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Hegemony and the Sixties: Observations, Polemics, Meanderings

Anthony Ashbolt

The concept of cultural hegemony and the 1960s are interconnected in important ways. First, it was in the 1960s that a keen interest in the concept developed. Second, the battle for cultural hegemony today takes place in the shadow of the sixties. The neoconservative agenda has been developed with reference to Vietnam and the liberation movements of the 1960s. The neoconservatives certainly saw sixties radicalism as a challenge to power and privilege. Ironically, some on the Left now beg to disagree and see the radical sixties, in particular the counterculture, as paving the way for a new phase of consumer capitalism. This paper argues that despite the contradictions of cultural radicalism, there were genuine challenges to hegemony in the sixties and that it is important to keep alive the Utopian spirit of radicalism in that period.

Key Words: Hegemony, 1960s, Radicalism, Counterculture, Neoconservatives

It was in the 1960s that great interest in the work of Antonio Gramsci, and specifically the theory of ideological or cultural hegemony, was sown in the West. In 1957, two translations of Gramsci's writings were published yet, despite contributions from Howard Stuart Hughes (1959, 99–104) and Gwyn Williams (1960, 586–99), it was not until a series of articles in *New Left Review* and the publication of John Cammett's *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (1967) that he began to be more widely appreciated (Anderson 1976–7, 7; Genovese 1970, 284–316). Within Australia (but also internationally), Alastair Davidson helped pave the way with various articles, a booklet, and later a book (Davidson 1964, 1965, 1968, 1977). It is ironic that the Gramscian concept of hegemony rose to prominence in the sixties, as the struggles of that decade underpin the current attempt to cement a neoconservative hegemony.

Until the 1960s the word “hegemony,” if used at all, was a synonym for imperialism. This “commonsensical” usage has returned with vigor more recently, reflecting both America's status as the sole superpower and the bellicose policy drafted by the neocons. Strange bedfellows Noam Chomsky (2003) and Owen Harries (2004) use hegemony as imperialism, rather than in a Gramscian sense, yet the two distinct uses of the term need not be seen as totally separate. They are, indeed, dialectically interrelated. U.S. hegemony abroad is also, and always was, about hegemony at home. Force, of course, prevails on occasion abroad and consent at

home, but elements of both can be found in the imperial project and domestic policies. The “hearts and minds” policy in Vietnam, now being replicated in Iraq, was and is insane, but it reflects the very way the two senses of hegemony are bound together. Discussions of hegemony today, whether concerned with imperialism or with the reproduction of capitalist social relations domestically, resonate (both consciously and unconsciously) with the politics and culture of the sixties. This article examines the concept of hegemony through the lens of the sixties. First, the scene will be set by examining the contemporary context wherein the sixties is an ever present force. Second, various critiques of sixties radicalism will be examined to assess whether the movements of the period were genuinely counterhegemonic or if they simply prepared the way for the latest stage of consumer capitalism.

The Imagined Sixties

Not too far behind the surface of contemporary policymaking in America lurk the sixties. The first wave of neoconservatives rose to prominence in the 1970s as part of a backlash against what they alleged to be sixties excess—in particular, libertine values that undermined the bedrocks of religion, family, and community. Connected with this reaction was an attempt to reinvigorate American power abroad, highlighted most clearly in the Committee on the Present Danger and its warnings about American decline (Podhoretz 1980). The Kristols and the Podhoretzes sent forth their young, and thus it was that a new wave of neocons took center stage and began running the asylum. Their agenda was underpinned by the sixties: by black, women’s, and gay liberation, by alternative theories on education and social organization and everyday life—above all, by Vietnam. In social policy, the neocons or their spiritual advisors want to roll back modernity generally, and sixties morality specifically, while in foreign policy Vietnam is a constant, haunting memory that fuels a “never again will we be defeated” mentality. In that way, Vietnam is not remembered; it is simply used as a bludgeon to bash a Democratic nominee for president, discredit the antiwar movement, and set the framework for policy reversals in fields like abortion rights for women.

The attempt to construct an alternative society in the 1960s, to develop counter-institutions or to fashion a new way of life, was always regarded with scorn by conservative ideologues. It was seen as self-indulgence masquerading as social protest. Daniel Boorstin (1968, 121–34) characterized the new spirit of rebellion as one that stressed “sensation” rather than experience and instant gratification rather than long-term vision. Similar propositions were put forward by other established scholars like Lewis Feuer (1969) and Edward Shils (1988). Feuer’s study of student movements focused on generational underpinnings of rebellion, with radical commitment being seen as one moment or passage in life.

Like Boorstin, Feuer saw the young radicals’ commitment to community as essentially fake. Boorstin suggested they “deny any substantial community—even among their own ‘members’” (1968, 128). Feuer noted that “it was a remarkable sociological phenomenon to watch a Vietnam Day Committee parade and see a Nobel

Laureate in Physics marching in new found community with a nonstudent 'drop-out' activist" (1969, 472), and suggested that young radicals would use issues as a pretext for forging a "community of the young" (465). Writing somewhat later, Shils viewed the radical commitment to "self-determination" as little more than a celebration of the individual who lived outside any traditions or conventions (1988, 14–5). Allan Bloom (1987, 313–35) saw things in a similar fashion, and left readers of his best-seller in little doubt that sixties radicalism was a primary factor in the decay of American higher education. This sort of perception is not confined to conservatives. More recently, Stephen Ambrose (1995, v) lamented the failure of radicals in the sixties to establish a political party of the left. Instead, they rushed into a series of self-destructive indulgences devoted purely to pleasure. This, however, is conservative critique with a radical pose and others have developed a more authentically leftist analysis.

Most famously, Thomas Frank (1997) has detailed the degree to which advertising gurus and marketers generally were hep to the jive, rendering the counterculture a moment in the growth of consumer capitalism. To some degree, Frank was specifically reacting against a turn in cultural studies toward consumption over production and the valorization of various practises as counterhegemonic. As interest in hegemony grew during the 1970s, there was a gradual shift in thinking away from a focus on cultural cohesion under capitalism toward resistances to it (Harris 1992). Paradoxically, this shift reflected a Left in retreat, particularly retreat to the academy. Having awakened from the Utopian dreams of revolution in the 1960s, sections of the academic left sought solace in self-justifying theory: theory that elevated personal tastes and habits to a state of critical practice (Frank 2001, 276–306; Jacoby 1999, 67–99; Lodziak 2002, 11–30; Mulhern 1995, 31–40; McChesney 1996, 1–10). Television watching became an act of resistance and so, too, shopping and, indeed, anything that took one's fancy and helped soothe the pain of dashed desires. The risk of valorizing practises that sustain rather than confront hegemony is evident. In avoiding that risk, some critics have imagined that neoliberalism is somehow an outgrowth of sixties radicalism. This, however, is a misperception that at times reflects directly conservative critiques of the sixties. Clive Hamilton does detect sinister seeds in the sixties.

It is now becoming clear that the Sixties generation tilled the ground for the neoliberal reforms and "turbo-capitalism" of the 1980s and 1990s. Railing against the conventions of their parents, the counter-culture tore down the social structures of conservatism that, for all their stultifying oppressiveness, held the market in check. The demands for freedom in private life, freedom from the fetters of career and family, and for freedom of sexual expression were noble in themselves, but it is now evident that the demolition of customary social structures did not create a society of free individuals. Instead, it created an opportunity for the marketers to substitute material consumption and manufactured lifestyles for the ties of social tradition. (2003, 109–10)

There is some merit in this argument, but it is eclipsed by faulty reasoning. First, it reduces the countercultural challenge to demands that fit in neatly with a market

mentality. Moreover, elements of almost any social tendency can be used for purposes contrary to the intention. As the Situationists understood, even protest against the society of the spectacle can be incorporated by the spectacle. And Hamilton's argument tends toward silliness when he states that "Margaret Thatcher should be thankful to Alan [*sic*] Ginsberg and Timothy Leary" for their contributions to the destruction of social conventions that checked the power of the market (2003, 111). Leary, it must be acknowledged, was no radical and the same can be said of the drug culture generally. Ginsberg, however, was (at least periodically) an eloquent champion of causes, and his political weaknesses flow less from his assistance (*pace* Hamilton, of a very limited kind) in laying the foundations of neoliberalism than from his tendency toward a pacifist therapeutic mode of resistance. The problem with the Frank and Hamilton propositions is that they are (or can be seen as) simple and unilinear while things do not work that neatly. Evidence to the contrary is simply missed, buried, or judged as irrelevant. Take, for example, the countercultural rejection of career. This, so it seems, paved the way for a flexible labor market: nice try, but the two are disconnected. There is not even much suggestion of a mirror. The fact that tendencies within the counterculture can sometimes seem to reappear in different guise, responding to different social pressures and different ideas, does not establish direct connections. It can and does reveal contradictions within cultural radicalism, and it is to these contradictions that I now turn.

The Radical Sixties

Cultural radicals in the 1960s formulated a living critique of bourgeois society, an at times potent critique that signified the possibilities of a creative alternative. The intense subjectivity of that critique, which contributed to the dominance of style in everyday expression and social protest, generated numerous compromises with spectacular consumer culture. This sort of contradiction is not peculiar to radical subcultures, but rather, can be observed in subcultures generally, and also the avant-garde. As Guy Debord noted:

Dadaism and Surrealism are the two currents which mark the end of modern art. They are contemporaries, though only in a relatively conscious manner, of the last great assault of the revolutionary proletarian movement; and the defeat of this movement, which left them imprisoned in the same artistic field whose decrepitude they had announced, is the basic reason for their immobilization . . . Dadaism wanted *to suppress art without realizing it*; surrealism wanted *to realize art without suppressing it*. (1977, 191; emphasis in original)

Working-class youth subcultures in England after 1945 attempted to combine elements of traditional working-class culture—in particular, argot and habit, with elements of the dominant culture—in particular, commodity fetishism. Traditional styles of speech and behavior were mediated by new styles of dress, the possession of accoutrements like bikes (the function of which was partly symbolic), and the worship of celebrity heroes like Marlon Brando and James Dean. Class experience was thus

simultaneously reaffirmed and escaped; problems of adjustment to the social order were resolved in an imaginary way, and rebellion was thus contained (Clarke et al. 1976, 47–8). This is similar to the contiguous adjustment and rebellion witnessed by Paul Willis (1977) in the classrooms of working-class schools. The very adoption of rebellion in the classroom reflected an anti-intellectualism that helped confirm the pupils' working-class status. They thus learned to labor partly by rejecting schooling itself.

Cultural rebellion can function (much as Frank and Hamilton imagine regarding the sixties) as the avant-garde of bourgeois life-style innovation. This was partly true of the 1920s, when American youth proudly challenged cultural conventions but remained politically conservative (Fass 1977, 292–329). Transformations in the cultural realm then suggested more a refashioning of life style to accord with a new era of capitalism than the construction of an opposition. The increasing prominence of advertising in the 1920s helped rivet youthful experimentation to market trends in fashion (Ewen 1976; Lears 1983, 3–38). To some extent, the way for this development had been paved by the Greenwich Village radicals whose bohemianism combined uneasily with socialism and feminism (Fishbein 1982; Stansell 2000). Instead of prefiguring Utopia, perhaps they provided life-style examples for the indigent bourgeois. Yet, that is an overly cynical perspective because they, too, were caught up in contradictions, and later developments did not negate (or simply absorb) their own significant contributions.

Cultural transformations in the period after the Second World War tended to assist a new dynamic of capital accumulation centered on consumerism. Television was significant in this (particularly through the creation of the teenager) but so, too, was the development of suburbia. This is not, however, to suggest that all manifestations of cultural change were functional, automatically, to the capitalist system, but rather to place them within an overall context of shifting patterns of consumption and leisure. In reviewing Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*, a commentator for the *Wall Street Journal* speculated that the Japhy Ryder character would soon settle down comfortably in middle America as "an account executive or a book-editor with too-expensive family, a white Jaguar, a collection of Maxwell Bodenheim poems, a Hammond organ, a hi-fi set and a mild delusion he is somehow shaping the world" (quoted in Jezer 1982, 273). Yet the real-life Japhy Ryder was beat poet Gary Snyder; he was to become a prominent participant in the Haight-Ashbury experiment, and has never severed his close ties to the American radical tradition. Predicted compromises, sellouts, and capitulations do not always prove accurate.

Those who fail to acknowledge the contradictions see only one side of the story. Thus folk music aficionado Irwin Silber once argued that the capitalist system needed "the cultural revolution" (1970, 11). There is some truth to this. Things that might have been initially threatening to the Establishment, like rock music, very quickly became part of the Establishment. This is because they challenged the sort of decent social standards that restrained the consumerist dynamic within capitalism. More flexible social values were required by the new capitalism, and it just so happens that radical subcultures helped fashion them. They engaged in other activities as well, however, ones not so easily identified with the latest stage of capital accumulation. Moreover, just because these more flexible social values were useful to capitalism,

or necessary to its latest stage, does not mean that they are intrinsically compromised. Capitalism, after all, can possess progressive characteristics. An understanding of the limitations of, and contradictions within, cultural radicalism historically can help us to avoid exaggerating the potentialities of cultural radicalism today. It can also warn against its summary dismissal.

Silber put it well when he noted that “the capitalist system transforms the energy and vitality of the radical movement into its own social necessity” (11). Thus hippies ostensibly despised the culture of consumption, yet embraced some of its tendencies. New York’s Lower East Side Feminist Collective singled out a glaring contradiction: “hip culture imprisons women in the name of freedom and exploits women in the name of love” (1970, 39). In much the same way, Herbert Marcuse argued in 1967 that the tribal focus of hippies actually tended to spawn new forms of repression and selfishness, which mirrored the dominant culture. But his reported suggestion that “the community can become acute only after the advent of social change and not before” suggested a rejection of prefigurative politics (quoted in the *Berkeley Barb*, 4–10 August 1967). Moreover, it established a standard differentiation between before and after, a weakness in strategic thinking highlighted by Gramsci’s stressing of the need to cement counterhegemonic processes in civil society before any revolutionary assault on the state. That should not blind us to the strengths in Marcuse’s overall analysis, strengths that partly revolve around his injection of psychoanalytic theory into Marxism. Thus it was Marcuse (1955), more than Gramsci, who understood that repression was not simply an institutional phenomenon and that consequently every revolution historically had been betrayed because it threw up structures of control similar to those dispensed with. Yet even Marcuse was to rethink his early negative perspective on the counterculture, as evidenced by later works, *An Essay on Liberation* (1969) and *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* (1972).

Regular genuflection at the altar of commodity fetishism mediated the hippie critique of plastic, prefabricated, fast-frozen society; the critique, however, persisted. Processes of incorporation and negation did not always succeed in blunting the critical edge of cultural radicalism. Susan Krieger (1979) has studied the ways in which San Francisco’s hip radio station KMPX was coopted in the late 1960s. Yet KMPX was never particularly radical; it simply programmed the new music that other stations shunned. Experiments at the edges of mainstream culture should not therefore be confused with projects that offer genuine challenges. Marcuse’s warnings about sexual rebellion are, however, more generally applicable to radicalism. Desublimation can be repressive rather than liberating (Marcuse 1972, 57–77) and so, too, the smashing of tradition can simply foster insidious new means of control and regulation. Hippies did arguably help unleash a process of “profound cultural disintegration and transformation” (Flacks 1971, 72), but perhaps the final terms of their endeavor could be set by the society of the spectacle. Antagonism toward the dominant culture was accompanied by the furtive embrace of that culture. While their celebration of leisure signaled an escape from bourgeois order and discipline, Christopher Lasch (1971, 333) argued it also endorsed a bourgeois vision of Utopia. He did not point out that this bourgeois vision had its own strengths as well as weaknesses. These days, such a vision seems almost inspired.

260 All youth subcultures resist, albeit often incoherently, the process which makes
them part of the parent culture and, in that way, they reveal and act upon
contradictions in that culture (Cohen 1972, 23). The social world confronted by the
counterculture was itself suffused with contradictions: there was the glamour of the
spectacle and the turgid sameness of life itself; the idolization of the individual and
265 the triumph of mass society; the pursuit of happiness and the reification of pleasure;
the reliance upon collective will (expressed cogently by the ideology of consensus)
and the replacement of that will by images of politics and life manufactured by the
mass media. The subcultural response to the contradictions was framed primarily at
the level of style and symbol. Style was a key fact because it enabled “the
communication of significant difference” (even if at times an illusory difference) and
270 thus of a group identity (Hebdige 1979, 102). As Stuart Hall once suggested, to some
extent hippies “made the question of *style itself* a political issue” (1969, 194). Their
life-style politics partly involved an endeavor to both reclaim urban community and
strike out for the wilderness. This was prefaced by a critique of the Faustian ideals of
progress that had increasingly ruptured human community and distanced people from
the natural environment (Stent 1978, 15–33, 71–6). The fact that this critique was
275 somewhat incoherent does not lessen its significance. If anything, it reaffirms the
oppositional trajectory of much countercultural thought and practice.

John Sanbomatsu has developed a critique of what he calls “the expressivist
aesthetic” in sixties radicalism. It is this aesthetic (or, following Russel Jacoby [1975,
101–18], what could be called “the politics of subjectivity”) that supposedly
280 underpinned both radical activism and radical theory in the period. Sanbomatsu
(2004, 21–50) reveals little interest in the activism, preferring to focus on the ideas.
This, however, is problematic as for many there was a dialectical relation between
the two. Thus the stress on feeling, on personal authenticity, on moral commitment,
arose directly out of experiences within the civil rights movement. Without that
285 movement connection, it can seem like therapeutic babble. Along with Julie Stephens
(1998), Sanbomatsu sees postmodernism emerging out of sixties radicalism. Unlike
Stephens, however, he is not concerned specifically with the protest activity. This is
peculiar, given his overall project of resuscitating Gramsci.

You cannot hope to assess the legacy of the sixties from a Gramscian perspective
without confronting the many attempts to develop counterinstitutions, alternative
290 communities, the underground press, “free spaces” generally (Evans and Boyte 1982,
55–65; 1986). These could be seen as concrete elements in a somewhat under-
developed war of position, elements arguably weakened by an “expressivist
aesthetic,” but still ones that offered a challenge to the dominant culture. Where
Stephens reports glowingly on the playful politics of subversion in groups like the
295 Diggers, Sanbomatsu fails to address particular projects in any detail and thus tends
to rely upon generalization. The Diggers do not rate a mention, but in a telling
passage the Yippies do.

300 The expressivist aesthetic enabled a qualitative deepening of commodity
logics in the lifeworld. Foucault’s call for an ethic of “care of the self”
would become the rallying cry of global capitalism, which was happy to
oblige by engineering new desires and products for individuals in multiple

niche markets. The Yippie cry “Do It!” had been transformed by the Nike Corporation’s *detournement* into “Just Do It!” while banks put up expressivist billboard ads like “Use your American Express Card. Win prizes. Scream uncontrollably.” (Sanbomatsu 2004, 49–50)

Dastardly clever thing, this capitalism. And to think that sixties radicals furnished it with new slogans and styles, spectacularizing the very spectacle they sought to overthrow. Sanbomatsu recognizes that this is only one side of the story (in actuality, it is much less than that); a slightly earlier passage brings out the strengths of “the expressivist cultural habitus,” its unleashing of potent forces of imagination, and its exposure of systems of control and regulation in the fabric of everyday life (2004, 49). It did this and it ushered in a new stage of hypercapitalism? Not quite.

While Sanbomatsu is right to point to links, they are neither direct nor causative but, rather, indicative of consumerism’s power to incorporate almost anything. Take this ad for a retirement village: “In the sixties your generation championed some mighty causes. The Vietnam War, women’s rights, racism, the environment . . . you challenged each and changed the world for the better in the process. Now as you hit 50 you realize that there is one last wrong that needs to be righted.”

The Retirement Village

This publicity for Aurora Developments does not constitute proof that sixties radicalism opened the way for retirement villages. Old age and the entrepreneurial spirit might have had something to do with that. Yes, the ad is tongue in cheek with a dash of surrealism and a splice of merry pranksterism, but then, advertising copywriters can be clever and can even draw on oppositional (or sometimes pseudo-oppositional) currents to sell their concepts. A slogan like “Do It!” was less a call to arms than the title of a book by Jerry Rubin. Nike’s use of the slogan (if there is, indeed, a direct connection) proves nothing but the capacity of spectacular society to transform any image or concept into something functional. Did the antiglobalizers create the dynamic whereby even images of shops being trashed could be used as selling points by the shops themselves? Here we are dealing with processes over which oppositional movements can exert no real power. There are, however, instances where such movements do directly compromise their opposition or exhibit contradictory tendencies. Compromise can be seen in the sixties hippie marketplace. Ron Thelin (1968), proprietor of the Haight-Ashbury Psychedelic Shop, once made the following plea on behalf of Zen finance capital: “What we are talking about is the evolution of a new culture, a new civilization. We have to find new means of exchange . . . I understand that money is energy and it has to flow, it’s a matter of channelling.”

Needless to say, Thelin and other hip proprietors did little to galvanize a counterhegemonic spirit in the hippie communities. This was left to groups like the Diggers, but even they were suffused with contradictions. Thus, the Digger ideology and practice of “free” (including its free stores) did on one level prefigure a society

345 less obsessed with material wealth, less voracious in its appetite to turn everything
into a commodity. Yet the free store, or free food in the park, or the rituals of money
burning (also used by Yippies) were activities fueled by the booming economic
350 conditions. Moreover, these counterinstitutions and rituals could display a marked
insensitivity to the needs of the poor. One day some black women from the Fillmore
District came into the Free Store and were surprised to hear everything was free and
that they could take what they needed. The women began to carry out piles of clothes
from the racks until a worried Digger stressed they should only “take what they
need.” One woman responded tartly, “We can sell it to make money. We need the
money” (Forman 1979; Forman quoted in Morris and Merton 1987, 220).

355 Evidence of aesthetic expressivism does abound in Digger ideology. The Digger
Papers opines, “So a store of goods or clinic or restaurant that is free becomes a
social art form. Ticketless theater,” nonetheless, the Diggers’ Free City program
resonated with the spirit of counterhegemonic practice, including free schools,
hospitals, and housing (n.d, 3–17).

Conclusion: The Sixties as Cultural Battleground

360 Actual and projected counterinstitutions were a vital part of sixties radicalism and
not all of them tilled the soil for rampant consumerism. Many were significant
breeding grounds for activists in the civil rights, antiwar, women’s liberation, and
environmental movements. They failed in their revolutionary endeavors, but their
dreams of revolution kept alive a sense of Utopian possibilities, and it was this sense
365 that encouraged experimentation with the idea of the good society. As noted, the
ideas and the activism often reflected contradictions. This is but one reason
generalizations about sixties radicalism have to be treated carefully. Critics of the
movements tend to ignore, slide past, or reconstruct the actual histories of political
and cultural dissent, and end up providing a caricature. Sanbomatsu (2004) at times
370 runs that risk, if only because his source material on the period is rather narrow.

Certain forms of cultural radicalism, in particular, were susceptible to distorted
characterization partly because of their internal contradictions. Political radicalism
was itself subject to media hype, whipped-up sloganeering, and personality fetishism.
Tendencies toward subjectivity and therapeutic consciousness were present in the
375 New Left, even in early treatises like the Port Huron Statement. It needs to be
understood, however, that the subjectivity explored by the New Left was mostly of a
different order from that mulled over within the various cults and therapies that
flourished in the 1970s. It had a definite political framework and was not simply a
quest for personal development. Parallel, counter, or alternative institutions were
380 central to this framework, but not as units of a grand theory. The escape from
ideology and strategy was signaled early on. Tom Hayden (1961) advocated a
“radicalism of style” and a little later (1962) encouraged his fellow new radicals to
“leave the isolated world of ideological fantasy” and “allow your ideas to become
part of your living and your living to become part of your ideas.” Here, of course, is

385 one crucial source for the later slogan “the personal is political.” Hayden himself
owed a huge intellectual debt to C. Wright Mills (who was, indeed, the subject of
Hayden’s graduate thesis). Mills’s eloquent exploration of the dialectical relation
390 between the personal and the political can be found in the first chapter of his
1959 book *The Sociological Imagination*. And there we find a still pertinent warning:
“In every intellectual age some one style of reflection tends to become a common
denominator of cultural life. Nowadays, it is true, many intellectual fads are widely
taken up before they are dropped for new ones in the course of a year or two. Such
enthusiasms may add spice to cultural play, but leave little or no intellectual trace”
(Mills 1970, 20).

395 One thinks immediately of sections of the Australian left moving from Lukácsianism
to Althusserianism via Gramsci only to end up with Foucault or Derrida. Yet there is
also that point about “one style of reflection” tending “to become a common
denominator of cultural life.” Here Mills, apart from sounding somewhat Gramscian,
was predicting the triumph of “the sociological imagination,” an imagination that
400 promises “an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connexion with
larger social realities.” Instead, of course, our time has been marked by the steady
infiltration of neoliberal ideas and assumptions into the very texture of daily life. The
connection between personal and political is thereby severed except inasmuch as
personal aggrandisement becomes a guiding principle of life.

405 The sixties have become a whipping boy, held responsible for the breakdown of
the family, the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, the
proliferation of drugs, the general decay of morality, and the decline of patriotic
sentiment. The sixties underpin the war on political correctness and the so-called
culture wars. It underpins war in another sense because, in the wake of defeat in
410 Vietnam, the culture warriors also turned their attention to American power in the
international arena. War in the future, they implied or just argued, was to be won. *No
More Vietnams* was stolen from the antiwar movement and turned into its opposite.
Guevara’s call for “one, two, three, many” Vietnams now seems somewhat chilling.
Iraq is not Vietnam; that is hardly a surprising geographical fact. It reverberates,
415 however, with memories of Vietnam, something the Rumsfelds of this world and their
supporters in journalism and academe do not want brought into focus. Vietnam
amnesia sustains hegemony today, as do negative characterizations of sixties
radicalism.

420 In struggling for civil rights and against war, radicals in the 1960s also developed
ideas about the good society. Such ideas tend to evoke at best a tolerant nostalgia.
Yet, as Gramsci understood, they are the stuff of politics: “What ‘ought to be’ is
therefore concrete; indeed it is the only realistic and historicist interpretation of
reality, it alone is history in the making and philosophy in the making, it alone is
425 politics” (Gramsci 1971, 172). These days, pessimism of the intellect feeds pessimism
of the will. Dreams of the good society have melted before a barrage of claims that no
alternative exists. The task of confronting hegemony is also the task of reviving
dreams and resuscitating memory.

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