Does the commentator’s commentary serve to translate to the audience what is actually occurring on and outside the “field of play” or does it serve to transmit a conservative ideological message to the audience supporting the notion that the powerful are the most talented because they have competed and been found victorious on an equal, level, and fair playing field? What if a “role player” was given the same amount of playing time, the same access to the ball, and had plays specifically designed for him or her?

I would like to propose that the chances are good that a “role player” shown the same favouritism as a “star” player in a team sport would soon come to accumulate the kind of statistics common to a “star” player. Likewise, I would like to propose that a member of an oppressed class shown the same kind of favouritism as a member of the late monopoly capitalist class would soon come to accumulate significant power and wealth. But even if a “role player” were to accumulate the same kind of statistics as a “star” player, the question would remain whether the “role player” would ever be able to shake off the label of “role player” or would always be perceived as a “second class star,” because the athlete had once been labelled a “role player.”

Another professional basketball game provided an excellent example of the sometimes lingering nature of a derogatory label, when the commentator both praised and negatively labelled a “role player” at the same time.

Commentator: “That’s what I like about him. He understands his range. He isn’t taking shots beyond 20 feet.”

But was the praise given really praise or was it a verbal cover designed to disguise the spreading of predatory ideology supporting an exploitive sociocultural system at the expense of the player being talked

about? In this particular case, “good” is defined as a player who limits himself with boundaries defined by the sports commentator. If the “role player” had attempted to step outside of his predefined limits, he would have been considered “bad.” What happens when this same model of perception is accepted and applied in the personal life of the viewer?

is is best summed up in a quote from the end of an episode of *Hard Knocks: Baltimore Ravens*, a documentary television series based on the inner machinations of a professional football training camp. As an individual who has just been cut from the Raven’s tryouts walks sadly out the door, a player who has made the team informs the audience with no small amount of pleasure that “Some players belong on the team and some don’t belong on the team” (*Hard Knocks*). The typical sports fan would probably accept such a statement at face value without considering its deeper sociocultural, political, and economic implications.

### **The Extreme Focus of Commentary on Sports Stars.**

Linguistic code switching is combined with a disproportionate focus on star players and even other high-status individuals not involved with sports who attend games as members of the audience, representative of the alliances which tend to be formed between members of the late monopoly capitalist class. During a particular NBA playoff game found to be representative of most of the playoff games examined in the study, the camera spent an inordinate amount of time focusing on a “superstar” player at the expense of the other players on the court. The commentator had something positive to say about the “superstar” at regular intervals throughout the game. Before and after commercial breaks the camera would often switch between close up cameos of Tiger Woods (a “superstar” golfer in the audience) and the “superstar” basketball player. In addition, the commentators spent an inordinate amount of time talking about which “superstar” should be the MVP of the league, rather than talking about the actions and play of other players who were on the court and who were actually playing at the time. What does such commentary and focus on “superstar” athletes

teach the non-critical members of the mass viewing audience about the need to worship and submit to the successful and powerful?

### **Political Manipulation of Commentators Outside of Sport.**

In an April 2008 article the *New York Times* reported that the U.S. Military Groomed TV Analysts. Specifically, it was reported that many “U.S. military analysts used as commentators on Iraq by television networks have been groomed by the Pentagon, leaving some feeling they were manipulated to report favorably on the Bush administration” (Barstow 2008). Apparently, the United States military extended offers to a number of popular television military analysts to attend specially organized retreats sponsored by the military with the stated purpose of sharing information to the analysts about the state of the Iraqi-United States conflict. The US military completely controlled the information they released to the analysts. The analysts who attended the retreats would later go on air to a mass television audience having knowledge of the Iraq conflict based only on what they had been told by the U.S. military.

Robert Bevelacqua, a former Fox News analyst and Green Beret, was quoted as saying that “It was them (the Bush administration) saying, we need to stick our hands up your back and move your mouth for you” (Barstow 2008). It seems clear that the U.S. military desired to use military analysts on popular television news programs as mouthpieces spreading the official U.S. military version of events to the masses in the Iraq conflict. According to the precepts of late capitalism, the military and the government are essentially in place to support the status and power of the elite capitalist class. If commentators are routinely being coerced into spreading conservative political ideology on major news programs, is it really that much of a stretch to claim that they may be being used in other settings in a similar way?

Not only were major news programs using military commentators to alter the public’s perception of the Iraq conflict, but many of those same commentators had direct ties to military contractors making money off the war. If this is the case, does it not seem reasonable to assume that sports commentators

might be coerced to alter their commentary in ways meant to maximize a network's profit off of televised sporting events?

Perhaps the corporate structure in which the sports media and sports commentators operate serves to "inform" sports commentators what they should say and not say as well. Perhaps Lenny Flank is correct when he writes that "the media cannot think in a non-corporate way precisely because they are corporations, and they are organized as corporations because without these economic resources, they would be unable to survive in a market economy" (2007: locations 2536-56).

### **Conclusion**

I propose that the evidence supports the possibility that sporting events have become a premier "school" of late monopoly conservative capitalist-oriented political indoctrination in the United States. Where historical examples of relatively blatant political indoctrination mechanisms associated with Khmer

Rouge Cambodia, the U.S.S.R., North Korea, or Communist China may be fairly easy for an outsider to recognize, somewhat similar political and ideological mechanisms supporting late monopoly capitalism may currently be at work in the United States under the guise of televised sporting events and presumably in many other areas of society as well.

Surprisingly, conservative ideological transmissions supporting late monopoly capitalism embedded within popular sporting events may be more effective in keeping the population adhering to the dominant political and economic ideology than were the more direct methods used to indoctrinate the populace in places like Cambodia and China, precisely because the illusion is presented that sports is entertainment, not a political or ideological event. A significant percentage of the American population are willing participants in their own indoctrination into the tenets of conservative capitalism without even realizing they are being indoctrinated at all.

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# LOHAS and the Indigo Dollar: Growing the Spiritual Economy

Joseph Gelfer

**ABSTRACT:** It is well documented that alternative spiritualities can be commercialised and commodified. My aim in this paper is to extend this further by identifying how LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability), which describes a multi-billion dollar marketplace in the United States, seeks to consciously grow the spiritual economy to unprecedented levels. I then provide an example of how this consumer-focused logic is expressed by integral theorist Ken Wilber, resulting in what might be called the “indigo dollar.”

**Keywords:** LOHAS, spirituality, late capitalism, integral theory, Ken Wilber

It is well documented that alternative spiritualities can be commercialised and commodified (Aldred 2000, Carrette and King 2005, Ezzy 2006, Heelas 1999, Possamai 2003, Rindfleisch 2005, Roof 1999, Waldron 2005). My aim in this paper is to extend this further by identifying how LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability), which describes a multi-billion dollar marketplace in the United States, seeks to consciously grow the spiritual economy to unprecedented levels. It does this both by selling spiritual products and, more importantly, by co-opting spirituality into its “values” to further generate revenue, resulting in increased acceptance of the transparent commercialisation of the spiritual. I then provide an example of how this increased acceptance manifests in the work of integral theorist Ken Wilber, who sells a range of spiritual products and services resulting in what might be called the “indigo dollar.” My aim here is not to belittle the spiritual experiences sought in the LOHAS marketplace, rather, following Jeremy

Carrette and Richard King’s Marxist analysis of the spiritual marketplace, to “challenge constructions of spirituality that promote the subsuming of the ethical and religious in terms of an overriding economic agenda” (Carrette and King 2005:4). Acknowledging that “spiritual materialism is not the same as spirituality” (Gould 2006), the concern is precisely for those in the LOHAS marketplace who are, quite literally, in danger of being sold a false idea: that growing the spiritual economy is the same as spiritual growth.

## LOHAS and the Spiritual Economy

LOHAS is an acronym for *Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability*. The term was coined by Gaiam (Nasdaq: GAIA), a highly successful media company known for producing yoga DVDs (Gaiam 2009). The LOHAS marketplace comprises five key segments: sustainable economy, healthy lifestyles, alternative healthcare, personal development, and ecological lifestyles (Peterson 2008), and is inspired by the

findings of Paul H. Ray's (2000) book, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People are Changing the World*. Ray identified Cultural Creatives as constituting around twenty-five percent of the population in the United States. Their main concern, as the label suggests, is creating a new culture based on values reflecting ecological sustainability, authenticity in personal and public life, women's issues, looking at the bigger picture, and spirituality. Ray argued that Cultural Creatives were an influential but largely invisible demographic, spanning the full spectrum of age, race and income. LOHAS made the Cultural Creatives visible.

Spirituality is a core part of LOHAS and falls within its market segment of "personal development."

The term "spirituality" is subject to a broad array of interpretations, often contrasted against the more dogmatic constructions of "religion." Serving, for example, as a relatively specific contemporary definition, Robert Forman's (2004) "grassroots spirituality" seeks to be as inclusive as possible of many spiritual constituencies on their own terms, and suggests it "involves a vaguely pantheistic ultimate that is indwelling, sometimes bodily, as the deepest self and accessed through not-strictly-rational means of self transformation and group process that becomes the holistic organization for all life" (51). However, the "vaguely pantheistic ultimate" is too specific for the LOHAS demographic, who are part of the "spirituality revolution" defined by a broad spectrum of alternative spiritualities largely focused on the "subjective turn" away from transcendent sources of significance and authority towards the internal (Heelas and Woodhead 2005:6). In this context, (alternative) spirituality is best understood as being concerned with Sandra Schneiders' (1989) "horizon of ultimate value" (684).

"Ultimate values" function as shorthand for spirituality and is implied via interpretations of "values," "sustainability," "ethics," "well-being" and so forth. However, while these allusions can be vague, the spirituality message communicates clearly enough: when profiled in *Newsweek*, for example, LOHAS consumers were described as "21<sup>st</sup> Century New Agers" (Waldman and Reiss 2006). Spirituality is certainly prevalent among the consumer magazines in which *LOHAS Journal* suggests producers adver-

tise: *Alternative Medicine; Body & Soul; Experience Life; Healing Lifestyles and Spas; Vegetarian Times; Optimum Wellness; Delicious Living; Better Nutrition; VegNews; Yoga Journal; Yogi Times; Plenty; Organic Lifestyles; Sunset; Spirituality and Health; Mother Jones; Ode; Utne* (LOHAS 2008c). Depending on how strict one is in defining spirituality, one could probably expect to find regular spiritual articles in the majority of these titles; indeed one could argue that spirituality, along with food are the prime common denominators.

The LOHAS employment of the spiritual is intended to reflect consumers' desire to bear witness to their spiritual values while making purchasing decisions. However, the importance of spirituality within the LOHAS marketplace can also be viewed via a more worldly lens. First, spiritual products are simply another market that can be expanded and exploited. Second, a co-option of spirituality by LOHAS as part of its "values" lends credibility to its overall mission to make money, which might otherwise be looked upon unfavourably by some consumers. The point of LOHAS<sup>1</sup> is to learn how to "communicate with" (i.e. "sell to") consumers who fit the LOHAS demographic (French and Rogers 2006). LOHAS business argues that it serves a "triple bottom line" (Elkington 1998) of "people, planet and profit" which measures a business's or organisation's success not just by its financial performance, but also its environmental and social performance. Allusions to spirituality lend more emphasis to people and planet in this formula. However, the LOHAS marketplace is clearly focused on profit, demonstrated by the following outline of LOHAS business values.

*LOHAS Journals* fundamental premises for values-driven business are higher productivity and profitability among employees who work in a company they "believe in," and loyalty and forgiveness from customers who appreciate a company's dedication to both their product and community (Warwick 2008). The result of these values is the

<sup>1</sup> This paper would have benefited from reading the Natural Marketing Institute's, *The LOHAS Report: Consumers & Sustainability*, which contains a section on "The Role of Religion and Spirituality." Unfortunately the report costs \$4000 [[http://www.nmisolutions.com/r2\\_07\\_toc\\_lohas.html](http://www.nmisolutions.com/r2_07_toc_lohas.html), accessed 28 December 2009] and was thus beyond my reach.

“sustainability” of business (the insured longevity of profitability). The use of the word “sustainable” when actually meaning “continually profitable” is an explicit example of LOHAS co-opting language to serve its own financial ends.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, all three aspects of the triple bottom line are referred to in these values, but profit remains the chief focus. In much the same way, when discussing clean technology, *LOHAS Journal* is less interested in what this means for the planet and more focused on “a compelling investment opportunity” (Propper de Callejon et al 2008).

A clear formula can be identified in the presentation of LOHAS values-driven business, framing business opportunities first by “people and planet” and then by “profit.” For example, *LOHAS Journal* highlights Organic Bouquet, a green alternative in the “\$19 billion dollar US floral trade” (Spiegelman 2008).

is producer partners with charitable organisations such as Amnesty International and in doing so trades upon what can be described as their “credibility asset.” Of this partnership, Amnesty’s Executive Director claims both “share the goal of improving the lives of and securing justice for people throughout the world.” But the Organic Bouquet profile concludes with what we can only assume is the “bottom triple bottom line,” noting the company has “created the market for organic fresh cut flowers.” Making such purchases then becomes the method by which consumers are encouraged to play their part in solving the world’s problems: buying on certain credit cards can be a “force for change. ... for you and for the planet” (LOHAS 2008b).<sup>3</sup> So much emphasis is given to “people and planet” that it becomes easy to forget the “profit” altogether, resulting in paradoxes which enable *LOHAS Journal*, with its focus on selling possessions, to quote the Dalai Lama’s criticism that “In our increasing materialistic world, we are driven by a seemingly insatiable desire for power and

possessions” (Lupberger 2008). This quote demonstrates both how profit is obscured within LOHAS, and how spirituality (in this case personified by the Dalai Lama) is employed in this process.

LOHAS attempts to consolidate these “values” by surrounding them in a veil of “authenticity” (LOHAS 2008a). LOHAS does not offer much context for what it means by authenticity. However, the drive toward authenticity is typically seen as a response to the three core malaises of modern society: “The first fear is about what we might call the loss of meaning, the fading of moral horizons.

The second concerns the eclipse of ends, in face of rampant instrumental reason. And the third is about a loss of freedom” (Taylor 1992:10). By alluding to authenticity, LOHAS appeals to an intuitive desire to mitigate this societal malaise, deflecting attention from its core financial business to one of ultimate concerns. At the same time, securing its morally privileged position of incorporating such ultimate concerns, LOHAS criticises those who appear to have no authenticity: Identifying the recent explosion of LOHAS awareness in Japan, *LOHAS Journal* worries that Japanese consumers are “being showered with flashy information and advertising gimmicks that lack any authenticity and instead prey on the pure popularity of the term” (Kunita 2008).<sup>4</sup> For LOHAS, authenticity is vested with a certain capital that its member organisations can trade upon, even if those members do not immediately appear to be in the business of mitigating societal malaise: the 2007 LOHAS conference literature refers to members such as Ford, Unilever, Boeing, Toyota, Nestle and Walmart (LOHAS 2007).

2 Of course, one can be well aware of all the dangers outlined in this paper, yet still reach a more generous conclusion concerning LOHAS. In her doctoral thesis about LOHAS, Monica Emerich (2006) argues that its treatment of sustainability is akin to religious, concerning itself with the “purpose and meaning of life” and being “articulated through a moral and ethical code” (9).

3 There is no doubt the inspiration behind the “enlightenment card”: “Introducing a credit card for people who wish to make a difference in the world,” operated by LOHAS pioneers Gaiam [http://www.enlightenmentcard.com, accessed 28 December 2009]

4 Not only is there a certain audacity about claiming LOHAS is beyond “flashy information and advertising gimmicks,” there is also a whiff of racism in suggesting that the Japanese market “where consumer fads burst onto the scene and fade just as quickly” is somehow less able to grasp the subtleties of LOHAS than that of the United States. Indeed, Western Imperialism is another theme that raises its head in the LOHAS market. For example, the Fairmont Hotel and Resort group writes about its “environmental stewardship program” [http://www.lohas.com/journal/fairmont.html, accessed 28 December 2009] in countries such as Kenya and Mexico (see Nash 1989). Following the old phrase “selling ice to Eskimos” one Taiwanese magazine editor says LOHAS can teach the Taiwanese how to live better, “Our ancestors lived simply and in harmony with nature. It is part of Chinese philosophy. LOHAS provides the opportunity to show this to the younger generations in a trendy and fashionable way” [http://www.lohas.com/Taiwan, accessed 28 December 2009].

Following this theme of authenticity, Paul Ray's company, Integral Partnerships, which develops his theories about the Cultural Creatives, describes what he calls "authentic power," which builds upon spiritual awareness and is part of "an emerging wisdom culture" (Ray 2008). This concept has gathered some momentum and Ray is now one of the "mystics without monasteries" at Wisdom University where he serves as Director of the Institute for the Emerging Wisdom Culture (Wisdom University 2008). The question is, why is the "authentic" commercial co-option of the spiritual accepted so uncritically within LOHAS, a demographic identified, driven by and including many very intelligent and spiritually sincere people just like Paul Ray? Numerous persuasive arguments claim that alternative spiritualities function freely in a context of late capitalism – characterised by a shift from production to consumer capitalism – (Carrette and King 2005; Ezzy 2006; Heelas 1999; Possamai 2003; Roof 1999; Waldron 2005), so in this sense LOHAS is simply perpetuating the norm. Carrette and King argue that the "consumer world of 'New Age' spirituality markets 'real,' 'pure' or 'authentic' spiritual experiences, but these are manufactured worlds that seek to escape the 'impure' political reality of spirituality" (83). I want to add an extra dimension to these arguments in relation to LOHAS, one that comes unwittingly from Ray himself in his report *The New Political Compass* (Ray 2003).

The subtitle of Ray's report gives an immediate indicator of why LOHAS remains largely politically unchallenged: *The New Progressives are In-Front, Deep Green, and Beyond Left vs. Right*. Ray's political compass shows, pointing west, fifteen percent of voters who are "standing pat on the left modernist liberals." Pointing south are nineteen percent of voters who are "profits over planet and people business conservatives." Pointing east are twenty-one percent of voters who are "longing for the old ways cultural conservatives." Pointing north are a runaway forty-five percent of voters who are "in front on big, emerging issues: cultural creatives, new progressives." Ray begins his report with the question many want answered: "How can progressives actually win in the face of the right wing political juggernaut, composed of big money, big media and religious right shock

troops?" (Ray 2003:3) Ray then notes that while the majority of voters are facing north progressives, "83 percent of them reject any identification with the left." To engage these voters (and, presumably, consumers), Ray argues for the need to move beyond concepts of "left" and "right."

Ray defines "the left" variously as "conventional left politics–big government paradigm," having a "tight focus on programmatic ideas" and having once provided the forum of progressive issues (Ray 2003:1, 3, 7). No doubt Carrette and King's (2005) critique of the overriding economic agenda of contemporary spirituality – which underpins the present analysis – would also fall into Ray's definition of the left. However, those (old) leftist progressive values do not disappear on Ray's compass. It is now the new progressives who "own" values such as, "ecological sustainability, women's issues, consciousness issues, national health care, national education, and an emerging concern for the planet and the future of our children and grandchildren" (Ray 2003:5), but identifying with the left is nevertheless unacceptable to them, being reminiscent of an "'impure' political reality." Whether or not one agrees with Ray's argument that the alternatives between left and right are less meaningful now than ever before, I suggest that in order for LOHAS to appeal to the new progressives with their suspicion of the left, it has jettisoned one of the most explicit characteristics of the left: its economic/class analysis.

Ideally, this abandonment of a leftist economic/class analysis would be replaced by something appropriate to the perceived values of the new progressives, however this is not the case. As a result, the LOHAS consumer can identify with those standard liberal values but without any of the economic awareness about what is needed to manifest them. This lack of awareness is filled with the only alternative left on the table: the late capitalist status quo. Some residual leftist understanding is alive in LOHAS, thus the need to rebrand late capitalism to something less unsavoury: conscious capitalism; triple bottom line; social profit. Monica Emerich (2006) writes about a performance at a LOHAS conference by Joan Baez, during which she looked rather bemused. "We are a greed society and the rich are going to have to give

to the poor. I believe you are here to address this” (3), Baez tells the attendees. Baez should indeed look bemused, because behind what was no doubt a completely sincere statement was probably the realisation that the economic-political territory she was used to inhabiting was not just different at the LOHAS conference, but absent. The conference had no interest in Baez’s “leftist” values, rather a desire to trade upon her “authenticity.”

### Ken Wilber and the Indigo Dollar

I want now to provide an example of what spirituality can begin to look like in the absence of a suitable economic analysis, and once sincere spiritual seekers have become desensitised to the co-option of spirituality by late capitalist tendencies, whether conscious or otherwise. The example is the recent trajectory of Ken Wilber’s “integral spirituality.”

Wilber’s (2000) aim is to construct “a world philosophy. ... one that would believably weave together the many pluralistic contexts of science, morals, aesthetics, Eastern as well as Western philosophy, and the world’s great wisdom traditions” (xii). He hopes to achieve this task by identifying the developmental nature of human evolution. Wilber categorises evolution in various ways which echo those of Swiss philosopher Jean Gebser (1985), who suggested evolution unfolded via the following stages: “the archaic, magical, mythical, mental, and integral” (42). Wilber develops other models including the “Great Nest of Being” following: matter/physics, biology/life, psychology/mind, theology/soul, mysticism/spirit (2000:444) and also the stages of egocentric, ethnocentric and worldcentric (2006:6). Wilber argues each level of evolution “transcends and includes” the previous level, thus honouring the partial truth claims revealed within them rather than negating them. Wilber also builds on the visually attractive colour stages of spiral dynamics developed by Don Edward Beck and Christopher C. Cowan (1996), which he has recently adapted to his altitude colour chart (Wilber 2009a). This chart, pegged to Gebser’s categories for example, has the archaic as infrared, magical as red, mythical as amber, mental as orange, and integral as indigo. Spiritual development, for Wilber, involves rising in altitude up the colour

chart, transcending and including the lower levels, until reaching the fully integral (nondual) awareness of indigo. A person’s developmental progress can be charted on the integral map which is called AQAL, an acronym for “all quadrants, all levels.” The quadrants show “the inside and the outside of the individual and the collective, and the point is that all 4 quadrants need to be included if we want to be as integral as possible” (2006:23). AQAL is basically a highly developed schematic for what we generally understand as “holistic.”

While Paul Ray employs the term “integral culture” in regard to the Cultural Creatives, he does not mean quite the same thing as Wilber. While all integralists are Cultural Creatives, all Cultural Creatives are not integralists. Wilber argues that Ray’s identification of some twenty-five percent of the American population being Cultural Creatives is a measure of green altitude, not integral (Wilber 2009b). Wilber claims green altitude, typified by the academy and political correctness, resists the integral because its radical pluralism and phobia of hierarchies are incompatible with the integral ranking of transcending and including. However, because altitude is developmental, all people must progress through green before they can become integral (culminating with indigo). According to Wilber only two percent of the population is integral, which represents about ten percent of the multi-billion dollar LOHAS marketplace. For much of his career Wilber resisted the typical glories of the spiritual guru, opting instead to remain largely secluded in his writing. But in recent years he has come out of his shell to market a variety of products and services designed to facilitate the developmental journey to indigo, and in the process has created an elite sub-segment of the LOHAS market: the indigo dollar.<sup>5</sup>

The indigo dollar started rolling in 1998, with the founding of Wilber’s *Integral Institute* (I-I), intended to promote his vision of an integral worldview. I-I’s history claims that Internet entrepreneur Joe Firmage “announced that ‘there is nothing anywhere in the

5 Indigo also resonates with another alternative spirituality phenomenon of the “indigo children,” a generation of young children popular in the spiritual marketplace purported to be in possession of paranormal gifts. See Carroll and Tober (1999).

world that is doing what Integral Institute is doing,' and then promptly donated a million dollars in cash."<sup>6</sup> No doubt Wilber genuinely considered the funding of the institute as a wonderful opportunity to share his integral vision, but in a few short years Wilber's dry, pseudo-academic writings had been repackaged for a consumer market. We will not know until either Wilber or one of his inner circle publishes a full account of the development of I-I whether the centralising of the indigo dollar was a conscious shift on behalf of Wilber, having had a taste of "a million dollars," or whether it was down to the business advisors that almost inevitably came attached to such a donation. Whichever way, the I-I and related websites are now a storefront for the integral consumer.

Even a cursory examination of the I-I website can identify how much it borrows from business in its presentation of a spiritual worldview. I-I is a branding machine, underpinned by its "Integral Certification... Powered by AQAL" (Wilber et al 2007:12). Like any commercial operation, I-I has built a proprietary wall around its spiritual products. Numerous phrases are trademarked on the I-I *Integral Life Practice Starter Kit* website: Big Mind™; 3-Body Workout™; 3-2-1 Shadow Work Process™; AQAL™; a product that comes at a mere \$249 (Integral Life Practice:N.d.). Nor is the term "spiritual products" one projected on to Wilber from an interpretive-critical perspective. At the time of writing, Wilber's most recent email newsletter carried the subject line "Ken's Newest Product - Now Shipping!" which announced the launch of *Essential Integral*, again priced at \$249 (Core Integral 2010).

Other marketing strategies play into the hands of instant demand consumerism. Wilber's integral practices are packaged like convenience food to appeal to the busy consumer with scalable life practices whittled down to "1-minute modules" (Integral Life Practice: N.d.). Wilber's book *Integral Spirituality* reads suspiciously like a catalogue for I-I products and services, which are referred to on numerous occasions in the text, including various URLs to I-I websites and a

whole chapter on *Integral Life Practice*. This is exactly the type of commodification Carrette and King write of, identifying the selling of "ideas and claims to authenticity in service to individual/corporate profit and the promotion of a particular worldview and mode of life, namely corporate capitalism" (15).

I-I terminology makes those of a business and corporate orientation feel comfortable, thus making them more likely to purchase integral products and attempt integral development. Integral Sustainability Training is clearly orientated towards sustainable profits, resulting in "increased market share, superior retention, higher profitability, less risk, mitigated uncertainty in planning, and deeper traction for organizational strategy" (Integral Institute 2006). This echoes another of Carrette and King's observations that these supposedly transformative spiritualities bring about little in personal transformation, except perhaps increased efficiency and productivity at work (Carrette and King 2006:5-6). Confirming this, in an Integral Naked (I-I's media outfit) podcast, "The Future of Business is Integral" (Mackey 2006), John Mackey, Chairman and CEO of Whole Foods Market tells Wilber that integral business "is going to grow at an extremely rapid rate... and that it will out-compete anything else out there." Wilber agrees, claiming that integral people function ten times more efficiently than those at a lower developmental level. In another Integral Naked podcast, "The Higher Reaches of Success" motivational business guru Tony Robbins continues the process of normalizing large sums of money, informing Wilber that he sees no "separation between building a billion-dollar a year business and the spiritual drive to contribute" (Robbins 2004). Wilber (2006) continues his courting of corporations: referring to his AQAL model in a business context, he writes, "the quadrants give the four 'environments' or 'markets' in which a product must survive, and the levels give the types of values that will be both producing and buying the product" (29). So it should come as no surprise that Wilber's work has been picked up by numerous individuals in regard to work, business and management/leadership (Barrett 2006; Cacioppe 2000a, 2000b; Cacioppe and Edwards 2005a, 2005b; Edwards 2005; Küpers 2005; Landrum and Gardner 2005; Locander et al

6 After research was undertaken for this paper, Integral Institute revised its website. The original text is still available via the Internet Archive WayBackMachine: <http://web.archive.org/web/20070318010538/http://www.integralinstitute.org/public/static/abthistory.aspx>, accessed 28 December 2009. See also Howard (2005:389).

2002; Lund 2004; Pauchant 2005; Paulson 2002; Pielstick 2005; Reams 2005; Steingard 2005; Van Marrewijk 2003; Van Marrewijk and Hardjono 2003; Volckmann 2005; Warneka 2006).

Wilber goes further than simply talking in a corporate-friendly language: he also seeks to enclose the integral two percent of the population within an elite wealthy community. One of the Integral Naked podcasts is called “Entrepreneurial Idealism and the Integral Model” (Johnson and Wilber 2006) with Brian Johnson, certified “integral friend” and founder of the social networking site Zaadz which focused on “conscious capitalism” (Johnson N.d.).<sup>7</sup> The podcast introduction states, “Like Integral Institute, Zaadz is a gated community. . . . But wait! - isn’t that marginalizing, discriminatory, and elitist? Well, not really. If you join a country club, there are certain rules that you agree to follow.” Here I-I likens itself to both a gated community and a country club, simultaneously suggesting two things: first, that belonging to I-I is to be safely tucked away in an economically privileged community; second, that I-I is quite happy to articulate it as such, ignoring the economic realities that enable the existence of gated communities and country clubs.

Wilber and I-I have crafted different levels at which individuals can part with their money and join the integral country club: “You can donate to the Institute’s mission at any level of giving, but for those donors who seek to give through a formal program the Institute offers the Society of Fellows and the Society of Integrals.” Costs are \$1,000+ annual donation for the Fellows Society and \$10,000+ annual donation for the Integral Society. I-I is “assembling a new Board of Trustees drawn from our largest donors,” so it appears possible to purchase a governing position at the evolutionary edge of spirituality (Integral Institute 2009).

The irony is traditional late capitalism, on which gated communities and country clubs are based, consciously feeds upon the labour of those outside the club. By ignoring this, I-I and Zaadz are exemplars of *unconscious* capitalism, a result, as mentioned above, of having no appropriate economic analysis within the allegedly “new progressive” politics.

7 Johnson has since gone on to sell Zaadz to Gaiam, which eventually discontinued the social network..

Wilber discusses the topic of money and spirituality at some length in an essay entitled, *Right Bucks* (Wilber N.d.). He makes several questionable turns in this essay, which is essentially a theological justification of cash. First he notes how money was demonised by Buddhists, “without exception these early Dharma traditions, East and West, were (and still are) stamped with a disdain of money, of food, of sex, and of women” (Wilber N.d.:5).” Immediately, Wilber sets up an ostensibly liberatory project, three-quarters of which (food, sex, women) sounds perfectly reasonable: he wants us to believe the liberation of money and women are comparable. He then appeals to the “Nondual revolution, introduced in the West by the brilliant Plotinus and in the East by the remarkable Nagarjuna” (5). Here we are told that the nondual tradition embraced the manifest as an expression of spirit rather than rejecting it as evil. We are now being led to believe money (manifest) is an expression of spirit. Wilber argues, “this nondual orientation involved a profound re-evaluation . . . of the ‘sinful’ nature of money, food sex (and women)” (7); the nondual is not anti-money, it is in favour of “appropriate money, appropriate bucks” (8). Wilber continues to talk at some length about the liberation of women, as if inseparable from the liberation of money, consistently ignoring the fact that food, sex and women are of a natural order whereas money is not: money is merely a social or government fiat. If we can put aside this dishonest correlation between money and women,<sup>8</sup> we are left with the idea of “right bucks”: money is ok, as long as it is treated appropriately. Again, this sounds quite reasonable, as long as some agreement can be made about what is appropriate. Are the gated community and country club appropriate?

Wilber’s connection of women and money in this essay is an interesting one, and offers some insight into the appropriateness of Wilber’s economic analysis. Elsewhere, Wilber (2000) offers a highly problematic presentation of women via a very selective reading of feminist scholars, which results

8 Ray makes a similar bid here, suggesting the new progressives are “about women’s values and concerns coming forth into the public domain for the first time in history,” again implying that having a problem with the logic of the new progressives is somehow having a problem with feminism (Ray 2003:8).

in a gender parity of 60/40 (male/female) as well as an essentialised understanding of gender and the depoliticisation of patriarchy (Gelfer 2009:103-115). It is up to the individual to decide if Wilber's idea of appropriate bucks is comparable to appropriate gender parity. In *Right Bucks* the only sensible monetary question that remains for Wilber is how to share the Dharma with those who cannot afford it, and he claims to be fond of charges being pegged to a sliding scale. However, he notes, "unfortunately it is rather hard to apply to seminars and retreats and other Dharma events, because the bookworking is so complex" (Wilber N.d.:15). Certainly, there are no sliding scales for any of the products and services available on the I-I website, except those relating to how much one is willing to donate to I-I.<sup>9</sup> Wilber has anticipated such criticism with his creation of the "mean green meme," which would say that green consciousness, which has yet to reach integral, will seek to pull down integral efforts for transformation, in this case lacking the developmental abilities to appreciate and realise the nature of "right bucks." Clearly, indigo consciousness is also prophetic.

### Summary and Conclusion

LOHAS represents a multi-billion dollar marketplace in the United States focusing on five key segments: sustainable economy, healthy lifestyles, alternative healthcare, personal development, and ecological lifestyles. LOHAS business argues that it serves a "triple bottom line" of "people, planet and profit" and in doing so is based on "values." Spirituality plays a significant role in the LOHAS marketplace, accounting for much of the "personal development" segment. LOHAS seeks to grow the spiritual economy by selling spiritual products and services. But LOHAS also engages with spirituality at a deeper, more disturbing level. By co-opting spirituality into its values, LOHAS trades upon the "authenticity" of the spiritual in order to serve its "bottom triple bottom line" of profit. In this way spirituality then grows

the LOHAS economy. Because this operates in a transparent and unapologetic fashion, and because its ostensible values of "sustainability" appear reasonable, the connection between the commercial and the spiritual becomes normalised.

Once this connection has become fully normalised, spiritual consumers come to expect spiritual products to be sold to them, and their expectations are met. Examples are the products and services promoted by Ken Wilber and Integral Institute, which constitutes a sub-segment of the LOHAS marketplace focusing on higher, indigo consciousness and, consequently, the "indigo dollar." Following LOHAS with its proliferation of books, DVDs and workshops, I-I packages and sells spiritual products and services in a way that appeals to people who operate within a commercial environment. Indeed these products and services seek to aid the consumer's operations within a commercial environment by generating increased efficiency and better strategies in the workplace. Wilber also seeks to normalise the connection between the commercial and the spiritual by providing a theological justification for money in his essay *Right Bucks*.

A key similarity between LOHAS and integral products is the perception of the political domain, and the resulting economic critiques that flow from it (or not). While a number of LOHAS values are traditionally located on Ray's definition of the left, it seeks to appeal to consumers who do not identify with the left, and in doing so abandons one of its most identifiable features: its economic analysis. Wilber's integral theory performs a similar turn: while Ray views Cultural Creatives as "beyond left vs right," Wilber's nomenclature would "transcend and include" left and right. Wilber's assumption is that all the analysis and critique of the old left has been fully engaged, dealt with, and transcended. However, this is a problematic assumption.

As Douglas Ezzy (2006) notes in his analysis of the alternative spirituality segment of witchcraft, "Consumerist individualism does not operate by arguing against broader social, political or religious issues. It simply ignores them. As the consumerist self becomes focused on itself, these broader social and communal issues simply do not feature in the

<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, there is a good deal of free reading material at Wilber's personal website [<http://www.kenwilber.com>, accessed 28 December 2009], and that of his publisher [<http://wilber.shambhala.com>, accessed 28 December 2009], and such is the repetitive nature of his books, one could get a firm grasp on his voluminous work without ever purchasing a book or visiting the library.

concerns of the consumerist individual” (27). While integralists would not see themselves as possessing the same worldview as witchcraft (firmly relegated to primitive consciousness by integral standards), there is a good chance consumerist individualism is still operational: in other words, they do not transcend and include the left vs right dichotomy; rather they ignore it. The net effect of this process is that both LOHAS and integralists have no functional political-economic analysis and adopt the only working economic model at hand: late capitalism, which becomes “spiritualised” and authenticated into “conscious capitalism,” thus consolidating the connection between the commercial and the spiritual. Wilber further silences a critique of capitalism by denying that there is even an alternative position to inhabit: one article is titled, “Like it or Not, You’re a Capitalist. But Are You a Conscious One?” (Parlee and Wilber N.d.).<sup>10</sup>

While it is both convenient and reasonable to argue that alternative spiritualities adopt a late capitalist position with their consumer focus, there are always degrees to which this happens. Returning again to Ezzy, we see that even within a focused constituency such as witchcraft, there can be varying positions: old-style Wicca is focused more on knowledge and gifts, whereas contemporary witchcraft has a greater reliance on the exchange of commodities within the consumer market (cited in Possamai 2003:41). While, then, some alternative spiritualities may be defined by a certain ambivalence towards the consumerism of late capitalism, the LOHAS position is explicit: not only a consumerism that co-opts spirituality, but a consumer-focused spirituality in itself.

Wilber takes the position of LOHAS further to a form of hyper-consumerism via the employment of corporate language, further spiritualised products and services, and the creation of an integral elite dwelling in ideological communities resembling spiritual country clubs. Wilber even steps down from his own indigo altitude to promote the products of those less

developmentally advanced. The Q-Link, for example, is a stylish pendant about which Wilber states,

This technology has been scientifically demonstrated to enhance the body’s ability to protect itself from harmful environmental radiation, and thus it helps to remove harmful influences on the organism’s health and well being. This technology therefore removes some of the blocks to inner transformation to higher and healthier states of being. [Q-Link 2009c]

Unfortunately, the Q-Link’s transformational technology is only available to those with \$99.95 to spare for the basic pendant, or \$1199 for the gold model (Q-Bling?), and another \$59.95 for Pet-Link, a pendant for animals (Q-Link 2009b). Anyone can partake in Q-Link business as the company “offers a variety of easy start business opportunities including Affiliate, Reseller & Licensing programs” (Q-Link 2009a). Assuming the Q-Link does indeed aid transformation to higher states of being, it remains a sad example of both LOHAS’ and Wilber’s commodification of spirituality: packaged, available to only those who can afford it, enclosed in gold, and an “easy start business opportunity.”

<sup>10</sup> This denial of the meaning of the transcended and included is employed by Wilber elsewhere: see Leon Schlam (2001) and George Adams (2002) in relation to the theme of non-duality, not to mention Wilber’s gun-sliding approach which seeks to intimidate his critics (Gelfer 2009:117-118)

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