

Fall 1998

# The Specters of Gramsci: Revolutionary Praxis and the Committed Intellectual

Peter McLaren

*Chapman University*, [mclaren@chapman.edu](mailto:mclaren@chapman.edu)

Gustavo Fischman

*University of California, Santa Barbara*

Silvia Serra

*University of Rosario*

Estanislao Antelo

*University of Rosario*

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## Recommended Citation

McLaren, P., Fischman, G., Serra, S., & Antelo, E. (1998). The Specters of Gramsci: Revolutionary Praxis and the Committed Intellectual. *Journal of Thought*, 33(3): 9-41.

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# The Specters of Gramsci: Revolutionary Praxis and the Committed Intellectual

## **Comments**

This article was originally published in *Journal of Thought*, volume 33, issue 3, in 2002.

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## **The Specters of Gramsci: Revolutionary Praxis and the Committed Intellectual**

**Peter McLaren & Gustavo Fischman**  
*University of California, Los Angeles*  
& **Silvia Serra & Estanislao Antelo**  
*University of Rosario, Argentina*

...my own view is that no-one understands Gramsci better than Mrs. Thatcher. She has never read it but she does know that politics nowadays is conducted through the articulation of different instances. She knows that politics is conducted on different fronts. You have to have a variety of programs, that you are always trying to build a collective will because no socio-economic position will simply give it to you. Those things she knows.... It is called "instinctive Gramsci-ism." Instinctive Gramsci-ism is what it what is beating us, not the old collectove class subject.

—Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities," 1970

The posthumous birth of Antonio Gramsci in the works of the British and North American New Left theorists over the last twenty years has left an impressive and important legacy. The contemporary debates that it has provoked—about the saliency of the term "articulation"; the conceptual status of the term ideology in relation to that of discourse; the political import of the "new times" project of analyzing and regulating capitalism via the flow of finance and post-Fordist capitalist formations and the concomitant changes these formations have brought about in social, political, and cultural life; the rise of the metropolitan service class and the overall decomposition of social class as the main axis of politics; the question of whether the social totality is an open field or structured by the determining lines of force of material relations; the positionality of politics within a network of strategies and powers and their articulations—are as variable as they are important (see Harris, 1992).

However, it is not the purpose of this article to map the shifting

trajectories of these debates except to note one general question central to the thesis of this paper that has emerged from these debates: Given current structural and conjunctural conditions such as the capitalization of global culture, the privatization of subjectivity, free market fundamentalism, and the moral collapse of social democracy after the defeat of communism, should the role of Gramsci's "organic" intellectual primarily be restricted to practicing "cultural politics" or should the Gramscian agent challenge in a more direct manner the pernicious power of capital? In other words, to what extent has Gramsci's work remained at the level of methodological idealism with respect to a neo-Gramscian privileging of culture over structure? To what extent have the entire dynamics of subjectivity been commodified, including those very faculties of self-reflexivity that might enable the masses to disturb official culture and rebel against such commodification?

In this essay we shall argue that in the face of the global restructuring of accumulation, global corporatism, the financescape of "high octane" unfettered capitalism, and the blandishments of "free market authoritarianism," and in the midst of the current emblathering of the culture/ideology of consumerism and individualism within neocapitalist technoculture, revisiting Gramsci's ideas can provide important resources and inspiration for teachers as they attempt to transform schools into sites of radical reform within "real existing capitalist societies." Today's globalized culture with its lifestylization grounded in consumption patterns provides an urgent backdrop for revisiting Gramsci, especially his work on the role of the intellectual. De Azua (1996) has described the intellectual as someone who consults the dead. However, in the light of current metropolitan life, this necessarily implies several paradoxes. Present-day intellectuals have spent more time and energy trying to get an "advertising" spot in tabloids, instant sound byte news commentary, and television talk shows instead of using those possibilities as forums for critique and analysis.

A second paradox results from the rather simple observation that talking with the dead is impossible. It is impossible because death implies closure and ending. Death "does not conceal any mystery, does not open any door. It is the end of the human being. What survives...is what is given to other human beings, what remains in their memories" (Norbert Elias, cited in Eribon, 1992: p. 100). Yet what is not considered in the remark made by Elias is the presence of the dead through their ability to haunt and influence the living, and thus the tremendous and tremulous power of their spectral essence. What do we make of such specters haunting us as intellectuals, teachers, and activists as we struggle with the limitations of contemporary social theory and social activism?

## Haunting and Talking to Specters

In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels write that “the specter” of communism is haunting Europe and 148 years later Jacques Derrida (1996) defines the term “specter” as the frequency of a certain visibility—the visibility of the invisible, as if the specter were projected on an imaginary screen (for our purposes this screen is composed of the pedagogical discourses of the contemporary educational left). The specter sees us before we see it. It pre-exists our consciousness, puts us under surveillance, and can violently repay us a visit. It occupies a social mode or style of haunting that demands to be understood in the singularity of its temporality or historicity (which for us seems too eerily close to Nietzsche’s eternal return of the same).

Whereas Marx and Engels call for the specter of communism to become a living reality, a chilling yet concrete presence on the stage of world history, Derrida examines the “specters of Marx” as “the persistence of a present past, the return of the dead which the worldwide work of mourning cannot get rid of, whose return it runs away from, which it chases, excludes, banishes, and at the same time pursues” (1995, p. 101). For Derrida, Marxism is a discourse whose finality is interrupted by its own haunting of the present. Derrida believes that Marx wanted to replace the ghost of communism with the living presence of communism. Just as capitalist states feared the ghosts of communism, so Marx apparently fears the ghost of communism’s “other.”

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida accuses Marx of fearing spectrality, of wanting to rid society of its ghosts altogether in order to raise his own philosophy to the status of ontology (Lewis, 1997). Derrida wishes to replace Marxist ontology with hauntology—yet, paradoxically, the entire project of *Specters of Marx* is to exorcise the ghost of Marx, to blast Marx from the rock of living history. In this deconstruction as exorcism, Derrida disavows class struggle and establishes an international built on the unfinalizability of discourses and the impossibility of political co-ordination. It is here that Derrida betrays a vogueish dissidence, a fashionable apostasy, an insurgent posturing in his preoccupation for celebrating the incommensurability of discourses. Uninterested in class politics, Derrida forecloses the possibility of mounting a program of anti-capitalist struggle.

Marx understood vividly in a way that Derrida does not that discourses always converge and pivot around objective labor practices and that global capitalism has a way of reshaping, re-inflecting, and rearticulating dissent. Consequently, Derrida’s cosmopolitan deconstructionist efforts to establish a “hauntology” fit securely within the

manageable compass of business interests and a corporate-sponsored rebellion. And while they decenter and unsettle the dusty elitism of canonical tomes of Western Enlightenment thinking, aloof and posturing on varnished bookshelves, the conditions of life and action that structure our everyday lives through exchange value and labor are rarely, if ever, deeply challenged.

Fixation on the dead can embalm the spirit of the living and often signals the other face of the cynicism we harbor about the living. We need not be impeccably reverential in our role as translators of the dead since our unswerving loyalty is neither to the dead nor to the living but to disinter the unsaid so as to provoke an awakening of critical self-consciousness. Avery Gordon (1997) develops a “spectral sociology” that takes such “structuring conditions” of everyday life more seriously than Derrida. She maintains that “haunting” is a “constituent element of modern social life,” a “generalizable social phenomenon of great import.” Hers is a spectral sociology or hauntology that “looks for a language for identifying haunting and for writings with the ghosts any haunting inevitably throws up” (1997, p. 7). For Gordon, ghosts are the remains of a history of unaddressed social injustices that have been spectacularly and systematically suppressed in mainstream sociological thinking. Gordon describes haunting in a haunted society as an objective force. It is the moment of mediation that she believes exceeds both psychoanalysis and Marxism. She writes:

Haunting...is precisely what prevents rational detachment, prevents your willful control, prevents the desegregation of class struggle and your feelings, motivations, blind spots, craziness, and desires. A haunted society is full of ghosts, and the ghost always carries the message—albeit not in the form of the academic treatise, or the clinical case study, or the polemical broadside, or the mind-numbing factual report—that the gap between personal and social, public and private, objective and subjective is misleading in the first place. That is to say, it is leading you elsewhere, it is making you see things you did not see before, it is making an impact on you; your relation to things that seemed separate or invisible is changing. This is not to say that the gap or the reification is not an enormously powerful real experience. Nor is it to say that haunting somehow transcends the actually existing social relations in which we live, think, and think up new concepts and visions of life. Quite the contrary. But these questions remain: what effectively describes the gap as an organized and elaborate symptom, and what describes the moment when we understand that it is, in fact, misleading us? (1997, p. 98)

Hauntings, as we intend the term, have little to do with the ectoplasm of Ouija board conjurers in rhinestone turbans and frayed linen loin-cloths, but rather refer to dangerous memories that live in the structural unconscious of humanity. It is the task of the intellectual to mobilize these

ghostly memories so that they irrupt to haunt the social consciousness of the living. That is, the intellectual does not function to exorcise ghosts but to give ghosts the necessary materiality so that we recognize them and have the opportunity to understand their meaning. An intellectual is an artisan and a laborer who works with inherited memories, recollections of that stuff of which we are constituted. Yet death and memory only speak about heritage.

Heritage, however, has been described by Derrida (1994) as something not related to what is given and easily transmitted but is a never-ending labor. Heritage involves infinite operations of acquisition. We agree with Derrida on this point. But let us now bring the conversation closer to our main theme: that of education. We recognize that if heritage implies intellectual labor and operations of acquisition, these tasks must at the same time be eminently pedagogical. In this sense, then, an educator is a carrier of culture, a dealer, a “smuggler of memories” (Hassoun, 1996). A smuggler that testifies, gives testimonies, and shapes words. An intellectual speaks through the lips of the dead, and serves as the medium for subjugated histories to be released into the present. Yet it is precisely the intellectual who is most at risk for failing to give voice to the specters of history. This is because, for Derrida, scholars feel that looking is sufficient and are singularly incapable of entering into a dialogue with a ghost. He writes:

As theoreticians or witnesses, spectators, observers, and intellectuals, scholars believe that looking is sufficient. Therefore, they are not always in the most competent position to do what is necessary: speak to the specter.... A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts - nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality. (1995, p. 11)

The dead are not only revisited by us; their ghosts also attempt to be hauntingly present among us. To communicate with the dead is not to visit them and reverentially offer their ghosts our most sincere homage. It is to press them for answers, for explanations; it is to demand that they provide us reasons for why they haunt us. The dead to whom we wish to speak—not as scholars but as agents of social change—are the spirits of Antonio Gramsci, for it is certainly true that Gramsci is not one but many spirits. There are the Gramscian spirits that haunt the cultural Marxists, the orthodox “manifesto Marxists,” the “post-Marxists,” and the “postmodern Marxists” who occupy the North and South American educational left. The ghosts of Gramsci haunt teachers working in public schools who have been reduced to a fetishized form of hypostasized public service clerks. And they haunt us, the educators of the educators, those of us who are paid by the State to teach the clerks of the new internal colonies of hegemonized memory.

For some of us, the surviving ideas of Gramsci become the ghosts of memory that we must confront in order to understand our own histories. For others they represent a ghoulish voice from the past that threatens the foundations of our moral, ethical and political lives and our studied complacency as citizens. As critical educators we are concerned with speaking to both the ghosts and the ghouls of Gramsci on specific issues surrounding the role of the educator as intellectual, as activist, as someone engaged in organic praxis, in revolutionary struggle.

### **Talking to the Specters of Gramsci**

Gramsci studied historical linguistics at Turin University but abandoned his studies in favor of working full time on the paper *Avanti!* Inspired by the Russian Revolution, he became involved with the Turin factory council movement (at a time when 600,000 workers from Italian industrial cities occupied their factories) and was greatly influenced by the work of Italian idealist philosopher Benedetto Croce. In 1919 he helped to found the socialist paper *L'Ordine Nuovo* with its motto: "Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will." Determined to break with Second International Marxism and social Darwinism, Gramsci became deeply involved with rethinking Marxist philosophical formulations that were developing from the Third International. He spent the 1920s involved in the Italian revolutionary movement as a member of the Communist Party. In 1922, he was an Italian Communist Party delegate on the Executive Committee of the Communist Third International in Moscow.

In 1922 Mussolini took power, began arresting Communist leaders, and in a relatively short time defeated the Italian proletariat drive for a Soviet-style revolution. In the general election of April, 1924, Gramsci was elected parliamentary deputy and eventually became the general secretary of the Italian Communist Party. He worked from the conviction that the greatest potential for overthrowing fascism lay with the peasantry and helped to organize the party on the basis of workplace cells. His inaugural speech in 1924 exhibited an uncompromising and fearless commitment to anti-fascist struggle, and several years later, on November, 1926, he was arrested along with other Communist deputies on charges of conspiracy, insurrection, agitation, inciting class war, and alteration of the Constitution and the form of the State through violence.

Sentenced on June 4, 1928, to over twenty years of imprisonment, Gramsci spent the 1930s—"the long Cavalry of Antonio Gramsci" (Fiori, 1973)—in Mussolini's prison. His prosecuting attorney, Michele Isgro, is reported to have exclaimed, "For 20 years we must stop this brain from



working” (cited in Ledwith, 1997, p. 84). Moving from Rome to exile on the island of Ustica, to Milan to await trial, back to Rome for sentencing in May 1928, to a special prison in Turi in July 1928, and finally to a clinic in Formia in 1933, Gramsci remained a prisoner of the state until his death from a cerebral haemorrhage on April 27, 1937, six days before he was to be granted freedom. It is a testament to his indomitable will and fearless optimism that his brain did not stop functioning during his confinement in prison, which saw him produce 33 notebooks or 2, 848 tightly packaged papers of his writing for his *Quaderni del Carcere* or *Prison Notebooks* (Ledwith, 1997, p. 84), written from 1929 to 1935.

Throughout his intellectual life, Gramsci sought ways to oppose the idealist conception of consciousness common to neo-Hegelian and neo-Kantian philosophy through an encounter with Saussurean linguistics and Russian formalism (Brandist, 1996, 1996a). Perhaps the two Gramscian concepts that have exercised (and exorcised) the North and South American educational left the most over the last two decades have been those of ideology and hegemony. For Gramsci, as well as for many of his followers (Aronowitz, 1992; Eagleton, 1991), there exists a continuous interplay—a dialectical reinitiation of sorts—between the workings of ideology and hegemony. Terry Eagleton (1991), one of the most perceptive scholars of Gramsci’s thought, indicates that for the Italian revolutionary, the concept of “ideology”—based on Marx’s “solidity of popular beliefs”—refers to the way that power struggles are developed in any given society at the level of signification. The view of ideology presented by Stuart Hall and James Donald (1986) is quintessentially Gramscian. For Hall and Donald ideology refers to :

...the framework of thought which is used in society to explain, figure out, make sense of or give meaning to the social and political world.... without these frameworks, we could not make sense of the world at all. But with them, our perceptions are inevitably structured in particular directions by the very concepts we are using. (1986, p. xi-x)

For this reason, it is possible to say that ideologies serve as a collective embrace or cajoler that seductively corrupts the civic culture, or that is perhaps imposed upon the people (an obvious condition of any colonial project) such as in the case of white supremacist ideologies in South Africa or national security doctrines that predominated during long periods of dictatorial rule in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. These historical examples illustrate what Gramsci meant when he stated that “the exercise of domination without leadership or dictatorship without hegemony” (1971, p. 106) occurs when a dominant class resorts to coercive means of control rather than adopting a strategy of hegemonic consensus building.

In contrast, hegemony is a broader concept than ideology, as it

requires the use of ideological forms but at the same time it cannot be reduced to them. Hegemony invents a co-incidence among four relevant sites of ideological production: identity politics; “imagined” communities; the state administration; and social relations of production. Hegemony points to the essential caducity of ideology; not only does hegemony eluviate over time, it also enlists new forms and assemblages; it is able to permute new social relations and formations; it functions as a public regulatory agency that embargos certain ideas and promotes others. In other words, hegemony points to the constitutive nature of ideology.

The relationship between ideology and hegemony is further elucidated in Dick Hebdige’s (1996) discussion of the two dominant and potentially opposed tendencies that have emerged from debates (primarily among the British left) surrounding Gramsci’s work. On the one hand, there exists the tension between populism and the national-popular; secondly, there exists the tension between ideological discourse in the shaping of historical subjectivities and the world outside of discourse (sites of extra-discursivity). The imaginary community of the “we” has itself become a reflection of these tensions.

Stuart Hall’s use of the term “articulation” is heralded as a theoretically fecund means by which the “double emphasis” of Gramsci—that is, the emphasis on culture and structure, on ideology and material social relations—can be linked together. What this “double movement” through the concept of articulation has achieved has been to conceptualize class and cultural struggles as interwoven and complexly articulated as a “range of competing populisms” (Hebdige, 1996). According to this formulation, groups and classes exist in a shifting and mediated relationship, in a structured field of complex relations and ideological forces stitched together out of social fragments and privileging hierarchies, in structured asymmetries of power, in contending vectors of influence, and in emergent, contingent alliances. When examining ideology, we do not look for smooth lines of articulation; rather, we conceive of a regime of culture not stitched together as a set of canonical ideas but rather existing as a palimpsest of emergent and residual discourses. Hebdige offers a summary of the Gramscian conception as follows:

From the perspectives heavily influenced by the Gramscian approach, nothing is anchored to the “grand récits,” to master narratives, to stable (positive) identities, to fixed and certain meanings: all social and semantic relations are contestable hence mutable: everything appears to be in flux: there are no predictable outcomes. Though classes still exist there is no guaranteed dynamic to class struggle and no “class belong”: there are no solid homes to return to, no places reserved in advance for the righteous. No one “owns” an ideology because ideologies

are themselves in process: in a state of constant formation and reformation. In the same way, the concept of hegemony remains distinct from the Frankfurt model of a “total closure of discourse” (Marcuse) and from the ascription of total class domination which is implied in the Althusserian model of a contradictory social formation held in check eternally (at least until “the last [ruptural] instance”) by the work of the RSAs and the ISAs. Instead hegemony is a precarious, “moving equilibrium” (Gramsci) achieved through the orchestration of conflicting and competing forces by more or less unstable, more or less temporary alliances of class fractions. (1996, p. 198)

In order to grasp the nuanced relationship between ideology and hegemony, we recommend that they be seen in *parallax*, that is, from the perspective of the positionality of the social agent at the present moment, with the understanding that this location or site of enunciation is in itself dialectically conditioned by this interplay. Gramsci underscored the fact that to obtain hegemonic power, a dominant class or class alliance necessarily requires two forms of control: coercion (sustained by politically regulated repression) and consent. These forms of control work together to stipulate an ethical domain tied to the forces of production. According to Gramsci,

Every state is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces of development, and hence to the interest of the ruling classes. The school as a positive educative function, and the courts as a repressive and negative educative function, are the most important State activities in this sense. (1971, p. 258)

Not only are hegemonic relationships ethical, but they are also pedagogical. Gramsci (1971: 350) clearly stated that “every relationship of hegemony is necessarily a pedagogical relationship” because:

A class is dominant in two ways, i.e., “leading” and “dominant.” It leads the classes which are allies, and dominates those which are its enemies... one should not count solely on the power and material force which such position gives in order to exercise political leadership or hegemony. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 57)

Intellectuals also help to create and sustain hegemonic conditions for the ruling elite. Gramsci writes:

The hegemony of a directive centre over the intellectuals asserts itself by two principal routes: 1. a general conception of life, a philosophy... which offers to its adherents an intellectual “dignity” providing a principle of differentiation from the old ideologies which dominated by

coercion, and an element of struggle against them; 2. a scholastic programme, an educative principle and original pedagogy which interests that fraction of the intellectuals which is the most homogeneous and the most numerous (the teachers, from the primary teachers to the university professors), and gives them an activity of their own in the technical field. (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 103-104)

The above perspectives stress the importance of cultural, political and pedagogical aspects in the construction of hegemonic orders. However, as a Marxist intellectual, Gramsci never failed to emphasize the importance of economic relations because he insisted that the *economy* determines (in the last instance), the extent of the compromises and agreements that can be achieved among the dominant groups and the popular sectors. He further clarifies this point as follows:

Undoubtedly the fact that hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed—in other words that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity. (1971: 161)

Richard Brosio (1994, p. 48) emphasizes Gramsci's realization "that hegemony must be ultimately anchored in economic strength—and ultimately physical power." Brosio also reminds us that while the State uses a combination of force and consent in order to maintain hegemony, we must not forget "that the exercise and maintenance of hegemony over subaltern groups is still a variation of class struggle." Brosio further cautions us not to forget the relationship of power to the educative aspects of hegemony: "There is a tendency to stress Gramsci's important development of hegemony, the role of persuasion and consent, the seemingly willing participation by subaltern groups in their own domination; however, he was not naive about the relationship of power to this persuasive hegemony" (1994, p. 49).

The characteristics of consent and coercion that underwrite Gramsci's model of hegemonic domination are fundamentally dynamic categories. Because they are dynamic, and not static relationships they admit the possibility of rearticulation into alternative or counterhegemonic practices. We must not forget Gramsci's firm conviction "that ordinary men and women could be educated into understanding the coercive and persuasive power of capitalist hegemony over them" (Brosio, 1994, pp. 49-50). One of the merits of Gramsci's framework is that it makes a vital

departure from the conception of ideology as a somewhat outdated system of static and fixed ideas—such as in Althusser's conceptualization that is often recited by orthodox leftists with great condensation toward the very possibility of new forms of resistance—to ideology as embodied, lived, dynamic sets of social practices that are constructed and carried out by individuals as well as institutions.

However, the notion of *hegemonic rule* was not well-developed in Gramsci. Walter Adamson notes that the relationship among hegemony, state power, and forms of political legitimization was at times ambiguous and was used in several different (and sometimes contradictory) senses:

It is used, first of all, in a morally neutral and instrumental sense to characterize those bourgeois regimes that have proved capable of organizing mass consent effectively. But it is also used in an essentially ethical sense to characterize the functioning of a proletarian regulated society. Here is another instance in which the attempt to incorporate Machiavellian and ethical state traditions raises perplexing and unresolved questions. Is the sort of consent being obtained the same in both cases? Or is consent in a bourgeois hegemony somehow passive and noncritical, while under proletarian auspices it would be active, participatory, and philosophical? If so, what more fully is the institutional basis of this latter sort of control? (1980, p. 242)

We find that the Gramscian dichotomy of force and consent is not nearly sufficient or comprehensive enough to allow us to examine the complex character of hegemonic rule since these two terms do not permit a detailed and nuanced analysis of forms of political legitimization. Consequently, it makes more sense to view the terms “force” and “consent” in Adamson's terms, as “endpoints of a continuum that includes such intermediate positions as constraint (e.g., fear of unemployment), co-optation, and perhaps even Arendt's category of ‘authority’” (Adamson, 1980, p. 243).

Whereas Gramsci often stressed as a defining attribute the spirit or the will, Marx gave pride of place to production. Gramsci emphasized human consciousness as a defining attribute of humanity. Consciousness was akin to spirit, which was linked to the notion of history as a form of “becoming.” Organized will becomes the basis of his philosophy. While Gramsci acknowledges the link between humanity and production, he does not sufficiently emphasize the most important aspect of humanity's “complex of social relations”: the satisfaction of human needs and the human necessity to produce (see Hoffman, 1984). The satisfaction of human needs is the primary historical act, and must be satisfied before men and women are in the position to make history. The human necessity to produce *thus underwrites all social relationships*. For

Gramsci, humanity is defined by concrete will (will plus historical circumstances), whereas for Marx, will is a response to social and historical *circumstances independent of human will*. Human relationships thus exist independently of the way in which people understand them (Hoffman, 1984, p. 112). Here we agree with Brosio (after Mandel) that “classical Marxism examined closely the repressive function of the class State, and that Gramsci and Lukacs stressed the integrative function” (1994, p. 50).

Eagleton (1991) points out that Gramsci, “with certain notable inconsistencies,” associates hegemony with the arena of *civil society*, a term used by the Italian revolutionary to indicate an extensive range of institutions that serve as intermediaries between the state and the economy: the church, schools, the press, the family, hospitals, political parties, and so on. In this regard, Perry Anderson (1977) asserts that Gramsci was wrong when he exclusively located hegemony within the realm of civil society, because by doing so he diminished the importance of the capitalist state as a vital organ of hegemonic power. However, Torres (1992), also referring to Anderson’s work, points out that Gramsci’s distinction between civil society and political society is basically methodological. In addition, Gramsci’s attention to culture and the relatively autonomous institutions of civil society enabled him to reject the pitfalls of a monodeterministic base-superstructural model.

Although Gramsci did adhere to the Marxist premise of one hegemonic center (i.e., the social relations generated by the mode of production), his attention to culture and to the relatively autonomous institutions of civil society amounted to a rejection of the monodeterministic base-superstructure argument of classical Marxism. Unlike Leninism, which ignored the democratic forms of culture needed to sustain autonomous movements, Gramsci’s focus on a “war of position” resonates with the efforts of social movements to create new political spaces within civil society and alter the content of hegemony. The Gramscian concept of “historic bloc” has its counterpart in the coalition-building notions prevalent in NSM [New Social Movement] theory. The emphasis on the unification of class with popular-democratic struggles can be viewed, positively, as offering an analytic basis for exploring historical continuities between “old” and “new” social movements, a continuity otherwise obliterated by the atemporality of identity politics. (Carroll & Ratner, 1994, p. 21)

For our own purposes, it should be stressed that hegemony is as much related to antagonistic processes as it is to consensual individual and social practices of negotiation and/or exchange that take place, not only in the realm of the civil society but also in the everyday actions of families, the state, and the various political arenas. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe

(1985) explain that the concept of hegemony was originally tied to an *essentialist logic* in which only one authentic historical subject, “the working class,” was able to develop truly counterhegemonic policies and practices. Such a logic, rather than advance the project of social change and social justice, covered over and obstructed multiple forms of struggles developed by several groups and social movements (such as those developed by indigenous peoples, ethnic groups, women, ecologists, human rights activists, etc.) which could not be reduced or categorized on the exclusive basis of the class position of their members. However, instead of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, Laclau and Mouffe propose to free “hegemony” of any kind of essentialism and re-appropriate the potentially emancipatory characteristics of the concept. Best and Kellner maintain that for Laclau and Mouffe:

Hegemony entails a detotalizing logic of articulation and contingency that refuses the conception of the *a priori* unity or the progressive character of the working class or any other subject position. Rather, cultural and political identities are never given in advance, but must be constituted or articulated, from diverse elements. ( 1991, p. 195)

Similar to the position articulated by Laclau and Mouffe, Stuart Hall situates the Gramscian challenge as the struggle for a new social order. Hall’s eloquent summary is worth quoting at length:

Gramsci always insisted that hegemony is not exclusively an ideological phenomenon. There can be no hegemony without “the decisive nucleus of the economic.” On the other hand, do not fall into the trap of the old mechanical economism and believe that if you can only get hold of the economy, you can move the rest of life. The nature of power in the modern world is that it is also constructed in relation to political, moral, intellectual, cultural, ideological and sexual questions. The question of hegemony is always the question of a new cultural order. The question which faced Gramsci in relation to Italy faces us now in relation to Britain: what is the nature of this new civilization? Hegemony is not a state of grace which is installed forever. It’s not a formation which incorporates everybody. The notion of a “historical bloc” is precisely different from that of a pacified, homogeneous, ruling class. It entails a quite different conception of how social forces and movements, in their diversity, can be articulated into strategic alliances. To construct a new cultural order, you need not to reflect an already-formed collective will, but to fashion a new one, to inaugurate a new historical project. (1988, p. 170)

Contemporary social scientists such as Hall and Laclau and Mouffe have in important and sophisticated ways extended and deepened Gramsci’s conception of hegemony as an ever-evolving political, economic, ideological, and cultural set of processes by which the dominant

social sectors (hegemonic bloc) elicit consent from the popular sectors. And yet, hegemony is inseparable from conflicts and struggles over it. In this process the struggle for control over the symbolic and economic means of any given society and the role the state plays in such struggles cannot be diminished.

Yet we have some reservations about the analysis advanced by Laclau and Mouffe as well as by Hall in terms of their penchant for de-emphasizing the totalizing power and function of capital. In their inauguration of a new collective will, postmodernists and post-Marxists such as Laclau and Mouffe often theorize or abstract out of existence the working class, even as they seek new positions of popular will from which to struggle and wage war against the hegemonic order. We believe this is a major mistake and misappropriation of hegemony. In our view, Gramsci's work can help us in understanding the class contradictions that structure the subjectivities of oppressed classes. Such an understanding enables us to resist the formation of the comprador intellectual who simply (and often unwittingly) resecures the consent of the subaltern classes for the relations of domination that structure and exploit them.

It is a major error, we contend, to use Gramsci's concept of hegemony in such a way as to depotentiate class analysis by reducing class to a series of unstable "negotiations" among all and every political position. Hegemony does not take place in an indeterminate terrain (Katz, 1997). The concept of hegemony as articulated by many post-Marxists often serves as a type of *trompe d'oeil* whereby forces of domination are willfully misrecognized as the structured equanimity of inevitability, fate, chance, or irreversibility. Built into a number of theories of hegemony is the notion of the "reversibility" of cultural practices, as if such practices are asocial or ahistorical or have otherwise been severed from the chains of class determination. According to Katz (1997), this is clearly a misunderstanding of Gramsci and evacuates the entire problem of domination. Misappropriations of Gramsci's work have caused domination to, in effect, virtually disappear into a storm of relational "negotiations" in which certain ideological positions are "won" through "consent."

Here we need to be reminded that intellectuals themselves are always participants of renewed forms of collective power struggles acting within the structures of real existing capitalist formations. In this sense it is important to consider that part of the consolidation of the New Right hegemonic regime embodied by Thatcher-Reaganomics originated in the 1930s. The patience and well-funded work of no more than fifty anti-Keynsian, neo-liberal intellectuals for the last sixty years speaks directly to Gramsci's "crisis of authority" and emerged as the hegemonic solution to a set of complex, interrelated crises—fiscal, environmental, cultural,



ethical, technological—that the New Right reduced to only one: the crisis of the welfare state. Through this act of simplification, neo-conservative intellectuals have been setting the political, social, and cultural agendas that have reversed many of the small gains that working-class and ethnic minority populations had made over this century. This process has been to the exclusive benefit of an increasingly powerful transnational capitalist class (Sklair, 1997).

### **From Resistance to Agency**

The distinctive presence of the notions of collective will and consciousness in Gramsci's work are closely related to the concepts of resistance and agency. Gramsci described resistance as largely passive and unconscious, and suggested that as a political movement develops, agency replaces resistance:

If yesterday the subaltern element was a thing, today it is no longer a thing but a historical person, a protagonist; if yesterday it was not responsible because "resisting" a will external to itself, now it feels itself to be responsible because it is no longer resisting but an agent, necessarily active and taking the initiative. But was it ever mere "resistance," a mere "thing," mere "non-responsibility"? Certainly not. (1971, p. 337)

Gramsci also argued that some intellectuals, particularly those that could be described as traditional, mistakenly understand the popular sectors as merely resisting hegemonic processes, "when they don't even expect that the subaltern will become directive and responsible" (1971, p. 337). The importance of the articulation of knowledge with passion and commitment was something that Gramsci took to heart. He reminds us that

The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned (not only for knowledge in itself but also for the object of knowledge): in other words that the intellectual can be an intellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated—i.e., knowledge. (1971, p. 418)

For Gramsci, "resistance" was a sign of (subaltern) discontent, rather than a conscious effort to promote social change. An immediate question uncoils: How is it possible to transform resistance into agency? The

organic intellectual (specialized intellectuals that each class develops) was Gramsci's answer. According to Carl Boggs, Gramsci helped to synthesize Lenin's Marxist Jacobinism (harnessing the state apparatus to the task of social reconstruction) and the radical spontaneism of Luxemburg and Lukács.

It was Kautsky who first set forth the rationale for an intellectual vanguard. He argued that "since socialist *ideas* were first coherently articulated within the bourgeois intelligentsia, mass revolutionary consciousness depended upon the tutelary function of an educational and politically committed elite" (Boggs, 1993, p. 41). Boggs affirms that:

Kautsky's thesis, inspired by a naturalistic and positivist view of consciousness, justified a rigid separation between "scientific" knowledge of intellectuals and the limited, partial ideology of the average worker. It follows that only when the proletariat finally grasps the necessary "laws" of historical development (as formulated by intellectuals) can it become an active revolutionary force. (1993, p. 42)

Lenin similarly felt that the ideology of the worker, confined to the realm of production, could only be partial and that workers needed intellectuals to teach them the laws of historical development and diffuse among them the socialist ideals necessary to move beyond the logic of bourgeois reformism and towards a class political consciousness. This could be achieved most productively through the efforts of a disciplined and highly organized vanguard party that, through forms of bureaucratic centralism, would serve as a repository of political knowledge and the agency of collective will capable of seizing state power. Unmediated popular self-activity was flatly rejected. According to Boggs (1993),

Leninism, therefore, was able to "resolve" the problem of mass consciousness that had troubled Marxism for so long: a centralized, professional, and disciplined party would be the main repository of political knowledge. Intellectuals, fiercely dedicated to the party's historical mission, impose their own conception of totality upon the chaotic flow of disparate popular experiences and struggles. (p. 43)

Yet Lenin's vision of intellectual leadership demanded coercion, force, and manipulation in order to be successful. More than this, it demanded the type of instrumental rationality and rationalizing ethos based on an internal division of labor that was constitutive of the very logic of capitalism. This situation was as precarious as it was perilous:

Leninism found itself trapped in a dilemma. As it strove to consolidate power in a way that was bound to turn the masses it claimed to "represent" into manipulated objects, it was sure to gravitate toward an instrumental rationality wherein the methods and tools of politics took

precedence over ultimate objectives. This suppression of the teleological element permitted Lenin to employ the very logic of capitalism in the service of its overthrow: hierarchical organization, mass assembly-line production, material incentives, strict forms of labor discipline. It also meant that socialist goals would be deferred to a "future" that bore little resemblance to the actuality of the present. Ultimate aims were scarcely discussed or questioned, meaning in effect that organizational methods became ideological ends. (Boggs, 1993, p. 45)

Marxists such as Rosa Luxemburg, Emma Goldman, and Georg Lukács supported a more voluntarist or spontaneous approach, as did the worker-centered syndicalism of Sorel. From the spontaneist perspective, radical consciousness was *immanent and organic to proletarian social relations*. Boggs writes that

Luxemburg, like Lukács a few years later, sought to locate her critique of Jacobinism squarely within a Marxist framework: pitting Marx against Lenin, she anticipated massive worker upheavals growing out of the ever-widening global crisis of capitalism.... Luxemburg waged a protracted fight against elitism, bureaucracy, and authoritarian manipulation that, in her view, was too often justified by appeals to "scientific" truth and the need for an intellectual vanguard. She understood democracy as being central to the revolutionary process, following the 1905 Russian model of the mass strike. Both the social Democrats and Bolsheviks had erred seriously in their tendency to dismiss mass spontaneity and in their fetishism of leadership. (1993, p. 51)

Gramsci took up the challenge of articulating the extent to which the working class *could generate its own intellectual force*, building on his well-known conviction that "All men are intellectuals...but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals" (1971, p. 9). His solution—the "organic intellectual"—took a collective character within a working-class formation in which the role of theory was organically linked with the ebb and flow of daily proletarian life. In this view, intellectuals should become an elaborate, historical expression of traditions, culture, values, and social relations. As Boggs (1993) notes, quasi-Jacobin ideological functions were still important intellectual tasks in Gramsci's formulation but now were required to be centered within the proletarian milieu (factories, community life, culture). In this regard, intellectuals would be organic to that milieu only if they were fully immersed in its culture and language. Intellectuals therefore carried out "universal" functions that situated social activity within local and specific class struggles and in the defense of class interests. In effect, Gramsci was able to transcend the mechanical separation between the intellectual and popular realms that was upheld by both spontaneism and vanguardism. According to Gramsci:

The popular element “feels” but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element “knows” but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel. The two extremes are therefore pedantry and philistinism on the one hand and blind passion and sectarianism on the other. Not that the pedant cannot be impassioned; far from it. Impassioned pedantry is every bit as ridiculous and dangerous as wildest sectarianism and demagoguery.... One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without the sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of such a nexus the relations between the intellectual and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationship of purely bureaucratic and formal order; the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood. (1971, p. 418)

In a similar fashion to Gramsci, Paulo Freire also proposed to transcend the antimony of populism and vanguardism through a synthesis of various types of demands and the development of reflective knowledge. As Aronowitz remarks:

Freire’s solution to [the] antimony of populism and vanguardism is to find a “synthesis” in which the demand for salaries is supported but posed as a “problem” that on one level becomes an obstacle to the achievement of full “humanization” through workers’ ownership of their own labor. Again, workers pose wage increases as a solution to their felt oppression because they have internalized the oppressor’s image of themselves and have not (yet) posed self-determination over the conditions of their lives as an object of their political practice. They have not yet seen themselves *subjectively*... (1993, pp. 16-17)

Aronowitz describes the role of the Freirean intellectual as sharing the power over knowledge. He writes:

Reporting on a conversation with workers’ leaders in São Paulo, Freire *defines* class consciousness as the power and the will by workers and other oppressed and exploited strata to *share* in the formulation of the conditions of knowledge and futurity. This demand inevitably alters the situation of power: intellectuals must be consistent in the translation of their democratic visions to practice. In other words, they must share the power over knowledge, share the power to shape the future. (p. 21)

Gramsci, like Freire, urged intellectuals to develop a relational knowledge *of and with* the popular sectors in order to help them become self-reflective. His unsurpassed understanding of the relationship between theory and practice stipulated an active participation in their quotidian struggles and an investment in their future well-being. Hence, Gramsci enjoined intellectuals to live intellectual life praxiologically, that is, in a state of ongoing praxis: “The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and

momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator" (1971, p. 10).

In other words, Gramsci believed that intellectuals need to develop not only intellectual capital to distribute to the masses but the social capital of trust and collective will necessary to bring about community-based liberatory praxis (Richards, 1998).

Gramsci was concerned that popular revolt would be absorbed into the prevailing hegemony and domesticated into oblivion or else mobilized into the direction of reactionary fascism. Gramsci did not believe, as did the anarchists and syndicalists, that common sense was innately rebellious. For Gramsci, mass consciousness was contradictory and rather formless by necessity and the construction of a collective political will is always gradual, uneven, and part of a counter-hegemonic movement where intellectuals play an increasingly important role (Boggs, 1984). Leadership was indirect, as spontaneity was refracted through cultural formations and organizational and institutional sites. The challenge for Gramsci "was how to move beyond social immediacy without at the same time destroying spontaneous impulses" (Boggs, 1984, p. 208) to a point where common sense became good sense and where spontaneity was transformed into critical consciousness. Boggs describes the democratizing character of the organic intellectual as follows:

It seems clear that Gramsci, with the Turin council movement of 1918-1919 always in mind, saw the organic intellectual as democratizing force who, virtually indistinguishable from the average worker in many ways, could articulate the values and goals of proletarian revolution. It was this spirit that Gramsci could refer to theory as a "popular" enterprise and could champion the subversive idea that all persons are in some sense intellectuals insofar as they carry out certain forms of mental activity, enter into social relations, express opinions and make cultural choices. (1993, pp. 58-59)

### **Intellectuals: From Organic to Committed**

For Gramsci, organic intellectuals were in a fundamental way an important expression of working-class life, an interrogation of emergent patterns of thought and action, the radicalization of the subaltern strata, the translation of theory into strategy, and the creation of revolutionary subjectivity through the formation of continuous and multi-faceted counter-hegemonic activity and the development of a revolutionary historical bloc where divergent interests converge and coalesce around

shared visions and objectives. He did resign himself, however, to a commitment to some form of mass party, given the conjunctural events within Italy at that time. Boggs writes:

Gramsci's anti-Jacobinism gave way to certain historical pressures: he soon concluded that the Communist party ought to be the repository of theory, with its leadership the final arbiter of strategy. Gramsci himself was a founder and leading figure in the Italian Communist party. Yet his view of the party, like his concept of intellectuals, differed profoundly from Lenin's in many ways, beginning with Gramsci's emphasis on the ideological-cultural role of the party (the "myth prince") in contrast to Lenin's zeal for organization and power. Gramsci's idea of a "national-popular" movement required jettisoning the strict Leninist boundary between political and social realms bet exemplified by the professional cadre—the hallmark of Bolshevik-type parties. Even in his later Jacobin phase Gramsci approached critical consciousness as the product of an ongoing dialectical relationship between intellectuals and masses. This syntheses, however flawed, did go beyond the polarities of Marxist theory in the period 1890-1930: it was more compatible with the aims of popular self-emancipation than was vanguardism, more attuned to the indeterminate nature of mass consciousness than spontaneism, and more suitable to condition of advanced capitalism than either. (1993, pp. 59-60)

While Gramsci considered all individuals to be intellectuals, not all of them had the function traditionally assigned to and developed by intellectuals (1971). Most importantly for Gramsci, organic intellectuals of the working class do not only resist hegemonic processes, but they attempt to displace the old hegemonic order by leading their class or popular front into more elaborated forms of understanding the capitalist system of exploitation. At the same time, organic intellectuals serve as role models that open the horizons of their class or popular front in order to secure a more equitable system of societal organization, which Gramsci believed must take the form of a socialist society.

The role of the organic intellectual was to mediate between the good sense of subaltern groups and the formation of a counter-hegemonic consciousness that can read the contextually specific and historically conjunctural contradictions that suffuse the social formation. According to Carroll and Ratner, Gramsci

...held that all people are intellectuals in capacity, if not function. He believed that counter-hegemonic leadership emanates from intellectuals whose organic ties to subaltern groups enable them to achieve a unity of theory and practice and of thinking and feeling, thus mediating between the abstract and concrete in a manner foreign to traditional scholastic, ecclesiastic, and political elites. For Gramsci, the role to the

intellectual is that of organizer and facilitator: instead of bringing correct consciousness to the masses "from without," the organic intellectual facilitates the practical movement from "good sense" (which resistant subordinates already possess) to a broader, counter-hegemonic consciousness that is sensitive to the specific conditions of a social formation at a given conjuncture. (1994, p. 12)

In the search for the limits of what it means to be an intellectual, there exists a lucid mistrustfulness in Gramsci's materialism. He maintains that an intellectual activity is not outside of a relational logic, therefore to think about the role of an intellectual is to think about its very limits. If, as Ernesto Laclau (1993) points out, to see the limits of something is to see what is beyond those limits, then the criteria of distinction of what is and what is not, in strict terms, an intellectual task is something that becomes constitutively opaque.

Gramsci knew that to say "all men" or "everyone" is the same as saying "no one." He was more concerned with the intellectual "function" than the function of the intellectual. Laclau (1993) has pointed out that "the intellectual for Gramsci is not a segregated intellectual group but one that establishes the organic unity among a group of activities that, if left to themselves, would remain fragmented and dispersed. A union activist, in that sense, would be an intellectual" (204). As Laclau emphasizes, this is not about the function of the intellectual but about the intellectual function. It is not focused on a class, it cannot be the exclusive place of an elite: it emerges at all the points of the social net. And this consists of the practice of articulation—priests, physicians, notaries, lawyers, teachers, nurses, drop-outs and gang members, schools, court houses, hospitals, churches, and street-corners. Once we accept the intellectual task as a function, does it matter who and what they are? For Gramsci (and also for Paulo Freire) political-pedagogical actions are not an exclusive problem of having the right knowledge, but also of faithfulness to the event: In other words, to be in the right place at the right time.

Let us recall a passage of a rural educator's tale which Freire mentions in his *Pedagogy of Hope*: "We need to tell you, friend, something very important. If you came here thinking you were going to teach us that we are being exploited, you do not need to, because we know that very well. Now, what we want to know about you is whether you are going to be with us at the time we are hit" (Freire, 1995, p. 67).

Is this a popular expression of the rejection of intellectual tasks? Not necessarily. It deals with the ethical privilege of being "there" over being "something." By focusing on the relationships developed through hegemonic and counterhegemonic practices, Gramsci highlighted the paradoxical practices in which the popular sectors engage, and he shows only

one way out of this paradox. The *organic intellectuals* of the popular classes have the knowledge and the solutions that must be exercised if society is to become democratic. Gramsci saw democracy as essentially a dialectical movement between individual agency and structural location:

But democracy, by definition, cannot mean merely that an unskilled worker can become skilled. It must mean that every "citizen" can "govern" and that society places him, even if only abstractly, in a general condition to achieve this. Political democracy tends towards a coincidence of the rulers and the ruled (in the sense of government with the consent of the governed) ensuring for each non-ruler a free training in the skill and general technical preparation necessary to that end. (1971, pp. 40-41)

On the one hand, Gramsci believed that the popular classes are the only *historical subjects* that are able to effectively resist, challenge, and transform the hegemonic position of the bourgeoisie even though the working class and the peasants (i.e., popular classes) have developed a contradictory consciousness which ultimately does not allow the elaboration of autonomous decisions or choice. On the other hand, organic intellectuals, on their own merits, are able construct other models of consciousness in political and cultural arenas and it is this process that, for Gramsci, constitutes the key to overcoming the shortcomings of the popular classes:

Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the construction of an *elite* of intellectuals. A human mass does not "distinguish" itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organizing itself; and there is no organization without intellectuals, that is without organizers and leaders, in other words, without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of "specialized" in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 334)

A fundamental challenge accompanying Gramsci's framework, and one that is reiterated by many in the field of education, is that there exists a categorical assumption that organic intellectuals must develop some sort of supra-natural level of consciousness, avoiding or overcoming the contradictory personal and social struggles present in everyday life. At the same time, this hyper-valorization of the role of one small group of leaders and organizers replicates the heroic myths of romantic idealism of the last century, which in turn reflects its positivistic heritage, and a firm belief in the existence of a normal and teleological line of progress for all societies (i.e., from backward societies, to capitalistic forms, to socialist and finally communist societies).



Additionally, it is worth noting that ideology, hegemony and resistance are also concepts that have been developed and used in deeply gendered frameworks. For this reason, the important criticisms of feminist scholars must be taken seriously (i.e., Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Butler, 1993; Hill Collins, 1990). Margaret Ledwith (1997) points out that Gramsci's work often "fell foul of the public:private divide" (p. 91). For example, Gramsci largely overlooked the support of his sister-in-law, Tatiana Schucht, during his prison years, especially in relation to her assistance with his prison notebooks (Ledwith, 1997). However Gramsci's thinking did capture at least some of the issues confronting gender equality. Ledwith notes that Gramsci

...was not confronted with the feminist awareness that has developed over the last few decades. There seems to be some contradictory issues here: Gramsci accepted as natural the roles of the women in his personal life without recognising their political implications. However, there is a glimpse that he was aware at some deeper level of the complex subordination of women. In his discussion of Americanism and Fordism...he not only acknowledges women's exploitation in the public domain, but also recognises our vital function in the reproduction of the workforce, thereby identifying sexuality as a focus of oppression.... he saw economic independence as only part of the story; true emancipation involves freedom of choice in relation to sexual relationships. What he referred to as a "new ethic"...is the transformative moment gained from a *war of position* which frees women in a truly liberatory way. Gramsci's feminist consciousness therefore connects women's sexual rights not only with women's liberation, but with the total transformation of society as a whole. (1997, p. 91)

Some Gramscian scholars and activists have pointed out that the very distinction between domination and resistance has often been misunderstood by contemporary social scientists because it is only when resistance is performed as a violently explicit act, or as an act of direct opposition, that it is given validity or conceptualized as the true voice or will of subjects expressing their agency. Yet counter-hegemonic practices do not necessarily result in violent acts. They partake of many genres and modalities of "performance" ranging from decentering dominant discourses in a variety of public practices such as political journalism, political theatre, insurrectionary artistic endeavours, or acts of scholarship, to actively resisting repressive state apparatuses through strikes, walkouts, political demonstrations, armed struggle, etc. Furthermore, counter-hegemonic resistance among feminist intellectuals carries its own set of special challenges. Boggs notes that feminist intellectuals

...are immersed in the world of collective action, in the language and

values of women struggling to change their lives. The gulf between intellectual work and everyday life, between thought and action, is greatly narrowed where it is not eliminated altogether. With few exceptions, feminist intellectuals of this sort carry no Jacobin illusions, no global or "imported" theories, no fixation on a single privileged agency of change. Nor do they adhere to prevailing technocratic norms. At the same time, the always shifting social bases and fortunes of women's movements and projects means that long-term organic attachment of intellectuals to local communities is problematic. In this sense the "organic" character of intellectuals in new social movements can be expected to have a provisional status. (1993, p. 178)

### **Rethinking Critical Pedagogy in the Spirit of Gramsci**

While we agree with Boggs (1986) that today's critical intellectuals also embody some elements of Gramsci's organic model, we are concerned about the lack of interest in class politics and class struggle on the part of the emerging strata of postmodern intellectuals and their relationship to new social movements, including movements on a global scale. We further believe that Gramsci's appropriation by educational postmodernists has too often emphasized the priority of language and representation in the hegemonic processes of identity formation to the detriment of acknowledging how the social construction of race, class, and gender are implicated in the international division of labor. Postmodern educators have not sufficiently comprehended the importance of understanding and challenging the totalizing power of capitalism. Capitalism totalizes like nothing else—it is its totalizing character that renders capitalism unique (Carroll & Ratner, 1993). According to Marx:

[I]t is not values in use and the enjoyment of them, but exchange value and its augmentation, that spur [the capitalist] into action. Fanatically bent on making value expand itself, he ruthlessly forces the human race to produce for production's sake.... Moreover, the development of capitalist production makes it constantly necessary to keep increasing the amount of the capital laid out in a given industrial undertaking, and competition makes the immanent laws of capitalist production to be felt by each individual capitalist, as external coercive laws. It compels him to keep constantly extending his capital, in order to preserve it, but extend it he cannot, except by means of progressive accumulations.... To accumulate, is to conquer the world of social wealth, to increase the mass of human beings exploited by him, and thus to extend both the direct and the indirect sway of the capitalist. (Marx, 1967:592, as cited in Carroll & Ratner, 1994, p. 17).

We argue for a counter-hegemonic coalition of social formations composed of committed intellectuals whose political links are connected

and articulated through the unification of demands in heterogeneous, multifaceted, yet politically focalized anti-capitalist struggles. This is not to limit counter-hegemonic struggles to the productivist framework of unilinear labor struggles or Marxist “workerism,” for instance, but rather to forge new links between labor and new social movements without dismissing the potential of “politically” unorganized social sectors (such as the growing numbers of unemployed and homeless).

One of the main goals of these multivaried coalitions should be to eradicate the authoritarian power of the state and curb its ability to support other structures of oppression. To do so, demands moving beyond the radical autonomy of localized struggles or the creation of a network of micro-political struggles. This does not mean we reject community-based multiform politics but rather we need to coordinate our single-issue and micro-political efforts so that the power of state apparatuses are not underestimated and can be effectively challenged. Of course, we also acknowledge that the state is not the all-encompassing structure of domination that orthodox Marxists have often made it out to be. But we also recognize that state formations, while more fluid in the context of global markets and the internationalization of capital, have not become obsolete. Too often radical pluralism does not sufficiently acknowledge the extent to which relations of subordination are connected to state formations through which capitalist power circulates and becomes legitimate.

While we agree with Boggs that “a reconstituted definition of organic intellectuals emphasizes movement as opposed to class or social identity” (1993, p. 179), we worry that such a renovated dialectic between intellectuals and social forces or movements is unlikely to challenge sufficiently let alone to overturn the highly integrated power structures of global capitalism associated with the economic exploitation of the masses, ecological genocide, and bureaucratic domination.

We argue that it is imperative to move beyond the more orthodox and monodeterministic base-superstructural argument. Consequently we reject, as did Marx (in the *Grundrisse*), the establishment of a mechanical one-to-one “mimetic” relation of determination between the social relations of production and cultural formations. Yet we strongly advocate for the recognition of the priority of labor relations in social processes and the “logic” inherent in the productive processes of capital—the expropriation of the labor of the many by the few.

While it is surely the case that economic and cultural relations can be—and often are—decoupled within capitalist society, we call for the need to acknowledge that objective surplus labor *grounds* cultural practices and social institutions. Here we follow Hoffman (1984) in arguing that to avoid a mechanical hypostatization and organic splicing

apart of the Gramscian couplet of coercion and consent, *all political action must be premised on the idea of the coercive character of all social relationships*. Failure to do this has led post-Marxists who champion the new social movements to over-emphasize contingency at the expense of structural determination. The cabaret avant-gardism of many postmodernist critics confirms rather than contests the authority of sovereign discourses in a way that reduces desired exchange with the specters of the unsaid. While their gravitational center constitutes a cultural politics that attempts to locate culture as a terrain where social justice is contested and where victory for the subaltern needs to be won, it is too often the case that dominant images, symbols, and representations are portrayed as establishing the most fundamental conditions of daily action, structuring daily life in the most immediate and important ways.

This is not to say that cultural discourses are secondary to economic relations, or to maintain that symbolic production (as in the work of Walter Benjamin) has no revolutionary significance or potential, or that resistance at the level of culture is merely epiphenomenal (we are thinking of the Chicano school walkouts in East Los Angeles over Proposition 187, art by Barbara Kruger, and project by ACT-UP, for instance). What we are saying is that in much postmodern criticism, the world of class struggle linked to the social division of labor and relations of production is theoretically dissolved into a world composed of unstable constellations of meanings and indeterminate and incommensurable discourses that appear severed from the messy terrain of capitalist social relations. In this scenario, class struggles are too often rewritten as a political economy of conjunctural antagonisms or a type of cross-hatching of determinations that do not intersect neatly in terms of class location.

Post-Marxist or postmodernist critics do not see consent as a moment conceived within social coercion brought about by productive practices. In contrast, the committed intellectual recognizes that so-called autonomous acts of consent are *always already* rooted in the coercive relationships of the realm of necessity. Since coercion is the “ethical expression of the fact that people *have to* produce” (Hoffman, 1984, p. 212), it makes sense to view the dialectical relationship between coercion and consent as a unity in distinction. Hoffman asserts that “Consent has to respond to coercion in order to ‘negate’ it. We have to avoid...a fatalistic social determinism...and a voluntaristic postulation of situations in which ‘social pressures are non-existent’” (1984, p. 210). Without acknowledging coercion as such we are faced with a pedagogy grounded in an anti-politics of free-floating critique. As Carroll and Ratner remark: “Politics becomes an anything-goes adventure—as exhilarating as it is strategically rudderless” (1994, p. 14).

## **Towards a Critical Pedagogy of the Committed Intellectual**

We wish to extend the role of the organic intellectual by suggesting that the resisting, hegemonized, and fragmented subaltern needs to function not only as a critically super-conscious "organic intellectual," but also as a committed one (Fischman, 1998). The committed intellectual strives to be critically self-conscious, active and critical, but at times is confused, or even unaware of his/her limitations or capacities to be an active promoter of social change. Or as Paulo Freire has noted:

*Conscientization* is not exactly the starting point of commitment. Conscientization is more of a product of commitment. I do not have to be already conscious in order to struggle. By struggling I become conscious/aware. (Freire, 1988, p. 114)

Consciousness always implies that the subject has some awareness of the immediate world that concerns him/her. As Freire (1989) came to recognize, a deep understanding of complex processes of oppression and domination is not enough to guarantee personal or collective praxis. What must serve as the genesis of such an understanding is an unwavering commitment to the struggle against injustice. Only by developing an understanding that is born of a profound commitment to social justice can such an understanding lead to the type of conscientization necessary to challenge the hegemonic structures of domination and exploitation. Today's hegemons are embedded in globalizing flows and networks of capital accumulation. The globalization of capital can be challenged and defeated not only by understanding its formation but also by developing the will and the courage—the radical commitment—to struggle against it. The committed intellectual does not ask for guarantees in the struggle for a socialist democracy or in the elimination of gender, ethnic, and sexual discrimination, but finds a firm ground for commitment to such historical projects on a global basis.

The committed intellectual is not someone who is interested only in resisting and defeating forms of cultural domination, but rather someone for whom the end of all forms of exploitation is the focal point of his or her commitment to transform the world. We do not endorse the view that conflicting or competing claims are ultimately, or "in the last instance," unsolvable, nor do we wish to articulate a view of the intellectual that merely invites the subaltern to add her or his recipe for social justice to the existing pot so that the clenched fists of history can ladel them into an apocalyptic meltdown of final consensus. This would be a politically ambiguous stance, as well as an intellectually dishonest one.

The point is not to initiate a “face off” between two equally dogmatic assertions: between advocates of structural determination versus proponents of universal contingency or between supporters of Leninist reflectionism versus those who support a post-structuralist relativism. We believe that a better strategy is to follow Gramsci’s stress on acquiring a critical understanding of hegemonic structures (civic, social, state) that constrain human action while at the same time emphasizing a commitment to revolutionary agency that will permit collective re-definitions of social change and enable freedom from capitalist exploitation. Following Carroll and Ratner (1994), we need a more dialectical view of revolutionary praxis that acknowledges that systems of intelligibility and relations of signification (i.e., cultural politics) are reciprocally re-enacted in social relations in the material world. This is as true of today’s utopian terraformers and green rangers as it is of insurgent Mayan guerrillas in Chiapas.

Of course, we recognize that the situation today is far different from the milieu of Turin in which Gramsci struggled. With the pervasiveness of ideological and social diversity that exists today, with the proliferation of modalities of *Lebensführung*, and with the lack of an integrated working class, it is more likely that intellectual labor for the cause of social justice will take place outside a single, global system of thought such as Marxism, although we believe such a system to be indispensable for achieving the conditions of liberation of which Gramsci spoke. Boggs remarks on the growth of critical, free-floating intellectuals that has accompanied the pluralization of social life-worlds and political opposition. As we noted in the case of feminist intellectuals, the new “critical” intellectual” associated with the new social movements and the struggle for radical democracy

...articulates oppositional values but does so in something of a free-floating manner, alone or in small groups, removed from the sphere of popular movements or constituencies. The organic type, on the other hand, engages in a more collective, transformative activity where the old distinction between intellectuals and masses is broken down, so that “theoretical” and other mental functions are no longer imported from the outside, in Jacobin style. From a Gramscian standpoint, organic intellectuals are counter-hegemonic precisely to the extent that their contribution takes place within a democratized struggle for social change. (Boggs, 1994, p. 175)

The committed intellectual recognizes that self-reflexivity or the capacity to engage in critical self-consciousness is not enough in order to resist both the repressive and integrative functions of hegemony. What is necessary is to find ways to actively intervene in the capitalist world order. Such

strategies entail combining aspects of the free-floating intellectual with those of the organic intellectual. In other words, the committed intellectual works in diverse space and spheres in which new social movements intersect with more organically traditionalist socialist movements. What links the two groups of intellectuals is a common commitment to anti-capitalist struggle and a provisional model of socialist democracy. Brosio's warning is apposite:

The fact that working-class consciousness has not yet overcome this hegemony in the West causes one to think that becoming aware may not be enough, when one considers the advances which have been made by capital in its colonization of the quotidian, lived experiences of the masses since the time in which Gramsci wrote. Moreover, there are many persons in Gramsci's native country and elsewhere who understand the nature of their sophisticated oppression, but are unable to muster the power to stop it and finally overcome it. (1994, p. 50)

### **Legacies of Gramsci's Specters: Revolutionary Patience and Committed intellectuals**

The figure of the committed intellectual that we are developing never forgets that we live in a world of messy material relations that not only structures our consciousness and shapes our subjectivities but frequently exploits human labor and strips subaltern subjects of their fundamental humanity and self-worth (McLaren, 1995, 1997). Exploitation not only alienates, it also destroys, it forces people to work and live in dangerous workplace environments, it pollutes the earth with toxic, life-threatening chemicals, it manipulates people into long hours of indignity, job insecurity, and low wages. Exploitation is not a subjective condition of malaise, but an objective force that from the shadows rules not the lives of the self-elected elite and their annoying adjuncts, but the lives of the struggling class. The ruling elite suffers existential anxiety; the working class suffers on the brink of an ignominious living death from hunger and the savagery of the elements.

The objective world produces our social intelligibilities and our discourses about this world. These discourses often function in ways that naturalize and legitimize objective labor practices (Ebert, 1997). They help to win approval for the extraction of surplus labor from the working-class. The textuality of the world enables us to know it primarily through narratives. Our engagement with the discourses of everyday life are relational because knowledge is never pristine or stable. Discourses themselves have a materiality about them by the very fact that they are uncontainable by any theory or explanation. As narratives, they are

immune from ultimate closure.

While the arena of signification is *always already* an undecidable social text, this is not the same thing as claiming that meanings constitute nothing more than the relations among signs or the adventitious free play of significatory difference. The committed intellectual does not view these discourses as seamless but rather views all discourses as fundamentally contradictory and conflictual; further, discourses are never immune from the larger context of objective labor practices or as disentangled from social relations arising from the history of productive labor. Recognizing that the international division of labor is refracted through race, class, and gender antagonisms, the committed intellectual confronts the capitalist world order with a race, class, and gender consciousness and a politics of respite and renewal. It does so without succumbing to a right-wing anti-statism of backlash populism (as in the case of agrarian fascists or Christian militia movements) or to an organic communitarianism, populist nostalgia, possessive parochialism, or militant cultural particularism. While it is true that Gramsci's world "is no longer our world" (Adamson, 1980, p. 246), his specters are whispering to us, reminding us that the struggle ahead is a politics of passionate remembrance, of re-visiting anti-fascist struggles of the past, of recognizing the lessons embedded in history's dreams and nightmares, of moving forward into the new millenium with renewed hope and an optimism of the will.

The intellectual current inspired by Gramsci's work is highly suggestive for understanding how the regime of capital functions through historically specific, ethnic, and gender differentiation and for understanding how the law of value is refracted through the culturally specific character of labor power (Kincheloe, 1998). His work on the contradictory aspects of ideological formations can give us a much better critical purchase on understanding the contradictory nature of "the 'subjection' of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideologies which imprison and define them" (Hall, 1996, p. 440). His concept of the organic intellectual offers a fecund beginning for understanding the possibilities inherent in developing a critical agency for anti-capitalist struggle. We have attempted to build on these potent ideas in our nascent formulation of the committed intellectual. We believe that Gramsci's conception of the relationship between ideology and hegemony and the role of intellectuals provides contemporary educators with a basis from which to forge a critical pedagogy that can meet the challenges of the new millenium. Some lines from Micere Githae Mugo's poem, "Intellectuals or Imposters?" (1994) serve as a fitting conclusion to our discussion:



Refrain: Aha! Intellectuals or imposters?

...Show me those

who cross

engulfing seas

seas of confusion

those who build

connecting bridges

bridges of understanding

those who traverse

dividing gorges

gorges of alienation

Show me those

who leap-frog

with human grace

hurdles of

ego-tripping

Friend, show me these

and I will tell you

whether they are

intellectuals

or imposters.

## Note

This article was prepared as a chapter which will appear in a forthcoming book on Gramsci to be published by Teachers College Press. The authors wish to thank Peter Mayo for his cogent suggestions and expert editorial advice. We also wish to thank Ramin Farahmandpur for his editorial assistance.

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