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Planning Theory 2009; 8; 140

DOI: 10.1177/1473095209102232

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Vol 8(2): 140–165
DOI: 10.1177/1473095209102232
<http://plt.sagepub.com>

RESISTING NEOLIBERALIZATION:
COMMUNICATIVE PLANNING OR
COUNTER-HEGEMONIC MOVEMENTS?

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Abstract This article argues that existing critiques of communicative planning become more salient when we consider the challenges posed by neoliberalization, which is understood here to mean the ongoing project to install market logics and competitive discipline as hegemonic assumptions in urban politics and policy-making. I develop how neoliberalization, by its normal operation, produces important legitimacy problems that must be managed. Overcoming these legitimacy problems necessitates decision-making practices that do not fundamentally challenge existing power relations but still confer a high degree of political legitimacy. The article presents existing critiques of Habermasian ideals to argue that communicative and collaborative planning, insofar as they follow these ideals, provide an extremely attractive way for neoliberals to maintain hegemony while ensuring political stability. The article argues therefore that communicative and collaborative approaches are not well-suited to confronting neoliberalization. More promising instead are radical counter-hegemonic mobilizations whose goal is not to neutralize power relations, but to transform them.

Keywords communicative planning, neoliberalism, social movements

Introduction

This article sits in the context of a larger argument about the relationship between democracy and neoliberalization (Purcell, 2008). That argument is a

political and normative one: neoliberalization has had a corrosive impact on cities and urban life, and democratic movements are a particularly promising way we might resist it. However, it is important to be clear about the specific form and content of democratic resistance. There are many different ways to conceive of democracy, and each has a different relationship to neoliberalism. Moreover, neoliberalism seeks actively to co-opt and incorporate democratic resistance. Both liberal and deliberative forms of democracy are being enlisted to support the neoliberal project. Therefore democratic resistance to neoliberalism must explicitly and directly challenge the foundations of the neoliberal project. I argue that what we require is a democratic alternative not rooted in the liberal or deliberative tradition. I elaborate one possible alternative that joins together, 1) elements of radical, participatory, and revolutionary democracy with, 2) Henri Lefebvre's idea of the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968, 1996, 2003).

The argument of this article parallels the one above, but it is specific to planning theory and practice. It contends that the ongoing neoliberalization of urban political economies makes more urgent the existing critiques of communicative planning. In general, insofar as they are rooted in a Habermasian ideal of communicative action, planning theory and practice are more likely to support the neoliberal agenda than to resist it. To make that case, the article begins by briefly describing the neoliberal project and its impact on urban governance. It argues that neoliberalization produces important democratic deficits, and neoliberals must seek creative ways to overcome those deficits. While they have at times turned to more authoritarian strategies (such as Giuliani's 'zero-tolerance' policies in New York; Smith, 2002), they have also actively sought to co-opt democratic rhetoric and practice and use them to legitimate neoliberalism. What the neoliberal project requires are decision-making practices that are widely accepted as 'democratic' but that do not (or cannot) fundamentally challenge existing relations of power. Communicative planning, insofar as it is rooted in communicative action, is just such a decision-making practice. To develop that argument, the article presents a well-developed critique advanced by political theorists and planners, the upshot of which is that communicative action reinforces existing power relations rather than transforms them. The article then suggests that if planners decide to heed that critique and move away from communicative ideals, there are better and worse options. One planning tradition, consensus-building, has consciously distanced itself from Habermasian ideals, but it is even more at risk of supporting neoliberalization. The article ends by outlining elements of a non-Habermasian, counter-hegemonic planning theory and practice that are much more likely to successfully challenge neoliberalization.

*Neoliberalization*¹

The doctrine of neoliberalism is in many ways the reassertion of a classical liberal economic argument: society functions better under a market logic than any other logic, especially a state-directed one. We should give firms and

individuals freer reign, the argument goes, to rationally maximize their private economic interests in open and competitive markets. In the post-Second World War era, until about 1970, a 'Keynesian' economic policy regime instituted strong union power, significant national-state intervention in the economy, a measure of material equalization, and a relatively large national welfare state apparatus. Even as Keynesianism became dominant in the 1950s and 1960s, opponents – such as Milton Friedman, Friedrich Hayek, and the adherents of the Mont Pelerin Society – were rebuilding an argument for the converse, a neoliberal ethic in which the state would play a minimal role in the economy and 'the invisible hand' of market decisions would determine economic outcomes. The neoliberal argument that the market is more efficient in allocating resources than the state or other institutions, true or not, was entirely marginal in the post-war era of Keynesian intervention. However, the Keynesian compromise eventually began to fray. In the 1970s, stagflation and economic recession made free-market alternatives seem much more desirable. By the late 1970s, the growing resonance of neoliberalism as an idea was given weight by the elections of Thatcher and Reagan, who pursued free-market policies that severely reduced government regulation of capital (for a rich historical account of neoliberalism's rise to hegemony, see Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism has subsequently been extended and deepened, and has come more and more to occupy a hegemonic position in urban policy. In the article, I use the term 'neoliberalization' to mean the process by which neoliberalism has become increasingly hegemonic.

In the neoliberal imagination, open and competitive markets not only produce the most efficient allocation of resources, they also stimulate innovation and economic growth. That claim is what might be called the *laissez-faire* aspect of neoliberalism.² Market logics and competition should be fostered in the economy, and they should even be extended beyond the economy, to institutions like the state, schools, hospitals, and so on. Moreover, because neoliberals see state policies as the primary impediment to competitive markets, they want the state to 'get out of the way' as much as possible by eliminating regulations that inhibit capital. However, even as neoliberal doctrine propounds a minimal state, actual practices of neoliberalization necessitate significant state intervention in order to facilitate the accumulation of capital. Thus there exists an *aidez-faire*³ aspect of neoliberalism in which the state mobilizes to actively assist capital, in addition to merely getting out of its way. *Aidez-faire* state intervention includes, for example, public investment in efficient infrastructure, the transfer of publicly created technology to the private sector, monetarist policies to control inflation, public investment in private land development, workfare policies to discipline the unemployed and reintegrate them into the labor market, and the increasing dominance of exchange value as the primary way to value urban land. Under neoliberalization, therefore, the state assists capital by both retreating *and* intervening. Generally, the process of neoliberalization combines these two aspects in a complex mixture of both *laissez-* and *aidez-faire*.

At the same time it has increased its support for capital, the state has retrenched its assistance for its citizens, especially the poor and vulnerable. A

long list of social assistance policies – for example, direct aid to families, unemployment insurance, social security, public housing, child care, and health care – have been reduced, offloaded onto local governments, or eliminated altogether (Staeheli et al., 1997). This retrenchment has been bipartisan. Reagan's vilification of 'welfare queens' in the 1970s and 1980s matured into Clinton signing the Welfare Reform Act of 1996. When combined with the stark social inequality that free markets tend strongly to produce (Dumenil and Levy, 2004; Harvey, 2005), retrenched social policy produces an increasing population of marginalized and desperate people. One state strategy to deal with that population has been disciplinary: zero tolerance policies, workfare controls, punitive policing, and expanded imprisonment (Davis, 1990; Gilmore, 2006; Mitchell, 2003; Peck and Theodore, 2001). Such disciplining has been an integral part of the complex processes of neoliberalization in cities. But of course the preferred neoliberal alternative is for people to leave the dole and join the labor market. A suite of *aidez-faire* policies known collectively as 'workfare' seeks to move as many former welfare recipients as possible into low-wage jobs.

On the whole, then, neoliberalization has increasingly shaped state policy to benefit capital rather than citizens. As a result, it has produced an acute political problem: how to legitimate itself as it dismantles welfare systems, increases inequality, and unleashes into urban political life the harsh relations of market competition. It is necessary, therefore, to understand neoliberalization not just as a concrete policy agenda to retrench welfare and assist capital, but also as a successful *ideological* project to establish neoliberal assumptions as dominant (Harvey, 2005). It is important to understand that neoliberalism is not just a set of policies, but an ideology, a legitimating argument, and, as Giroux terms it, a 'public pedagogy' (Giroux, 2004; see also Larner, 2000). In order to ensure its long-term stability, neoliberals must make neoliberalism into a dominant 'common-sense', so that market competition – creating a 'business-friendly' climate – comes to be seen as a *necessary* (and even the only) value in decision-making. The desired logic is along the lines of: *of course* we must offer tax incentives to corporations (or reduce environmental regulation or not pass a living wage) – if we don't our economy will stagnate and our city will die.

I understand hegemony and ideology here, with Gramsci (1971, 2000), to be a political project on the part of particular groups to establish their interests as the same thing as the general interests of the society. For Gramsci, this is the stuff of politics: all groups pursue ideological hegemony. That project can never be total or permanent. The success of capital in establishing neoliberalism as hegemonic, for example, is one in a long line of hegemonies that successfully (but temporarily) establish a particular interest as a universal one. What we are seeing currently is an ongoing struggle to maintain neoliberalism's dominance, an attempt to progressively 'neoliberalize' the ideology that shapes political economies. As with any hegemonic regime, both the concrete and ideological elements of neoliberalization must be continually refortified. Cracks and instabilities emerge as a matter of course. That instability is endemic to neoliberal hegemony because: 1) it must always articulate with and to an extent accommodate existing policies, habits, and assumptions (Brenner, 2005); 2) it

produces its own contradictions and legitimacy problems (which I sketch below); and 3) as a result, it is always resisted. Other groups pursue counter-hegemonic projects to challenge the existing orthodoxy and to establish *different* particulars as universals. So the advance of neoliberalism, as a hegemonic project to establish the interests of capital as universal interests, has been fitful, uneven, and highly context-specific. Neoliberalization is hegemonic, but it is not invincible. It is merely hegemonic *now*. Counter-projects are possible; indeed they are inevitable.

Democratic deficits

Any ambitious agenda like neoliberalization is going to produce political, as well as economic and social, instability. One central problem for neoliberalization is that virtually everywhere it has produced rapidly rising material inequality, because its logic rewards winners and punishes losers. Numerous longitudinal studies show increasing inequality on virtually every index (Dumenil and Levy, 2004; Fainstein, 2001; Harvey, 2005; Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, 2004). Of course, liberal democracies, because they preside over a capitalist economy, have long been adept at managing and legitimating social inequality. Their characteristic separation between the public and private spheres allows them to claim the existence of a formal political equality even when manifest social inequality is present. However, the tension between social inequality and political equality has always posed problems for liberal thought. One longstanding critique of liberal democracy is precisely that democracy demands a much more far-reaching notion of equality than liberal democracy allows. The greater the separation between rich and poor, the more implausible is the liberal-democratic claim that all citizens are equally valued and carry an equal voice (Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, 2004). But of course that formal political equality is a minimum requirement for almost all notions of democracy. When formal equality is increasingly called into question by social inequality, it produces an important democratic deficit. Under Keynesian policies, that deficit was mitigated by significant material redistribution and the meaningful inclusion of organized labor in state decisions. But those accommodations were central targets of the neoliberal agenda and were significantly eroded under Reagan and Thatcher and their successors (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). As a result, neoliberalization has increasingly exacerbated a democratic deficit that has long troubled liberal democracy.

Closely related to that deficit is the one that results directly from the neoliberal agenda in its purest form: the increasing control of capital over social life. As the state retreats from regulating capital and transfers more and more decisions to the free market, those who are powerful actors in that market – corporations first among them – gain increasing power to determine the fortunes of people and places. The disciplinary forces of competitiveness and capital mobility give large corporations significant control over public policy. The threat that a firm such as Boeing will move from Seattle, for example, gives it inordinate control over a range of policy fields, like taxes, infrastructure,

insurance, and environmental regulation. Local and state governments must compete with other governments that they fear will offer corporations more competitive incentives to relocate, and so capital is able to shape significantly the policy choices of governments. The mass of people, insofar as they are represented by their government, are therefore significantly disempowered with respect to capital in setting the agenda for their local area. While there are of course problems with the naked claim that governments in liberal democracies represent 'the people', elected governments are certainly far more democratically accountable to the people than are corporations. So, to the extent that neoliberalization succeeds in its explicit agenda to augment the power of capital vis-à-vis the state, and insofar as liberal-democratic states are the principle representative of the mass of people, neoliberalization produces a democratic deficit because it transfers power from democratic citizens to corporations.

A third deficit arises from neoliberalism's agenda to 'outsource' governance. The state has increasingly privatized and semi-privatized its functions by contracting out services to volunteer organizations, community associations, non-profit corporations, foundations, and private firms, and by developing quasi-public bodies, such as QUANGOS, appointed competitiveness councils, urban development corporations, and public-private partnerships, to carry out the functions of government (Jessop, 2002; Krumholz, 1999; Painter and Goodwin, 2000). For the most part, these new authorities are not subject to any kind of direct democratic oversight. For example, non-profit firms that are contracted to take on governance functions act much like any non-profit concerned to meet its mission and balance its books. To be sure, government agencies can lack democratic accountability as well. But even in a flawed system like actually existing liberal democracy, there are usually some lines of democratic accountability, as, for example, when a City Council must review and approve a planning department's decision. For the most part, then, the shift from formal government to informal governance has made it more likely that policy decisions will be made by bodies unaccountable (at least in a meaningful way) to democratic citizens.

Lastly, neoliberalism seeks to establish a particular commonsense notion that competitiveness is not only 'the way it is', but also a *good* thing, an ethic that will help generate wealth and ensure happiness. To the extent this ideological project has been successful, it has narrowed the options available to governments and the people they represent. A polity that values the environment, for example, might feel it cannot make a strong environmental policy (e.g. signing on to Kyoto) because it would make the area less competitive. The neoliberal claim is that competition is a question of life and death. Narratives like economic collapse in the Rust Belt continually reinforce the point. Decisions like signing on to Kyoto or raising corporate taxes or spending on libraries, parks, and community centers can begin to look very optional in the face of the competitive, and global, struggle for survival. Cities feel they *must* be competitive or die. The democratic deficit here is that a polity can hardly be considered democratic if it cannot offer its citizens meaningful options. Citizens might have formal decision-making power, but their range of decisions can

become so narrow as to not really be decisions at all. However governance is structured, therefore, the disciplinary force of competition creates important democratic problems.

Of course the degree to which neoliberalism will produce such democratic deficits varies from place to place depending on a range of contextual factors. But in the big picture neoliberalization cannot proceed without actively managing the political instability it generates. Not surprisingly then, we see much evidence of neoliberals working to associate their project with democracy. One element of that strategy has been to argue that the Keynesian welfare state was undemocratic because decisions tended to be national, top-down, bureaucratic, and expert-driven. Neoliberals argue that their agenda of deregulation takes such decisions away from the state and its arbitrary, unchecked power, and hands them to individuals making free, rational decisions in an open market. There is little doubt the Keynesian state suffered from important democratic deficits. However, the neoliberal solution is not to democratize the state, but to relocate its power to the market. Deep inequalities in capitalist markets mean that neoliberal 'marketization' is not at all the same thing as democratization. Neoliberals also make a parallel claim that the devolution of authority, from the national state to more local ones, similarly constitutes democratization. Devolving the authority of the national Keynesian state allows places more power to shape decisions to their particular context (this claim is chronicled by Swyngedouw et al., 2002). In the US urban context, we can see this claim clearly in the withdrawal of national funding for community development. As federal government programs to help poor communities were replaced by a plethora of block grants, local state agencies, non-profit corporations, religious organizations, philanthropic foundations, and for-profit firms, neoliberals claimed they had freed communities from the tyranny of central state control and created a more democratic, 'grassroots' alternative. Of course, devolution of authority is not in itself necessarily a move toward greater democracy (Purcell, 2006). It is true that in the Keynesian era policy-making tended to be bureaucratized and undemocratic. But when that authority is ceded by the national state to local authorities or to non-state entities, it can be mobilized democratically or not. Devolution may or may not be democratization, but neoliberals sell it as such. They make a concerted effort to portray their project as a more democratic alternative to the old Keynesian order.

In short, the strategy is to capture the banner of democracy for neoliberalism. The community development example is in many respects the ideal model for neoliberals: institute typical neoliberal reforms and simply label them more democratic. Where that ideal is unworkable (and neoliberalization's democratic deficits soon make such claims shaky), a more pragmatic strategy is to participate in and even promote new democratic initiatives that, while they might produce less-than-optimal material outcomes for capital, do not pose any *fundamental* challenges to the neoliberal project. Rather than allowing capital interests to entirely determine outcomes, such processes might include a range of stakeholders, many of whom have different interests than capital (e.g. environmental, neighborhood, or social justice groups). The material outcomes

of those forums may very well not be optimal for business interests (e.g. some environmental mitigation, or a scaled-back development). However, neoliberals will cede a certain amount of material gain to achieve a strong democratic legitimacy. That dynamic can be seen at the level of a single case (a developer willing to sacrifice some margin so she can be sure the project will move forward unchallenged), and it can be understood to operate at a more general level: neoliberalization has legitimacy problems, and it is necessary to sacrifice some of the ideal neoliberal agenda described above in return for stable democratic legitimacy. The caveat is that neoliberals must ensure some basic assumptions remain in place: the imperative of competitiveness, the inviolability of property rights, and the primary importance of the exchange value of urban land. That *quid pro quo* dynamic has long roots; abundant research has documented how the contradictions internal to capitalism must be socially and politically 'regulated' by political arrangements in order to prevent capitalism from collapsing under its own weight (Aglietta, 1979; Brenner and Glick, 1991; Jessop, 1990; Lipietz, 1992). It would be nothing new, therefore, for capital to bargain away a measure of material interest to gain political stability.

The next section will argue in depth that communicative planning offers an extremely attractive way for neoliberals to secure the democratic legitimacy they require, because it tends to reinforce the political-economic status quo while producing democratically legitimate decisions. In engaging communicative processes, neoliberals, if they are just a little savvy, can consolidate the hegemony of neoliberal assumptions and reinscribe the increased power of capital to shape the future of the city. There is a lot at stake here. The discourses and practices of democracy offer great potential for those who resist neoliberalization and imagine a more just and civilized urban future. But democracy is a contested concept. If neoliberals are able to capture its banner, not only will they likely suffocate a very promising strategy of resistance, they will reinforce their current hegemony. We must therefore pursue democratization that is unequivocally inimical to neoliberalization. To do so, I argue that in the big picture we cannot pursue collaborative and consensual relations with neoliberal interests so that capital gets what it needs; rather we must struggle against those interests in an effort to radically transform neoliberal hegemony.

Communicative planning

As Harris (2002) points out, there are many people doing a range of different work under the umbrella of communicative planning. So it is important to be specific about what I mean when I use the term 'communicative planning'. I do not mean to critique *uniformly* everyone who considers him- or herself to be a communicative planner. It is not possible to apply a single critique to such a diverse tradition. My critique in this article focuses on two clusters of work. The first cluster is planning theory and practice *insofar as it aims at the Habermasian ideal of communicative action*.⁴ For this cluster I present a critique developed by political and social theorists over the last 25 years or so. They argue that Habermasian communicative action cannot significantly transform existing

power relations. As a result, I argue, it is not the best way to resist neoliberalism. The second cluster includes planners who selectively step back from Habermasian ideals, particularly from his desire to limit strategic action. I offer a case study of one such stepping-back (consensus-building), and I argue it actually exacerbates the dangers of communicative action. The upshot of that case is that if we choose to distance ourselves from communicative action, it matters greatly how we do so. Both of these clusters exhibit the same tendencies: to simultaneously reinforce the political-economic status quo and produce democratically legitimate decisions. To the extent they do, both approaches are more likely to buttress neoliberalization than to undermine it.

Habermas's communicative approach

The first cluster draws its inspiration and significant guiding principles from Jürgen Habermas's work on communicative action (e.g. 1985a, 1985b, 1990, 1998). Few follow Habermas in every last detail. But it is fair to say that the mainstream of communicative planning theory is heavily indebted, in complex and varying ways, to Habermas's formulation. His ideas are an important part of the zeitgeist of contemporary communicative planning theory. Moreover, as Harris (2002) finds in his careful review, that same indebtedness is true of what is called 'collaborative planning' as well (see Healey, 1997). To reiterate, there is much variation in the way planners engage Habermasian ideals. The critique I rearticulate here has been a critique of those ideals. Every communicative planner engages those ideals in different ways. The extent to which this critique would apply to a specific communicative planner or communicative practice would have to be evaluated case by case. But if the critique is right that we should be very wary of Habermas's approach, then I think such critical evaluation is urgently needed.

One initial concern specifically about communicative planning that should be mentioned is a pluralist one internal to the discourse itself: the ideas of both communicative and collaborative planning occupy an extremely hegemonic position in planning theory (Harris, 2002; Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000). While some critiques of the approach have emerged inside planning in recent years (e.g. Fainstein, 2000), alternatives remain mostly on the fringes. Moreover, a not-infrequent and worrying response from communicative advocates is *ad hominem*: critics are impugned as 'confused', they 'show little evidence that [they] have consulted the extensive literature', and they exhibit large 'gaps' in their knowledge (Innes, 2004: 6). They are 'hampered' by theoretical 'over-generalization and vagueness' (Forester, 1999b: 263). So one response from the mainstream to their critics has been that the problem lies not with communicative planning, but with the deficiencies of the critics. Rarely are the specific arguments of the critique (e.g. Laclau and Mouffe's agonistic view of political relations) engaged seriously. Such dismissal from the dominant strain of planning theory suggests there is a real need to nurture critical and oppositional approaches, lest broad unanimity diminish the quality of thought. Harris (2002) goes a bit farther, in a way that is more germane to my larger argument. He suggests that any theory that has achieved such a solidified position is inevitably less radical and tends to be more oriented toward the status quo.

However, beyond such concerns about intellectual pluralism in the discipline, there is a strong and well-developed theoretical critique of communicative action that raises important concerns about its approach to politics. Before I articulate that critique, I want to be clear that it is not at all Habermas's intent to reinforce existing power relations. In fact, he is clear that his theory of communicative rationality is explicitly designed to be an alternative to the instrumental or strategic rationality of capitalism (and, we could add, neoliberalism). Furthermore, I think that a Habermas-inspired alternative like deliberative democracy, both in ideal and practice, is significantly more democratic than the kind of inadequate, Schumpeterian, minimal-electoral democracy that currently exists in advanced capitalist countries. Similarly, communicative planning is more inclusive and probably produces wiser outcomes than the technocratic rational-expert model of planning. It is not at all the intent of communicative planners to serve the interests of capital. Probably for most, just the opposite is true. Nevertheless, I maintain that communicative planning does not offer us a good way to challenge the political and economic hegemony of neoliberalization.

Communicative action posits an ideal of intersubjective understanding that Habermas believes can serve as the (universal) basis for democratic governance. His vision works to minimize strategic action, by which participants in politics seek to maximize their self-interest. He insists instead on *communicative* action, by which participants work toward the ideal of deliberating toward an intersubjective understanding of the common good for all. Participants should try to achieve that intersubjective understanding by communicating together using rational argumentation. Communication is therefore central to Habermas's conception, and so he is at pains to be clear about what kind of communication supports the intersubjective understanding he hopes politics can achieve. Communicative action should aim at creating what he calls 'the ideal speech situation' (Habermas, 2001: 102). That ideal requires that all participants transparently articulate what they really believe; that power differences between participants be neutralized for the purposes of deliberation; that all participants affected by the decision participate in it meaningfully; that everyone has an equal chance to participate in deliberation; that each must be willing to empathize with the arguments of others; and that everyone aim to achieve the good of all rather than their particular self-interest (Cohen, 1997; Cunningham, 2001; Flyvbjerg, 1998a; Habermas, 1990, 1993). Those conditions constitute the basis for what Habermas calls 'undistorted communication', which allows participants to forge decisions fairly and honestly without domination or coercion (1985b: 96). It is important to reinforce that Habermas presents such communication as an *ideal*. He does not think the ideal is easily – or even likely to be – achieved. Nevertheless, his project is distinctly modernist and asymptotic: he hopes we can progress toward the ideal. If we can just think it through carefully, and work at it seriously, we can eventually approach, if not achieve, undistorted communication. It is in many ways a 'leap of faith' (Flyvbjerg, 1998a: 192) to aim at such a difficult ideal. In practice it can take on a messianic quality as well: even if the ideal speech situation seems impossible, it is so desirable and we want it to exist so intensely that we will direct all our

efforts toward achieving it. It is that modernist project, in its broad outline, that I think communicative planning, as a whole, has taken up. Most don't claim they have achieved the ideal, rather they design their theory and practice to help us progress, as far as possible, toward its realization. But it is the wrong project, or so the critics of communicative action argue.

The first critique begins with a linguistic argument. Writers like Chantal Mouffe and Jean Hillier draw on the linguistic theories of Wittgenstein, Lacan, and Žižek to argue that the ideal of undistorted communication is a logical impossibility. The argument is that speech acts cannot be neutral and undistorted; they must necessarily contain distortion in order to be intelligible. Mouffe (2000) draws on Wittgenstein to make the case: if we actually achieved an ideal speech act we would find 'we have got on the slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground' (Wittgenstein, 1953: 46e). The necessity of distortion is picked up in Mouffe's (1999) and Hillier's (2003) analysis through Lacan. In everyday practice, they argue, all language can at best *represent* the actual thing it aims to signify. There is an irreducible gap between signifier and signified (Hillier, 2003). Therefore, a 'field of consistent meaning', which we need in order to make sense of language, cannot be anchored objectively, in the concrete things it seeks to represent (Mouffe, 1999: 751). In order for language to be mutually intelligible, therefore, participants must impose what Lacan calls a 'master signifier', a crux that sets the relationships between signifiers and signifieds and creates a consistent field of meaning. The master signifier necessarily *distorts* the symbolic field by arbitrarily elevating one particular representation over others (Žižek, 1992). However, the master signifier also holds the field of meaning together; it makes communication possible. Therefore, removing all distortion would cause the field to disintegrate, and communication would cease. According to this argument, distortion is therefore *necessary* to make communication possible. Aiming at an ideal of undistorted communication is not merely Herculean, it is futile. That claim is important because it means that language and communication, the centerpiece of the communicative project, cannot be a neutral, fully shared, and undistorted medium. Rather language is always political; it is distorted by power, and those distortions establish hegemonic relations among participants. That realization leads Mouffe (2000) to conclude that we should not be attempting to progressively *eliminate* distortion and create non-political communication; rather we should accept that distortion and power is necessarily present in communication. She argues we should seek to mobilize that power, not minimize it. Creating elaborate techniques to reduce distortion and power in communication can never neutralize or eliminate them. But practices of communicative action, because they seek to reduce communicative distortion and power, lead us away from a critical analysis of power in language. They therefore put us in danger of masking its operation.

A parallel critique applies to the communicative desire to neutralize power more generally. While the liberal model of democracy ignores power in the

private sphere and operates *as if* social inequality did not exist (Fraser, 1990), communicative action aims at more. It acknowledges the range of existing power differences, and it seeks actively to neutralize them for the purposes of deliberation. It wants to ensure that power is not the driver of political decision-making. That goal necessarily assumes an idea of power that imagines it to be discrete and alienable. That is, it conceives of an agent's power as a discrete resource that s/he possesses. In that conception, power can be neutralized, set aside, contained and the agent can go on operating without it. Critics see power differently. They draw on the later work of Foucault (1979, 1990, 2003) to see power as *relational*. In that view, power inheres in the relationship between social agents, such that power operates in the context of one's relationship with another (Laclau, 1996). Relational power is not an alienable quality that can be temporarily neutralized through skillful mediation. Rather it is ineradicable because it is constitutive of social relationships (Hillier, 2003; Huxley, 2000; Mouffe, 2005; McGuirk, 2001). It is therefore always present and always shaping human relations (Foucault, 1988). We cannot neutralize it any more than we can neutralize social relations themselves. Moreover, as Flyvbjerg (1998b), Hillier (2003) and Huxley (2002) point out, any active attempt to neutralize power through facilitation is itself an imposition of particular relations of power.

The problem with the ideal of a power-tamed deliberation, for Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Mouffe (1993, 2002, 2005), in addition to its impossibility, is that it tends to diminish emphasis on what Mouffe calls 'the political'. The political refers to the antagonistic relations that are always present in human society. She does not mean to say that all human relations are antagonistic, only that it is not possible (or desirable) to produce a seamless society without antagonistic, friend/enemy relations. Thus for her antagonism is 'irreducible'; it is an ineradicable feature of social relations. The task of democratic practice, for Mouffe, is to *domesticate* antagonism and generate instead what she calls 'agonism'. In antagonism, the us/them relation casts the other as an enemy to be destroyed. In agonism, the other is an adversary whose interests conflict fundamentally with ours and with whom we struggle; however, we do not seek to eliminate them from the polity. Agonism thus domesticates antagonism in the sense that it prevents conflictual relations from being engaged existentially. However, agonism very much retains the irreducibility of conflict; its vision of society is one that is necessarily shot through with antagonistic fractures that must always be a central element of political relations.⁵ The communicative ideal, on the contrary, seeks to progressively minimize the us/them distinction, to emphasize 'shared' interests, and to constitute a comprehensive 'we' (Mansbridge, 1992). Such 'suturing' of society's irreducible fissures, as Laclau and Mouffe put it (1985, drawing on Lacan), is both an impossible and an undesirable project. Politics, in their view, is not the search for intersubjective understanding and agreement; it is necessarily a struggle for hegemony. The goal is not to develop, with Habermas, a priori processes to control, neutralize, or eliminate conflictual relations of power.⁶ It is instead to *transform* those relations: to mobilize power to engage in counter-hegemonic struggles to

establish new hegemonies. Writing specifically about the current neoliberal hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe (2000: xvi–xvii, emphasis added) argue:

the present conjuncture, far from being the only natural or possible societal order, is the expression of a certain configuration of power relations. It is the result of hegemonic moves on the part of specific social forces which have been able to implement a profound transformation in the relations between capitalist corporations and the nation-states. This hegemony can be challenged. The Left should start elaborating a credible alternative to the neo-liberal order, instead of trying to manage it in a more humane way. This, of course, requires drawing new political frontiers and acknowledging that *there cannot be a radical politics without the definition of an adversary*. That is to say, it requires the acceptance of the irreducibility of antagonism.

In other words, an approach that confronts neoliberal hegemony with a cooperative search for a shared understanding and agreement cannot foster the kind of counter-hegemonic politics we require to challenge neoliberalization.

Exacerbating the lack of ‘the political’, at least in more faithful versions of communicative practice, is a commitment to the politics of the common good over and above a politics of self-interest. Whereas in ‘strategic action’ participants pursue their particular interests above the interests of others, communicative action urges that participants reason together toward a shared understanding of the common good. Such a vision relies on the progressive ‘suturing’ of society we saw above. Communicative action seeks to suture differences sufficiently that an agreement can emerge as to what the common good entails. The suture metaphor is an evocative one, for it suggests that the common-good approach sees conflict and difference as *wounds* that should be healed. A suture holds a wound together long enough for the body to heal itself, to recover from the wound. But if we see conflict and difference not as wounds, but as *orifices*, as ruptures whose very utility is that they remain open, then a suture (on, for example, the mouth, nose, or ears) imperils the body rather than healing it. If, like an orifice, antagonism cannot and should not be sutured, then conflict cannot and should not be *resolved* the way a wound heals. If every polity contains a level of fundamental antagonism that cannot be overcome through intersubjective understanding, then every seeming agreement or consensus is really always a temporary hegemony of some interests over others (Hillier, 2003). If antagonism is irreducible, then every agreement will silence some and not others, and every decision will favor some over others (Hillier, 2002; McGuirk, 2001; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998). Every agreement or ‘consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power . . . that always entails some form of exclusion’ (Mouffe, 2000: 104). Agreement is not a successful neutralization of power or an intersubjective discovery of a creative win-win solution, however much advocates wish it (and narrate it) to be so (Susskind et al., 1999). Even if communicative advocates readily acknowledge the difficulty of achieving substantial agreement around the common good, the fact that they aim at it, that they conceive of it as possible and desirable, means that when participants successfully agree to a course of action, that outcome will very likely be accepted as a

decision that is in the best interests of all. Such outcomes very often emphasize the achievement of intersubjective agreement and are at pains to take seriously the skillful practice used to achieve it (Forester, 1998). They suggest that some of the differences have been sutured, that some conflicts have been resolved, at least on issues relevant to the present agreement. But Laclau and Mouffe contend that conflict can only ever be masked, not transcended, even in the short term. Such masking can be an extremely useful tool for neoliberal interests because underlying power relations can remain essentially unchallenged even as significant political legitimacy is conferred.

Moreover, an important corollary danger of the common-good approach is that it denies disempowered groups their most promising political tool (Abram, 2000; Hillier, 2003; Sanders, 1997). They cannot – or they are urged not to – advocate for their own interests. Rather they must overcome their disadvantage by proposing a course of action that is seen to be in *everyone's* best interests, not just theirs. Such a requirement is really quite perverse, and even punitive, in the context of a history of injustice. It is easy to see how, for example, the ideal would mean that a neighborhood with a disproportionate share of noxious facilities must show why siting yet another new waste treatment facility in their neighborhood would not just be bad for the neighborhood, but bad for the city as a whole. The common-good requirement thus tends to *add to* the political burden marginalized groups bear. At best, the communicative ideal sits uneasily with social movements advocating for particular interests; at worst it systematically marginalizes them. Communicative action introduces important impediments to transforming existing power relations from below, which effectively means it supports those relations. Laclau and Mouffe's alternative is not to suppress strategic action, but to *mobilize* it into emancipatory movements. What is required for marginalized groups is a planning theory and practice that consciously and actively fosters counter-hegemonic mobilization (Sandercock, 1998).

Reinforcing the critique of common-good politics is a critique of communicative action's ideal of inclusiveness. Communicative action aims not only at creating a cohesive 'we', but also an inclusive one. Not only should fissures within the polity be increasingly sutured, but also no one affected by a decision should be excluded from the decision-making process (Healey, 1997). The problem with that ideal, critics argue, is that such inclusiveness can never be total, every group that includes must always also exclude. In theoretical terms, every 'we' necessarily implies a 'they' (Hillier, 2003: 42). The critique draws here on Derrida's notion of the 'constitutive outside', the idea that every identity must be constituted as much by what it is not (its outside) as what it is (its inside) (Mouffe, 1993). The constitutive outside is *necessary* to all social identity; every inclusive 'we' must *exclude* a 'they' in order to exist (see also Agamben, 2005). Therefore, the ideal of inclusiveness must always go unrealized; every process must always exclude some affected parties in favor of others. Moreover, even if the ideal of inclusiveness were logically possible, it would be so difficult as to be virtually impossible in practice. The logistical task of ensuring that *all affected parties* actually manifest as reliable, interested participants is far

beyond the resources (financial, imaginative, communicative) of any agency that is conducting deliberative processes. Even if it could assemble such a group, the agency would then have to work to create a fair and non-distorted deliberation. In practice of course, what happens is that agencies get the *most* affected stakeholders to the table (or, more accurately, they get *representatives* of the most affected stakeholders), and exclude relatively less affected stakeholders. While that exclusion is practicable, it does not approach the communicative ideal. What is worse, the gap between reality and ideal is papered over far too easily in public discourse, so that processes that are necessarily exclusive get narrated as inclusive. Unavoidably, decisions taken through communicative action will be imposed on people who have not had a full say in the process, people who are nevertheless affected by the decision. And such exclusion is all too often not random, but systematic. While it may be going too far to say that poor and non-white communities are being systematically excluded from communicative processes, it is not at all too much to say that property owners are being systematically *included*. Under the hegemony of neoliberalism, it is almost inconceivable that property owners or other business interests will be among those excluded from a communicative process. They are, therefore, systematically advantaged by a decision-making practice that must of necessity exclude some affected parties, but virtually never excludes *them*. Moreover, that process is commonly understood to be inclusive, and its exclusions are rarely questioned.

A last group of critics are more willing to argue that the communicative model favors some social groups and not others (Young, 1996, 1999). Habermas's theory poses its mode of communication as universal, as common to all people regardless of culture, class, gender, etc. Because it relies so heavily on persuasion through rational argumentation, the communicative ideal requires, as Lynn Sanders (1997: 349) puts it, 'equality in epistemological authority', by which she means 'the capacity to evoke acknowledgement of one's arguments'. But some people hold less epistemological authority than others. They are therefore less likely

to be listened to; even when their arguments are stated according to the conventions of reason, they are more likely to be disregarded. Although deliberators will always choose to disregard some arguments, when this disregard is systematically associated with the arguments made by those we know already to be systematically disadvantaged, we should at least reevaluate our assumptions about deliberation's democratic potential. (Sanders, 1997: 349)

Sanders's argument can be read as a concern about the politics of 'recognition', about the unequal esteem that different groups are granted by a dominant culture (Fraser, 2001; Honneth, 1995; Taylor, 1992). There is wide agreement that cultural recognition is unequally distributed in society, and that such unequal distribution largely mirrors the unequal distribution of other resources. The debate about recognition runs directly to questions of gender, race, class, and sexuality, among other categories. Patriarchies systematically devalue cultural traits considered not masculine; racist societies systematically devalue

cultural traits considered not white; heteronormative societies systematically devalue cultural traits considered not straight. If people are not equally esteemed, their arguments are less likely to be accepted by others in deliberation. Critics like Sanders and Young argue this is a problem even skilled facilitation can only partly mitigate. Dominant classes, genders, races, and sexualities begin with greater epistemological authority before they even open their mouth. More specifically, in a society where neoliberal ideas are hegemonic, arguments about economic growth, competitiveness, and property rights carry that same epistemological privilege. Habermas's desire to remove physical force and coercion from democratic decision-making and replace them with 'the force of the better argument' is admirable (Habermas, 1985b). But the unequal distribution of esteem means that this new force can never be fair; it will always systematically advantage some over others (Burgess and Harrison, 1998; McGuirk, 2001).

So taken together, these critiques suggest that communicative action tends in the long term to reinforce the current status quo because it seeks to resolve conflict, eliminate exclusion, and neutralize power relations, rather than embracing them as the very terrain of social mobilization. To the extent that it aspires to Habermasian ideals, communicative planning is subject to that critique. Equally dangerous is the fact that Habermasian communicative planning, when it achieves agreement, is extremely effective at legitimating decisions. Communicative processes are generally deemed more inclusive, more fair, and more democratic than traditional ones. This dual concern (status quo and legitimation) can even be read in the hesitations of advocates of communicative and collaborative planning. Harris (2002: 41–2) argues 'in the same way that Habermas "allowed [sociologists] to feel radical without actually being so" (Friedmann, 1987: 267), collaborative planning promises a suppressed radical and transformative edge to practice'⁷ but it only offers 'limited scope for or evidence of delivery'. It is therefore subject to the charge that it is 'too conservative, reinforcing present relations, and that ultimately belies its foundations in the social mobilization tradition'. The charge hits the mark. Resisting neoliberalization requires movements that can actually deliver a fully expressed 'radical and transformative' politics.

'An uncanny resemblance'

Because the critique above specifically targets Habermasian ideals, one way for planners to avoid the critique is to renounce the ideals, as some have done. Most who distance themselves from Habermas don't reject communicative action altogether, but do so selectively. Therefore, there are many different ways such renunciation gets manifested. Each instance must be analyzed on its own terms to understand how the less-Habermasian result meshes with neoliberalization. Clearly this article cannot provide a complete account of all such cases. What I want to contend is that while stepping back from Habermas is to be encouraged, a partial reworking is probably not sufficient. In fact, selective renunciation can be even more dangerous than the full-blown communicative project. To illustrate those dangers, I analyze just one example – consensus-building. I do

not mean to say at all that the problems the example brings out can be extrapolated unproblematically to all others who have moved away from Habermas. Again, each instance must be analyzed on its own terms.

The example is the work of Innes and Booher, who write within the communicative planning tradition mostly about the more specific practice of consensus-building. Earlier in their work, they tie consensus-building very tightly to Habermas (Innes and Booher, 1999). In that article, after they give detailed exposition of the practice of consensus-building, they affirm that 'Innes (1996, 1998) has equated [consensus-building] to communicative rationality as articulated by Habermas (1985a, 1985b) and interpreted by Dryzek (1990) and Fox and Miller (1996)'. Several years later, however, Innes puts quite a bit more distance between consensus-building and Habermas. She acknowledges (2004: 10) that Habermas's 'concept of communicative rationality has an uncanny resemblance to the work of serious and skilled consensus-building efforts', but she claims '*consensus-building grew up as a practice without knowledge of or reference to Habermas*' (emphasis in original). She continues: just 'because we borrow from his insights and ideals does not mean we accept them fully' (Innes, 2004: 10). Unfortunately for Innes, the decision to distance herself from Habermas makes her approach far more problematic with respect to neoliberalization, not less. Innes's not-quite-Habermasian consensus-building has a far stronger tendency to support neoliberalization than communicative planning that adheres more closely to Habermasian ideals.

Innes's account of consensus-building clearly retains some Habermasian elements. She preserves both the ideal of undistorted communication and the desire to neutralize power. She believes, surprisingly, that 'the technology is . . . very well developed on how to create undistorted communication or ideal speech situations' (2004: 11). She also asserts (2004: 12) that power differences can largely be equalized for the purposes of deliberation 'with skillful management of dialogue, shared information, and education of the stakeholders'. However, she breaks with Habermas's ideal that participants should refrain from strategic action (i.e. action to serve their self-interest). That is a significant break from communicative action, which insists on the importance of deliberating toward the common good. Innes accepts instead (2004: 14) that 'stakeholders enter the process to serve their interests. They give up nothing they have outside the process unless it benefits them.' Her model becomes one in which various stakeholders work together to produce a creative new solution that is perceived by each group to benefit its self-interest; it may or may not benefit the common interest. The value added here is not, as in Habermas, that groups set aside their self-interest. It is rather that through deliberation participants invent new solutions they could not have imagined before engaging each other. Innes is unequivocal that in order to come to a shared solution, all participants must be satisfied with the outcome. No group can believe its self-interest was not well served. All participants must see the outcome, in short, as a win-win solution. By logical necessity, such a model guarantees that preexisting relations of power will be largely reinscribed. Relatively more powerful groups can ensure their interests are met (indeed it is a requirement), and so there is no possibility of fundamentally transforming existing relations of power. Innes

reinforces that point. While she believes power differences around the table can be equalized by facilitators, she freely admits that preexisting power relations are 'untouched by consensus-building . . . Consensus-building is not, in any case, the place for redistributing power' (2004: 12).

That admission makes Innes's consensus-building entirely safe for neoliberalization, since it guarantees that the hegemonic position of capital cannot be significantly challenged. Moreover, it offers business interests an extremely attractive legitimization tool. And Innes doesn't hide the legitimating potential of her model. The democratic deficits that neoliberalization produces means that business groups need the buy-in of 'disadvantaged and minority stakeholders' in order to legitimate the decision (2004: 11). In cases of land development, for example, such legitimization problems can stall the process, and if they can become chronic and generalized they can stall future development. In Innes's process, if developers incorporate the concerns of weaker groups into the agreed plan, developers 'can still get what they want without compromising their welfare if they provide some benefit to [weaker] groups' (p. 13). As long as they can ensure that the development goes forward in the short term and that development in general can proceed in a timely manner, developers' essential needs are met, and their projects are legitimated by the buy-in of disadvantaged groups. Such a model, far more nakedly than a more traditional Habermasian one, both preserves and legitimates the status quo. And it guarantees that a 'structural transformation of . . . systematic inequalities', as Sandercock (1998: 176) puts it, cannot take place.

Another way the consensus-building model (both in Innes and more generally) phases with neoliberalization is that it favors the concept of the 'stakeholder' (Healey, 1997). 'The term is used in a relatively literal interpretation referring to all those who have a stake in a particular place' (Harris, 2002: 35). Of course, 'citizens' is the traditional way to conceive of agents in a democratic decision-making process. While in some ways the stakeholder concept can expand the pool of potential participants, it is also easy, as Harris points out, for it to slide into the more literal and narrow notion of someone deeply impacted by the decision (they have something tangible at 'stake'), as opposed to the broader, civically interested 'citizen'. The stakeholder category can, therefore, easily narrow rather than broaden the range of participants. Moreover, and more directly relevant to neoliberalization, the move from citizens to stakeholders greatly changes the consideration afforded to property owners (Huxley, 2000). Property owners, as owners, are formally excluded from deliberations among citizens. However, they are virtually always formally *included* in deliberations among stakeholders. Thus a large corporation that owns property in a city's downtown cannot participate as a citizen in a downtown revisioning process, but it would be considered a major stakeholder and so have considerable standing under that rubric (see, for example, McGuirk, 2001). Such systematic augmentation of the power and influence of property owners is precisely the agenda of neoliberalism.

Lastly, there are strong parallels between most consensus-building (and communicative planning more generally) and neoliberalism in terms of their self-promotion as utopian. That is, both claim to offer a new and better way to

organize society. Proponents of consensus-building claim they offer a better way to make decisions, one that creatively invents new, win-win solutions that allow everyone to benefit, solutions that were not offered under the old way of doing things (Ehrmann and Stinson, 1999). Consensus-building ‘can produce unexpected results that seem almost magical to the parties involved’ (Forester, 1999a: 464). Neoliberals, for their part, make the parallel argument that unfettered economic growth increases overall wealth and allows all boats to rise. Everyone wins, they claim, when the market’s power is unleashed. Both want us to believe that if we follow their precepts, we will be freed from an unsatisfying contest for scarce resources – from antagonism, struggle, and ‘politics’ – and we can forge a new society in which everyone can achieve their goals. We need not engage in struggles for hegemony, both want us to believe, we can transcend them. While such resonance with neoliberalism is perhaps unintentional on the part of consensus-building advocates (although maybe not surprising given Habermas’s starkly modernist approach), it means that neoliberals can make a strong argument that consensus-building practices are entirely consonant with their vision.

Conclusion

It is instructive, I think, that in the article above Innes characterizes the current historical moment as a ‘global postmodern world’ typified by ‘the fragmentation of power’ (Innes, 2004: 16). Such a world, she argues, requires a *cooperative* strategy like consensus-building to bring multiple interests together across difference. Similarly, Healey (1997) sees collaboration as the way to shape coherent places in ‘fragmented societies’. If we instead see, with David Harvey (2005: 80), a neoliberalizing world characterized by ‘the increasing consolidation of oligopolistic, monopoly, and transnational power within a few centralized multinational corporations’, if neoliberalization constitutes ‘a successful project for the restoration of ruling class power’ (p. 203), if we recognize that to the extent power is being fragmented it is the power of those least advantaged by neoliberalization, then a very different strategy is called for. What is required is a strategy of *counter-hegemonic struggle* to achieve ‘a profound transformation of existing power relations’ (Mouffe, 2005: 52). For planning, that transformation requires ‘counter-hegemonic planning practice’ (Sandercock, 1998: 169) that can destabilize the current hegemony and establish an alternative one. It is clear that partly Habermasian consensus-building such as that offered by Innes cannot provide what is required. Those models that adhere more closely to communicative action, on the other hand, do offer a different solution: a ‘de-hegemonizing’ of political life such that the current consolidation of ruling class power would evaporate. I have tried to show, however, that critics have made a compelling case why communicative action, as a way forward in the current context, is far more likely to reinscribe and legitimate the current hegemony than it is to achieve its utopian project of a non-hegemonic politics.

While this article's focus is to offer a critique of communicative action rather than to elaborate alternatives to it, nevertheless I think some sketch of the alternative is necessary. Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 2000) understand that if we are to pursue a model of agonistic struggle, existing power differences mean that marginalized and disadvantaged groups will need to assemble creative and deeply *political* strategies to undo the current hegemony. In that context, they advocate what they call "chains of equivalence": movements made up of allied groups seeking broad transformation of existing power relations. The groups in the chain each have their own distinct relation to the existing hegemony, and each group's experience and interests are irreducible to the others. Each retains their difference. However, they are able to act in concert around an agenda of equivalence. That is, they see themselves as *equivalently* disadvantaged by existing power relations. 'Equivalent' in this case does not mean identical. They are not disadvantaged in precisely the same way, and Laclau and Mouffe explicitly reject the old-style social movements that reduced participants to a single social position (usually class). Each link in the chain remains distinct, but they operate together, in concert. The most talked-about model for this kind of idea is the so-called "anti-globalization" movement that carried out the string of protests in Seattle, Goteborg, Doha, Genoa, Geneva, Quebec, etc. The movement is better understood as an anti-neoliberalization movement, because it involved a range of groups (e.g. labor, environmentalists, anti-third-world-debt, human rights in China, etc.) that shared an equivalent opposition to the globalization of neoliberalism. Their concerns were in many ways disparate (outsourcing of jobs, sea turtles, rediscovering jubilee obligations, the occupation of Tibet, etc.), but they strategically defined themselves as equivalent and acted together to oppose the WTO and other institutions committed to neoliberalization (Hardt and Negri, 2004). Each member of the coalition achieved much more than they could have alone, but they did not have to dissolve into a large and uniform collective to do it. While they did not achieve the end of neoliberal hegemony, they certainly succeeded in identifying it and calling it into question.

Such chains of equivalence can be imagined on a much smaller scale as well. For example, in Seattle presently a coalition of environmental, neighborhood, Native American, small business, and environmental justice groups (called the Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition (DRCC)) has come together to advocate for greater popular empowerment in a Superfund cleanup of the city's main river. The cleanup is being overseen by a typically neoliberal governance arrangement: a public-private partnership (PPP) among major polluters has been given wide authority to study, plan, and carry out the cleanup. While the PPP's agenda is diverse, at its base is a vision of the river as a waterway and its banks as marketable property. The watershed, for the PPP, must meet the needs of the economy. The DRCC brings together groups with quite disparate interests. But they share an equivalent opposition to the PPP's waterway/property vision; they see the watershed instead as *inhabited*, by residents, by native tribes, by fish and wildlife. The diverse elements of the DRCC have

therefore consciously constructed together an equivalent vision for the river. They see that vision to be irreducibly different from that of the PPP, and, although they do not use Laclau and Mouffe's terminology, they understand their relations with the PPP to be agonistic. That is, they see the PPP as an adversary with whom they must struggle, not a partner with whom to build a cooperative solution through communicative action. I don't mean they never cooperate, never communicate, and always protest. They use a range of political practices. Rather I mean in the big picture they believe they want something fundamentally different from the PPP. While there may be ample room for negotiation and strategic compromise along the way, in the long term an *inhabited* watershed is very different from and in many ways incompatible with an *owned* watershed. Currently, the PPP's owned-watershed vision is hegemonic. The river is seen as first and foremost as a waterway that serves the needs of the economy. The DRCC struggles agonistically to supplant that hegemonic vision with a counter-hegemonic vision of the river as inhabited.

While communicative planners might hope the DRCC would be more willing to change its attitude if it only understood better the power a of communicative approach, I think the DRCC, as a result of their long experience in such politics, is the better judge. While they have not yet transformed the relations of power that govern Superfund cleanups, they have been able to make promising inroads: to exploit existing opportunities (and invent new ones) to call into question neoliberal governance structures and values, and to significantly empower non-owner interests to advance a distinctly different idea of what the watershed should be.⁸ The goal of counter-hegemonic movements is not to eliminate power, not to bracket or corral it, but to mobilize it. Against the neoliberal orthodoxy of property rights and rights to accumulation, such movements come together to claim other rights: to inhabit urban space, to maximize use-value rather than exchange value, and to play a central role in decision-making (Purcell, 2008). They claim, in Henri Lefebvre's (1996) words, a 'right to the city'. Such movements seek to resist the current hegemony and establish a new one. And such movements, though nascent, are proliferating. They are creatively resisting neoliberalization and insisting that another city is possible. As planners, we must learn from their struggles, and we must make it our business to actively nurture them, for they offer us a way out of the wilderness of neoliberalism. Reclaiming power through political mobilization is our best hope for creating more democratic, more just, and more civilized cities. But it requires that, with Laclau and Mouffe, planners consciously take up the hegemonic struggle against neoliberalization, rather than trying to paper it over with dreams.

Notes

1. Due to the constraints of a short article, this account of neoliberalization is brief. My goal here is merely to establish that neoliberalism exacerbates material inequality, and it therefore requires political legitimation. For readers wanting to learn more, there is an enormous literature. See, among others, Brenner and Theodore (2002); Harvey (2005); Jessop (2002); Mayer (2007); Peck and Tickell (2002); Purcell (2008); Swyngedouw et al. (2002b).

2. *Laissez-faire* means 'let do'.
3. *Aidez-faire* means 'help do'.
4. Each planning theory and practice, of course, is different in how fully it embraces Habermas's vision. It is only insofar as they do that the critique applies. The critique therefore applies more to some theorists and practitioners, and less to others.
5. In this light we should not be surprised to read Abram's (2000) finding that as more people participate in public decisions and increasingly engage with others on important public issues, the result is not greater intersubjective understanding and agreement, but the multiplication and deepening of conflict.
6. Habermas has been particularly interested in how constitutions could achieve that goal.
7. Recall here Habermas's goal of resisting the instrumental rationality of capitalism.
8. Another well-known local-scale example in this vein is the Bus Riders' Union (see Grengs, 2002).

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