Anti-hegemony on the web

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Abstract

Anti-hegemony on the web

To counter hegemony in capitalist societies, Marx predicted, based on Gramsci's theory of hegemony, that labor unions and political parties would organize the working class masses into agents of cultural resistance. In this presentation, part essay and part web demonstration, I will use Gramsci's analysis to demonstrate how Your Neighbors' Biz (in development at the time of this writing, with expected launch date in Dec. 2008) is an electronic, networked communication method of organizing the masses towards anti-hegemonic practices at the level of local economics.

Hegemony

Hegemony, or cultural domination, is Gramsci's methodology, launched like a Soy Bomb as a war of positioning by the ruling class. A hegemonic society is made possible by ideological leadership. Soy Bomb was written on Michael Portnoy's chest when he alarmingly rushed the stage during Bob Dylan's performance at the 1998 Grammy Award show. Portnoy's interruptive activity has become a meme that members of American culture who saw the performance interpret in various ways. Portnoy "launched" a Soy Bomb at Dylan and the Grammy Awards as a conceptual act. Gramsci's ideologically based war of position is also an act of launching a new set of ideas into society.

Hegemony

If hegemony is the result of an ideological hold on culture by normative rules and values, anti-hegemony is the directive of the counter-culture.

Global vs. Local

John Fiske begins his article, *Global, National, Local?* in response to Scott Sassa's (president of the Turner Entertainment Group in 1995) statement that "The 'middle class' of movie is going to be non-existent" (113).

Hegemony

Global hegemony erodes national culture; and this erosion may create socio-economic opportunities for such microscopic entities as local cultures on a transnational scale. For Fiske, a hybrid local culture, one that is always on the move, continuously deterritorializing and reterritorializing, provides optimism for the creation of a "middle class" of culture – one that opposes subordination by the transnational mainstream.

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Virtual communities

In his book The Virtual Community, Howard Rheingold wrote that a virtual community is established "when people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships" (Rheingold).

The voice of anti-hegemony within virtual communities

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Your Neighbors' Biz and RealCosts

In this paper, the case studies are my own project, Your Neighbors' Biz, and Michael Mandiberg's RealCosts. Your Neighbors' Biz is a Facebook application that promotes shopping off-the-grid, within a users' social network. RealCosts is a Firefox plug-in that inserts carbon footprints into websites that feature directions for air and ground travel.

Your Neighbors' Biz and RealCosts

During the rest of the talk, I used the web to locate these two projects and discuss their independent, counter-cultural articulations.