

Introduction

In a recent article, Sidney Tarrow (2005) explored an issue first highlighted by Naomi Klein (2004): the possibility of a rift dividing activist communities within the movements of the new transnational activism, particularly those movements usually subsumed under the antiglobalization, global justice, or global anticapitalist title. Klein elaborates,

...we sometimes seem to have two activist solitudes. On the one hand, there are the international anti-globalization activists who may be enjoying a triumphant mood, but seem to be fighting far-away issues, unconnected to people's day-to-day struggles. They are often seen as elitists: white middle-class kids with dreadlocks. On the other hand, there are community activists fighting daily struggles for survival, or for the preservation of the most elementary public services, who are often feeling burnt-out and demoralized.

(Klein 2004: 227)

To be sure, a possible divide between activist communities *is* a cause for concern. However, it seems strange to suggest that the international activists, the 'white middle-class kids with dreadlocks,' are not engaged in local struggles. Indeed, even Tarrow noted that 'we are witnessing to an increasing degree the formation of a broad spectrum of activists

who face both inward and outward and combine domestic and transnational contention' (Tarrow 2005: 58). So, we should first ask ourselves: what happens to those white kids with dreadlocks after transnational protest events are over? Do they leave behind the values and ideals they trumpeted on the glass covered streets? Not only is this a somewhat insulting assumption to make, but it seems hard to believe that pungent, patch-covered activists slip back, unnoticed, into the middle-class western world they supposedly came from. And while it's not uncommon to run across someone who may have been pepper-sprayed in Genoa or Montreal working in your favorite coffeeshop or attending your Graduate seminar, we are still left with this key question: where are the rest of them?

Not to put it too simplistically, they're everywhere, doing their best to operate outside of the capitalist society that surrounds them and building *potentially* powerful foundations for their vision of another world. They're building in the shape of bookstores, infoshops, zines, bands, food distribution schemes, broadcasting stations, internet databases, libraries, cafes, squats, video networks, public kitchens, clubs, online message boards, record labels, bars, and more. Heavily influenced by the DiY (Do-it-Yourself) ethic of the modern punk community, these efforts reflect a growing understanding among activists of the important differences between reflex, reaction, and action:

REFLEX is to get pissed off... To talk shit... To get drunk... To bicker and complain.

REACTION is throwing bricks... It's stealing food and eating out of

dumpsters...It's a defense...It's saying "NO!"

ACTION is growing vegetables...Action is saying "yes" to community needs...It is building our own future.

(Augman 2005: 236)

However, despite the exciting picture this brief description paints, these activist communities are still plagued by a great deal of confusion and frustration. Bevington and Dixon (2005) capture this situation in a recent article, quoting Richard Flacks (2004),

...activists are hungry for insight into the practices and experiences of organizers, into how collective and personal commitment can be sustained, into relationships between day to day activism and 'long-range vision', into problems of intra-movement contention, organizational rigidity and democracy, etc.

(Flacks 2004:146-147, in Bevington and Dixon 2005:193)

Activists are doing their best to tackle many of these issues in meetings, zines, training conferences and various online formats. Discussions range from explorations of on-the-street tactical and organizational issues to more 'far-reaching critiques and self-critiques exploring the ways in which racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, colonialism, and other systemic forms of oppression' are currently hindering movements (Bevington and Dixon 2005: 196). One activist's sweeping call for 'a *theory* to go with one's practice, a theory that can *think the "subjective" and "objective" simultaneously*, seeing them in all their

mutually-conditioning relatedness' underlines the weight and complexity of these debates (Kellstadt 2001 in Bevington and Dixon 2005: 197).

Unfortunately, even though activists have an obvious desire to develop useful and relevant theory, they are not looking to prevailing social movement scholarship for help. Douglas Bevington and Chris Dixon (2005) have recently noted that 'rather than reading the dominant social movement theory, [activists] are generating theory largely outside of academic circles' (Bevington and Dixon 2005: 186). The reason, these authors argue, is that 'activists do not find such theory useful' because, in the words of Barbara Epstein, '[m]uch of current theory is so detached from the concerns of social movements that it is little if any use to those engaged in these movements' (Bevington and Dixon 2005: 186; Bevington and Dixon 2004: 230). Rather than accusing activists of anti-intellectualism, we should question whether dominant social movement theory is, at least to some degree, out of touch with the movements it seeks to address. In the case of Klein's observation, we should consider the possibility that some problem with our analytic lens may have distorted the quality of this rift. To address these problems, Bevington and Dixon have argued for the development of 'movement-relevant theory' to reawaken the discipline's relevance for theory-hungry activists.

This paper is the first step in my attempt to answer Bevington and Dixon's astute call for 'movement-relevant theory.' First, a brief overview of the problems that plague social movement theory reveals exactly how scholars have let movements down and where

improvement is needed. Indeed, Klein and Tarrow's 'two activist solitudes' are only one example of the discipline's misrepresentation and misunderstanding of these movements. With these shortcomings in mind, I then re-examine the formation and recent history of these movements in order to develop theory which is situated in the realities from which these movements were born, focusing on the radical environmental movement. Finally, using this new perspective, I link Antonio Gramsci's 'war of position' concept to the current circumstance of these movements with the ultimate goal of building movement-relevant theory that remains grounded in the day-to-day reality of activists without abandoning large-scale models which, hopefully, can 'help situate and inform social movement strategy' (Bevington and Dixon 2005: 191).

I should say here that this essay is only intended as a preliminary exploration of the promising relevance and utility of Gramsci's theories for these activist communities. In subsequent work I plan to explore how his ideas might respond to activists' deeper questions and consider the practical implications of Gramsci's long-range vision for the movements of today.

Social Movement Scholarship and the New Transnational Movements

Uncovering the reasons why much of contemporary American social movement theory has become 'irrelevant' for social movement participants is a complex and daunting task. Consequently, it seems best to begin with an example to draw out the larger issues. I

use Sidney Tarrow's examination of the 'major difficulties in mounting and sustaining transnational mobilization...out of international "megaprotests,"' because, in the process of outlining the 'difficulties' he perceives, Tarrow actually underscores some of social movement theory's shortcomings (Tarrow 2005: 58). However, my focus on Tarrow's recent article is not intended to emphasize a single weak spot. It is offered only as an example of the immense problems facing dominant American social movement theory, as evidenced even in the work of one of the field's most intelligent and respected scholars.

Tarrow's essay is an examination of three 'major problems' currently facing transnational activism: 'first, the difficulty of establishing durable transnational coalitions; second, the problem of bridging the gap between movement protesters and NGO advocates; and, third, that of escaping movement structuration by national cleavages, alignments, and opportunities' (Tarrow 2005: 54). As he discusses the sources of these 'dilemmas' and begins to make recommendations for addressing them, the irrelevance of the theory becomes clear.

For example, as a response to the 'dilemmas of coalition formation,' he calls on activists to strive for 'medium-term campaign coalitions' which will 'combine the virtues of informality with the intensity of commitment offered by issue specificity' (Tarrow 2005: 59). This appeal condescendingly assumes that activists would accept a movement form based in such coalitions if they were only shown the way. Further, it automatically supposes that the campaign coalition organizational form can aid their struggles. Tarrow

uses the landmine coalition to illustrate the potential of such formations; however, the struggle against global capitalism and the fight against landmines are of entirely different classes. Tarrow seems to have dismissed the possibility that these activists purposefully avoid forms such as campaign coalitions. Indeed, the nature of their struggle requires something much larger; 'issue specificity' is not particularly viable for these antisystemic movements. As Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) notes, today's movements face a set of issues for which the 'two-step, state-oriented strategy has become irrelevant, which explains the discomfort of most existing descendants of erstwhile antisystemic organizations in putting forward either long-term or immediate sets of political objectives' (Wallerstein 2004: 271).

Later, addressing the decentralization ethos of these movements, Tarrow argues that, despite its advantages, this organizational form also produces 'frame incoherence,' 'tactical outbidding,' and 'undemocracy' (Tarrow 2005: 59). Again, the emphasis placed on 'concrete unified programs' in the pursuit of frame coherence seems unwarranted when dealing with movements that seek change on a grand scale and value autonomous, personal action. Secondly, Tarrow's view that the spontaneous violence ('tactical outbidding') and leader creation ('undemocracy') that occur at megaprotests are 'dilemmas' confuses conscious decision for unwanted side-effect. Generally, violent activists have made a personal choice to behave that way and the activists' respect for autonomy celebrates the absence of leaders who would command them otherwise. And while the rise of

opportunistic leaders does occur, their ability to control the movement and threaten its democratic nature is only as strong as other activists allow it to be; essentially, as autonomous actors, if activists follow certain leaders, then the movement must respect their decision.

Ironically, one source for this sort of misconception is discussed in an article that appears alongside Tarrow's in the Tenth Anniversary Issue of *Mobilization*. In it, McAdam, Sampson, Weffer, and MacIndoe (2005) write,

The movements of the 1960s and 1970s greatly increased interest in the [social movement] field but their own particular forms and processes have tended to dominate contemporary social movement scholarship and theory.

The danger is that the disproportionate attention accorded the struggles of the sixties has created a stylized image of movements that threatens to distort our understanding of popular contention...

(McAdam et al. 2005: 2)

Reflecting on the influence of the movement form of the 1960s and 70s, McAdam and his coauthors note a 'close association in the minds of most researchers between movements and extreme forms of protest' (McAdam et al. 2005: 9). This association has, among other things, allowed megaprotests to become a central empirical focus for study of the new transnational activism. For example, in Tarrow's article, two of his three 'dilemmas of transnational activism' are centered on protest event dynamics. His call to

move beyond short-term ‘event coalitions,’ again, assumes that activists have not yet considered this option because their heads are buried in megaprotest plans. Later, when discussing the challenges of decentralization, Tarrow himself states that the ability of activists to ‘combine decentralization with coherence and continuity...will only become clear when we have enough data to examine the next generation of international protest events and their composition’ (Tarrow 2005: 60). Social movement theory’s obsession with megaprotest data overlooks the fact that, for the majority of activists, battling with police for media attention at protest events is not generally seen as a very important step towards change. In the words of John Sellers, director of the Ruckus Society, ‘[t]o truly be radical, you’ve got to go for the roots, and the cops aren’t the roots’ (Sellers 2004: 185). McAdam, Sampson, Weffer and MacIndoe’s call to ‘thoroughly interrogate the changing nature of the social movement form’ is an important one; they are right to question whether current theory is capable of capturing ‘the more routinized, less disruptive forms of claim making characteristic of the recent period’ (McAdam et al. 2005: 16, 10).

The spectre of the movements of the 1960s and 70s has a power beyond the realm of academic scholarship as well. In the words of George Katsiaficas,

The aura of the sixties is being used against the antiglobalization movement...An exaggerated sixties diminishes contemporary movements.

Movements today are written off as shadows, imitations or lesser beings.

Seattle is recognized as highly significant, but movements between the

sixties and the present are forgotten. Glorification of decades (or of great events and individuals) diminishes the importance of continuity and everyday activism in the life of social movements. As a social construction, the myth of the sixties functions thereby to discourage people from having authentic movement experiences now, in the present.

(Katsiaficas 2004: 9)

Through personal experiences and discussions within the global justice, environmental, anticapitalist and anarchist movements, I have found that many activist communities feel they are fighting on two fronts: against the systems they wish to change as well as an entrenched activist vanguard. They constantly struggle against the patronizing attitude of many older activists, manifest in everything from coffee shop discussions to social movement theory itself.

Bevington and Dixon's recent article explores the fallout of this troubling situation as it pertains to the dominant social movement theory in the US, namely, that 'it is not being read by the very movements that it seeks to illuminate' (Bevington and Dixon 2005: 186). To be sure, there have been recent *academic* criticisms of political process theory (PPT), the dominant American social movement theory; the authors cite Goodwin and Jasper (1999) in particular. However, they quickly point out that neither these criticisms nor PPT replies have yielded theory that activists find useful. Indeed, as a young activist and scholar myself, I've also found that most activists have no use for the discipline's ivory-tower

discussions that only validate and refine obscure concepts. Accordingly, Bevington and Dixon's call for 'movement-relevant theory' rests on the view that contemporary social movement theory is simply not relevant to the movements it studies (Bevington and Dixon 2005: 189).

In an effort to rule out antiintellectualism on the part of activists, Bevington and Dixon stress that while 'activists aren't reading the dominant contemporary theorists,' they are reading 'academic social movement histories' (Bevington and Dixon 2005: 189,186). Despite living under their shadow, activists recognize the valuable lessons offered by the movements which preceded them. In fact, beyond simply reading, activists are also writing, discussing and mobilizing their research to produce theory of their own. While it's great that activists are willing to engage with difficult material, social movement scholars should still be wary of being made obsolete.

Hoping to reinvigorate social movement scholarship and render it once again valuable for activists, Bevington and Dixon call on scholars to work towards theory which can supply 'useable knowledge for those seeking social change' (Flacks 2004: 138 in Bevington and Dixon 2005: 189). American social movement theory's recent tendency to focus on 'case studies and narrowly defined causal relationships' threatens the development of 'the larger models needed to help situate and inform social movement strategy' (Bevington and Dixon 2005: 191). They are 'seeking a broad space for theory, including large-scale theory, within social movement scholarship at a time when that space

appears to be contracting' (Bevington and Dixon 2005: 191).

The remainder of this essay is my attempt to lay the groundwork for a movement-relevant theory. Because the new transnational movements are addressing issues on a scale previously unknown to social movement theory, or, for that matter, contemporary society as a whole, we should expect the tactics and methods employed to be equally unique. Consequently, we must be willing to explore their efforts through fresh eyes and seek to understand how these movements view themselves and the world around them. Only through reexamination of the growth of these movements can we hope to understand their perspective, a key to developing a theory which can offer long-range vision while remaining situated in the day-to-day realities of activists. To begin, I focus on the early growth of the radical environmental movement because, as one of the largest segments of the new transnational activism, its story provides excellent insight into the processes that eventually pulled together this diverse body of movements.

BUILDING A MOVEMENT-RELEVANT THEORY

Born of Frustration: the Growth of the New Transnational Activism

By the late 1980s, the political left, particularly in the US, had gone into decline: 'It fractured into the aggrieved and squabbling grouplets of identity politics or became the refuge of self-proclaimed victims and moralizing scolds. It was defeated, bloodless, and dull' (Kauffman 2002: 35). Liberal social movement groups succumbed to pursuing more

reformist demands and the environmental movement was no different. It became 'more pragmatic, culminating in a massive surrender to ecological modernization,' deciding that solutions to environmental problems were more easily found 'not [in] the changing of capitalist industrial society but changes within it' (Van der Heijden 1999: 204).

However, even as environmental organizations institutionalized, professionalized and demobilized throughout the 1990s, 'the number of protest mobilizations that were not controlled or coordinated by established EMOs [Environmental Movement Organizations] appeared to be increasing' (Rootes 2003: 4). The environmental movement had become fragmented, with certain portions engaged in the processes of institutionalization and professionalization while others developed more unconventional and confrontational perspectives.

Eventually, two broad currents in green thought began to emerge. Andrew Dobson places these factions under two headings:

environmentalism [which] argues for a managerial approach to environmental problems, secure in the belief that they can be solved without fundamental changes in present values of production and consumption

ecologism [which] holds that a sustainable and fulfilling existence presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world, and in our mode of social and political life

(Dobson 2000: 2)

The latter philosophy, ecologism, is home to a variety of sub-discourses ranging from 'ecocentrism, bioregionalism, and feminist ecology to eco-socialism and alternative lifestyles' (Van der Heijden 1999: 204). These activists believe that finding solutions to environmental problems requires a radical critique of contemporary patterns of production and consumption, if not modern society as a whole.

Radical environmentalists share their expansive critical perspective with a diverse body of social movements that have, together, been developing new forms of radical politics since the 1970s. Citing the 'gay and lesbian liberation movements, the feminist movement, the antinuclear movement, the radical environmental movement and the AIDS activist movement, to name only the largest ones,' Kauffman notes how these groups 'profoundly influenced both each other and the larger radical project and...created the new vernacular of resistance that has been demonstrated in the global justice movement of today' (Kauffman 2002: 35-6).

The 'new vernacular' Kauffman is referring to has two features in particular that stand out for their practical idealism: decentralization and direct action. Within many activist communities of the new transnational activism, there is a tendency to eschew classic leader-follower arrangements in favor of a model that emphasizes individual, autonomous decision making and decentralization. Activists organize into affinity groups, 'small face-to-face groups that form the basic units for a protest,' who make their own decisions, usually by consensus, both on the street and in daily activism (Kauffman 2002: 36). The

rationale is that activists will be more comfortable with their chosen course of action if they come to these decisions themselves, and will feel more safe knowing their immediate group of friends is there in support. While the movements' embrace of decentralization does have, as Tarrow noted, 'advantages' and 'defects,' we must not forget that decentralization is *much* more than a purely tactical choice; it is a celebration of an ideology. Klein notes how the movements tend to look like 'an elaborate web,' partly as a result of internet-based organizing and partly in response to 'the very political realities that sparked the protests in the first place: the utter failure of traditional party politics' (Klein 2004: 225).

Closely connected to this organizational model is many activists' commitment to direct action politics. For the radical environmental movement, '[d]isillusionment with mainstream political parties (including the Green Party) and the agendas they promote has given rise to a form of do-it-yourself [DiY] politics' (Dobson 2000: 142). Klein describes this 'shared spirit' as one that, through participatory action, pushes the activist to directly engage the focus of a protest (Klein 2004: 22). During on-the-street protest events, direct action tactics are generally theatrical, disruptive, confrontational and always creative. The Radical Cheerleaders, for example, combine flashy costumes and pom-poms with radical feminist chants and cheers. Reclaim the Streets events throw illegal street parties, blocking roadways for dancing and socializing. As Tim Jordan observes, 'direct action should not be thought of as a single tactic, but as a collection of ideas and actions which stretches from passive notions of civil disobedience to active, often aggressive, interventions' (Jordan

2002: 60). Indeed, just like the decentralization ethos, direct action is more than a means to an end. The antics of the Radical Cheerleaders are not ‘merely about visual display or media spin. The theatrics are central to a vision of a creative empowered society...[it] is in part a backlash against routinized demonstrations and negotiated arrests’ (Wood and Moore 2002: 31). The ‘emancipatory’ actions of Reclaim the Streets events address the fact that ‘urban space is increasingly controlled and privatized;’ one activist elaborates:

It’s about reclaiming the streets as public inclusive space from the private exclusive use of the car. But we believe in this as a broader principle, taking back those things which have been enclosed within capitalist circulation and returning them to collective use as a commons

(Reclaim the Streets, as quoted in Wood and Moore 2002: 32)

Not only are the institutional targets of this brand of activism indicative of the ideological systems and structures of power they wish to change, but the means by which they pursue their goals reveal their vision for a better world. For radical environmental groups, for example, such methods are a multi-faceted response to the shortcomings of conventional environmental discourse where

[t]he boundaries of the discourse are never questioned and the limited scope of a problem-solving approach precludes an understanding of environmental degradation as embedded in the wider global political economy and deeper social relations than merely those of states and experts

(Ford 2003: 122)

The marriage of theory and practice that forms the radical perspective we see here, manifest in protest targets, organizational forms and on-the-street tactical choices, underscores activists' ability to generate relevant theory of their own, including large-scale theory. For example, whereas more conventional movements see themselves as one of many normative forces working to influence a largely value-free State and Economy – evidenced by their work *within* the discursive boundaries of relevant institutions – radical thought argues that the State and Economy are governed by particular norms and are anything but value-free arenas that simply articulate the demands of society. Radical criticism, then, is rooted in an all together different understanding of the forces leaning on economic, political, and social institutions. Bevington and Dixon also cite numerous examples of theory developed within activist communities, pointing out that 'social movement scholars do not have a monopoly on theory about movements' (Bevington and Dixon 2005:194).

Nevertheless, questions remain. As Richard Flacks observes, 'activists are hungry for insight...into relationships between day to day activism and "long-range vision"' (Flacks 2004: 146-47 in Bevington and Dixon 2005: 193). Fortunately, social movement scholars are uniquely qualified to help elaborate these connections, 'both by virtue of their training and by the research time available in the academy' (Bevington and Dixon 2005: 191). Indeed, scholars' familiarity with early social movement theory can

help activists make these vital connections between day-to-day life and long-range vision.

I believe that Gramsci's work is particularly valuable for these movements, given the nature of their struggle, their perception of the social landscape as discussed above, and how this influences their day to day activism. What follows is an outline of what I feel are the most pertinent of Gramsci's concepts, a demonstration of their relevance to the movements in question, and an exploration of the power these concepts may hold for activist communities seeking connections between daily efforts and a broader vision of the future.

Gramsci

It has become relatively common to find the phrase 'global civil society' used liberally in academic scholarship from many disciplines, including social movement theory. However, the phrase is often vaguely defined and usually serves as 'a kind of catchall term for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or social movements, of all shapes and sizes, operating in the international realm' (Taylor 2002: 339). Some even view global civil society as an altruistic, radical and all together 'good' actor with a defined political project (cf. Lipschutz 1992). However, evidenced by the massive amount of contradiction one encounters when reading global civil society literature, a great deal of this scholarship clearly suffers from some variety of constricted conceptualization, an over-inflated use of the term or simple subjective definition.

Antonio Gramsci's understanding of the civil society concept provides us with a very different picture as it defines civil society spatially rather than materially. In contrast to delineating the institutional boundaries or components of civil society based on specific, empirical characteristics, he generally conceives of civil society as a superstructure 'that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called "private,"' that is, the ensemble of ideological-cultural relations that comprises all of society (Gramsci 1971: 12). The problems of defining the boundaries and members of civil society are circumvented by allowing the concept to remain somewhat 'loose and elastic' so that it 'attains precision when brought into contact with a particular situation which it helps to explain – a contact which develops the meaning of the concept' (Cox 1983: 162-3). Accordingly, when we combine this concept with Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony' the relevance of these ideas for today's activists becomes even clearer.

Hegemony, in the Gramscian sense, attempts to describe relations of social dominance and subordination. The relative strength of a hegemonic social class lies in its ability to coerce subordinate classes into accepting, adopting and internalizing its system of values and norms. While this term had been in use before Gramsci's work, it was applied to the working class only to 'express the rôle of the working class in leading an alliance of workers, peasants and...other groups potentially supportive of revolutionary change' (Cox 1983: 163). Gramsci, however, applied it to the bourgeoisie, 'to the apparatus or mechanisms of hegemony of the dominant class,' and understood hegemony as being

maintained through the same mix of consent and coercion that preserved the power of Machiavelli's Prince (Cox 1983: 163).

Together, these conceptualizations of 'hegemony' and 'civil society' helped Gramsci describe the social nuances of those northern European societies where capitalism had first become established. In these countries, he argued, the capitalist values of the bourgeoisie were hegemonic, they were firmly entrenched in civil society and formalized through State action. *Coercion* was exercised through the legal apparatus of the State and *consent* to hegemony was fostered through control of the social institutions of civil society (Gramsci 1971: 12). The social institutions of civil society are those bodies that work to 'underpin the political structure in civil society,'

the church, the educational system, the press, all the institutions which helped create in people certain modes of behaviour and expectations consistent with the hegemonic social order

(Cox 1983: 164)

In Gramsci's view, hegemony works through these social institutions to reproduce, legitimize and firmly entrench its value system within civil society.

Applying Gramsci's concepts in more recent times, Cox (1983) described how the establishment of a modern, global hegemony would involve 'an outward expansion of the internal (national) hegemony established by a dominant social class' whereby '[t]he economic and social institutions, the culture, the technology associated with this national

hegemony become patterns for emulation abroad' (Cox 1983: 171). Cox summarizes hegemony at a global level as follows:

Hegemony at the international level is thus not merely an order among states. It is an order within a world economy with a dominant mode of production which penetrates into all countries and links into other subordinate modes of production. It is also a complex of international social relationships which connect the social classes of the different countries.

World hegemony is describable as a social structure, an economic structure, and a political structure; and it cannot be simply one of these things but must be all three. World hegemony, furthermore, is expressed in universal norms, institutions and mechanisms which lay down general rules of behaviour for states and for those forces of civil society that act across national boundaries – rules which support the dominant mode of production.

(Cox 1983: 171-2)

Cox's now twenty-two year old framework for a Gramscian global hegemony and even the most conservative descriptions of contemporary globalization patterns are nearly identical. The norms of contemporary globalization *are* globally hegemonic, dominant both materially and ideologically, spread through a combination of consent and coercion. Increasingly articulated through national and international organizations, these hegemonic

values are ‘dominant in their ability to provide material rewards and impose sanctions’ and they are, perhaps, even more successful at ‘...portraying specific definitions of “free trade” and “competitiveness” as representing the general interests of all citizens,’ instead of a few (Evans 2000: 230).

Looking again at the new transnational activists, the focus of this paper, we can see clear similarities between their perspective, outlined above, and Gramsci’s. Radicals eschew conventional politics because domestic and international governmental organizations are increasingly, as Cox described, a ‘mechanism through which the universal norms of a world hegemony are expressed;’ they focus their confrontational protest on those institutions that

embody the rules which facilitate the expansion of hegemonic world orders; ...[that] are themselves the product of the hegemonic world order;...[that] ideologically legitimate the norms of the world order;...[that] co-opt the elites from peripheral countries and...absorb counter-hegemonic ideas

(Cox 1983: 172)

However, as mentioned above, there is also an understanding within the movements that a successful attack on this global hegemony requires more than spectacular protest. Activists realize they must look beyond institutional targets in their challenge to the dominant global hegemony. It is here that scholars’ focus on megaprotests and ‘structural

“openings”...rather than the process by which movement activists come to perceive opportunities’ truly fails the movements they seek to address (Bevington and Dixon 2005: 187). The emphasis placed on movements’ engagement with political and economic institutions masks the power of activism that does not *directly* confront such institutions. Fortunately, building on the concepts outlined already, Gramsci offers a model for movements seeking to link their daily action with long term goals, a model they are unable to find in the dominant American social movement scholarship.

War of Position

Gramsci conceived of two methods for challenging a dominant hegemony: a ‘war of movement’ and a ‘war of position.’ A war of movement involves physically overwhelming the coercive apparatus of the State. However, the success of this strategy rests on an undeveloped hegemony within the rest of civil society so that, as the State falls, there is no social foundation to uphold the hegemonic value system (Cox 1983: 165). But what if the hegemony is thoroughly entrenched and reproduces itself within society through social institutions such as those discussed above? Even if a war of movement were able to seize the State apparatus, it is only, as Gramsci describes, ‘an outer ditch, behind which there [stands] a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks’ (Gramsci 1971: 238).

Instead, a well-established hegemony demands a war of position which ‘slowly builds up the strength of the social foundations of a new state’; this requires

...creating alternative institutions and alternative intellectual resources within existing society and building bridges between workers and other subordinate classes. It means actively building a counter-hegemony within an established hegemony while resisting the pressures and temptations to relapse into pursuit of incremental gains for subaltern groups within the framework of bourgeois hegemony

(Cox 1983: 165)

The movements of the new transnational activism face just this sort of hegemony. Activists already know that they need to form a counter-hegemony, one which can challenge dominance on many levels, though they may not use those terms. Indeed, the daily actions of scores of activists could be considered foundations for a global war of position. The examples mentioned in the introduction to this essay – zines, infoshops, public kitchens, etc. – are manifestations of activists' intuitive understanding of the need for a war of position. These myriad ventures *are* 'alternative social institutions and intellectual resources' as described by Gramsci (Cox 1983: 165). They might also be understood using Aldon Morris' 'agency-laden institutions', that is, institutions that

...house cultural and organizational resources that can be mobilized to launch collective action. Such institutions are configurations of cultural beliefs and practices that permeate and shape their social networks. Their cultural materials are constitutive in that they produce and solidify the trust,

contacts, solidarity, rituals, meaning systems, and options of members embedded in their social networks.

(Morris 2000: 447)

To further elaborate this point, I offer an example directly relevant to these movements: a DiY punk show. That noisy mess on the corner which draws hordes of dirty kids dressed in black every Friday night can also be understood as an ‘agency-laden institution,’ a social foundation for a massive culture that many global justice activists call home, including many of Klein’s white middle-class kids with dreadlocks.

The DiY Movement

As mainstream culture lost interest in punk in the early 1980s, a new punk began to emerge. Partly an answer to the excess and wasted recklessness that preceded it, and partly a necessity, DiY (Do-it-Yourself) initially surfaced when bands began creating their own record labels and recording spaces (Poldervaart 2001: 151). However, DiY quickly became fused to the core of the modern punk movement and its many subgenres and over the last 25 years, the DiY-punk movement has blossomed into a massive and ‘widely varied political subculture,’ one which shares many members with the movements of the new transnational activism (Poldervaart 2001: 151). Ultimately, the DiY ethic is about ‘creating your own alternative’ and ‘being aware of your own possibilities’ (Poldervaart 2001: 151). Accordingly, the DiY value system has threaded itself through many different

formal and informal activities, including political organizing (eg. Food not Bombs, Books Through Bars), music creation, recording, distribution and promotion (eg. R5 Productions), film distribution (eg. Lost Film Fest), retail business ventures, and, very significantly, alternative media outlets.

The Independent Media Center (IMC), a ‘collective of independent media organizations and hundreds of journalists offering grassroots, non-corporate coverage,’ offers news from over 150 affiliates in countless languages and from locations as diverse as Beirut, Tampa Bay, Manila, and Ambazonia (Indymedia 2005). Since 1995, Infoshop.org has hosted a massive collection of resources for the global anarchist community in six different languages, featuring message boards, news stories, general information articles, a global events calendar, and innumerable links to other online assets. With resources such as these, when a motivated individual in Belgrade wants advice on publishing a new zine, friends in Tokyo, Omaha and Caracas are there to help, exchanging tips through a message board where they might also argue about politics, share vacation photos, trade rare punk vinyl or discuss tactical options for upcoming protests.

Clearly, the DiY punk show is only one example of an ‘agency-laden institution’ within the immense DiY-punk culture, which itself is only a portion of the new transnational activism. However, it is an excellent illustration of how this community ‘actualiz[es] the ideal that anyone can (and should) be a producer of culture’ because the DiY show simultaneously brings together multiple agency-laden institutions and is itself an

agency-laden institution (Spencer 2005: 200). For example, organizers, not interested in turning a profit, set up shows in the basements of houses, churches or community centers to keep ticket prices cheap or free as well as to offer the most open and accepting space for all show-goers. Not focused on hitting it big, bands play for whatever they can gather at the door, valuing the joy of performing, spreading their message and supporting the community over making money while on tour. Those attending the show bring flyers for political events, other shows or social gatherings and there's usually a plethora of free literature tackling issues like sexism, racism, poverty, war, police repression, the environment, animal rights and more. Some may bring homemade clothes, pins, artwork, zines or books to sell, often for whatever the buyer can afford, with the act of exchange prized over the monetary value of that exchange. People open their houses, create and buy handmade artwork and throw bands they may not like a few extra dollars gas money just to support their community. Everyone brings ideas and experiences to share and is prepared to learn from others as well; everyone is there because, as members of the DiY culture, that is where they belong, supporting a cultural institution patently opposed to the dominant capitalist hegemony that presses upon them everyday. One DiY punk band member captures this spirit in a passage from his online zine:

Tour is also taking me to new and interesting places, geographically and socially. A show every night provides an amazing opportunity to briefly peer into the workings of scenes scattered across the country, and while

there are always important differences, there are also critical similarities.... There is always the jerk, the bro, the drunk, or the idiot. However, the very fact that these people are identified (and begrudgingly tolerated) demonstrates that—universally—scenes are held up by mutual respect, self-control, and careful thought. Although most members of the scene will not become prominent politicians, acclaimed authors, or even college graduates, they bring to bear phenomenal insight and accumulated experience. Every evening produces a conversation with somebody who built a synthesizer from scratch, taught in Eastern Europe with the clothing on their back, or split town to preach a social gospel with an acoustic guitar... The fact that the underground is out of step with the rest of culture, that our dreams are to some perversely small or perversely grand does not make us stupid. We are not uneducated because we did not go to college. We are not inarticulate because we speak through full-stack [amps], photocopiers, and blogs. We are not perverse because we don't love blind consumption. We believe, and gropingly always will, and the white-knuckle terror of touring is alleviated by the knowledge that somebody who understands will offer me a floor every night.

(BenBonanza 2005)

The Evolution of Social Movement Theory

Above, I have demonstrated the relevance of Gramsci's theories of civil society, hegemony and counter-hegemony for activists working in the movements of the new transnational activism. Developed communally during the early formation of their movements, the perception many of these activists have of the role of social movements within society has some clear Gramscian qualities. Activists' understanding of the scope and power of the processes of globalization and the spread of global capitalism closely mirrors Gramsci's writings on hegemony, as well as Cox's more recent interpretation of that term on a global scale. Moreover, the daily actions of many of these activists are potentially counter-hegemonic in that they serve as social foundations, or agency-laden institutions, for a massive culture, in this example, the DiY culture. With these linkages made clear, social movement theory is now charged with helping activists realize the full potential of their counter-hegemonic organizations.

Without a doubt, social movement theory is overdue for a reconsideration of both the theoretical and empirical basis of its understanding of the new transnational social movements. Faced with a novel group of movements unlike any before, social movement theory must develop equally innovative methods for examining them. This article has tried to raise some important questions for this task; it has also attempted to provide some possible avenues for further exploration.

As only one example, the DiY punk movement has been cited here as a portion of

the new transnational activism often overlooked by social movement theory. While many of this movement's activists are dismissed as 'middle-class white kids with dreadlocks,' their role within the larger movement is extremely important. If the everyday activism of those living in the very belly of the global-capitalism beast has been overlooked by social movement literature, what else may have been neglected? To be sure, insuring accurate scholarship within the social movement field is extremely important. However, beyond the basic aspiration of precision, in the words of Barbara Epstein, 'activists need theory, not only about society and how to change it, but also about how social movements function and how progressive movements can best be built.' (Bevington and Dixon 2004: 231).

It is my hope that the questions raised here will help open new doors for contemporary social movement theory. As both a student of and activist in these new social movements, I feel there is a real need for a more powerful conceptual paradigm, one that tenders both academic import and true mobilizing potential. As social movement scholars, we must step away from the well-worn and comfortable theoretical models of the past. As academics, we must take great care to avoid missing the forest for the trees, and, as activists, we must learn how to best make use of that vast forest.

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