Common Sense

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Where is the revolution of the masses; the next epic upheaval that was predicted to wipe away all oppressive existing social conditions? The left has matured enough to step out its determinist and teleological infancy, yet this maturity has not resulted in a strengthening of the "philosophy of praxis" in the material world. Disavowing economism requires a critical reevaluation of superstructure, particularly the popular worldview of the masses: "common sense". For this analysis no framework provides better theoretical tools than Antonio Gramsci's analysis of cultural hegemony. The framework of common sense gives modern social science the best method of examining why certain segments of society act against their own interests.

From time to time social revolutionaries of the left wipe their theoretical chalkboards clean and start anew, but ironically the start of a new project is begun with an oft ask question: "What is to be done?", without ever asking if the problem is in the form of the question itself, visionaries have used this question to construct programs of social transformation from the pragmatic to the sublime. However, many 19th and 20th century activists that chose this question as their point of theoretical departure made the tragic error of assuming a moment of social rupture, within the present order, was destined to occur; answering the question is simply a matter of how to prepare for or accelerate the occurrence of the inevitable. Yet while revolutionaries asked what should be done, the masses often replied with "About what?" The greatest shock to revolutionary leaders is the moment they realize those with ideological or physical chains on are perfectly content in their bondage. Exacerbating matters is when an
economic or political crisis in a system of alienation results in the systems strengthening opposed to progressing to a crisis of the system.

The Multiple Tiers of Common Sense

Recognizing that emancipatory politics is a matter of consciousness turned into practical action rather than fatalism, Antonio Gramsci was free to evaluate culture in a historicist and critical manner. Writing from behind the bars of Mussolini's prison, Gramsci articulates the multi-layered picture of cultural hegemony. In Gramsci's view the social class that achieved and maintained hegemony would rule the politico-economic landscape. Hegemony presents itself in two distinct layers, the first being "civil society...the ensemble of organisms commonly called private" which is the principle agent of common sense (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci utilizes a modified Hegelian definition of civil society throughout his analysis, therefore Gramsci's civil society includes a massive constellation of social agents and institutions; all of which falls between the family and the state. Civil society is the platform where the most fundamental element of hegemony is built: consent, a point to which we will return. The second layer of hegemony is "The apparatus of state coercive power...", the political society which reenforces consent by "legal" means, resorting to force where required (Gramsci, 1971). This symbiotic relationship creates a civil society armed by coercion. By presenting these two realms of society, Gramsci gives Marxism its first analysis of superstructure which fully abandons determinism.

Concerned that bourgeois ideology was standing in the way of revolution Gramsci focused his inquiry on civil society. State violence has never been an ideal way to maintain order; alienation and exploitation are too easily identified and rebelled against. Even in instances
of prolonged state trany (such as era in which Gramsci lived) the state's power must be backed by a centralized civil society. The real struggle for control takes place at the level of "private" society, within the conscience of "free" agents. Stifling rebellion before it begins protects capital from the loss of productivity and efficiency of a recalcitrant working class. Gramsci’s view of civil society would diverge from that of Hegel's and even further from that of Marx. Hegel included systems of order in his definition, such as courts and police forces used to reenforce economic and social relations, Gramsci transfers these institutions to the category of state power. For Gramsci civil society was primarily the institutions responsible for diffusing and creating modes of thought; the ideological superstructure which operates outside the realm of economic production, unlike Marx's glib definition of civil society as the spawn of the economy. (Femia, 1981). It is the private world that disseminates common sense to the masses, but what is it exactly and how does the process of diffusion occur exactly?

The concept of common sense employed in the Gramscian manner is not to be confused with the notion of being practical or grounded in thought. Common sense (buonsenso) does not have the same connotations in Italian as in English. It is the Weltanschauung or world-view of those who are not critically engaged with philosophy; it is the "philosophy of the non-philosophers.... the conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which...the average man is developed" (Gramsci, 1971). Although here, common sense is painted as being unitary and a defining characteristic of only the uneducated multitude, Gramsci articulates a multiplicity of common senses that occur simultaneously within the same society. They may be conflicting or congruent, but there as many common senses as there are subcultures in civil society. However, this multiplicity of
senses always leaves the whole of the working class, who Gramsci terms the "subaltern", as casualties of the non-philosophers philosophy.

Common sense is inherently fragmented, disorganized, "diffuse" and "un-coordinated". It is purposely delivered by the bourgeois class and institutions acting in a disorganized fashion to the subaltern classes in this manner to keep them as disorganized as their senses are. The result is the subaltern resorts to "spontaneous" methods of action based on what is thought to be "instinct", although it is actually a "... primitive and elementary historical acquisition" (Gramsci, 1971). The example of economic crisis is given to demonstrate this point. At times of (d)recession spontaneous mass movements of the subaltern often rise to express discontent, however in the absence of the conscience leadership needed to direct the malcontents out of the confines of common sense, the masses are in a competition with "the reactionary groups, who take advantage of the objective weakening of the government in order to attempt coups d'états" (Gramsci, 1971).

It is important to put Gramsci in the historical context of early 20th century Europe when reading the preceding quote, and to recall the reactionary regimes that rose to power as a result of The Great Depression. Put in this context, Gramsci's observation has great relevance when studying the rise of European fascism and the failure of left-wing factions to capitalize on capitalism's most acute collapse in history. However, the quote also has a great deal of relevance to contemporary politics. De facto coups in the West became quite rare in the post-war era, yet the chronic instability that characterizes the capitalist system lingers on. Market collapse never leads to the proletarian upheavals Marx predicted, but more often than not, to bloodless political coups that result in a dramatic shift to the reactionary right, which is characterized in the current era by xenophobia, anti-Islamic rhetoric, and above all a deepening of neo-liberal policies. In
Gramsci's view this results directly from the failure of the masses to transcend the spontaneity of common sense, by never turning their negation of crises into, "...a positive political factor" (Gramsci, 1971).

Above all common sense makes the multitude submissive and subordinate to the dire gives of state and economic Power. It is foreign in nature to the subaltern classes, something deriving from external relations with those outside their own social group. For the masses, two worlds exist: one of thought and one of action. A general conception of the world is held by the subaltern that is contrary to their intellectual and economic superiors. This conception of the world shows up in episodic fashion from time to time, but only "occasionally and in flashes when, that is, the group is acting as an organic totality" (Gramsci, 1971). However, "in normal times", times outside of economic or political crisis, the subaltern has a proclivity for adopting the viewpoint of their perceived superiors. Their own healthy powers of negation and criticism is buried beneath the desire for "normalcy". Yet, in normal times the conduct of the masses "is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate." To complicate matters the subaltern normally feel their superiors have their best interest in mind, holding on to false narratives of upward mobility. That is why common sense can not be taken as the mass's own Weltanschauung. The multitude "...for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group." (Gramsci, 1971). Common sense's externality is where its fragility exists. It enters the conciseness of the masses like a virus, creating an internal dialectic between common sense and critical thinking. Nevertheless, as Gramsci frames it, this instability will not rupture unless resistance is stoked in a particular manner.
At this point, a point of further linguistic clarification is needed. Common sense must be read as a "collective noun" like religion; a multitude of religions exist but with the same underlying creationist themes and structure. The use of religion in my example is no coincidence, but is meant to allude to the broader connections between common sense and faith. Viewing the term in this light is crucial to proper comprehension because "...religion is an element of fragmented common sense", arguably its greatest fragments (Gramsci, 1971). The discipline and ideological purity diffused through religion penetrates deep into the popular conscience of the masses. Gramsci demonstrates this by carefully perusing the intellectual hierarchy of the Catholic church. In his view "the strength in religion" is doctrinal unity of the upper and lower strata. By emphasizing the clergy's direct participation in civil society the church was able to dive deep into the cultural world of the subaltern. The relation which exists between the upper echelons of the clergy, the church's intellectual base, and the "simple souls" cements Christian morality, submission, and obedience into the populous (this is of course a Eurocentric view but is just as germane to the Islamic and Jewish cultures).

For Gramsci religious doctrinal unity was something to envy and even be used as a model for the future structure of the revolutionary organization that could potentially liberate society, however the content of the church's messages he saw as a bit of a theoretical obstacle in his perceived path to liberation. The church interjected Christian morality into the realm of politics, a major intellectual barrier to what Gramsci saw as the appropriate functioning of politics. Religious morality defied the Machiavellian logic of politics that Gramsci so desired to enter popular consciousness. As a great admirer of much of Machiavelli's political theory, Gramsci employed many elements of it in his own, but particularly a Machiavellian conception of political morality and action.
It is erroneous to place Gramsci’s approach to political science firmly in the Machiavellian column, however it is just as grave of a mistake to ignore his appreciation for some elements of Machiavelli’s theory of politics. For Gramsci, Machiavelli’s assertion that "...politics is an autonomous activity, with its own principles and laws distinct from those of morality and religion" (emphasis added) rang particularly true (Gramsci, 1971). It was only by deed of the church that Machiavelli became the "devil incarnate" to the masses. The failure of this point of Machiavellian philosophy to become common sense was to the loss of the subaltern, who in the absence of *The Prince’s* wisdom were left with ecclesiastical conceptions of human nature and morality applied to politics. Transcendentalist thought positioned the "fixed and immutable" human nature as the subject of politics and society. Such a conception covers up the liberating potential of discovering "that human nature is the totality of historically determined social relations" (Gramsci, 1971). For Gramsci it is possible to discover truth, within limits, by utilizing "philology and criticism", practices theological notions of truth and morality make unnecessary.

Religion is not the only way in which common sense may be transmitted. The entirety of civil society works to create and reinforce the "popular" conception of the world. The state, which in Gramsci’s analysis is an instrument sought after and utilized by rivaling segments of the bourgeoisie, also manufactures consent by directing civil society to act on its behalf: "the state, when it wants to initiate an unpopular action or policy, creates in advance suitable public opinion; that is, it organizes and centralizes certain elements of civil society" (Femia, 1981). Gramsci makes this point in reference to yellow press and radio manipulation of information. Governments can often gin up a tremendous amount of support in the mass media due to the close connection between the elites in the state and the elites in the press. Sharing the same class
interests and world-view allows for various forms of collusion between press and state; a symbiotic relation formed that would produce consent from the masses and greater freedom of action for the elite. When such a symbiosis does not occur, governments often find other ways to control the thought of civil society. Gramsci takes note of government encroachment in culture, particularly museums, libraries, theaters, and education (Femia, 1981). One can not fail to recognize the contemporary examples of state intervention in all the same realms as Gramsci commented on: the film rating system, library censorship, cuts in public funding for "offensive" art exhibitions, and the most flagrant intervention, state mandates and standardization of school curriculum. In the Gramscian sense all these interventions are intended to standardize more than academic success rates, but consciousness itself.

Gramsci paints a picture of a penetrating and and nearly inescapable ideological prison to which the masses are subjected to. Created by civil society and enforced by the state, common sense turns into a dizzying array of beliefs and moral codes that bolsters the subaltern's own subordination. Their disorganized and uncoordinated conception of the world leads to spontaneous and ultimately unproductive fits against the current order of things, yet these never quite materialize into the revolutionary movements envisioned by various theorists. To Gramsci the central task was to expose the non-philosophers philosophy to the masses, along with the powerful actors who generate it, so that the revolutionary project envisioned by Marx may carry on.

Common Sense, Hegemony, and Marx

As discussed previously, Gramsci's conception of common sense represents a dramatic departure from orthodox Marxist perspectives on culture and civil society, although
Gramsci saw himself as being true to Marx: "References to common sense and to the solidity of its beliefs are frequent in Marx" (Gramsci, 1971). Here he was referring to the earliest of Marx's work on ideology and to a less extent commodity fetishism. What one finds in Gramsci's conception of cultural hegemony is a shift in the traditional Marxist subject of inquiry from the economy to consciousness, although the intent remains unchanged: to foment revolutionary rupture. To illustrate this point it is important to draw some parallels and contrasts between Marx's work and cultural hegemony. Marx's common sense functions similar to Gramsci's, yet for Marx you will find an analysis carrying the weight of staunch historical materialism and economic determinism. Gramsci's conception liberates common sense from rigid materialist notions, allowing for a full analysis of superstructure.

The themes discussed in Marx's critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, are very prevalent throughout Gramsci's work. Marx avers that the "task of history" is to "establish the truth of this world" via philosophy. This is a task which can only begin once religion, "the other-world of truth has vanished" (Marx, 1978). This train of thought falls in line with Gramsci's Machiavellian approach to political ethics. In Marx's analysis religion serves as man's self-consciousness in the absence of critical thought or the improper employment of philosophy. Gramsci strongly echoes this point in *The Study of Philosophy*, asserting that neither religion nor common sense can "constitute an intellectual order", but philosophy, being a form of critique, gives intellectual order, thus superseding both common sense and religion (Gramsci, 1971).

Despite agreement on the critical function of philosophy in establishing "the truth of this world", Gramsci bends his conception of common sense towards superstructure while Marx takes aim at the base. This split led Gramsci to cultural hegemony and Marx-Engels to "false conciseness" and "ideology". The two diverging conceptions represent the biggest rupture
between Marxian and Gramscian thought. In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx argues that material conditions are the sole creator of consciousness, never consciousness birthing material conditions: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but their social existence that determines their consciousness." (Marx, 1978). A method of ideological production is elaborated in *Capital*. Here, Marx's theory of commodity fetishism explains how relations between people become relations between things. The act of buying or selling a commodity on market has a mystifying effect on the system of economic relations that produced the commodity; the product's worth is measured only in its quantitative value on market, while the process of exploitation to make the product in the first place is hidden. The ultimate outcome is the masking of the domination and coercion involved in the relations of production (Marx, 1978). As relevant as such a critique is, Marx's historical materialism keeps his analysis narrowly fixed on the economic effects on popular consciousness and in doing so relegates civil society to an extension of capitalist economic relations. Without ever looking at consciousness in isolation from the economy (or even believing such a concept was possible) Marx blunts the force of his argument and creates what would become an anathema to Marxism: a theory that lacks a proper theorization of cultural superstructure.

Gramsci on the other hand was much more reluctant to deconstruct Hegel. Marx's determinism led him to advocating a "class in civil society that is not a class of civil society" to arise and challenge the materiel conditions of society; this is clearly where Lenin looked when theorizing the revolutionary vanguard. It was presumed that the ideology of the proletariat would be transformed by the conversion to socialist economic relations; once the exploitation of the body was end, the mind would become free as well (Marx, 1978). Of course this is a liberal use of exaggeration, given Marx's stances established in the *Theses on Feuerbach* which opposed
French materialism and the dualism of mind and matter. However, Gramsci would take the
Theses to new heights, theorizing revolution as firstly a intellectual endeavor. Disabusing Marx's
determinism meant an emancipatory project would now have to begin in the realm civil society.
The premise of Gramsci's theory is that political action is culturally conditioned, not necessarily
a reflection of physical conditions. This also meant a break from viewing revolution as part of
the inevitable logic of history; revolution in a hegemonic society is simply a singular possibility
among many. Gramsci's polemics addressing Bukharin's Popular Manual is an attempt to
disband orthodox and "scientific" Marxism of its positivism and "vulgar materialism" which led
them to the "inevitably" of revolution (Femia, 1981).

Eschewing both the fatalistic and economistic elements of the "scientific" Left, Gramsci
gave socialism a more complex theory of human cognition, he returned to a Hegelian perspective
in recognition of the "creative role of the mind in shaping the world of experience present to the
individual consciousness" (Femia, 1981). Scientific Marxists held the epistemological position
that man's knowledge was simply attempting to copy the external world more accurately. This
takes the brain's cognitive process, and hence man's ability to contribute to the production of
knowledge, out of the equation. Theorizing that human consciousness is a reflection of material
conditions means the laws of man and laws of nature are identical. Gramsci felt that applying a
single scientific method to all fields was a grave mistake, particularly when the laws the
"natural" sciences were superimposed on the social sciences. Not only did Gramsci resent the
total abandonment of historicist methods but quantifying all aspects of the human experience to
make formulaic methods of inquiry seemed outright absurd. The laws of natural science could
never fully explain the contradictory and swiftly changing conditions of human society (Femia,
The social sciences were to operate by their own unique set of laws, with philosophy constituting the most important intellectual order.

It should be made clear that, to Gramsci, critical philosophy must eventually challenge material power. Gramsci understood, as Marx and Engels expressed in *The German Ideology*, that "the class that is the ruling material power of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual power" (Femia, 1981). Therefore, awakening the mass's psychology was only to serve as the first step in creating a counter to those who controlled the means of production. This idea would form a major element of Gramsci's theory of counter-hegemony.

**The Healthy Nucleus of Good Sense**

"Good sense, which once ruled far and wide,

Now in our schools to rest is laid.

Science, its once beloved child,

Killed it to see how it was made." (Gramsci, 1971)

It is a typical mistake to see no hope in common sense. Given the interlocking methods of domination and subjugation it contains, it is natural for one to only see the philosophy of non-philosophers as an airless chamber in which the subaltern is trapped. Nothing could be further from the truth! Common sense contains the "healthy nucleus" of critical philosophy: good sense. Good sense, although in an embryonic, undeveloped form, represents the way out of the suffocating chamber of the masses. Even popular philosophy contains elements of philosophy proper; common sense rapidly decays in the face of proper application of philosophical inquiry. Despite the tremendous difficulty of radical new ideas to move from inception to popular acceptance, common sense to Gramsci is developing in a progressive manner, moving closer to a
point of rupture. Common sense will only fully develop into good sense once the appropriate
course of actions have been taken by select members of society. The revolution's goal is the
overthrow of the existing order of things, but the tactic is firstly one of philosophy, the
awakening of the good sense buried within popular consciousness.

Finding good sense in the subaltern's regime of knowledge and discourse is possible
through examination of the "popular image of philosophy", not to be confused with the "non-
philosophers philosophy". The later exists as a synonym for common sense while the former
refers to bits and fragments of actual philosophy within common sense. Discovering good sense
must be done in a "systematic, coherent, and critical fashion". The popular image of philosophy
can be reconstructed by analyzing just what the masses perceive in the signifier philosophy. This
is best found by examining how the phrase "being philosophical about it" is employed. Yes, the
phrase may allude to "resignation and patience", but the popular understanding of being
philosophical is to "reflect and realize fully that whatever happens is basically rational", allowing
one to use their powers of logic to give sense to a situation instead of caving to rash impulse
(Gramsci, 1971). This urge to overcome instinct and passion through calm and conscious
contemplation of ones actions forms "...the healthy nucleus that exists in 'common sense', the
part of it which can be called 'good sense' and which deserves to be made more unitary and
coherent" (Gramsci, 1971).

Amalgamating the fragments of good sense into a coherent whole is where Gramsci fixes
his attention. He begins by filtering good sense out of common sense, discovering where good
sense is produced and where it is not. Good sense does not come high culture as some elitists
(philosophy, literature, and art of the intellectuals) nor the world-view of the clerical leaders
need be confronted by any counter-hegemonic project, since "these systems are unknown to the
multitude and have no direct influence on its way of thinking or acting”; they serve as neither
good nor common sense. (Crehan, 2002).

Gramsci returns to the "popular image of philosophy" held by the subaltern. For the
philosophy of praxis the task is not to confront common sense in a polemical and overtly
antagonistic altercation. The goal of social revolutionaries is to use the popular image of
philosophy and enlighten it, by "renovating and making critical an already existing activity" and
by doing so showing the multitude that "everyone is a philosopher" not just an esoteric group of
intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971). Turning the masses into philosophers requires "organic"
intellectuals, those members of the revolutionary elite who maintain direct ties with the
subaltern, embedding themselves in common sense in order to expose it. Organic intellectuals in
Gramscian thought are counterposed to "traditional" intellectuals, the philosophers who consider
themselves an autonomous entity existing outside both common sense and the dominant ideology
of the ruling class. Despite traditional intellectuals having no direct contact with the masses
below, their method of philosophy is to be opposed as well, simply for the fact it is not grounded
in the practical activity of the masses.

The organic intellectuals form the social class which is to foment an "organic
consciousness" in the subaltern's culture; their good sense "renovated and made critical".
Ironically, this must be done by appropriating elements of Catholicism. To Gramsci religion's
strength is in the doctrinal unity between the upper and lower stratum of the faith; "the upper
echelons do not get too separated from the lower" (Gramsci, 1971). This same unity is needed
between organic intellectuals and the subaltern. Philosophical movements can only properly arise
when they are based on the thoughts and needs of the masses; the struggle for a strong link
between the intellectuals and the masses is the same struggle for a link between theory and
practice. Once these nexuses have been established between the multitude and the organic intellectuals which act in their service, have thus constituted a social and cultural bloc.

The process of establishing a new socio-cultural bloc has been a challenge to many idealist over the course of history's march forward. Gramsci speaks at length about the difficulty of cementing new conceptions into popular consciousness, particularly ones that are antithetical to the widely accepted orthodoxy. Using Catholicism to demonstrate this point, he shows the methods by which the religion was able to hold on to and, at times, loose its grip of influence. The church is in a battle of perpetual self-defense against doubt, skepticism, and oppositional ideas, in which its primary weapon is repetition of doctrine and apologetics. Fighting indefatigably, the church puts a great emphasis on cohesion in the ranks and a well defined chain of command. The allusion to war is more than a metaphor; the church must position itself militaristically or collide with existential annihilation. Gramsci demonstrated this point by looking at the "dechristianization" of France during the French Revolution. In the absence of the church's continuous proclamations of salvation, Catholicism entered into an era of tremendous decline in France.

Several lessons are to be drawn out of the church's success (barring the French Revolution) in establishing the moral and ethical standards of the subaltern. Should organic intellectuals (or any cultural movement for that matter) gain similar success they must appropriate the church's methods, most importantly: "1. Never to tire of repeating its own arguments (offering literary variation): repetition is the best didactic means for working on popular mentality. 2. Work incessantly to raise the intellectual level of ever-growing strata of the populace..." (Gramsci, 1971). However, socialism's goals will be the opposite of the church's. Opposed to the theologians who intentionally create submissive and primitive
mindsets, organic intellectuals would not leave the subaltern with their distorted conception of the world "but instead lead them to a superior conception of life" (Morera, 1990).

The goal is to lead the masses to self-criticism, to a critique of one's own conception of the world that produces a new vision, a new consciousness which is critically engaged with both common sense, and subsequently civil society and material conditions; this is the essence of the counter-hegemonic project. Counter-hegemony must penetrate deep into civil society if the project is to be successful. In a nation with a well constructed civil society "smashing the state" holds little tactical value: "In the West, there was a proper relation between state and civil society..the state was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks...(Crehan, 2002). With civil society awakened, the subaltern will have the intellectual tools to resist social democratic reformism and other attempts by the state to neuter radicalism by integrating political opposition into its existing framework. The masses will move from being "a class-in-itself to being a class of itself" (Crehan, 2002).

Gramsci's conception of common sense represents a radical leap in the Marxist school; a return to its Hegelian roots. However, many of Gramsci's theory's are understandably out of date, while others are only appropriate to the era and circumstances in which Gramsci lived and worked. This left Gramscian thought with useful theoretical tools like hegemony, but some anachronistic Leninist elements that begged from revamping. This renovation took the form of post-modern update, theorists and revolutionaries alike.
War of Position

The most significant theoretical achievement of Gramsci's work was to conceptualize an entirely new mode of waging politics. The tactical roles assigned to social activists bare little resemblance to those assigned by canonical Marxism. The "war of position", that is the prolonged ideological struggle for control of civil society's world-view, no longer seeks head-on confrontation with the state, at least not where civil society is well fortified, but attempts to articulate a counter-hegemonic discourse which will undermine the dominant paradigm. The ideological hegemony of the subaltern becomes prerequisite to concrete political gains. Such a goal required Gramsci to choose new political subjects of inquiry along with innovations in the methods and processes of disrupting bourgeois cultural dominance.

The classic Gramscian method to social revolution follows a two-step process: the struggle to create ideological supremacy (war of position) and an insurrectionary uprising against state power (war of maneuver). This linear path to revolution and socialistic transcendence leaves contemporary theorists with a few contradictions and complications to unwind. The most pertinent questions regard control of civil society itself. Following the classic Marxian canon, Gramsci privileges the political and social influence of the economically affluent. By doing so Gramsci ends up doing to the state what Marx did to culture: assuming it is a by-product of economic relations of production. The state is theorized as the guardian of bourgeois economic hegemony, but Gramsci never thoroughly questions whether the state is an actor in the production of ideology itself. Not until a much later date do we get a thorough analysis of the state's ability to generate ideological hegemony. The work of Nicos Poulantzas creates the greatest theoretical challenge to Gramsci's conception of civil society. The war of position
assumes that state power and cultural hegemony exist in two separate, albeit mutually
reenforcing, spheres of society, hence Gramsci's use of the word "private" to characterize civil
society as to differentiate it from the state. On the other hand Poulantzas argues civil society's
"action is determined by the action of the State repressive apparatus", thus privileging the war of
maneuver: "the destruction of the ideological apparatus has its precondition in the destruction of
the state repressive apparatus which maintains it" (Femia, 1981).

It is easy to criticize Poulantzas, as many have, for over-emphasizing the ideological power of
the state, yet he does bring an important question to the fore for contemporary Gramscians: what
is to be made of the state's relationship with civil society? Gramsci alludes to the idea that the
state has *some* power over civil society, such as in times of unpopular government action when
the state "centralizes" civil society in order to minimize political resistance. However, in
"normal times" the state's rightful place in bourgeois society is separate from "private" society
and the process of common sense's diffusion. Without getting too deep into the structuralist
versus instrumentalist debate, it is fair to say Gramscians must produce a more thorough analysis
of the capacity of the state to produce common sense.

The state is not the only theoretical obstacle in the way of Gramsci's linear path to revolt. What
the path in its current form tells us is that multiple micro-revolutions are necessary before the
single macro-revolution can gain any real traction. The war of position must prove itself in civil
society by resolving the questions posed to it or by exposing these questions to be false. More
than this, before the subaltern can rise and seize power they must "already exercise
leadership...before wining governmental power", through the articulation of their hegemony
(Femia, 1981). Such a tactic's efficacy must be questioned given the history of French, Italian,
and Latin American socialism. Not only have historical conditions favored Revolution in these
places (histories of insurrection and Marxist based resistance to their respective past dictators), but Marxist discourse is regularly employed by socialist and communist parties that maintain quite a bit of popularity among the population (Femia, 1981). However, despite many factors favoring rebellion and the articulation of a counter-hegemonic discourse, bourgeois hegemony has never been truly subverted. This falls inline with what contemporary Gramscians suggest: "There is no subject which is absolutely radical and irrecuperable by the dominant order", there is no topic which guarantees social mobilization and upheaval (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). Furthermore, the frustration of not seeing the revolution Leftist parties once clamored for has not led to an expansion of Marxist discourse, but actually resulted in movement to the other direction, towards reformism and abandonment of even the pretense of Marxist positions.

For all its complications, the war of position is far from irrecoverable. Gramsci's real watershed was showing that "meaning depended upon hegemonic articulations", not laws of history. Moreover, Gramsci theorizes organic ideology in more than just classist terms; ideology is formed by disparate social elements cemented together by "articulatory principles", which by themselves "do not have any necessary class belonging" (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). Gramsci opens the door to broad political alliances by going beyond Leninist notions of "class alliance" and including diverse fragments of society. In Notes on the Souther Question Gramsci makes the subaltern's success contingent on its ability "in creating a system of alliances...of working people against capitalism" (Gramsci, 1971). Here Gramsci indicates a desire for a broad historical bloc, not just one of the proletariat and the intellectuals who lead them, but of many social actors united together by "ideological cement". Gramsci's notion of ideology is not any more a system of ideas than it is classist, it is a social unity which is bound together through institutions and
practices, and which unites around several tenets of hegemonic articulation (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). The political subject in the end is not a united class, but a "collective will".

What Laclau and Mouffe attempt to do is purge Gramsian theory of the essentialist elements that remain. Gramsci's theories, despite recognizing the complexities of the social strata and value of a "collective will", still returns to determinism in the last instance by demanding a single unifying principle in all social movements, and this unifier can only be a hegemonic class. What starts as collective will must end in the working class's hegemony, anything short of proletarian hegemony will eventually regress back into bourgeois ideological and political domination.

Politics turns back into the approach advocated in Marxist-Leninist theory: a zero-sum game between rivaling classes (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). Laclau and Mouffe take Gramsci's notion of hegemony, purge it of its essentialist core, and replace it with radical democratic theory and practice, or as they term it "the democratic practice of hegemony".

The duo of theorists certainly puts the "post" in front of Gramsci's Marxism, but Femia's concerns of state ideological power and the efficacy of the war of position are not fully answered in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. For the real-world application of the war of position and the implications on social movements we turn our focus to the mountains of the Mexican southeast. In Chiapas Mexico, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (The Zapatista Army of National Liberation) or EZLN have made their own modifications to Gramscian theory and practice and have been waging their own unique form of guerrilla-poet politics since 1994. Embodied in the Zapatista's struggle is not only Gramscian theory, but also the answers to Poulantzas's and Femia's theories of state and civil society as well as distinct strains of Laclau and Mouffes radical democracy.
"War of Ink and Internet"

The Zapatistas exploded onto the political stage in classic war of maneuver fashion on New Year’s Day 1994. It sought to smash neoliberalism, the force it claimed was attempting to "shape the world into a coffin." The mainly indigenous band of guerrilla warriors were given orders to overcome the Mexican military, seize the capital, and allow all citizens in "liberated" territory to institute and exercise the EZLN's policy objectives of democracy, liberty, and justice. Meeting resistance from truculent military-security units pushed the EZLN back into the jungles of Chiapas, back into the mountains of the southeast. The Zapatista army did not view retreat as a tactical failure; after all the Zapatista's simply "armed itself to be heard." (Marcos, 2001).

The catalyst to the EZLN's existence was the North American Free Trade Act, which forced Mexico to modify article 27 of its constitution, the article that forbade the selling of communal peasant lands. Article 27 was a product of the hard fought Mexican Revolution and the work of famed revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, hence the name Zapatista. In the context of NAFTA the peasants of largely indigenous and rural Chiapas would be driven off their land by foreign multinationals eager to extract the untapped resources of the state. To the Tzeltal natives this equaled being written out of history as their culture, labor, and historical means of subsistence were to be sold to the highest bidder. However, given the dynamics of the Mexican political order (an entrenched seventy year legacy of single party rule) and malicious security forces, neither a parliamentary challenge nor an armed confrontation with the state had great prospects of success. Shortly after being driven back into Chiapas, with mounting casualties, inadequate weaponry, and now surrounded by thousands of Mexican soldiers, the EZLN summoned the spirit of Gramsci's war of position. A ceasefire was declared a dozen days into the campaign.
Given the limited supplies and weaponry the EZLN was working with and the de facto state of siege it found itself surrounded by, the organization had to primarily rely on local communities for means of support. By constructing a revolt dependent on civil society for resources the Zapatistas had to "rule by obeying" the members of the communities it depended on. Furthermore, the organization became militarily constrained, not only because communities had little supplies to spare, but also because of the political fallout that frequently accompanies military action; a community sponsored revolution has to be much more conscientious of the popularity of its actions, especially since the EZLN has taken strong stands against robbery and drug trafficking to generate revenue. Supplanting the war of maneuver for the war of position made practical political and military sense. (Bruhn, 1999).

Inside Chiapas the EZLN has constructed its own "autonomous zones", areas outside the central government's control where the Zapatiastas have successfully erected their own unique form of democracy titled La Junta del Buen Gobinero or The Good Government Councils. Despite strongly resembling libertarian-Marxist and social-anarchist forms of governance, (decentralized governing councils, direct referendums, and rotating leadership) the EZLN has defied attempts to label its model within the realm of traditional Leftist vernacular. It refuses definition because Zapatismo "generates meaning" distinct from all others. Outside of Chiapas the primary forms of resistance the Zapatistas employ are purely ideological methods such as communiques, mass rallies, and what it calls encuentros (encounters) with civil society. Here the Zapatista's Gramscian usage of language is prevalent. Gramsci advocated starting with common sense, that is the concepts and language that the subaltern are immersed in. The EZLN speaks to society in its own language rather than superimposing Marxist jargon onto "mainstream" Mexican political discourse. The State's and free-market economic institutions are lumped together as "Power", 

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capitalism becomes "neoliberalism", and references to Marx, socialism, or any other canonical Leftist ideal are few and far in-between. Military references have become increasing scant as they are replaced with references to dialogue, negotiation, and civil society, which helped increase the presentability of the organization to mainstream Mexican society (Bruhn, 1999). Furthermore, the concepts of liberty and justice are frequently presented in Zapatista discourse as being incompatible with "Power" and neoliberalism; the EZLN effectively appropriated the terms as civil society's own.

The Zapatista's appropriation of language is a necessary action from a Gramscian viewpoint. As Herbert Marcuse argued, one of the greatest obstacles to revolt occurs when liberty and freedom are synonymous with the current order (Marcuse, 1972). Since language can be used to "reinforce the values of common sense or potentially transmit new ones" the EZLN purposely mutates the signified of symbols in an attempt to attach new meanings to already existing signifiers (Anderson, 1980). This redefining of common political phrases and terms has worked to make existing discourse critical. As the General Command of the EZLN often states "Power" in Mexico fears the EZLN's words over its weapons. The Zapatistas redefine words in the same manner they redefine history. The habitual references to Emiliano Zapata work to undermine the current image of the man, who in recent years has been utilized by Leftists and neoliberals alike. By taking Zapata's slogan of liberty and justice, while supplanting land (which was the original ending of the motto) with democracy, by utilizing Zapata's phrases but in contemporary context, and by invoking his image in art and countless communiques, the Zapatista's have reradicalized a hackneyed signifier. The image of Zapata is highly revered in Mexico, more so than any other figure in Mexican history, making his reappropriation fitting for the creation of a counter-hegemonic historical bloc (Bruhn 1999). The blurring of language's definitions and
reappropriation of historical figures works to "construct a different way", rather than "conformity, skepticism, or distrust" Zapatismo attempts to "show the world what is really happening, to have a critical worldview", what Gramsci states is the essence of the counter-hegemonic project (Marcos 1997).

The culture war being waged penetrates deep into civil society, not just in Chiapas, but throughout the whole of Mexico as well as cyber-space. Building the coalitions Gramsci spoke of has become remarkably easier for contemporary social activists given the dawn of the Internet and the global reach it creates. Now, even those in Gramsci's position (locked inside authoritarian states and advocating "enemy" ideologies) can transmit radical ideas globally in nanoseconds. No social justice movement will gain even the prospect of success without mastering the craft of social networking the way the Zapatistas have. Armed with keyboards and pens the EZLN has called numerous gathering of both Mexican and international civil society. The "Other Campaign", the "Pan-American Meeting for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism" and the "National Democratic Convention" all served to make a "coalition of madmen" who "suppose it isn't true that there's no alternative" to neoliberal economics and bourgeois "democracy" (Marcos, 1996). The Zapatista's attempts at creating a bridge to Mexican civil society have produced mixed results. Despite tremendously large conventions, drawing diverse segments from Mexico and abroad, on the whole the Zapatista's control little outside of their small spheres of influence in Chiapas. The group finds itself marginalized at times of national elections, by issuing broad critiques of all involved parties and abstaining from electoral activity itself, the movement risks falling out of popular consciousness. On the other hand aligning with the traditional Mexican parties presents the organization with the theoretical paradox or
participating in mainstream politics while longing to build coalitions outside of the traditional parliamentary system.

Although remaining outside of the parliamentarian system may be problematic for some, it is quite tactically Gramscian. Gramsci despised the parliamentary system, viewing it as insufficiently democratic, he also argued that counter-hegemony should fight for ideals over concrete proposals. As theoretically idealist and as little tactical efficacy as such a method would seem to hold, this is the exact model the EZLN has been successfully employing. Zapatismo is not a "plan" or platform of any sort, but the ideals of democracy, liberty, and justice articulated as an alternative to Power. It is the notion of collective control over authority of all types and participation in decisions making. Given the cynicism of Mexican society towards an electoral system that has been dominated by a single party for seventy years, the extra-parliamentary advocations combined with a discourse of negotiation, dialogue, and community involvement has created a powerful political imaginary for civil society; existing consciousness has been reworked and made critical in true Gramscian fashion. To the EZLN their "sovereignty resides in civil society. Only the people can alter or modify their government. It is to them that we address this Declaration" (EZLN General Command, 1994).

The Zapatistas spend the vast majority of its time and resources on propaganda campaigns of various sorts, thus keeping its profile high and favorable amongst the population. The General Command releases a plethora of communiqués on any given week addressing everything from foreign policy actions taken by the international community, to letters of solidarity for Other oppressed groups, to commentary on Mexican actresses and sport stars. In doing so the EZLN never becomes too far separated from the people it seeks to reach. The unity that exists between the General Command of the Guerrillas and the masses inside and out of Chiapas has been made
purposely strong. The theoretical unity created between the upper and lower echelons of the movement also helps to combat Power's official version of national and world events. Whether it is intervention in the Balkans or the latest neoliberal modifications to the Mexican state or economy, the EZLN is prepared with its version of events, thus existing in a perpetual battle for whose truth shall be transformed into the "common sense" of civil society. While the amount of Mexican society in support of the Zapatistas may be sizable, the coalition of supporters internationally is nearly unfathomable. From student exchange programs which bring European undergraduates to study with guerrillas for a semester, to American coops selling Zapatista brand coffee and handmade dolls, the Zapatistas have become the first post-modern revolutionaries to gain true international appeal. The EZLN is the first group of its kind to embed itself in both national and international civil society.

The "War of Ink and Internet" is the modern incarnation of Gramsci's war of position, which has greater political efficacy in the postmodern internet era than at any other time in the concept's life. The EZLN has successfully utilized Gramscian methods of language modification and reappropriation of historical symbols and events, embedding the organization in civil society and addressing common sense on its own terms, and building the broad based coalitions on a scale Gramsci could have never had dreamt of from his prison cell. While many strong parallels exist between Gramsci's theories and the counter-hegemonic bloc of the Zapatistas, the "poet-guerrilla" Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos embodies the "organic intellectual" like none other, and may very well be genesis of the Gramscian current in the Zapatistas movement.

"We Apologize for the Inconvenience, but this is a Revolution"
By now it is obvious that the EZLN borrows Gramscian tactics, not goals, but their cultural war certainly speaks to the efficacy that a war of position contains for post-modern revolutionaries. The human face of the Zapatistas is the guerrilla-intellectual only known as Marcos. Paradoxically, Marcos became the face of the EZLN while donning a balaclava, "hiding his face to be seen", since the mask is meant to be a mirror that all individuals excluded by Power can peer into and see themselves. Through the mask exists an organic intellectual with a mindset that seeks to create alternative definitions to the ones assigned by Power. In many overt ways Marcos identifies common sense in Gramscian terms, and speaks of the need to undermine its grip on civil society. By recognizing common sense as the ideological defense of the current order, a mandate is created in EZLN doctrine to debase Power's version of reality. This is the essence of many of Marco's communiqués and poems; attempting to demystify the version of "truth" that Power promotes.

When the EZLN rose up to conquer state power they quickly realized something Gramsci could not have constructed a theory for given his place in history; there was no government to resist, what the Zapatistas were up against was "great finical capital, against speculation" which makes decisions all throughout the globe (Marcos, 1998). The theoretical issue that Poulantzas confronts Gramscians with does not seem to apply to the situation the Zapatistas find themselves in. States have been relegated to an inferior position relative to capital and the international institutions which support its hegemony. States still serve as the defenders of capital and the common sense that sustains it, but as the national becomes the transnational Poulantzas's notion that states create ideological subjugation becomes less relevant as individual states become more directed from capital abroad. State action in continuously turning into the will of international Power, hence this memo from Chase Manhattan: "The [Mexican] government will have to
destroy the Zapatistas to demonstrate their effective control of the national territory”; a "recommendation" for the Mexican government (Zapatista, 1998). If anything, states create space for the actual sources of common sense (multinational corporations, bourgeois media outlets, consumerism, etc.) to take root.

Neither Poulantzas nor Gramsci envisioned the process of globalization, trade liberalism, and transnational organizations, in its current form and certainly not on the scale here today. Although "we talk about Ideological State Apparatuses, ideological apparatuses are now global in scale" (Buck-Morss, 2002). This left Marcos in a curious spot; if success was to be achieved in Mexico, an effort to undermine ideology would have to take place domestically and abroad. Whereas, Gramsci was critiqued for turning the international to the national, Marcos has turned this element of Gramscian theory, quite necessarily, on its head, reaching out to both Mexican and international segments of civil society.

It is important to note that Marcos is working within Gramsci’s concept of common sense as the basis for ideological struggle: "What is the frame of reference of 'common sense'? Is it not that of the dominant ideology?...the role of dominant social theories has been to justify the dominant system” (Bruhn, 1999). Creating the democratic, pluralistic space Marcos desires requires the EZLN to uproot the dominant notions created by Power. Marcos often states that the Zapatistas are "fighting on the battleground of history", that the fight for truth is really a matter of unearthing the "hidden history of resistance and struggle" that delegitimizes Power. In the present situation, the "power has taken the past and deformed it to justify" its rule (Zapatistas, 1998). Here, Marcos seems to be making his own distinction between good and common sense. For Marcos, good sense is the buried history of resistance to “otherness”, to exclusion and subsequent oppression, while common sense is the history that Power promotes to legitimize its
rule. The “healthy nucleus” and international appeal of Zapatismo is the uncovering of the
history of rebellion that follows not only Mexican historical development, but the historical
development of all oppressed groups everywhere. Since the history disseminated by Power
hides resistance as a theme, Marco's task is often to reappropriate history, to "connect with a
tradition of struggle, with a cultural tradition" (Bruhn, 1999).

Marcos has acted as the primary messenger of new ideas and conceptions, but what is
particularly important here is the effort made to keep the intellectuals, such as Marcos, close to
civil society, a Gramscian requirement for organic intellectuals. Given the importance of the
connection between the counter-hegemonic intelligentsia and the subaltern in Gramsci's theory,
it would seem the EZLN is following Gramscian thought quite closely. A painstaking effort is
made to make what would normally be lofty theoretical perspectives, intellectually accessible to
the greatest possible number. This is usually done by teaching through poems and short stories.
Marcos is rarely the teacher in his story's, but the student of a humble beetle named Durito.
Durito is the true intellectual in Zapatista narratives, often making Marcos appear foolish.
Although, what is most intriguing about Durito is his lucid manner of explaining what would
otherwise be nebulous or difficult to understand concepts. No matter what the narrative is
though Marcos is always the pupil, not the leader of the masses, but its most eager and attentive
apprentice. As Marcos puts it "we wanted to lower theory to the level of the human being"
(Bruhn, 1999). In this way Marcos is able to show that "everyone is a philosopher".

When Marcos is not teaching the masses, while by being taught himself by a beetle, he is
working to make the resistance against neoliberalism more unitary, more coherent. There are
few progressive movements that the ELZN has not reached out to. Marcos has written open
letters of support to former Black Panther Party activist Mumia-Abu Jamal as well as Native
American activist Leonard Peltier, inviting them both to Chiapas when justice is served to them. Letters have been sent to independent media forums as well as peace organizations. The web of support that Marcos has weaved together through the years works to defend the Zapatista movement when encroached on by Power and to assist the EZLN on its efforts to consolidate civil society against neoliberalism.

What is interesting here is the use of Gramsci’s tactics but without Gramsci’s goals. While Gramsci was attempting to create a more effective Leninism, those who most often appropriate his theory employ an anti-vanguardist, even anti-revolutionary discourse. A radical-democratic discourse has supplanted the "revolutionary party", the counter-hegemonic project no longer seeks to establish working-class supremacy, but to establish space for democratic and plural institutions and processes. These are departures Gramsci would quite certainly not welcome if he were walking among us today but maintained his early 20th century mindset. However, given the Soviet and Chinese "socialist" models demise, Left melancholia, an obsession with old guard theories, can only repeat the egregious errors of the old state socialist model. In the wake of globalization and other events in recent historical memory, Gramsci’s theories may be better utilized in radical-democratic discourse.
Contemporary Appropriation

Scholars who have utilized Gramsci's theory's in recent times have cut and pasted his fragments together, while omitting others, for their own political projects. Ironically it has been "conservative" Leftists such as radical democrats and post-modern socialists that have used Gramsci's theory of hegemony most frequently. The discursive twist of mixing hegemony with post-Marxist politics has made for an amalgamation of unlike elements, whose contradictions will be evaluated later on. However, Gramsci also served as an early predecessor to Althusser, who would examine common sense as a form of ideology, expanding its scope and function. It has become necessary to examine Gramsci's contemporary relevance and the use his theories have provided present-day scholars.

Radical Political Economy

Gramsci's discourse has allowed for a repolitization of the economy for some scholars. Breaking the common sense behind the meta-narrative of capitalist efficiency and productive capacities opens the door to the economy becoming subject to democratic intervention. The narrative supporting capitalism links the free market to the naturalness of biological functions and human modes of social existence. Markets function according to laws that govern the natural world, making any form of alteration or critique, by definition, abnormal. Given the perceived abnormality of democratic institutions in the process of production, it has become common sense to accept to the market's failures as unfortunate, but inevitable and even necessary for the proper and "natural" functioning of society. The neoliberal paradigm has thus depoliticized the economy, making a religion out of capitalism's institutions, complete with
banker-priests, cardinal-politicians, and transnational-temples, who all claim to be simply 
upholding the "laws" of the free-market faith. Yet, while the congregation suffers under the 
current regime their arms are too short to box with God; the economy is a private matter, largely 
insulated from popular rage. The problematic is exacerbated when the non-social is coerced to 
conform with the economic sphere; environmental policy is relegated below economic 
efficiency, female exclusion from "male industry's", etc. The positivism of the natural sciences 
also serve as a form of common sense, often making undemocratic and malicious practices seem 
proper and organic, thus giving rise to individualistic discourses. These discourses further 
fragment society, creating a "process of becoming" detached from proper social inputs. The 
result is the solidification of identity which engenders the us vs. them mentality.

Conversely, a Gramscian conception of political economy theorizes economic practices 
as "contingent, historical, and thoroughly social", opening the door to alteration of what had been 
formally seen as natural (Swanson, 2008). The overturning of that which is viewed as natural is 
a crucial element to counter-hegemonic theory; the "natural" and the "real" stand in the way of 
"micro-political subjectivity" (Connolly, 1999). More than demonstrating that economic 
practices are not natural, theory must show that identity and definition are always in a "process 
of becoming", leaving political subjects in a state of flux, not fixed to concrete social positions 
(Gibson-Graham, 2006). The effect is the politicization of the economic sphere and the total 
rejection of essentialist and determinist economic conceptions. More important though, a 
Gramscian analysis of the economy would show that democracy (or any political practice) 
cannot be limited to an isolated space within society, such as governmental institutions. 
Democratic praxis can and must be proliferated in a manner that allows for its diffusion into the 
social, cultural, and especially economic realms. Once Marxism is blended with democratic
theory "class becomes the object of democracy", opposed to liberal democratic practice which continuously recycles the existing class relations (Wolff, 2005; Swanson, 2008).

Yet before the macro-political-economic theory can gain traction it is necessary to address to the "micro-political receptivity" of the subaltern (Connolly, 1999). Given the unstable state of the hegemonic process of constituting subjects, there is room left for sabotage of the popular discourse. Ginning up resentment and discontent of the current system can bolster alternative socio-economic visions. Jacinda Swanson argues that the starting point is to uncover the discursive positions which are compatible/defensive of capitalism, tirelessly working to undermine these notions, and channeling the anger and suspicion of the workers to introduce new conceptions (Swanson, 2008). There is a danger in her position though, seeing how popular anger against capitalism more often results in ultra-nationalism than a Marxist resurgence, a more optimistic vision of the future should be a starting point, not an end. However, she is correct to aver the need to undermine narrative's that justify capitalism's existence; the starting point of Gramsci's counter-hegemonic project.

A good starting point is to address the over-simplified narratives of capital's function which obscures the complexity of economic processes, conversely narratives that conceptualize the economy as being too complicated to be comprehended by the average person does damage to the democratic process by immediately excluding large segments of society from debate. To address this situation J.K. Gibson-Graham introduce "weak theory", or theory that localizes its purview, does not seek to know too much, and rejects even the possibility of "escape" from Power (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Such a theoretical approach allows for the appreciation of the particularities and uniqueness of a situation. Weak theory, opposed to strong theory which is the all knowing and generalizing meta-narrative, eliminates the mystifying of localized social
relations, but simultaneously mystifies international political economy if it localizes too much. This situation begs the need for what I dub "moderate theory". In the political-economic context, it is theory that accepts the interconnectedness and the international scale of economies, but emphasizes the diverse and disparate effects global economic processes and institutions have on local communities. It is a theory that rejects both economism and the meta-narrative, but never withdraws itself from the international element of all antagonisms and social relations. The future of Boatwright's moderate theory as a form of political economy is questionable, but Gramsci's critical theory has great efficacy for examining the structure of economic common sense. This is the essence of the radical democratic project, burgeoning and borderless democracy resting on an anti-essentialist theoretical foundation (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001).

When the willingness to accept certain views is established certain forms of action become possible and the path to new hegemonic articulations is blazed.

Crisis of Authority

Many scholars on the Left have used Gramscian theory to validate democratic (parliamentarian) socialism. Critics and supporters alike regularly employ hegemony, the war of position, and common sense for their own purposes. In most instances scholars have interpreted Gramsci as a democrat of one sort or another. I believe this is an incredible error that most scholars involved with Gramsci's theory are guilty of. Gramsci only mentions democracy democracy 15 times in his entire body of work and in only two manners: mass participation in political deliberation, and while describing the internal dynamics of the revolutionary organization (Morera, 1990). Building a counter-hegemonic bloc will almost necessarily lead to a revolutionary situation if the bloc is truly successful. Gramsci's theories may produce a more
democratic revolution, a more inclusive revolution, but even when an anti-essentialist discourse is superimposed on his work, antagonism inevitably leads to revolutionary rupture and Power's inevitable counterrevolution, the only alternative is reintegration of radical sentiments back into the current system.

The first mistake, and most common, made by scholars is to separate the war or maneuver from the war of position. To Western social democrats the most important aspect of Gramsian thought are the advocations of compromise, broad alliances comprised of many sectors of the society, and acceptance of intermediate goals en route to the ultimate goal of socialism. It is no error to focus on these aspects of Gramsi's thought, but social democrats made the egregious error of divorcing short term political tactics and long term revolutionary aims, commonly framing Gramsci as an advocate of bourgeois liberal-democracy. Ironically theorist to the Left of Gramsci made the same error, but in their case this was a point of criticism. Trotskyist and other ultra-Leftist are broadly guilty of seeing Gramsican theory as non or even anti-revolutionary, placing him squarely in the reformist category. In reality Gramsci was nothing but hostile to prospect of parliamentary democracy creating long-term gains for the working classes, a fact which is often glibly dismissed by his critics.

Both of these assessments ignore the conditions of both Gramsi's imprisonment and of Italian politics during the rise of fascism. The man was neither a strict revolutionary nor a reformist, but a pragmatist with a keenly perceptive eye, fixated on Italian fascism. Gramsci's project was as much about overthrowing the institutions of fascism as it is the institutions of capitalism, making his prison-era writings very situationally influenced. Aligning the worker's movement with other struggles of society was in a large part a tactical response to Mussolini's totalitarianism. Gramsci did not foresee a proletarian revolution bursting out of Italy where the
Left had been decimated by years of incarcerations, assassinations, and divisions. The only political response he believed would have any efficacy of countering fascism would be for the revolution to be *delayed* for a liberal-democratic interregnum between dictatorship and revolt. In this intermediary period, revolutionary forces would begin to consolidate their hegemony. Critics and Gramscians alike tend to be purposely forgetful that this period was only meant to be a transition, not a permanent fixture on the proletarian’s landscape (Femia, 1987)

The confusion is understandable given the fragmented nature of Gramsci’s notebook, but given the ever watchful eye of the prison sensors, direct advocations of revolution, the indictment that put him in prison in the first place, were impossible, particularly because Gramsci denied the charge that he was attempting to overthrow the fascist state. However, there is little ambiguity in the fact that Gramsci viewed parliamentarian institutions with a great deal of contempt, viewing them, as Femia argues, as "irredeemably elitist and devoid of democratic content" (Femia, 1987). Hardly being the institution the subaltern could rely on, the parliament was just to be a tool of to lead to a "crisis of authority".

Those who see a peaceful path to socialism or radical democracy through Gramsci’s theory of hegemony are making a tragic flaw, which some contemporary examples illustrate better than theory. Scholars do not seem to ask themselves "what is after common sense and the ruling class's hegemony?". All theorized forms of ideological subjugation, whether common sense, ideological state apparatuses, or governmentality, all work in similar fashion; as Foucault would say, they make humans "docile bodies". Docile bodies that Power may put into the machine of bourgeois, theocratic, or authoritarian societies. The essence of the counter-hegemonic project is to abolish these deradicalizing discourses, supplanting them with liberation theory, with good sense, and so on. Perhaps it is so obvious scholars innocently miss the fact
that once common sense is disrupted there is nothing left to do but to act. We now enter a zero-sum game of politics/warfare; Power vs those exercising good sense. When the human psychology is broken from its docile state, Power must react to the counter-hegemonic project with its "legal" means of violence and oppression. These now activated bodies are in a fight or flight situation, choosing to rescind their defiance and be reintegrated into the status quo, or engage in a war of maneuver.

Contemporary revolts throughout the Middle East demonstrate many of the above points. Although many of the upheavals were those spontaneous "episodic" revolts Gramsci was very critical of, they also demonstrated a keen awareness of the importance of creating counter-hegemonic discourses. Utilizing social networking, in a similar fashion to the EZLN, activists interjected the discourse of revolt into their respective society's status quo. Docile bodies were then activated and thrown into the streets. However, a stark reality set in for most of them almost immediately: when disruptive discourses become popular, Power becomes overtly repressive. With the sole exception of Egypt, primarily for reasons regarding the relation of the military to civilian society, the discursive demands for broader liberties were met with violence. Protesters quickly became rebels in Libya, as they may still in Syria, Bahrain, and elsewhere.

This is the exact procession of events Gramsci foresaw when theorizing the wars of position & movement. If a counter-hegemonic project gains any success at all it will inevitably have to confront Power as the ideological bonds break free from the captive's hands. This makes it nearly impossible to divorce Gramsci's theory of hegemony from a theory of revolution. Abandoning revolution does a disservice to the radical democratic project, leaving it with few ways to survive in a hostile political environment. Gramsci did not see the therapeutic nature of violence the way his contemporary Sorel did, but he would certainly reject the notion of a
"peaceful road to socialism", and for good reason. If Power begins to wane it will continue its struggle for existence by other means.

**Conclusions: Revolution Continues**

The most valuable lesson post-modernist can take from Gramsci is a notion of post-modern revolution. In post-modernity's rejection of dialectical revolution it seems to have done away with the notion of revolution all together. But the counter-hegemonic project calls for revolutionary action against Power. Radical democratic theory is venerable in its attempt at expanding the realm of democratic action, but falls short of creating the space necessary for democracy in the first place. More often than not radical democracy is made contingent on catastrophe. Since the theory is dependent on antagonism that only takes place when one group is being denied their democratic rights by another, action becomes contingent on certain levels of exploitation. The inadvertent outcome is a reformulation of Lenin's theory of misery; when things are worse for the workers they are better for the movement, a position Gramsci certainly had issue with in Lenin's thought. I'm quite sure both Laclau Mouffe and Gibson-Graham would have issue with such a conclusion, but it is difficult to walk away with any other impression given the way their arguments are framed and the illustrative examples they employ to demonstrate their theories. The theorists make the possibility and points of rupture plural, but always in reaction to oppression and domination, leaving the multitude in wait for calamity before they can began the project of reconstituting themselves. This makes the counter-hegemonic project reactive instead of proactive. Gramsci's vision was to fight for a positive
conception of an alternative, not wait for Power to crush the subaltern and then began to mobilize.

Anti-essentialism and radical democracy is an appropriate place for Gramsci’s theories to be utilized in the contemporary era, but theory much provide us with a basis for political action, not just reaction. Laclau and Mouffe are correct to assert that democracy can act as a "fermenting agent" which allows diverse movements to carve out their own space for resistance to Power, unique from others, but based on the same discourse. The question is really how to make an alternative discourse gain micro-political receptivity outside of times of tragedy. The constitution of new cultural ethics opens the door to a positive program. An appreciation for contingency, unpredictability, and incompleteness linked with an ethic of autonomy makes way for greater experimentation on part of the masses (Gibson-Graham, 2006). The Left will need to interject popular discourse with and ethic of autonomous experimentation at every avenue. Social activists will not need to wait for calamity or antagonistic domination to come to a head in order to act, but can seek to create democratic spaces immediately. The diverse spheres of democratic practice must make every effort at moving in unity, of seeing itself as a historical bloc moving in unison, or any individual movement runs the risk of being marginalized by Power. Local experimentation must be linked with national and international solidarity if the multitude will ever view itself as a multitude, or individualist discourses will reconstitute themselves.

Gramsci’s project lives on today although its form and content have shifted dramatically. However, post-modern theory has given the counter-hegemonic mission a comfortable home. What remains ahead is the long march through the institutions that the war of position calls for, undermining popular discourse and allowing the masses to enlighten themselves along the way.
Gramsci’s work also shows the Left a new way to constitute itself: radical democratic theory.

History is all but over for the masses; they still have nothing to lose but their chains.
Works Cited


