Beyond altermondialisme: anti-capitalist dialectic of presence

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ABSTRACT
That ‘Another World is Possible’ has become the ensign of the left’s common sense. For lack of having been thought through, and for want to take it all in, the new reasonableness has given itself a hollow name with a ring to it: altermondialisme. Notwithstanding fashionable certainties, everything about it needs to be problematized, both because, in carrying on the century-old internationalist drive for programmatic coherence, altermondialisme rather stands at the rearguard of the movement than at its forefront, and because in its relationship to it, it reproduces rather than challenges attempts by the World Bank et al. to contain contemporary anti-capitalism and empty it of political possibilities. The text is divided into three parts. In the first, I identify what I take to be an essential political dynamic of contemporary world order: the attempt by regulatory agencies of global capitalism to invent a functional, civil and perfectly apolitical global subject that could serve as an ideal social companion to global-neo-liberalism. In the second part of the text, I work from concepts that originated with the Internationale Situationniste to begin making political sense of contemporary anti-capitalist praxis. In the third part of the article, I extract from the first two principles of articulation that may allow us to understand contemporary anti-capitalism for what it is, without containing or reifying it.

KEYWORDS
Altermondialisme; anti-capitalism.

Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somewhat related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition – not only the conditio sine qua non, but the conditio per quam – of all political life. (Arendt, 1998)
Four years after its spectacular coming out in Seattle, the political riddle that is the anti-globalization movement is already in the process of being resolved by being wrapped up into alternative agendas for world order, as what The Economist had labeled the ‘fight for globalization’ (The Economist 1999a, b) is settling into programmatic chicanery: ‘Another world . . .’ the new slogan goes (borne of unquestioned common sense, validated by 27,600 hits on Google) ‘. . . is possible’.1 Do, the settling discourse instructs, forget about Emma Goldman’s wooly radicalism; to be reasonable is no longer to demand the impossible, another world is now possible, and what is possible can be circumscribed, realistic objectives defined, the path to a new order plotted, do follow the guide (call it a set of ‘proposals [born of] free exchange of experiences and inter-linking for effective action’, if you have been to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre or Mumbai – perhaps as a Global Exchange ‘reality tourist’ –, or a ‘New Prince’ if you have not but have read Gramsci a little and believe that comprehensive strategies are needed to regulate the inchoate movements of the global multitude and help it make something reasonable and political of itself.2

For lack of having been thought through, and for want to take it all in, the new reasonableness has given itself a hollow name with a ring to it: altermondialisme. Notwithstanding fashionable certainties, everything about it needs to be problematized, both because, in carrying-on the century-old internationalist drive for programmatic coherence, altermondialisme rather stands at the rearguard of the movement than at its forefront, and because in its relationship to it, it reproduces rather than challenges attempts by the World Bank et al. to contain contemporary anti-capitalism and empty it of political possibilities.

Between the First (1864–1876) and Second (1889–1914) International, during what F. van Hoolthijn and M. van der Linden called the ‘classical age’ of left internationalism, programmatic a priorism came to over-determine the building of transnational social coalitions (Drainville, 1995; van Hoolthijn and van der Linden, 1988). Rather than actually participate in what Marx called the creation of ‘fraternal concurrences’, left internationalism came to be about the drawing of ever more coherent programs on behalf of increasingly abstract subjects that grew in political rightness as they became more and more removed from bounded interventions into quotidian life. Between the end of the first world war and the collapse of the Bretton Woods world order in the 1970s, attempts to define terms of programmatic coherence on behalf of reified global subjects continued to define the workings of left internationalist bodies and gatherings from the Zimmerwald (1915), Berlin (1922) and Cologne (1923) congresses, to the Vienna International (1921), the Internationale ouvrière socialiste (1923–1940), as well as the Third (1919–1943), and Fourth (1936–) Internationals. The last and perhaps most synthetic expression of this drive for programmatic coherence was the G77’s plan for a New International Economic
Order (NIEO), that brought about a medley of UN resolutions detailing the common interest of a wholly principled humanity.

In the 30 years since the end of that, a ‘new internationalism’ has begun to take shape that, in many ways, signals the return to the social movement internationalism of the beginning of the nineteenth century (Galtung, 1988; Breyman, 1994). As I argued elsewhere (Drainville, 1999 (1998), 2001, 2004), what defines this ‘new internationalism’ is its radical ordinariness: where classical left internationalism was shaped by programmatic fights fought on behalf of abstract subjects, the ‘new internationalism’ drags actually existing human beings, in all their bounded plurality, unto the terrain of the world economy (Ichiyo, 1988; Waterman, 1988; Hunter, 1995). Located within the realm of civil rather than strictly political society, unfixed by referents to unitary subjects (Vahabzadeh, 2003), as tactically focused as it is organizationally diverse, prone to direct action and shaped by concerns over what Melucci or Touraine would have called ‘life’ issues (Touraine, 1988; Melucci, 1989), the ‘new internationalism’ stands in relationship to classical internationalism much like new social movements vis-à-vis old ones.

From the point of view of political neatness, the radical indeterminacy of the new internationalism seems a problem to be solved; something, as Trotsky might have said, that is in need of being integrated. This is the impulse that altermondialisme answers to, with unquestioned precipitation and a political immodesty that risk stifling what is most radical about it. This risk is even greater in the present juncture, when global regulatory agencies are laboring to assemble exactly the kind of abstract subject on whose behalf the World Social Forum and attendant regional fora want to draw political programs. In this juncture, it is absolutely critical that we take a step back from altermondialiste revelries and try not to resolve the new internationalism, but to understand it. This has to be done both with respect for its specificity as a social movement and with a sense of the workings of two intimately related orders of dialectics: (i) that between the dynamics of order and counter-order in the world economy and (ii) that between what goes on in the world economy and in national social formations. Only by taking those into account can we situate contemporary anti-globalization in relation to actually existing anti-capitalism.

Both as a discourse and, increasingly, as an ideology, altermondialisme rests on foundationalist assumptions. As Machiavelli wrote for a new prince in a newly founded principality (Althusser, 1994), and as Gramsci wrote of the party as a New Prince in a new juncture, altermondialisme wants to begin ad novo, as if the world economy really was virgin territory, by drawing programs for a new subject in a new world. To problematize what it takes for granted, we have work more dialectically and question both the newness and the separateness of the global anti-capitalist movement and of what it might be up against. Concretely, this means that we
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have to think not only from the most spectacular and explicitly global, moment of appearance of the ‘anti-globalization’ movement (anti-WTO demonstrations in Seattle or Québec city, anti-IMF riots in Washington, Caracas and elsewhere), but also from more situated and quotidian practices of resistance that are being born in the present context, whether in global cities, export zones, tourist destinations or in other sites of the world economy. We should not take the ‘new internationalism’, then – or, indeed the anti-globalization movement or altermondialisme – as things unto themselves, but as related parts of a relatively continuous struggle against capitalism. What gives this ensemble its coherence is contextualized praxis. If, as Raymond Williams would have said, ‘we are serious … about political life, we have to enter that world in which people live as they can themselves …’ (Williams, 1961). To understand the significance of anti-capitalism as a way of life and struggle, we have to look at the situated practices of knowable communities, where the action is; to think, then – to paraphrase Althusser on Machiavelli – not of politics, but into it.

The text is divided into three parts. In the first, I identify what I take to be an essential political dynamic of contemporary world order, about which I have written before (Drainville, 2004): the attempt by regulatory agencies of global capitalism to invent a functional, civil and perfectly apolitical global subject that could serve as an ideal social companion to global-neo-liberalism. In the second part of the text, I work from concepts that originated with the Internationale Situationniste to begin making political sense of contemporary anti-capitalist praxis. In the third part of the article, I extract from the first two principles of articulation that may allow us to understand contemporary anti-capitalism for what it is, without containing or reifying it.

BIRTH AND DEATH OF GLOBAL SUBJECTS

In what was the West, the paradigmatic subject of cold war exterminism (Thompson, 1982) was a nuclear family buried for its own good, cowering comfortably in a basement bunker, absolutely reduced to survival (I.S., 1962). Less dramatic but also stuck in place, and as bound and reduced, were variously constituted groups, from schoolchildren minding turtle Burt’s advice to ‘duck and cover’, to mothers in the kitchen, to ‘old’ social movements bound to officines of the Keynesian state, to social forces fixed and integrated by Fordist regulation. In the East, state socialism made the twinned processes of confinement and reduction more throughout, direct, and sometimes brutal, involving as it did ‘… the organization of grass-roots frameworks capable of reaching, mobilizing and controlling all citizens’ (Friedgut, 1979), house committees, comrade’s courts, asylums, Gulags and kolkhozes (Chiama and Soulet, 1982). In allied peripheries, ‘overdeveloped’ states and regimes (‘bloody Taylorism’, ‘peripheral Fordism’,
popular democracies, dictatorships), created and contained political subjects that belonged less to themselves, or to national social formations, than they did to the world economy as a whole (Mathias and Salama, 1983).

When the cold war’s official nightmare lost its capacity to over-determine and contain political subjects, new ‘global concepts of control’ were concocted in private enclave where transnational capital was making itself into a global class. In the beginning, transnational capital worked from assumptions that nineteenth century haute finance would have shared if not recognized – what Karl Polanyi called the ‘stark utopia’ of a self-regulating market (Polanyi, 1957). Isolated in a nébuleuse of private and semi-private boards and agencies (Cox, 1992; Drainville, 1994), it imagined a no society neo-liberalism and sought to apply its new concepts of control unsocially, though it did fine-tune them to the limits and possibilities of different national social formations, applying monetarism in the old West, shock therapy in the old East – to ‘clean up the shambles of communist mis-management’ (Sachs, 1990) –, and harsh conditionality everywhere else it could, especially in countries at the epicenter of the debt crisis, in Latin America and, increasingly, in sub-Saharan Africa.

Almost as soon as they began to be put into operation, neo-liberal concepts of control proved at once unworkable and unsustainable. Monetarism, the first neo-liberal conditioning framework applied to Keynesian countries, was useless either at controlling the growth of monetary aggregates or at disciplining social relations (Drainville, 1995). In countries said to be in transition from state-planned economy, the insufficient autonomy of central banks, the weakness of market mechanisms and the absence of a market-based civil society, made shock therapy difficult and inefficient at ‘sustaining the human capital base for economic growth’ (World Bank, 1996). In some debtor countries where elements of civil societies had already assembled themselves with a measure of autonomy from state institutions (in Bolivia, Ecuador, Panama, Nicaragua, Mexico, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Peru, etc.), harsh conditionality provoked riots and general strikes (Walton, 1987; Bigo, 1992). In others where authoritarian rule had kept societies from developing means to protect themselves (as Polanyi would have put it), corrupted administrations and rulers siphoned money earmarked for adjustment, thus increasing what the World Bank called ‘friction costs’ (Banque Mondiale, 1993).

This was the context in which ideas of ‘global governance’ began to make their way from such peripheral organizations as the UNCTAD or the Brandt or Palme Commissions, where they had surfaced in the context of debates over the NIEO, to core regulatory agencies of the world economy, thus moving global neo-liberalism beyond no society utopianism – and even beyond defensive attempts to shield adjustment against social backlashes (Williamson, 1996; Gowan, 1999) – toward social constructivism. This is
what the Commission on Global Governance called building the ‘global neighborhood’ (Commission on Global Governance, 1995). From utopian planning, then, global neo-liberalism moved to hegemonical construction. Since the beginning of the 1980s, this enterprise – what Paul Cammack (2002) called a ‘matrix’ and Mark Duffield (2002) a ‘strategic complex’ – has mobilized much of the political and financial resources of global regulatory agencies, transforming in the process much about them, from the way in which they interpellate social forces down to their policy frameworks, institutional make-up and standard operating procedures (Drainville, 2004).

Central to ‘global governance’ as a hegemonical strategy is a broad attempt to assemble a global civil society in which to embed neo-liberal concepts of control. Key here are twinned processes of severance and re-composition. At once, the making of global civil society involves (i) cutting off social forces and organizations willing to work within a global market framework from other social contexts and (ii) re-assembling the lot into a functional and efficient whole that will work to solve global problems and, in the process, fix the terms of social and political interaction in the world economy. In governance’s schemes, then, global civil society is to be anything but an autonomous realm, or a theater of history (in Marx’s sense of civil society), but a collection of atomized organization with little or no autonomous sense of itself, utterly incapable of developing what Foucault in his *herméneutique du sujet* would have called *le souci de soi-même* (Foucault, 1994).

Notwithstanding foundationalist discourses carried by both the World Bank *et al.* and altermondialistes fora (whose politics, in that respect, are sides of the same coin), ‘global governance’ does not just aim to supplant or transcend existing structures of power, but, dialectically seeks to integrate and transform them where and when it can, by consensus and coercion, only excluding or by-passing them where and when it must. Specifically building from existing structures of inter-state and class power, governance works in relative connivance with imperialist strategies and projects of transnational capital, and gets applied with relative autonomy to countries, classes and fractions of classes standing at the periphery of world order.

At the center of governance’s picture, there is ‘correspondence’ (in Marx’s sense of the term) between, on the one hand, attempts to create a functional global subject as well as circumscribe its realm by consent and coercion, and, on the other, the domestic forms and international policies of imperialist states. As ‘embedded liberalism’ (Ruggie, 1982) in the post-war period came out of Keynesian/Fordist regulation in advanced capitalist countries, governance’s attempt to assemble a functional, problem-solving, global civil society bound by problem-solving ethics and terms of ‘stakeholders participation’ (World Bank, 1992, 1994, 1996; IDB, 1997) is a general expression of a post-Keynesian regime of ‘shareholders democracy’ in advanced capitalist countries. Where Hanna Arendt (1976) could write of...
the ‘alliance between mob and capital’ in the period when imperialist exploitation was growing into a colonial world-order, we can write now of an alliance at the center of the world economy between shareholders-citizens and transnational capital that gives social moorings to what David Harvey called the ‘new imperialism’, characterized by a process of ‘accumulation by dispossession’. In shareholder democracies, where neo-liberalism is re-defining the terms of social consensus on models of corporate governance, ‘the commodification of cultural forms, histories and intellectual creativity (...) the corporatization and privatization of hitherto public assets’ (Harvey, 2003), the privatisation of intellectual property rights (from the WTO’s TRIPs agreements to national patent legislations), as well as the surveillance and disciplining of outsiders, dissidents and non-compliers find their strongest social basis. Thus, we see convergence, connivance and complicity between what Stephen Gill called the ‘Global Panopticon’ (Gill, 1995), new national security regimes in Bush’s US and Putin’s Russia, and the defining and punishment of incivilities in France under Sarkozy and Chirac. As free-trade imperialism dealt with deviants and dissidents by sending them off to penal colonies, the new regime sends aliens back home under now-normal processes of mandatory sentencing (Sinnar, 2003; Van Cleef, 2003), exiles young offenders to extraterritorial ‘boot camps’ (Koch Crime Institute, 2000) and concentration camps (in Baghdad airport or Cuba’s Guantanamo Bay). For those, like middle-class students, who are too close to the social center of the new imperialism for outright exclusion, it reserves such free-speech enclaves as are becoming the fashion on US campuses (Fletcher, 2001; Academe, 2002; Lukianoff, 2003).

To describe the relationship between the center of the new order and its periphery, we can speak not of ‘free-trade imperialism’ – as Gallagher and Robinson did 50 years ago, in refutation of Kautsky’s and Lenin’s opinion that ‘British free trade and imperialism did not mix’ – but of a kind of ‘governance imperialism’, enforced with as much autonomy, impunity and coercion as nineteenth century colonialism or, indeed, as the Bretton Woods world order was in peripheral countries.\(^3\) In this respect as well, there is complicity between, for instance, UN’s interventionism in Kosovo, the World Bank’s sovereign war on corruption and the US-led wars on drug and terrorism, as there is between World Bank’s strategies for dealing with ‘Highly Indebted Poor Countries’ (that requires them to draw up ‘Poverty Reduction Strategies’ whereby they abdicate power to ‘civil society and other stakeholders’), and US attempts to reconstruct ‘failed states’ though what Susan Søderberg (2003) labeled ‘pre-emptive development’, that exports rules of governance, with dramatic disarticulating consequences in the periphery – which, in turn, has given neo-colonialist critics of governance occasions to argue that some parts of the world are just not ready for democracy (Kaplan, 1999; Stiglitz, 2002; Chua, 2003).
There are then, what Futurist or Dada painters would have called ‘force-lines’ running through governance’s world picture. As we follow them from the center to the periphery, the impunity of the new order, and the violence of its enforcement, increases. At the center is governance’s ‘global neighbourhood’ (Commission on Global Governance, 1995), newly opened up by global regulatory agencies and imperialist countries for paradigmatic subjects of the new order; what may be called ‘problem-solving’ NGOs, organizations (either already existing or purposely created) . . . who run the refugee camps, provide disaster relief, design and carry-out development projects, monitor and attempt to contain the international spread of disease, and try to clean up an ever more polluted environment’ (Murphy, 2002), all the while remaining – confined as well but in more comfortable quarters – within the limits of the new world order, and only linked to one another by the machinery of governance – the obligatory intermediary between all things and matters. At the margins of the new order are critical sites of decontextualization: export zones, detention camps, peripheral social formations free-speech zones. These are the barrios of governance, where are confined governance’s non-subjects.

Where exterminism buried national societies for their own protection from nuclear annihilation, ‘global governance’ builds from problems, emergencies and crises of all sorts (of poverty, development, habitat, credit, service delivery, corruption, health, human and food insecurities) that ‘go beyond the capacities of states to address individually’ (Gordenker and Weiss, 1996) to foster a state of permanent preparedness that creates a new global civil society as it reduces it to functionalities. What gets severed in the process is the space between distinct men and women in action; site of what Arendt (1995) called the vita active, the birthplace of politics.

DERIVES AND HUBS: HOW AND WHERE NEW SUBJECTS MIGHT BE MAKING THEMSELVES IN THE WORLD ECONOMY

In the first years of their uneasy association – before they began concerning themselves with matters related to La société du spectacle, principals of the Internationale Situationniste (1957–1972) worked primarily with reference to the conditions of life in contemporary cities, where the modern regulation of existence had reached its most explicit form. The functional grid of cities, Situationnistes argued, provided revolutionary artists with the clearest maquette of modern life, and, dialectically, with a privileged site for experimenting non-alienating practices.

To fight off the alienating grid, Situationnistes invented dérives, an experimental technique borrowed from surrealist déambulations (Breton, 1952; Artaud, 1979) and adapted to the exigencies of life in cities. As surrealists used l’écriture automatique to break away from literature in order to regain
a truer sense of words (Breton, 1952; Abasto, 1984; Reeves, 2001), as collage artists break with the falseness of pictorial constructions in the hope of creating truer images (Lavin; Aragon, 1980 (1965); Spies, 1984), and as Dali used ‘critical paranoia’ as a means to construct a more authentically reflexive self (Dali, 1933; Lacan, 1933), Situs moved away from fabricated discourses and practices to find unalienated subjects. Willfully abandoning their usual, grid-regimented, reasons for moving about the city, teams of two or three Situs rather followed scattered hints and solicitation from topography, ambient architecture as well as chance encounters, moving about in a manner they considered closer to being in tune with the creative unity of the city (Debord and Fillion, 1954; Debord, 1958; I.S., 1958; Ivain, 1958; Home, 1996).

What dérives teams specifically aimed to unearth in interstices between functionally designated areas was what they called plaques psychogéographiques (psycheographic hubs): contingent, polysemic and radically whole sites of unreduced life that were both sovereign places unto themselves – oases in the desert as Heidegger or Arendt might have put it – as well as connecting points – much in the same manner that, for E.P. Thompson, corresponding societies were ‘junction points’ where working men of London could assemble themselves outside sites of production (Thompson, 1980 (1963)).

As ideal-type referents for unalienated life, psycheographic hubs could be placed on a shelf alongside phalanstères, workers councils, Soviets, self-governing neighborhoods and Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ, a late addition). In this collection they could be seen as prototypes of sorts, as Antonio Gramsci saw Factory Councils during the optimist years of the Bienno rosso:

The factory Council is the model of the proletarian State. All the problems inherent in the organization of the proletarian State are inherent in the organization of the Council. In the one as in the other, the concept of citizen gives way to the concept of comrade. Collaboration in effective and useful production develops solidarity and multiplies bonds of affection and solidarity … It is a joyous awareness of being an organic whole, a homogeneous and compact system which asserts its sovereignty and realizes its power and its freedom to create history. (Gramsci, 1977)

More critically, and prospectively, we can draw from the manner in which Situs sought to unearth psycheographic hubs means to discover in the world economy subjects that might be, if not truer, than at least more self-directed – and possibly more capable of self-invention – than the paradigmatic things of global governance.

Who, then, dérives across the terrain of the world economy that might lead us to where junction points may be found? Who are the men and women
who have foregone, by choice or obligation, both the political ways of
classical left internationalism and the grids of governance, to follow more
immediate hints and solicitations, moving not by politics or programs but
by tactical and strategic necessities?

Two decades ago, had one sought to find men and women who were
moving across the terrain of the world economy following tactical and
strategic solicitations rather than political highways, one would have had
either to (i) fall back on examples pre-dating classical left international-
ism (the anti-slavery campaign for instance, or attempts during the 1868
strike movement in Europe to organize what Marx called ‘guerrilla bat-
tles’ against capital and get workers of different countries ‘not only [to]
feel but [to] act as brethren and comrades in the army of emancipation’,5 or
(ii) to make too much of a few exceptional twentieth-century occurrences
(the Sacco and Vanzetti, Rosenberg or Mandela campaigns, for instance,
or the global ‘anti-systemic’ occupation movement of May 1968 (Arrighi
et al., 1989)), that were either still largely overdetermined by programmatic
concerns or brought into being by extraordinary moments of global propin-
quity. In the last 20 years, however, there has been a veritable explosion
of transnational movements that, out of necessity, have followed the fluid
paths of tactical and strategic opportunities across the whole of the world
economy, hopping-and-skipping from issues to issues, creating strategic
alliances from chanced encounters, opening and defending positions and
institutions. This is the movement that was beginning to be known a gener-
ation ago as the ‘new left internationalism’, that then got associated with –
and sometimes reduced to – the ‘anti-globalization movement’ after WTO
demonstrations in Seattle, and is now in danger of being wrapped up in the
settling politics of altermondialiste reformism. To center questioning on its
praxis rather than on its assumed politics, to look into it rather than at it, we
will forego these problematical handles and rather consider the movement
as a collection of dérives made necessary by the globalization of production,
finance, and, mode generally, of everyday life in contemporary capitalism.

Already, tactical dérives have transformed existing institutions that had
been born of previous internationalist efforts, and they have created others.
The most spectacular, often cited, example of new global institutions is the
Indymedia network, born of anti-summit protests in Seattle and elsewhere,
that has had some success in short-circuited the highways of commercial
network and state-sponsored media.6 In the world of labor, transnational
campaigns have, to an extent, transformed International Trade Secretaries,
World Industry Councils and International Confederations, from centers
of powers unto themselves into links, thus bringing them away from cos-
mopolitan politics closer to international praxis. Also worthy of note are
what are beginning to be known as ‘strategic organizing alliances’ linking
otherwise unrelated union locals. A model here is the alliance between the
United Electrical Workers Union (UE) and the Mexican Frente Auténtico
del Trabajo (FAT), which led to the creation in 1992 of the North American Workers to Workers Network (NAWWN), that has had considerable impact in forming individual organizers and in coordinating unionizing drives, especially in Maquilla industries (Cook, 2002). Following supply, production or commodity chains, informed by what Andrew Herod in his analysis of the 1998 strike at GM called ‘guerilla cartography’ (Herod, 2001), workers have also created such links as the International Coordinating Committee of Solidarity Amongst Sugar Workers (ICCSAW) or the Banana Action Net, that has organized a worldwide campaign for the respect of labor rights on banana plantations, in solidarity with the Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Sindicatos Bananeros (COLSIBA, a gathering of Chiquita workers in Costa Rica, Columbia, Panama, Honduras and Guatemala), the European Banana Action Network (EUROBAN, 30 organizations in a dozen European countries), and the US/Labor Education in the Americas Project (US/LEAP). This latter organization, founded in 1987 as the US/Guatemala Labor Education Project (US/GLEP) by trade unionists and human rights advocates concerned about the basic rights of Guatemalan workers (Hogness, 1989; Johns, 1998) now links trade unionists in Central America, Asia (e.g. Korean House of International Solidarity, Focus on Globalization in Taiwan, etc.) with a broad range of religious, human rights, student, and US trade union organizations such as Campaign for Labor Rights, United Students Against Sweatshops, NISGUA, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, Global Exchange, STITCH, the Maquila Solidarity Network, Witness for Peace, the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, etc. In turn, these links have made possible campaigns on behalf of workers who are directly or indirectly employed by such US companies as Starbucks, Dole and Phillips-Van Heusen. In like manner, transnational women’s campaigns (that have revived women’s internationalism, dormant in the Keynesian period), have led to the creation of such linkage points as the Women’s International Information and Communication Service (WIICS), the ‘Feminist International Networks of Resistance to Reproductive Technologies and Genetic Engineering’ (FINR-Rage, 1984), Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUM), (Peterson and Runyan, 1993; Moghadam, 2001).

The list of transnational dérives and of the new links they have created could, of course, be lengthened, perhaps ad infinitum. Indeed, analyses of transnational doings often do little more than assemble such a list, putting side by side everything in sight and labeling the lot ‘anti-globalization’, or ‘globalization from below’ – the title of a ground-breaking book (Brecher, 2000), and a particularly popular moniker: 5,270 hits on Google. We live in a moment of such profound restructuring that we do not lack for examples of people organizing in any way they can to resist their impoverishment, the destruction of their community, or the degradation of their living and working conditions. But listing is not theorizing. More needs to be done to
make sense of the political meaning and possibilities of what gets created when people forego set ways.

Were we to share the foundationalist assumptions of both governance and altermondialisme, and thus presume either the newness or the separateness of what is being born in the world economy, that we would be encouraged to consider transnational dérives and the links between them as a collection unto itself and argue, for instance, that the NAWWN or WLUM should be seen as potential positions in Gramsci sense of the term. If the optimism of our transnational will energized by the ‘spirit of revolt’ that animated Situationnistes was strong enough to carry the day against the pessimism of our intellect as informed by knowledge of how social forces have been historically structured at the national level, we would then be led to argue that, even from such fragile and temporary positions, a new world order could be built. Thinking thus would bring us to set the transformative possibilities of transnationalism against efforts to establish or defend positions within national boundaries.

This is a false dichotomy, as we learn from looking at the relative continuity in anti-capitalist praxis. Indeed, beyond what they have created at the global level proper, transnational dérives have also broadened and socialized positional struggle taking place in national social formations. This is an absolutely critical development, especially in the context of governance’s twin processes of severance and recomposition.

Again, anti-summit happenings offer us a good starting point for thinking this through. In Québec city, where this article was written, mobilization against the Summit of the America (April 2001) brought about a few days of direct actions and anti-capitalist carnivaling, as did anti-summit mobilizations elsewhere (Drainville, 2001). It also led, in already routine fashion, to the creation of an IndyMedia outlet: the Centre des Médias Alternatifs du Québec. In the year that followed the Summit of the America, social forces that had been mobilized in Québec City, which quickly fell below the radar of anti-globalization watchers, resituated their actions on more local issues, most notably the housing shortage (in the year following the Summit of the Americas, Québec city became the Canadian city with the lowest rate of apartment vacancy). The same people and organizations who, a year previously, had organized demonstrations against the US-led drive for a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), organized the city’s first political squat in more than a generation, on rue De la Chevrotière, within sight of where the Summit of the Americas’ security perimeter had been breached a year previously. When the war in Iraq began, the movement resurfaced as a global movement, organizing what were, all proportions given, the largest anti-war gatherings in the world. Again, the movement disappeared from view when the conjunctural sense of urgency abated. As the time of writing, it is in the process of reorganizing itself against social re-engineering programs of the Liberal government, elected in April
No-Logo campaigning offers us other telling examples of the dialectical linking between transnational dérives and the socialization of more localized and positional struggles. For instance, campaigns launched in the United States by the United Students against Sweatshops (USAS, 1998), that at times has brought USAS reps in contacts with anti-sweatshop campaigns elsewhere in the world (in Indonesia in support of the struggle of workers at the Kahatex Sweater Factory in Bandung; in Columbia against Coke-sponsored death squads, etc.), has also led them to socialize and politicize struggles on some of the most commodified US campuses, that are both privileged marketing points for Nike et al. and critical sites of decontextualization (Broad, 2002). This, in turn, has activated the struggle against efforts to contain political protests in free-speech zones, that are perhaps the most important point of convergence of the US student movement since the days of the Vietnam war.

In the world of labor, the experience of the Coalition of Immokale Work- ers (CIW) offers us another telling experience. Founded in 1992 by migrant workers working as tomato pickers for Taco Bell sub-contractors in Florida, the CIW first organized for wage increases (of one cent a pound). Drawing on experiences of workers schooled in social struggles in Mexico, Guatemala, Central and South America and the Caribbean, workers organized community-wide general strikes in 1995, 1997 and 1999 (Beacon, 202). In 2001, the CIW organized its first ‘Taco Bell Truth Tour’, an 8,000 miles-long crisscrossing of the United States that brought workers from Florida to Taco Bell headquarters in Orange County, California. In the process, they linked up with workers in countries of origins, who organized support events in the context of continent-wide struggles against the US project for a Free Trade Area of the Americas. Rather than political organizing in the classical left international sense of the term, it is this shared context of struggle that prompted support actions outside the US, and gave them resonance and meaning.

In the most immediate terms, the CIW strikes and campaigns have succeeded in strengthening local bonds of solidarity between workers, and thus in diminishing field bosses’ ability to pit against one another workers of different national origins, about 90% of whom are new each season (Bohorquez-Montoya, 25–26 September 2003; Bowe, 2003). Beyond this, the CIW was key to defeating the so-called ‘Guestworker’s bill’, which would have allowed agribusiness to bring in seasonal workers under a visa contract specific to individual employers and thus created a class of indentured workers the likes of which has not been seen, or rather validated by legislation, since the days of slavery. Defining their struggle as a civil and human rights issues (Waddell, 2001), and their movement as a modern ‘under- ground railroad’ (Rondeaux, 2002), the CIW has been able not only to give
enough resonance to its particular struggle to win considerable recognition (and the 2003 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award), but also to link with such organizations as the United States Student Association, the Student Labor Action Project, Jobs with Justice, the Student/Farmworker Alliance, etc. At the time of writing, the third Taco Bell Truth Tour was about to begin. A measure of the broadening of CIW’s issues will be the participation of SFA members, and of others involved in this year’s ‘Student Labor Week of Action’. If indeed the issue of field-workers slavery and the right of migrant workers in the US does cross-over to US campuses, then we have a very strong indicator of the manner in which transnational campaigns broaden and socialize particular struggle.

Here as well, there would be countless fragments to pick up that would tell us something about the dialectical linking between transnational struggles and the socialization of positional struggles. In the Dominican Republic, the transnational campaign waged on behalf of workers at the Bibong Apparel Corporation, that involved strategic and tactical alliances between several union organizations in the United States, Europe and Latin America, secured the first collective bargaining contract in the history of export-processing zones in the Dominican Republic (Jessup and Gordon, 2000). This victory set the stage for greater militancy among workers in Dominican export-processing zones, which, in turn, led to other collective agreements being signed (Jessup and Gordon, 2000). In Nigeria, the Ogoni people got a stronger and more social sense of itself from the transnational campaign waged by MoSOP (Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People) on behalf of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the most visible figure of the movement against Shell’s effort to exploit oil reserves in the Niger Delta (Watts, 1997). In Botswana, the campaign against the forced displacement of Basarwa/San bushmen from the Kalahari, coordinated by Survival International, Global Witness and Fatal Transactions, which focused specifically on the DeBeers company, was not only successful in problematizing so-called ‘conflict diamonds’ (Bond, 2003) but it also socialized the struggle against the centralized government (Taylor, 2003). In Myanmar, transnational campaigns on behalf of Aung San Suu Kyi and against such companies as PepsiCo, Unocal and Texaco, have not strengthened the democratic movement enough to challenge the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), but has, at least, forced it into its last retrenchments. In the perverse ways of authoritarianism, the violence of the Council’s repression can be taken as a measure of the strength of the movement animated by the dialectics of presence in the contemporary world economy. In Canada, social movements got a stronger and more social sense of themselves from the trilateral campaign waged in the late 1980s against the North-American Free Trade Alliance (Drainville, 1997, 1999). In Mexico, the transnational campaign of the Zapatistas EZLN, that began with an armed insurrection on the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, FTAA’s
precursor) was launched and continued with much publicized Encuentros
de la humanidad contra el neoliberalismo in 1994 and 1999, has not only had
considerable influence on what David McNally’s (2002) called the ‘People’s
movement’ the world over, but it has also allowed the EZLN to strength-
ened positions in autonomous zones and municipalities across Mexico
(Roman and Arregui, 1998). These are now nodal points of the struggle
against the so-called ‘Puebla to Panama plan’ to create a broad export in-
frastructure (roads, trains, pipelines, airports, hydro-electric dams) linking
nine Mexican states (Puebla, Campeche, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Tabasco, Ver-
acruz, Quintana Roo, Yucatan et Chiapas) with seven countries in Central
America (Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica
and Panama), thus further integrating 65 million inhabitants, the major-
ity of whom live in dire poverty, into a near-colonial pact with the world
economy (Moro, 2002; Pacificar. In Argentina and in Venezuela (to invoke
more problematical examples, that give us hints that the same dialectic
can be given distinct political directions), the social basis of Krishner’s and
Chavez’s government have been broadened and strengthened by their anti-
FTAA stance. In Brazil, the campaign of the Movimento dos Trabalhadores sem
Terra has been simultaneously (i) significant as a transnational event (both
directly, in the organization of such gatherings as the recent Encuentro In-
ternacional de la Resistencia y Solidaridad de los Pueblos Indígenas y Campesinos
and indirectly, through the influence it has had on the organization of
peasant struggles, from Argentina’s Movimiento Campesino de Santiago del
Estero, to France’s Confédération Paysanne and Acteurs dans le Monde Rural,
to South Africa and Venezuela), and (ii) key to the broadening of domestic
political possibilities (Naim, 2003). That the MST has been so visible inter-
nationally and that it has, by necessity and opportunity, become tactically
more mobile, has had, for better or for worst, the effect of freeing peasant
and native struggles from the immediate conditions of their emergence
and facilitating links with struggles of other dispossessed people – like the
homeless (Sevilla, 2002). This is what made the MST struggle such an im-
portant factor in the election of Lula da Silva (Paula, 2001; Ferreira, 2002).
In Ecuador, the dialectic has been activated and then manipulated by Lucio
Guitiérrez, who exploited and betrayed the indigenous and peasant move-
ments. Recent events in this countries (including the assassination attempt
on Leonidas Iza, head of the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de
Ecuador (Conaie) gives us an example of the manner in which dynamics of
globalization radicalize what Eric Wolf called, two generations ago, the
‘tragic fate’ of peasant movement

... peasants rise to redress wrong; but the inequities against which
they rebel are but, in turn, parochial manifestations of great social dis-
location. Thus rebellion issues easily into revolution, massive move-
ments to transform the structure as a whole. The battlefield becomes
society itself, and when the war is over, society will have changed and the peasantry with it. The peasant’s role is thus essentially tragic: his efforts to undo a grievous present ushers in a vaster, more uncertain future. (Wolf, 1969)

That a nébuleuse of peasant and native movements in the Americas has formed against the FTAA and other neo-liberal concepts of control has put into play particular manifestations of still broader social dislocations than those considered by Wolf in the context of wars of national liberation. In the present context, these struggles, above and beyond particularities, have all become ‘world-significant’ event. This broad resonance of particular struggles has encouraged organizations to become even more tactically mobile than the peasant movements studies by Wolf. This, in turn, has brought peasant struggles more quickly out of parochial specificity, into a still broader battlefield. The uncertainties of the future thus ushered in greater because the socialization of struggle has been accelerated in this manner, but so, perhaps, are possibilities for rebellions to gel into something like a revolutionary movement.

Again, there would be many fragments to pick up and pore over, but, already, we can raise the possibility that transnational dérives usher in a context in which particular, locally bound, struggles shaped by tactical necessities ‘over-leap’ the bounds of parochial or corporatist tussles – to borrow from Rosa Luxemburg’s theorizing on the dynamics of mass strikes. Against altermondialiste will-to-program, we might then profitably invoke her critique of Lenin’s ‘ultra-centralism’ (Melograni 1989).

Instead of the rigid and hollow scheme of an arid political action carried out by the decision of the highest committees […] we see a bit of pulsating life of flesh and blood … (Luxemburg, 1971)

At the very least, we can begin thinking of something else besides governance’s processes of severance and recomposition. While regulatory agencies of the world economy wish to provoke a controlled rupture that would give appointed representatives of ‘global civil society’ the full weight of political authority, transnational praxis re-establishes the continuum of experience between global and local contexts of struggle, in a manner that may radicalize and socialize both.

ABOUT ARTICULATION
Craig Murphy is right to assert that governance is a site of struggle in its own right (Murphy, 2002). In governance mode, regulatory agencies of the world economy have opened up programs and institutions that offer possibilities for partial struggles over the terms of world order. In the global neighborhood, men and women do indeed fight – over terms of
shareholders rights and responsibilities, ways to solve global problems, the best, most sustainable, practices and the ‘better way to manage [humanity’s] affairs . . . ’ (Commission on Global Governance, 1995). Of course, they fight: even bourgeois ‘lifestyle condos’ installed in popular neighborhoods like the barracks of an occupying army sometimes become site of struggle.

Seeing the global neighborhood not as an all-inclusive new world built on empty land but as a new development in an historic city, we can break with the developers’ mentality shared by the World Bank et al. and altermondialiste fora, and look elsewhere for distinct, perhaps revolutionary, ways of life and struggle.

For lack of theorizing, what we find might be considered counterhegemonical. This is often the kind of argument made by Neo-Gramscian scholars, for whom ‘counter-hegemony’ is almost always a residual category, something that has unity only by default. Satisfying ourselves with this, of course, would not bring us very far. Nor would giving imaginary coherence to practices of resistance. Tagging, even with such a resonant idea as counter-hegemony, is no more theorizing than listing. To move toward a theoretical understanding of the present moment, what we have to do is think about terms of articulation between practices born of specific actions, without reifying them. I am thinking here not of a post-materialist, Laclau and Mouffe (1985), sense of articulation between signified events brought together into a discursive whole, but of a political articulation between the bounded actions invented by men and women in the process of their struggles.

Looking into places where the action is, we can find the beginnings of a dialectics of presence that contrasts sharply with governance’s process of depoliticization by severance and recomposition. The poles of this dialectics are obvious: tactical dérives in the world economy and positional struggle in national social formations. In Gramscian terms, these strategies, that have not been invented by decisions of highest committees but have grown almost organically, are perfectly appropriate to their respective contexts: a war of movement has emerged in the world economy – a relatively new social formation where the earthworks of social hegemony have not yet been dug – and a war of position is continuing in national social formation – where earthworks have been dug and where adventurism would amount to recklessness. What looking into transnational actions suggests to us is that movements and positions should not be thought of as episode to be put into a chronological sequence (as they were for Gramsci), but as coincidental and intimately related, moments of a dialectical process.

A contrario of altermondialisme, we do not have to choose between them, celebrate one rather than the other or reduce one to the other. What we have to do is follow hints from what is being done in praxis and think the dialectic through.
Transnational dérives need strong positions to begin with and draw from. The anti-FTAA campaign, the US/GLEP or the NAWWN would not have been born but for the support unions provided, nor would transnational campaigns, whether of anti-Logo organizations, the Banana Action Net or WLUM activists amount to much without support from institutions that have fought to secure positions and build institutions inside national social formations. More generally, the fragile positions opened up by transnational dérives could not be held without support from other, stronger, positions that have been held in more mature social formations. That much is obvious, and it corresponds to what intuitive knowledge would suggest.

But transnational dérives and positions are not just fragile outposts in need of supplies, they also broaden possibilities for the struggle of positioned social forces.

A century and a half ago, Marx and Engels argued, in the founding manifesto of classical left internationalism, that, even though the proletariat was a universal subject, workers first had to settle matters with their own bourgeoisie. Twenty years ago, when global governance was only beginning to take shape, before transnational dérives had made anything of themselves, Robert Cox (1983: 174) re-stated this position when he advocated a patient war of position that would begin with ‘the long, laborious effort to build new historic blocs within national boundaries’. Since then, the context for struggles that take place at the level of national social formations has clearly shrunk, both in advanced capitalist countries (where even social democracy cannot shrivel fast enough) and in countries at the periphery of the world economy, that are disciplined with increasing impunity by governance’s, and US’s, imperialisms. In that period, transnational dérives have also begun to activate a dialectic of presence that may have very few precedents in the history of capitalism organized on a world scale. If pratique is understood as a process whereby a given situation is transformed by human agency, and if political praxis is the transformation of a given material situation by political subjects who are making themselves in specific junctures (Althusser, 1985) it is not its carnavalesque aesthetics, or its tactics (dé­rives, direct actions, No-Logo campaigns, etc.) or its targets (OMC, IMF, World Bank or Davos gatherings) that have defined contemporary anti-capitalism. Nor is it, as is often argued, the ‘global-network’ form of it all (Castells, 1996; Klein, 2000, 2000). It is its putting into dialectical relation of transnational movements and positional struggles.

For this dialectic to be most effective – that is for it to broaden as much as possible possibilities for transformative politics – its terms have to be separated as much as possible without their relationship being threatened. What Henri Lefebvre (1969) would have called the logique de différence has to gain as much amplitude as possible while still remaining disciplined by the exigencies of the logique dialectique. To put it as clearly as possible: transnational movements and positional struggles have to be as separate
and specific as possible without the link between them being severed – at which point moments of a dialectic become mere object separated from one another and weaker because of it.

In a way, this theoretical position seems to echo the ‘diversity of tactics’ call often heard in anti-summit manifestations. The most recent expression of this came during Mumbai Resistance 2004, which took place during the latest World Social Forum.

MR 2004 believes that the battle against globalization will be a long and protracted one and will be fought on many fronts and in many forms. It stands for and supports all militant mobilizations ... MR 2004 ... believes that every form of resistance, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem, that weakens the world capitalist system must be utilized and welcomed. In the achievement of equality, justice and liberation, we do not exclude any form of struggle that the situation may demand, unlike the WSF which by its exclusion of military organizations and ‘those that seek to take lives as a means of political action’ and other sideling of the militant movements of South America, actually keeps large sections of anti-imperialist fighters and movements out of its fold. MR 2004 believes that the achievement of justice, equality and liberation is the primary objective, and the people choose the method of struggle according to the specific situation for realisation of the alternative paradigm. Any restriction based on the forms of struggle can only serve to divide the forces standing up against imperialism and capitalism.

This position, like altermondialisme’s, is grounded in only half of the emerging dialectic of presence in the world economy and, because of that, it misses entirely what is most radical about present anti-capitalist struggles. In its petty-bourgeois ways, altermondalisme aspires to return to the old capitalist means of controlling social relations, by foregoing some forms of struggle and bringing global financial capital under national, neo-Keynesian, discipline (Barrillon, 2001; Oiseau-tempête, 2003). To give a social basis to this project, it tries to fast-freeze the transnational movement of the multitude and fix it to what is essentially a national form. By advocating indiscriminate variability, MR2004 thinks as if anti-capitalist movement was little more than global agitation with no political integrity whatsoever. The battle against capitalist globalization, of course, will be fought on many fronts and take many forms, but not all forms of struggle are equivalent and all cannot be brought into equal relation with anti-capitalist politics.

But coherence and discipline cannot come, as it does for altermondalisme, from the ex officio expurgation of some or other means of struggle. Nor can it be overdetermined, as governance agencies would have it, by some fabricated sense of responsibility toward humanity construed as an abstract, and thus malleable, bearer of rights. This false universalality, what Adorno
would have called a ‘cult of Being’ (Adorno, 1973), stands at the heart of ‘humanitarian ideology’ (Hours, 1998; Redeker, 1998), a privileged vehicle of governance’s interpellation. Rather, what should discipline anti-capitalist politics is the necessity to active and sustain the dialectical relationship between the war of movement taking shape in the world economy and the war of position in national social formation.

Borrowing avant-garde techniques has given us means to discover a field of practice that had been hidden from view by governance’s gridding and it has given us tools to think about the workings of a dialectic that may have few precedents in the five centuries-old history of global capitalism. It has also allowed us to carry on a kind of experimental mapping of the new terrain and let us imagine an anti-capitalist world-picture that would have its own, distinct, force-lines running through. At the center would be sites of action where the terms of anti-capitalist dialectic are most separated, and where the transformative possibilities of anti-capitalist politics might be strongest; at the periphery would be struggles where this dialectic is most reduced, or where its terms are so autonomized from one another that they cannot be thought of as being part of a dialectic at all.

This being said, everything needs to be done to operationalize and specify concepts of resistance. To move beyond experimental mapping to operational cartography, we would need to discover what the exigencies of the new dialectic are within the context of specific struggles, what possibilities exist for variability within it and where are points of rupture at given moments in given junctures. These, of course, are all matters for empirical investigation and for the kind of strategic thinking that cannot be synthesized with any intelligence or brought into political form, less we fall into the trap of programmatic reasoning and resolve what we should be trying to understand.

CONCLUSION

That ‘Another World is Possible’ has become the ensign of the left’s common sense. For all its engaging cheerfulness, and for all the hope and energy that can be drawn from it (George, 2001), this slogan advertises the wrong kind of anti-capitalist politics. Aping the ways of the ruling class is a sure way to fall into easy ambushes (Hoare and Smith, 1998). This is no less true now that governance is trying to humanize neo-liberal concepts of control than it was when Gramsci wrote. Rather than abide by the immense condescension of drawers of programs wishing to order and stabilize the global movement of multitude, we need to think from concepts of resistance that are drawn from what men and women acting against capitalist restructuring have already invented; rather than consider those inventions to small or not political enough for the world-restructuring task at hand, we need to think with enough imagination to see the relative coherence – and thus the depth and the strength – of what is being born of present circumstances.
NOTES

1 ‘Exact phrase match’ search carried out on January 21, 2004.
3 (Gallagher and Robinson, 1953) cited in (Panitch and Gindin, 2003)
4 La société du spectacle (Debord, 1992) is one of two defining texts of the Internationale Situationniste. The other is Raoul Vaneigem’s Traité de savoir-vivre à l’usage des jeunes générations (Vaneigem, 1967).
6 The first Independent Media Center was created in November, 1999 to cover protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle. The Seattle IMC web site was said to have ‘received almost 1.5 million hits during the WTO protests’. http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/FrequentlyAskedQuestionEn#how. At last count, there were more than one hundred members of the IndyMedia family.
7 Information on the Chiquita campaign can be found at http://bananas.xs4all.be/
8 See http://www.usleap.org/
9 See for instance (Gill, 2003).

REFERENCES


DRAINVILLE: BEYOND ALTERMONDIALISME


