



## Resisting Capitalist Reproduction in the Liminal State

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### Abstract

*World-systems theory is known for innovative approaches to understanding resistance to forms of oppression, especially as it pertains to anti-capitalist and environmental social movements. This article invites world-systems theorists to rethink resistance by recognizing that the modern world-system is in a soft collapse driven liminal state of transition to a new world-system. The provocation challenges conventional world-system understandings of resistance by inquiring if capitalism perishes or reproduces in the liminal state. The article finds the latter to be valid due to profit-making potential of resolving the perfect storm of crises. It argues capitalist reproduction is anchored within the 2030 Agenda, which is a plan generated by technocrats for weathering the perfect storm of crises. The article argues the 2030 Agenda serves as capitalism's accumulation mechanism through the liminal state transition. The agenda, however, calls for decarbonization, which requires a drastic increase in resource extraction that portends the end of capitalism through ecocide. To realize a just transition, this article advocates for the pluriverse proposition as a key to liminal state resistance, a position that places strategic primacy on defending other knowledges against the monoculture of the 2030 Agenda. The article proposes leveraging the instability, disruption, and confusion of the liminal state to undermine the legitimacy of technocratic elites through counter power campaigns informed by assemblage theory and classical counter-insurgency strategy. The article contributes to world-system theory by bringing the liminal state concept into our understandings of the future world-system.*

**Keywords:** Capitalism, Liminal State, Resistance, Soft Collapse, 2030 Agenda, Extractivism



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In the thirty-year update to *Limits to Growth* published in 2004, Meadows, Randers, and Meadows warned the opportunity for averting a collapse of the planetary system was rapidly closing. Twenty years later, an abundance of indicators supports the conclusion that the formula of planetary limits, growth and delays has driven the modern world-system into a soft collapse (Kuecker 2020). Echoing the *Limits to Growth* warning, over 11,000 scientists led by Ripple (2025) have warned humanity that only a rapid paradigm shift will prevent a hard collapse. In 2023, another group of experts led by Richardson put humanity on notice that our way of life had pushed the world-system past six of nine planetary boundaries. Also in 2023, Ceballos used the “tree of life” metaphor, in which humanity is hacking off tree limbs, to explain the current reality of mass extinction. While working for KPMG, one of the big four accountancy firms, Herrington (2021) tested the validity of the 1972 *Limits to Growth* study. She found the business-as-usual model valid, while arguing the avoidance of collapse would require a massive culture shift—a departure from consumer culture—and a massive technological game changer. The World Economic Forum’s 2025 *Global Risks Report* surveyed 900 experts who expressed negative future outlooks and a “skepticism that current societal mechanisms and governing institutions are capable of navigating and mending the fragility generated by the risks we face today.” Numerous UN agencies have addressed elements of the collapse in their reports. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment 2023 Synthesis Report, for example, finds “Climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health (very high confidence). There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all (very high confidence)” (The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2023,23).

Despite such indicators, the community of world-system theory scholars hesitate in positioning analysis within the context of an already existing collapse. Chase-Dunn and Almeida (2020), for example, reference my 2007 “perfect storm” proposition, which asserted crises had started the collapse of the modern world-system. Chase-Dunn and Almeida (2020:103), however, conditionally consider the possibility of collapse, “The perfect storm that might provide an opening for transformational global social change... may have arrived with the global COVID-19 pandemic.” Errantly viewing the status of the current world-system as a continuation of the modern system has significant implications for world-systems theory thinking about resistance movements and the prospects of social justice in the twenty-first century.

This article considers the question of resistance to capitalism during the current collapse driven transition from the modern world-system to a new, yet to be known world-system. To approach the question of resistance, it is necessary to consider the extent capitalism reproduces itself through the transition, and to what extent the collapse of the modern world-system is capitalism’s end. In answering these questions, the paper advances a seven-point argument. First, the modern world-system is currently in a state of soft collapse that leads to a transition to a new,

yet to be defined world-system. This transition is called the “liminal state” (Kuecker 2020). Second, in response to the collapse, a complex of technocratic elites commanding central positions within the accumulation mechanism of capitalist reproduction generated a plan for enduring the onslaught of systemic crises. The plan is called the “2030 Agenda.” This accumulation mechanism drives the energy transition to the maladaptation of decarbonization through electrification rather than degrowth, which assures the reproduction of capital at the cost of the extractivist ecosystem destruction anticipated by ecosocialists such as Kovel (2007), Moore (2015), as well as ecocommunist like Saito (2022, 2024). Third, the power/knowledge of the 2030 Agenda’s epistemic-technocratic rationality is made unstable by the soft collapse, which causes epistemic panic (Kuecker 2023) among its actors and makes the 2030 Agenda precariously vulnerable to resistance. Fourth, resistance to capitalism in the liminal state needs to target the 2030 Agenda’s function as one of capitalism’s accumulation mechanisms. Fifth, processes of emergence define the behavior of the world-system in the liminal state, where system potential for liberation from the oppressions of the modern world-system become viable paths in the formation of the new world-system. Sixth, the diversity of social movements, everyday resistances, and other knowledges constitute a pluriverse of resistance that can lead to the formation of a new world-system. And seventh, advocacy for the pluriverse merits resistance to the 2030 Agenda.

### **The Liminal State**

A central premise in ecosocialist thinking maintains capitalism’s infinite need for growth causes an accumulation mechanism incompatible with the finite boundaries of the planetary ecosystem. Kovel’s (2007) *The Enemy of Nature* bluntly asserts humanity faces the “end of capitalism or the end of the world,” while Moore (2013:13) maintains nature no longer yields its bounty “on the cheap,” an accounting that suggests capitalism’s periodic accumulation crisis is at a point “more epochal: the breakdown of the strategies and relations that have sustained capital accumulation over the past five centuries.” While it does not name capitalism, we can reference the 1972 *Limits to Growth* study to see how scholars have recognized “business as usual” is driving the modern world-system to an early twenty-first century collapse. Tooze’s “polycrisis” has become part of the global elite’s discursive framing of the state of the world, especially at events like the World Economic Forum (Kuecker 2023). For capitalists and liberal internationalists, system precarity is an omnipresent order of the day.

In 2007, I proposed the modern world-system had entered a state of collapse that is uneven in space and time, where geographies of the periphery enter first, followed by the semi-periphery, while the core persists with the modern world-system but in an unsustainable state of extreme overshoot. E. P. Thompson’s (1965) “great arch” metaphor is useful for seeing the collapse

argument. Thompson maintained the bourgeois revolution in England was not one event that made it clear to all a transition had happened. Rather, he saw it as a decades-long process of change, in which events happened like the smaller stones in an arch. The first stones set may not make it clear to the observer or participant that a revolution is in play. The arch does have a keystone that holds the structure together and which all the other stones lead into and out of in forming the arch. Collapse can operate in a similar fashion, with the early phases barely noticeable, while the fog of transition that sets in can make the collapse hard to see or see correctly. It may not be until the end of these processes that the events constituting the collapse are recognized as such.

Adding to the discernment challenge is the kind of collapse one is experiencing. In 2020, I updated the argument in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I argued the pandemic induced clarity about the kind of collapse we were in, which I maintain is a soft collapse where the move to disordered simplicity is staged over time, often decades. With the pandemic-driven soft collapse all the geographies entered the collapse, although unevenness in space and time persists. Regardless of the path outcome, the soft collapse also positions the global system in a liminal state of transition between the modern world-system and a new world-system. Gramsci called such transitions an “interregnum” when “morbid symptoms appear” (Gramsci 1971, 275 and Hobson 2025). Looking at historical world-systems, Chew (2007) views such transitions as “dark ages” when systems experience repeated crises driven by ecological stress and human responses. Such moments are transitional processes that impact the long duration of societal evolution. Liminal states are disruptive, unstable, and confusing in ontology, epistemology, and phenomenology. Blinders to the reality of the liminal state exacerbate the confusion, and in the current liminal state, the persistence of modernity, especially its legacies of “development” and post-colonialism, make liberation from modernity problematic if not an impossibility without a significant collapse. The persistence of modernity in the liminal state is an anachronism, so much so its narrative falters as regimes of truth that anchor human experience with common sense stories about the meaning of everyday life (Hartley and Kuecker 2022).

### **Houdini versus the Gravedigger**

World-system theorists such as Robinson (2004) build from Marxist theory in illustrating how capitalism reproduces itself by resolving the crises caused by its contradictions. Each successive crisis drives capitalism to its newest iteration in ways that generate ever deepening crises. Presumably the crisis will outmatch capitalism’s innovative capacity for Houdini escapes from the demise. Ecosocialists maintain capitalism’s gravedigger comes in the form of ecocide rather than the factory worker. In the liminal state evidence indicates the Houdini of capitalist reproduction persists through the profit-making opportunities of “sustainable development.” We can turn to the post-2015 world that the technocratic elite concocted to avoid a catastrophic ecological crisis to

illustrate the point. The post-2015 world is a term used to define the convergence of United Nations agencies' agenda renewal processes as they address the increasing scope, scale, intensity, and speed of global crises. Also known as the 2030 Agenda, the renewed agency agendas included: UNDRR's transition from the Hyogo Framework to the Sendai Framework in March 2015, the transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, the December 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, and UN Habitat's launch of Habitat III, also known as the "New Urban Agenda," in October 2016. Taken together they reproduce the power/knowledge of experts that maintains the hegemony of the modern world-system's liberal internationalism where technocratic rationality sustains capitalist accumulation by promoting development, managing mounting systemic risks, and creating vast market opportunities for the secondary circuit of capital to invest surplus capital (Harvey 1978). Given the great, if not unprecedented crisis of systemic collapse, capital seizes the opportunity for its reproduction through the profit-making markets generated by the 2030 Agenda (Hartley and Kuecker 2021, 2022).

Writing in 1956, C. Wright Mills examined the power of elites in the United States, those "whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major consequences." Mills continues,

For they are in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society. They rule the big corporations. They run the machinery of state and claim its prerogatives. They direct the military establishment. They occupy strategic command posts of the social structure, in which are now centered the effective means of power and the wealth and celebrity which they enjoy (Mills 1956).

In *Giants: The Global Power Elite*, Phillips (2018) brings focus to an even narrower cohort, the transnational elites whose control of global finance and vast wealth transcend the power of nation-states. Along with Mills and Phillips' elites, there is another set who are less visible and less wealthy, yet they are positioned within the global relations of power in a way that results in their having significant influence over the outcomes of the twenty-first century. These elites are the technocrats whose high level of training and specialized knowledge earn their legitimacy as experts, especially those working in the public policy complex of institutions, organizations, states, and corporations that created the 2030 Agenda. This complex gains its position of power by serving as an infrastructure, what Easterling (2014) calls "extrastatecraft," for capitalism's accumulation mechanism.

With two-thirds of the modern world-system's population inhabiting cities by 2050, it is apparent that the outcome of the liminal state rests on what happens with the process of urbanization. That outcome may depend on UN Habitat and Habitat III's New Urban Agenda,

which sets out the plan for humanity's urbanization until 2036. Launched in 2016, it is a twenty-year agenda (Caprotti et al 2017; Kuecker 2015a; Parnell 2016; Revi 2016; Satterthwaite 2016). We can understand the significance of the New Urban Agenda for capitalist reproduction by turning to Lefebvre's 1970 thesis that the modern world-system had been totally urbanized. He anticipated the ways neoliberalism would drive globalization while centering that process in the "implosion/explosion" of the urban form where the reproduction of capital was defined by the logics of urbanization (Lefebvre 1996 [1968]; Shields 1999; Elden 2004; Marcuse 2009; Stanek, Schmid and Moravánszky 2014; Brenner 2017). Significantly, Lefebvre anticipated "planetary urbanization" would lead to the "critical zone," the moment of capitalism's gravedigging, through the revolutionary potential of the urban form, what he called the "right to the city" (Purcell 2002, 2003; Harvey 2012; Merrifield 2005, 2014). Radical political ecology converged with planetary urbanization to constitute a school of thought about the planetary crises that anchors capitalism's metabolic rift within the urban question (Arboleda 2015, 2019; Brenner and Ghosh 2025). The 2030 Agenda sits precariously on the pinhead of the New Urban Agenda's capacity to avert capitalism's ecocide gravedigging while making profits.

At the launch of Habitat III in Quito, Ecuador, in October 2016, participants quickly discerned the New Urban Agenda was a mile wide with aspiration and hardly an inch deep with practical implementation. Facing the obvious failure, the technocrats who ginned up the plan, reverted to one of their favorite strategies—can-kicking—as they announced the path to implementation would be undertaken at World Urban Forum IX (WUF9), two years forward, in Kuala Lumpur. At WUF 9 in 2019, it became apparent that implementation centered on smart cities (Hartley and Kuecker 2020), as the promise of data-driven metabolic efficiencies jived nicely with the positivist fallacies of technocratic rationality: if only we had enough data to finally quantify the qualitative then humans—or their machines—could finally control the universe and resolve humanity's problems. Smart cities not only offered the implementation "silver bullet" for realizing the 2030 Agenda, but they also provided vast profit-making opportunities for capitalists, especially for information technology that was on the leading edge of early twenty-first century circuits of capital. Cisco, for example, played a lead role in the development of a smart city from scratch, South Korea's New Songdo City (Kuecker 2013, 2015b, and 2015c). The company knew that to survive as an internet "plumber" it needed to transcend its dominance in routers by capturing the emerging "internet of things." Planetary urbanization offered an expansive market for Cisco through smart urbanism. Alphabet also understood the potential when it formed Sidewalk Labs to build smart cities. China's urban boom embraced the smart city model, while experimental cities like Abu Dhabi's Masdar City (Caprotti 2015), as well as India's fantastical quest to build 100 smart cities (Kuecker, Stamets and Sarkulov 2020) represent how smart cities became the urban norm within the 2030 Agenda (Hartley and Kuecker 2020).

During the 2016 World Urban Forum in Quito, a presenter at a panel about the launching of Habitat III held up a router and boldly declared the twenty-first century infrastructure of the modern world-system would require a massive increase in the extractive industry. During the week's events, her presentation was the only voice from the official program that raised the core issue of the modern world-system's unsustainable planetary urbanization. The prescience of the presenter with the router shows us that the capitalist accumulation mechanism feeding off the planetary crisis drives us to a deepening of the catastrophe. The gravedigging of sustainable development is a deliberate choice made by humans as options are present.

The other path not chosen is degrowth. While many advocates of the idea offer many iterations of the concept, we can find common ground in its premises (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2015; Heinberg and Fridley 2018; Kallis 2020; Kallis et al 2018; Hickel 2020; Jackson 2009; Saito 2022, 2024). First, it holds that the best path forward in the planetary crisis is to scale back the complexity of the modern world-system by slowing the growth of its economy. Degrowth is a dematerialization of the economy, which reduces the ecological footprint by decreasing the volume of materials extracted to meet the demand of consumption. Degrowth is an anti-capitalist proposition as it defies the necessity of infinite growth while also challenging humans to break from the culture of mass consumption. Along with less environmental resources exploited for human consumption, degrowth promises to reduce our carbon footprint by lessening the extent of energy needed for production. A range of economic models fall within the degrowth umbrella, including the circular economy, permaculture, or indigenous models like the Andean region's *Sumak Kawsay* (Altmann 2017). Some might include "natural capitalism," in the mix, because it brings into the capitalist balance sheet the costs and benefits of ecosystem services (Hawken, Lovins, and Lovins 1999). This accounting presumably permits the correct functioning of capitalist markets that bring perfect outcomes through practices like "impact accounting" that aim to eliminate ecological cost externalization from corporate bookkeeping (Giampietro, Mayumi, and Sorman 2012; Makower 2021; King and Pucker 2025). Others object to putting ecological lipstick on the capitalist pig and maintain the natural capital accounting trick does not change the core contradiction between infinite expansion and finite host.

Advocates of degrowth fell into a rigorous debate with advocates of decarbonization (Grubler et al 2018; Heinberg and Fridley 2018). Consistent with the oxymoron, "sustainable development," and consequently favored by the technocratic elite locked into the mentality of the 2030 Agenda, decarbonization holds out the promise of a painless energy transition that resolves the climate change predicament while remaining loyal to capitalism's infinite growth. To win the 2030 Agenda future, electrification was the key, which would be fueled not with cursed hydrocarbons but rather the promise of renewable energy: wind, solar, and hydro. Decarbonization, however, has at least two limitations. First, renewable energy is a very poor substitute for the phenomenal

energy return on investment (EROI) provided by hydrocarbons. With returns pushing 30:1, hydrocarbons have done historically unprecedented work—in the thermodynamic meaning—for humanity. Without hydrocarbons the modern world-system’s complexity is impossible. We are, as Yergin (1991) explained, a hydrocarbon civilization. While wind, solar, and water can produce electricity at sufficient scale and price, they are poor substitutes for sustaining the modern world-system. Likewise, the work hydrocarbons do for the modern world-system extends beyond fuel for its industrial plant. It includes the industrial food system that feeds eight billion people, as well as the petrochemicals essential to almost the entirety of our manufactured products. Decarbonize and the modern world-system will need to find another way to feed eight billion mouths growing to ten billion. Second, decarbonization’s electrification will result in a radical increase in the demand for mineral resources, which will require a dramatic growth in the mining sector and its devastating ecological footprint (Glusing et al 2021; McKinsey 2022). Rio Tinto Zinc’s profits will be made, deserts will replace the forest carbon sinks, displaced peasants will be left to migrate to the cities in the positive feedback loop of the modern world-system’s planetary urbanization, and tribal peoples will undergo the final act of culturecide.

Ranked at number 146 in the Fortune 500, Cummins Inc. offers a case study for considering the place of decarbonization within capitalist reproduction during the liminal state. Cummins Inc. employs 73,000 people within its global operations and markets. The company has a strong reputation as the industry leader in the manufacture of large engines used to power industrial plants and transportation systems. It is an important enterprise to consider because its product sits at the point of convergence between energy and production, which makes it a key infrastructure for the modern world-system’s decarbonized energy transition. Cummins Inc. also has an industry leading reputation for meeting environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals. The company recognized its product faced market extinction with the end of hydrocarbons, which led it to a radical transformation in its product: a switch from diesel-powered engines to electric motors. In March 2023, Cummins Inc. launched its energy transition through its Accelera program for a zero emissions future, which involved a \$1.5 billion investment into research, development, and acquisitions. Cummins Inc. executive, Amy Davis, states that the “purpose of Accelera is simple—to secure a sustainable future for the industries that keep the world running” (Cummins Inc. 2023a, 2023b).

Evaluating the reproduction of capital within Cummins Inc.’s energy transition highlights four essential points. First, the infrastructural shift involved with decarbonization is an important accumulation mechanism for capitalism’s reproduction in the liminal state. Second, the company’s Accelera venture makes renewable energy infrastructure, science, and technology highly visible within the ESG market mechanisms, which also renders extractivism invisible within the same mechanisms. The accumulation mechanism persists with the same critical flaw: the ecosystem is

not factored into capitalist reproduction. Third, the remarkable transformation in the company's core function confronts the tyranny of time, where the fundamental issue of how fast capitalist markets can create the depth of economic, social, and cultural transformation as prognosticated by Herrington (2021) is pressing. The target date for Cummins Inc.'s zero-emissions commitment is 2050, which effectively kicks the can down the road. Finally, the Cummins Inc.'s case study suggests the Tainter Curve's (1988) additional tyranny of time, where each new wave of innovation causes two exponential processes to happen: the duration of the wave is shortened, and the extent of change becomes deeper and more intense. As Homer-Dixon (2000), Hallett (2013) and West (2016) illustrate, the modern world-system faces the predicament where the time available for making ever more profound innovations reduces to a nanosecond zero point. The market driven accumulation mechanism simply cannot innovate fast enough, and, even if it could, the scale of change would surpass the human capacity for adaptation. The Tainter Curve's "arrow of time" indicates that while Cummins Inc.'s energy transition accumulates capital it fails as the Houdini escape from capitalism's ecocide.

### **Revolutionary Imaginary in the Liminal State**

When Prime Minister Thatcher justified the modern world-system's age of neoliberal globalization with her assertion that there "is no alternative" to dismantling the Keynesian iteration of capitalism, the revolutionary imaginary—what would be a world without capitalism—reached its nadir. Global village idiots (Kuecker 2018) like *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman (2000) pitched the triumph of liberalism that confirmed the death of revolution and the end of history. As Fisher's (2009) *Capitalist Realism: Is There no Alternative* invited us to understand, capital's hegemony wrought a post-political world that reduced contestation to the narrow band of what is possible within capitalist accumulation: we get a world constituted by Friedman and Van Hayek or Keynes. Fisher, along with many others, points to the victory of Thatcher's TINA principle as the demise of anti-capitalist politics as articulated by Antonio Gramsci, at least paraphrased by Jameson (2003) and Žižek (2010): "it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism." In 1994 the Zapatistas slapped down Thatcher and showed revolution remained possible (Kuecker 2004). A surge in social movements and the "multitude" (Negri and Hardt 2009) restarted history, only to be dispatched by the neutralizing force of reactionary politics spawned by September 11, the 2008 financial crisis, and the global pandemic. History continued, but with the added element of the politics of resentment and our current toxic stew of authoritarianism and emergent fascism.

In the liminal state humanity appears to be capable of imagining many end narratives: the end of capital, the end of nature, the end of modernity, the end of liberty, the end of democracy, the end of progress. The liminal state is a time when previous iterations of hegemony—the "truths"

that were once considered “self-evident”—are destabilized by the collapsing system’s rupture of the structures of everyday life. Contestation between multiple narratives suggests the liminal state is a time when Gramscian historical blocks can articulate (Jackson 2014) in the formation of something new. The restarting of history is the process of articulation suggested by Jackson’s (2014) “Rethinking Repair,” which is when something broken is reconstituted in a new fit, an articulation where the world becomes smooth once again. In the age of liminal state monsters and morbidities, it is too early to tell which narrative or combination of narratives emerge to do the work of articulation.

The articulation work of the liminal state revolutionary imaginary can match processes of system emergence with prefigurative politics premised on the anarchist, autonomous, ground-up approaches to praxis, where the revolutionary imaginary is prefigured by everyday practice. This prefigurative politics resonates with Holloway’s (2002) notion of changing the world without taking power where the revolution happens by transforming the relations of power from the vertical to the horizontal through action rather than seizing state power to use the state apparatus to implement the radical transformation of society, politics, economics, and culture. Prefiguration also finds expression within the “right to the city” concept, where the urban inhabitants’ right to transform and be transformed by the city (Harvey 2012) is actualized through participation and expropriation (Purcell 2002), which Peter Marcuse (2009) articulates as the process of exposing, deposing, opposing, proposing, and politicizing (also see Carroll 2016).

Prefigurative politics enables radical change in the liminal state in at least three ways. Its intentionality offers a strident barrier to the continuation of the oppressive elements of the modern world-system’s structures and practices. The barrier needs to leverage the liminal state’s disruptions and instabilities by identifying the weakest elements in the mechanisms of reproduction, and with capitalism, that means the accumulation mechanism, which is under stress from onslaught of a perfect storm of modern world-systemcrises, such as climate change. Second, prefigurative politics can target key structures as they become disrupted and destabilized by collapse. Leveraging, however, requires organized capacities for multifront but unified action, such as that advocated by Chase-Dunn and Almeida (2020) in *Global Struggles and Social Change*. Thirdly, prefigurative politics needs a forward-thinking proposal for what the new world-system ought to be. The prefigurative politics presented by Santos’ (2023) and Escobar’s (2018) pluriverse agenda represents one such proposal in the liminal state.

### **Resistances Within The Crises**

While Chase-Dunn and Almeida (2020) see the climate justice movement as a force for radical change, a case can be made that climate change only had the potential to transform the environmental movement to a reformist focus on decarbonized sustainability rather than the anti-

systemic degrowth proposition that challenges capitalism's accumulation mechanisms such as the 2030 Agenda. As Klein's (2014) *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* illustrates, climate change presents the single most significant threat to capitalist reproduction, because it makes possible an anti-capitalist imaginary as being necessary for the survival of our species. Environmentalists in the United States, like Bill McKibben, led protest movements such as 350.org that mobilized progressives toward demanding political action. More radical forms of direct action, such as the United Kingdom's Extinction Rebellion, which embraces non-violent protest to demand policy change, as well as those advocated by Malm in *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* (2021). Climate change movements, however, failed to become revolutionary, as humanity has locked into the reproduction of capital by selecting the path of decarbonization over degrowth. When capital confronted climate, contrary to Klein's thesis, capital appears to have won.

As capitalism reproduces itself through the profit-making opportunities of the perfect storm's crises, it continues its relentless path of killing the host. Anti-capitalist, ecological analysis makes it clear that resistance to capital in the liminal state needs to focus on how the perfect storm constitutes an important accumulation opportunity for twenty-first century capitalist profit-making. The identified accumulation mechanism then serves as a significant target for resistance, for what anti-capitalists might say "no" to through thought, word, and deed. Among many priority targets for resistance is the extractive industry, especially the three key industries that are actively collapsing the planetary ecosystem: mining, fishing, and forestry. What are the tactics? One can argue direct action, such as preventing extractive infrastructure from being built with roadblocks, violence against property such as burning down buildings necessary for local management of the extraction, or violence against people doing the extraction. Another tactic aims at increasing the cost of the enterprise by challenging each step in the extractive process through legal challenges where corporate time, money, and social capital are diverted to court battles. Likewise, resistance can target the financial structures necessary for extractive operations, which often require raising hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars. Taking on finance, for example, can target the Toronto Stock Exchange for its role as the accumulation mechanism for global mining by using divestment campaigns or shareholder activism. Expose, depose, propose, and politicize can target corporate green and human rights washing, or go after the bogus ESG standards for corporate conduct. Resistance can use proposals like the "precautionary principle" as further obstacles to corporate practices. Organizing consumer boycotts can pressure corporate conduct. Consumers in the global minority can also act in solidarity with community resistance in the global majority by reducing their ecological footprint with reduced consumption, participating directly in stopping corporations, and organizing their own communities in anti-capitalist resistance. The examples of direct action all derive from the anti-mining resistance among peasants in the Intag region of

Ecuador that have successfully defeated mining projects since the mid 1990s (Kuecker 2008, 2010, 2014).

Throwing wrenches at the extractive industry, however, faces the great power of the post-2015 world complex of actors. The sustainability discourse of technocratic rationality weaves together public policy from the transnational to local levels throughout the global system. The hegemony of SDGs demands mineral resources for decarbonization's electrified climate agenda. The complex's power of extrastatecraft, which is manifested by the power to convene (Kuecker 2015b) at forums like the Conference of the Parties or World Urban Forum, as well as the financial mechanisms of transnational institutions like the World Bank, dwarfs the power of wrench throwing. While mining might be stopped in places like Intag region, the victory displaces mining to other geographies where communities have less capacity for resistance. Mining marches forward as infrastructures like the 2030 Agenda get a free pass to do the work of decarbonization.

Another word for the post-2015 world complex is "development." Kuecker and Hartley (2021) argue that sustainability is the "new development," which was the new "modernization," which was the new "colonialism." Development, however, is part of something grander. It is the political agenda of counterinsurgency strategy (McClintock 1991) that aims to defend capital accumulation from asymmetrical threats. Human development tragically becomes part of capitalism's inequity and inequality and a necessary part of neocolonial statecraft. Resistance to extractivism provokes counterinsurgency, a point demonstrated by Morosin's (2020, 2021, 2023a, 2023b) work on indigenous resistance in Oaxaca's Isthmus of Tehuantepec but also shown in Kuecker's (2008, 2014) analysis of the Intag region of Ecuador as well as Rights Action's solidarity work in Guatemala and Honduras (Nolin and Russell 2022).

### **Defending the Pluriverse by Countering the Accumulation Mechanism**

By pluriverse, Escobar (2018) invites us to see the world as a "multiplicity of worlds" consisting of a vast diversity in the human ways of being and the knowledges they contain. It is "a world where many worlds fit." The pluriverse is juxtaposed to the modern epistemic which flattens humanity into a singular, monocultural, universal proposition. Under modernity human potential is closed due to the monoculture, while the fluidity of the pluriverse keeps the narrative open. The flat, universal, closed qualities of modernity make it anachronistic in the openness, fluidity, and multiplicity of the liminal state. Escobar's pluriverse provides us with two significant concepts for the liminal state. First, he offers "design for transitions," which aims for articulated (smooth), intentional transitions necessary for navigating the "broken world" of the liminal state. Design transitions are emergent properties, which are adaptive, especially because they anticipate disruptions. It is also defined by collaborative, ground-up approaches to the transition. "Autonomous design" is the second concept, which invites us to think about ways to escape

modernity's predicaments that are free from capitalism's accumulation mechanisms, especially commodification and the enclosure of the commons. Autonomous design embraces bioregionalism's focus on locality, while connecting to environmental justice. It is a relational way of seeing and being because it prioritizes the interconnectedness of the world, and it tends to see long term.

In 2011, Hall and I examined who were the likely candidates for weathering the perfect storm of systemic collapse. The analysis built on the value of seeing outside the box of the modern world-system in which historical understandings of previous collapses show the importance of peripheral actors in both the decline of core geographies but also as seedbeds of emerging new systems (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997). We converged world-system theory with complex adaptive systems and insights from post-colonial approaches to new social movements that emphasized the other knowledges of indigenous people, subsistence agriculturalists, migrants, and urban slum dwellers. We argued that the marginalized peoples of the periphery are the most likely to make it through systemic collapse, while the privileged people in the geographies of the center who are the global minority are most likely to perish. Working with researchers at RMIT University, I extended the argument to consideration of the importance of community within the resistance capacity of marginalized peoples of the periphery (Mulligan, Nadarajah, and Kuecker 2011, Kuecker 2017) to weather the perfect storm of systemic collapse. With the Transition Network, I argued how everyday life struggles for survival, against structural violence, and the battle for liberation from colonial legacies are foundations to the pluriverse's other knowledges. I (2018) further argued that other knowledges are anchored within peoples defending the commons in the form of autonomy, especially indigenous peoples and subsistence agriculturalists. In the liminal state the other knowledges of marginalized peoples on the periphery can act as emergent properties in the transition to a new world-system, especially if their pluriverse is recognized, nurtured, and protected. In the liminal state, however, the other knowledges of the remains of the global commons are not the only emergent property, as the fragmented remains of the modern world-system persist. Defending the pluriverse from anachronistic remnants of modernity is imperative, especially because they turn to apartheid, authoritarian and fascist methods of retaining power. Many knowledges—a pluriverse—are active in the liminal state, and during the transition resistance becomes a question of defending the other knowledges while stifling the persistence of the dark side of the modern world-system, especially the toxic mix of capitalism and authoritarianism that threatens a return of fascism. These arguments complement Chase-Dunn and Almeida's (2020) assessment of the threat right-wing politics presents to social movements but aligns more closely with Santos (2023) due to his stronger positioning of resistance within systemic collapse and the pluriverse.

Holding the ground of other knowledges and the pluriverse throughout the liminal state is Antonio Gramsci's "war of position," the revolutionary strategy when the war of maneuver in which the revolution is accomplished by seizing control of the state is not possible. The war of position is fought to change power relationships, especially in domains where state and capital do not always have a monopoly. The war of position chips away at the "common sense" of state and capital's hegemony, subverting their legitimacy by exposing the injustices they cause or exacerbate (Dagnino 1998; Bruhn 1999; Kuecker 2004). As the Zapatistas have instructed us, it can be a discursive battle, a war of words and ideas fought in the domain of culture, as well as Scott's (1987) "weapons of the weak." The war of position establishes "counter publics," places and spaces within the structures of domination where alternative domains thrive. Resistance to the extractive industry by targeting the actors constitutive of the post-2015 world complex becomes a war of position in which asymmetries within unequal power relations are leveraged against the mechanisms of capitalist reproduction.

The war of position can counter the reactionary politics of the global minority, especially as the legitimacy of liberalism falters due to the mounting crises of modernity's collapse as well as the resurgence of authoritarianism, White nationalism, apartheid, and fascism. As liberalism falters, modernity's hegemonic hold on the regimes of truth slides further into a post-truth epistemic condition (Keyes 2004, McIntyre 2018). Alternative facts compete for the publics causing an epistemic disruption and confusion that mixes with the instabilities of the liminal state. The politics of fear, nostalgia, anger, and resentment find their traction in conspiracy theories whose destination is a large, mobilized, and determined political force that has the potential to seize the liminal state and emerge hegemonic as the new world-system (Eco 1995; Rosenblum and Muirhead 2019; Stanley 2018). The populist iteration of the extremity of Right-wing politics leverages the distrust of elites (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2019; Hartley 2023). While the liberal elite in the media and popular culture are core targets in the politics of distrust, a more significant target is in play when the aim falls on the intellectuals, bureaucrats, politicians, and corporate leaders who constitute the swamp that needs to be drained (Cole 2022). With the United Nations and liberal internationalism already a favorite target, the 2030 Agenda complex is a sitting duck for a virulent right-wing reaction, as illustrated by the pandemic-driven lost legitimacy of the World Health Organization. A Supreme Court decision away from the United States tipping into fascism shows how precarious modernity's place in the liminal state has become.

A prefigurative politics for left-wing radical change can engage the battle against fascism. It can be found in urban studies, especially the critical urban theory that is informed by Lefebvre's right to the city, which was forged by the philosopher's distaste for the authoritarianism of technocratic urban planners as well as his experience as a member of the French resistance during World War II. Urban studies, however, witnessed a nasty intellectual dog fight over the use of

assemblage theory within radical approaches to the right to the city (Farias and Bender 2010; McFarlane 2011; Swanton 2011; Brenner, Madden, and Wachsmuth 2011). Acting as self-appointed gatekeepers to proper radical theory, critical urban theorists led by Brenner and Marcuse rejected assemblage urbanism's claim to a place within the right to the city body of knowledge. I side with the assemblage urbanists, because they offer a way to conceptualize the war of position in the liminal state. Favoring a fluidly open view of reality, assemblage theory appears well suited for conceptualizing the rhizomatic qualities of the liminal state's instabilities, rupture, and fragmentation. Assemblage approaches suggest paths forward in conceptualizing a path of counter power to the 2030 Agenda, because it opens the narrative of resistance by extending agency to non-human actors, which allows us to see the cracks in the system where power is vulnerable.

We can take the example of the "Prama Group"—a fictional name used for reasons of security—in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia as related in Simone and Pieterse's (2017) *New Urban Worlds*. Resisting the power of corrupt elites, a group of adjunct professors organized a small, covert collective, in what Simone and Pieterse call "working in secret." Sequestered in a small apartment in Phnom Penh, packed with laptops and wall mounted diagrams, the group works with "an almost messianic devotion to detailing how the roughly forty families who run the country continue to acquire" their power to exploit the nation's resource wealth as well as the control of the urban economy. The group gathered intelligence by identifying the key weaknesses within the structures of power, which fell within the capital city's penchant for gossip, a network of information as opaque as the structures of power within the oligarchic family networks. The Prama Group secured information by integrating its network into the street markets, the places where those who work for the rich do their shopping, eating, drinking, and socializing. Often the street markets are the Foucauldian capillaries of power where the corrupt business networks sinew to the street level of commodity exchange, where gossip relates a bottom-up view of the structures of power. Simone and Pieterse (2017:118) explain, "While henchmen of the regime may crisscross the width and length of trading spaces, they concede the actual operations to more informal groupings," and it is the informality of the networks that creates the opportunity for subversive resistance. Leveraging the sense of "betrayal, resentment and jealousies" within the patron's clients—"the large coterie of domestics, drivers, managers, enforcers, errand boys, clients, sex workers, secretaries and personal assistants that keep the apparatus of social cohesion and deal-making together behind the façades of formal governmental positions"—the Prama Group sets out to undermine the structure of power by propagating rumors, circulating fake reports from consultancies about targeted businesses, photoshopping images of patrons at fake meetings that compromise their networks of power. The Prama Group uses information to create disinformation that results in messes that the corrupt need to clean-up often at great expense in financial and social capital. Simone and Pieterse (2017:120) summarize the tactics:

Dissimulation and trickery, long the weapons of the so-called weak, are cautiously experimented with here as a means of puncturing small holes in the otherwise seemingly seamless veneer of total control.

In the “dissonant times” of the “broken world” the liminal state presents opportunities for adopting but not cutting and pasting the Prama Group’s resistance in taking on the extrastatecraft power of the 2030 Agenda.

George published the *Lugano Report: On Preserving Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century* in 1999. The report was a satirical, fictional product of a fictional group of planners tasked with saving capitalism. It found that capitalism is an unlikely candidate for survival because it is undermanaged, threatened by its own success, and subject to ecological collapse. Widespread discontent with neoliberal globalization made satire an appropriate writing voice for George’s analysis, especially because the use of satire implies the delegitimization of technocratic power and knowledge. The satire also suggests how falsifications such as those deployed by Cambodia’s Prama Group can undermine the technocrats’ claim to legitimacy.

One can imagine the possibility of a “weapons of the weak” counterpower inspired by the example of misinformation campaigns illustrated by the Prama Group and George’s *The Lugano Report*. Further insight comes from counterinsurgency’s political operations where psychological operations target individuals, communities, and organizations within an insurrection. Resistance to the 2030 Agenda complex might learn from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) manuals that provided guidance in “simple sabotage” (Office of Strategic Services 1944), “trickery and deception” (Melton and Wallace 2009) as well as the aforementioned “psychological operations” (Central Intelligence Agency 1984). Disruptive disinformation campaigns fall well short of the more drastic counterinsurgency measures contained within state of exception, extrajudicial juridical use of violence, including assassination, such as Operation Phoenix where the CIA program killed an estimated 20,000 Viet Cong political operatives among more than 80,000 “neutralized” individuals between 1968 and 1972 (Valentine 1990). The Colombian use of counterpower to take down Pablo Escobar and the Medellín Cartel reached a stalemate before *Los Pepes* brought the full force of extrajudicial juridical violence that dismantled the structures of the cartel’s power (Bowden 2018). Or we can turn to the example of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) using post-structuralist theory to devise counterinsurgency strategies for the utter messiness of urban warfare. As Weizman (2006) reveals, study groups reading Deleuze and Guattari’s *Thousand Plateaus* as well as the works of Debord developed what Brigadier-General Kikhavi described as “inverse geometry” that conceived urban space as syntax to be reorganized through a set of minute tactics that resulted in “overground tunnels” that obviated the dangers of street combat by “walking through walls” – physically bypassing the street by horizontally passing

through the interior walls of houses. The key to the tactic is the assemblage notion of fluidity that redefines the material spaces of the city as actants for counterinsurgency to engage. When combined with swarming—the use of multiple disruptions to the urban syntax that overwhelm an insurgent’s capacity to operate in the urban environment—the IDF’s tactics disorientate the target’s strategic orientation by undermining its fixed categories.

With the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), the possibilities for misinformation campaigns against 2030 Agenda significantly increase the capability of disrupting the power/knowledge of technocratic rationality. Russian interference in United States elections features misinformation campaigns spread via social media that aim to undermine citizens’ trust in the electoral system to an extent that any lost election becomes a stolen election. The legitimacy of democratic institutions in the U.S. is in peril heading into the 2026 congressional elections. Another example comes from California Governor Newsom who deploys social media to propagate satirical disinformation that reveals core truths.

Psychological operations can disrupt the established structures of power/knowledge of the 2030 Agenda complex in at least six ways. First, it can make transparent the common-sense assumptions that the actors are legitimate due to their expertise, especially by showing their lack of objectivity, biases, interests, as well as the social networks and contexts that make decisions. Second, misinformation can enhance the public’s doubt and uncertainty about what constitutes an expert and what makes them authoritative. Alternative facts and narratives constructed on the big lie undermine the perception of technocratic infallibility. Anti-vaccine campaigns during COVID-19 show how disinformation and questioning expert authority morphed into the school board wars and book banning, and how promoters of the big lie, such as Chris Rufo (Wallace-Wells 2021) become significant players within right-wing politics. The populist politics of questioning expertise helps to delegitimize technocracy and present it as an elitist, anti-democratic form of unaccountable governance (Cole 2022). Third, misinformation can challenge the monopoly of expertise enjoyed by the 2030 Agenda complex of actors, which can create openings for alternative narratives and epistemics to gain traction in the liminal state. Fourth, misinformation can target tensions within the complex and take advantage of the latent and manifest conflicts between its members. Fifth, rumors can travel fast and far at meetings like UN Habitat’s World Urban Forum, where tens of thousands of delegates gather for a week-long agenda. Finally, participatory forms of decision making such as those practiced at progressive gatherings like the World Social Forum can gain traction with disinformation that leads people to perceive the 2030 Agenda as lacking inclusive decision-making processes.

Objections to the use of psychological operations against the 2030 Agenda rest on the merits of liberalism, especially the confident conviction that the rule of reason abhors the big lie while placing a premium on the facts as the foundation for truth claims. Psychological operations poison

the fact-based truth ecosystem. McQuaid's (2024) *Attack from Within: How Disinformation is Sabotaging America* makes the compelling argument against the weaponization of disinformation within a liberal democracy by showing how it is a key tool within the authoritarian playbook. The sanctity of fact-based truth within the liberal ethos constitutes a line in the sand where resistance ought not cross, a prohibition necessary for guarding against the slide into authoritarianism and the dystopian world portended by the Frankfurt School of Sociology's dark side of modernity. Once the lie becomes a normalized practice within the toolbox of resistance, the resistance becomes irreparably corrupted. The "end justifies the means" and "by any means necessary" logic of psychological operations opens a Pandora's box of oppressive ills that inevitably transforms resistance into a creature more horrific than the monster it sought to slay. The liberal counterargument is compelling; however, it is muddied in the liminal state due to the transition's epistemic instabilities. As the hegemony of liberal internationalism declines the guardrail of the rules-based system gives way to an anything goes disordering. At this point following the liberal ruleset might become an anachronistic handcuff that deprives resistance of a weapon of the weak.

### **Conclusion: To See the Devil's Way to the End**

In his 1917 Munich lecture, "Science as a Vocation," Max Weber stated, "First of all, one has to see the devil's way to the end in order to realize his power and his limitations" (Gerth and Mills 1946:152). The lecture invites us to reach beyond technical expertise Weber saw creeping into the modern epistemic because he thought technocracy could not bring us to the deeper existential issues of being human. The devil's way within the technocratic rationality of the post-2015 world brings humanity to one of the great existential moments that comes with the great moments of transition, those times when everything is disrupted, anything becomes possible, even Donald Trump, and the stakes, especially if we toss the world's 12,300-plus nuclear weapons into the disruption, instability, and disorientation of the liminal state, this would involve the continuation of life on the planet. Deciphering the end of the devil's way involves understanding the limits of technocratic power/knowledge at this moment in the modern world-system's soft collapse and the opening phases of the liminal state's great transformation to a new world-system. In the liminal state, technocratic rationality is epistemically destabilized by the collapsing structures of modernity, and that instability currently manifests in an epistemic panic, the moment when the technocrats realize the cycle of power/knowledge that premises their legitimacy as experts—the devil's way—is ending. The realization happens because their technique falters in the onslaught of crises their way of thinking created. Their epistemic panic makes technocratic rationality vulnerable to a counter power aimed at compromising technocracy's claim to legitimacy that clears the way for the other knowledges of the pluriverse to gain traction as the liminal state's emergent properties in the formation of the new world-system. Key to this analysis is the recognition that

one articulation of the devil's way is the 2030 Agenda, especially its function as the accumulation mechanism of capitalist reproduction in the liminal state. Taking down the 2030 Agenda is an important part of the path to ending capitalism in the liminal state that secures a just transition for the global majority as they build the new world-system.

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