Special Issue
Research and Methods in the Study of Social Protest: Dialogues on Disciplines

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AFTER DISCIPLINES?
CRITICAL ACTIVITY AS ENCYCLOPAIDEIA

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Abstract

In this article, I critically discuss the ambiguous notion of ‘discipline’ and the related constructions of inter-, multi-, post-disciplinarity, from an ‘epistemic’ and ‘socio-political’ point of view. Particularly, I focus on the role of ‘power’ and ‘authority’, and on the consequences that follow by assuming a ‘foundationalist’ or ‘post-foundationalist’ approach. Next, assuming a ‘Critical Theory’ perspective, I try to rethink the meaning of a ‘critical activity’ able to generate a real social and epistemic change. I contend that a new discipline of thought is needed, rather than new disciplines, and a new personal attitude, not only engaged in mere procedures of recording “facts”, but characterised by a serious concern for the role of generalization or theory. A ‘crossing homeless’ attitude is proposed, that is at the same time theoretical, intellectual and practical, concerning the ‘unreasonable’ discipline of a critical activity aimed at putting culture in circle (‘encyclopaideia’) by systematically discontinuing events of subjectification.

Keywords

disciplines; postdisciplinarity; critical theory; epistemology

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The Disciplines

In the social or human scientific field, research and theories are usually organized under the so-called “foundation disciplines” (philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, etc.). The disciplines appear to offer differentiation between types of enquiry or research, different kinds of learning domains, coherence in terms of internal consistency, and rigour of enquiry. These elements raise forms of enquiry, research or learning domains above the level of popular or received opinion (Bridges, 2006). Disciplines are usually rooted in different, and sometimes radically different, traditions and in different methodologies. At first sight, the differences among communities of disciplined scholars and disciples are as great as anything else they might have in common, except for the fact that these communities may be also seen as forms of academic organization aimed at justifying and protecting (but also at separating and controlling) any field of enquiry, research, and learning, including the people engaged in them.

The notion of discipline is quite ambiguous. On the one hand, its dark side concerns elements such as rules, orders, power, domination, surveillance, punishment (e.g., disciplinam dare, from Latin, which refers to corporal flagellation), and includes principles and systems of exclusion, of division and rejection which designate schemas of possible, observable, measurable, classifiable objects. Within the notion of discipline is recognizable a principle of limitation, as Foucault argues, ‘in what is called not sciences but “disciplines”: a principle which is itself relative, and mobile, which permits construction but within narrow confines’ (Foucault, 1971, p. 59). On the other hand, however, it is true that we need discipline (the conditio sine qua non) in intellectual enquiry. This is the “enlightened” side of the notion of disciplines, which allows us to rationally connect thoughts and ideas through methods, instruments and data.

The undisciplined Feyerabend, in Against Method, while outlining an anarchist theory of knowledge, recommended the well-known and sometimes misunderstood “anything goes” formula, the only principle that, in his opinion, permits and does not obstruct scientific advancement. However, the decision to always be without rules is a rule in itself, and one that has relevant consequences on the construction of knowledge within the community of researchers, and on the public and rational justification of what scientists do. How may inferences be drawn? When and how the results of new enquiries may or may not confirm/refute previous sets of beliefs? We do need some rules (or, if one prefers, a theory of rationality) to answer these types of questions.

“Rule governance” constitutes the discipline of enquiry or research. When a form of governance is developed and differentiated enough, it enables us to refer to the system as a discipline. The problem is that disciplines are essential structures for systematising, organizing, and embodying the social and institutional practices upon which both coherent discourse and legitimate exercise of power depend’ (Lenoir, 1993, p. 73). Once again, the discipline’s dark side. It is true, following Russell, that we cannot separate knowledge from power, the epistemic from the political and the social, and that we must also carefully consider epistemological relativism (the idea that there is no such thing as objective truth), and epistemological pragmatism (the
idea that truth is the same as usefulness). These are both closely linked with authoritarian and totalitarian ideas (see Russell, 1941).

**Interdisciplinarity, Multidisciplinarity, Postdisciplinarity: New Forms of Discipline?**

It seems quiet difficult to disagree with the following argument: ‘Interdisciplinarity is the institutional ratification of the logic of disciplinarity. The very term implies respect for the discrete perspectives of different disciplines. You cannot have interdisciplinarity, or multidisciplinarity, unless you have disciplines’ (Menand, 2001, p.11). And what of postdisciplinarity? The central point here is that it is not sufficient to approach complex issues from any single discipline. Disciplines should change, not disappear or simply (or ingenuously) fuse each other, but instead must create ‘theoretical paradigms, questions and knowledge that cannot be taken up within the policed boundaries of existing disciplines’ (Giroux, 1997, p.xii). Disciplines have to resituate themselves ‘in a way that removes their effects as unnecessarily constraining foundational structures […] so that the pursuit of knowledge is expanded, and the range of possibilities for what constitutes legitimate intellectual activity is broadened’ (Mourad, 1997, p. 86, my italics). So, the “postdisciplinarity” claim is not just a simple or sophisticated overcoming of different disciplinary traditions, a kind of odd or paradoxical change which seems to let things be how they are, but rather something that seems very different at first sight. Problems never consist of simple, single or isolated issues, but are often (or always) interwoven, and the first problem is the unravelling of the plot. One single discipline is not enough, the problem is “complex”, as people usually say, and exceeds a single discipline’s limits and power. Exceeding the limits, going too far beyond the possibilities of a single discipline, means going beyond its foundational structures: postdisciplinarity means postfoundationalism. Let’s have a critical look inside this side of the question.

Foundationalism refers to the general belief that the only way that we can adequately justify our beliefs, the only way we can show that they are rational and true, is to show how they rest on some basic beliefs, or foundations, that do not in themselves stand in need of justification because they are, in some sense, self evident. A belief is justified if and only if, it is either a self-justifying foundational belief or can be shown to be ultimately based on, or derived from, a foundational belief (see Audi, 2003). Foundationalism has a long history with rationalist and empiricist versions, and various candidates to which accordingly the status of foundational beliefs, including logical and mathematical truths, innate ideas, the truth of reason or the sensory experience. All of these candidates were presumed independent of particular historical, social or cultural circumstances. Foundations enable practices (social ones, educational ones, etc.) to be erected on rational principles which are relatively objective, general and rational. Consequently practitioners act on the basis of this free knowledge, and their practice is governed by universal rational principles that apply always and everywhere, rather than in the wake of their local or parochial practical beliefs. Is this the foundationalist discourse of modernity? Is the foundationalist project the modern form of epistemic authority? Bacon and Descartes, noticed Popper, set up observation and reason as new authorities (Popper, 1960). Empiricism is foundationalist, as we can easily see in the following classical statement from Hume: ‘If I ask you why you believe any particular matter of fact (…) you must tell me some reason; and this reason will be some other fact, connected with it. But as you cannot proceed after this manner, ad infinitum, you must at last terminate in some fact, which is present to your memory senses; or must allow that your belief is entirely without foundation’ (Hume, 2000, section v, part I, my italics). A groundless belief is not admitted. Reasons (and theories) must be grounded on a non-contextually dependent or subjective foundational beliefs.
Contrary to this, the “post-foundationalist” critique is persuaded that there are no unmediated facts, no neutral observational language, no view from nowhere. At first sight, one may easily agree with such arguments which have, at their turn, a body of significant and articulated (more recent) traditions. But, we can also observe at our turn, that the post-foundationalist critique cannot be conceived as a view from nowhere, being included as it is in a range of diverse traditions (e.g. the American neo-pragmatism, the French post-structuralism). The tradition in which it is embedded is, we could say, the “foundationalist” side of the post-foundationalist critique. The claim and the conviction that the time has now come to abandon the search of epistemological foundations which can guarantee the truth of theoretical knowledge, seems to be very well founded or grounded on rational arguments. The idea that we can occupy a position outside of history and culture is a myth, the post-foundationalists say, because we are always interpretively situated within history and culture. The consequence is that knowledge is never disinterested or independent and there can be no privileged epistemological position that will enable us to transcend the particularities of our culture. It is a futile attempt, as Rorty argues, ‘to step outside our skin and compare ourselves with something absolute [...] to escape from the finitude of one’s time and place, the “merely conventional” and contingent aspects of one’s life’ (Rorty, 1982, p. 6). So, beliefs arguments and theories are, following this perspective, all groundless. Reasons and theories can only be grounded on contextually dependent or subjective beliefs. The local, or the contextual situation, and the subjects now involved in it, are the new post-foundationalist or post-disciplinarist (epistemic?) horizon. A horizon that is limited to the given space of immediate experience. Knowledge is always situated and arises in the context of problems to be solved. This problem, here, in this specific, particular, contextual situation in which this individual or those individuals are now situated. It follows that a single founded discipline cannot do the job alone through its “constraining foundational structures” and its generalizing and theorizing attitude and purpose. A post-foundationalist and post-disciplinary (and post-modern too?) attitude is therefore required. The authority of the general, of the universal is thus replaced by the authority of the particular and of the contingent.

If we have a deeper look at these (new?) authorities, some further considerations can be taken and an ironic paradox emerges. The first authority, which sounds totalitarian, constrictive, conservative, disciplined, aristocratic, distant, severely controlled, and rigorously governed, is after all connected to science, practical judgement, freedom and social change. The second one, that seems to be so near, so closed to reality, to facts, to things how they are, to phenomena, to practices, to peoples’ real and concrete lives and which seems to be creative, libertarian, democratic, open to everybody independent of their talents, is connected to naive empiricism, standardisation, practical chaos, nudity of mind, and social conservatism. From the point of view of global economical powers, contingency is better than generalization. Think and act locally, remain in the contingency, we dominate globally, could be the slogan. But when the economic and political power was local or national, their epistemic preferences were, on the contrary, towards the general and the universal. Think and act generally and universally, we dominate locally or nationally. Power prefers to be inaccessible, unapproachable and not to become an object of disciplined, founded and rigorous study. This is the source of any powerful authority.

If this is true, both the foundationalist-disciplinarity and the post-foundationalist-post-disciplinarity approaches are ideological in nature. They seem to be no more than a rhetorical discourse aimed at preserving power’s unapproachableness. In fact, power changes its perspective before changing, for example, its school or university systems. A local or national power prefers general, cultural or theorizing schools and universities. Economic global powers prefer local (see the actual myth of “territoriality”), practical, technical, job placement oriented
school and universities, aimed on focus, e.g., on “education and economic performance”. They are encouraged to refer to “theories” about “technologically based learning environments”, where learning (and the so-called “learning or information or knowledge society”) is built on a one-dimensional technological foundation and on the highways of global and digital powers of control (see Hamilton et al., 2004). No one imagines the disciplined or undisciplined pursuit of knowledge and understanding to be entirely free from entanglement with structures designed or developed to preserve and legitimate certain orders of power, global, national or local.

A Critical Theory of Critical Activity

A critical activity – if it is to be conducted rigorously and successfully – requires not being a discipline and not aiming to become a new discipline, its own discipline. To manage the global commons we need more wisdom than ever. The adage – know yourself –, imprinted on marble on the temple of Apollo in Delphi, is at the centre of Western wisdom. I am not an Athenian or a Greek, said Socrates, but a citizen of the world, and I know only that I don’t know. Socrates questioned the wisdom of the rulers of Athens, who preferred prostration to protests, a preference he himself came to experience. In his saying that he knew only that he didn’t know anything, he also implied that the rulers didn’t know anything for sure, either. Insolence! But, following T. S. Eliot we can ask ourselves, where is the wisdom today that we have lost in data or in information? How much do we really know about ourselves today? And about ourselves in the global world?

If over time Western wisdom tried to interpret or explain the world, then later tried to change it, and more recently tried to adapt to it, now is the turn, after the postmodernist disenchantment of irony and contingency (les petits récits), to return to the initial pursuit. A new discipline of thought is needed, not new disciplines. The discipline of critical activity. This is not the search for a new principle of control over the production of the discourse or an attempt to fix limits for the discourse through the action of an identity which takes the form of a permanent re-actuation of rules. Modern societies are projects of Enlightenment and, as such, they are projects of learning. Although education may well be, by right, the instrument by which any individual in a society can have access to any kind of discourse, this does not prevent it from following in its distribution, in what it allows and prevents, the lines marked out by social distances, oppositions and struggles: ‘any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledge and powers which they carry’ (Foucault, 1971, p. 62). The problem today is that projects of learning and their systematically organized schooling are suspected of having helped develop, as ideological tools, “today’s crisis”. Now it becomes clear how inadequate that type of learning, and its inherent concept of technical-instrumental rationality, has been. In 1944, Horkheimer and Adorno wrote: ‘It turned out, in fact, that we had set before ourselves nothing less than the discovery of why humanity, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism’ (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947, p. xi). Were they wrong? Was this only a deceived or frustrated practice of a “hermeneutics of suspicion”, of which Ricoeur later spoke? Reason signifies the ability to free oneself from a pre-reflective bond with nature and to be differentiated from it. This capacity of distancing, however, contains within it the possibility of transforming nature into an object of domination, so that things become “the substrate of domination”. For those in position of power ‘human beings become raw material just like the whole of nature is for society’ (ibid, p. 79).

Reason thus degenerates into an instrument of domination, ‘the court of judgment of calculation, which adjusts the world for the end of self-preservation and recognizes no function other than preparation of the object from mere sensory material in order to make it the material
of subjugation' (ibid, pp. 83-84). No universal history ‘leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb’ (Adorno, 1973, p. 320).

Habermas’s thinking essentially has to be understood as a continuation of the work of the first generation of Critical Theory. But, is he right when he proceeds on the assumption that the statement of a universal context of delusion is not just an historical diagnosis, but has also been caused by the theoretical means employed, having the goal to explore, as Horkheimer said, the interconnections between the economic life of society, the psychic development of the individual and transformation in the realm of culture? The first phase of the Critical Theory research programme has to be found in a social-psychological approach that linked Marx’s theory of society to Freud’s psychoanalysis, and which was expected thus to accurately explain the interdependence of psychic and social foundational structure.

Education has often been conceptualised as initiation into a culture. In societies which find themselves undergoing rapid “change”, the reconstruction of a culture through the process of education must at the same time contain elements of transformation available for the next generation, if the process is not to unconsciously allow self-destructive tendencies. Culture, as the way in which human beings find meaning and value in their lives in our historical situation, depends on our attempt to comprehend more completely and with the development of reason, the interdependent elements of our situation and our situations as a whole. Human beings cannot find human meanings and values if, for example, school “change” is conceived in business terms. According to Pring who draws on the language and practices of the business world: ‘That means that we look at the changes for the improvement of standards as a “quality circle” in which one defines the product, identifies the means for producing the product, empowers the deliverers, measures the quality, empowers the client and develops partnership between the clients, the deliverers and the managers of the system such that there might be a continuous review of targets and means for achieving those targets’ (Pring, 2001, p. 208). School in the era of positivism and “culture industry”, Horkheimer and Adorno might argue; school and education in the era of technical reproduction, Benjamin may add. The subjugation of life to the production-process produces isolation and loneliness for every single person and universal objectification.

The discipline of critical activity could (or should) start from the following seminal aphorism; that the concept of what is subjective and what is objective have been completely inverted: ‘Objective means the non-controversial side of the phenomenon, its unquestioned imprint, taken as it is, the facade constructed out of classified data, therefore the subjective; and they call subjective whatever breaks through such, emerging out of the specific experience of the thing, divesting itself of prejudged convention and setting the relation to the object in place of the majority decision concerning such, which they cannot even see, therefore the objective’ (Adorno, 1951, p.43).

First of all, as an immediate consequence, one must separate oneself from the mainstream conceptions and practices in any field of human or social sciences. A science is human and social, and practices are human and social, if and only if they divest themselves form prejudged conventions that are contingent and temporary rather than universal and inevitable. Some preliminary questions are necessary to make progress in imagining alternatives: What actual tendencies work to marginalise and exclude? What ways of thinking and acting make less possible to engage in or be open to? If, following Foucault, prohibition is the most obvious and familiar procedure of exclusion, another uncomfortable question is: what is prohibited?

If in our societies the production of discourse is controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures, including disciplined research methods, disciplined learning or training activities, and so on, a critical activity consists preliminarily in
the subjectification process described by Adorno. Speculation has to depart or deviate from the current “epistemic” virtues of advanced industrial societies, from the administrative schema of analysis, from its transformation into neutral material or into a simple fact, ‘which can be filed in one of the branches of classification as a piece of evidence of what is always the same’ (Adorno, 1951, p. 43). In this process, the “inner” dimension of a mind in which opposition to the status quo can take root, is whittled down, and the loss of this dimension ‘in which the power of negative thinking – the critical power of Reason – is at home, is the ideological counterpart to the very material process in which advanced industrial society silences and reconciles the opposition’ (Marcuse, 1964, p. 11), and thus reduces the promotion and discussion of alternatives policies within the status quo. You are completely free inside the given field of possibilities. The form is given, the frame is established, the content is free. This trend, argues Marcuse, may be related to a development in scientific method: operationalism in the physical, behaviourism in the social sciences: ‘the common feature is a total empiricism in the treatment of concepts; their meaning is restricted to the representation of particular operation and behaviour’ (ibid, p. 12). A concept involves nothing more than a set of corresponding operations, and we shall not permit ourselves ‘to use as tools in our thinking, concepts of which we cannot give an adequate account in terms of operations’ (Bridgman, 1928, p. 31). Paraphrasing Russell we could say, Don’t let the people think. Let the “practical” people do, let the researchers accumulate data or evidence, let the teacher use her tool box. The “mere doing” just follows “standards” or “indicators” of “excellence” or “quality” in a narrow performative way. In this situation there is a strong tendency to identify, for example, teaching ability with the use of procedures that yield immediately successful (measurable) results. What is central is to achieve mastery of a particular art, that is to say skills and techniques. A teacher is a good teacher if she or he can use appropriately her or his tool box. As the baker makes breads, the teacher produces measurable learning. And the same occurs to a researcher: he produces data accumulation and “evidence” about “what works” in contingent (educational, social…) settings using her or his research tool box appropriately. Sometimes the same person does both, and this for example is the case of “the teacher as investigator”. But what must be noted here is that in both activities the tool box is central and not the theoretical equipment or the talent of the teacher or of the researcher or their ability to conceptualize.

Is this “new” mode of “thought” predominant in social sciences? If we look at mainstream methods and practices of research and teacher training in the educational field, the answer is yes. In a “natural” way, many of the most seriously ‘troublesome concepts are being “eliminated” by showing that no adequate account of them in terms of operation or behaviour can be given’ (Marcuse, 1964, p. 13). Therefore operationalism is a procedure of exclusion. What is marginalized, or prohibited? The transcending elements of reason. Several modes of protest and transcendence are astutely permitted from the point of view of the status quo because they are no longer contradictory to the status quo and no longer negative: ‘They are the ceremonial part of practical behaviourism, its harmless negation, and are quickly digested by the status quo as part of its healthy diet’ (ibid, p. 14). To reasonably protest within the given untouchable power (the global financial markets and their non democratic global “institutions” and “political” players), is one of the given possibilities in a democratic and open society. So, the special concern of dialectical reason is to “trip” the healthy opinions about the immutability of the course of the world. Dialectical reason is, as opposed to the ruling one, the unreason that helps the truth of the fool to attain the consciousness of its own reason (Adorno, 1951, p.45). There are three great systems of exclusion: ‘the forbidden speech, the division of madness, and the will to truth’ (Foucault, 1971, p.55). The third system is my focus here.
Encyclopaideia: The Discipline of Critical Activity

A critical activity is an unreasonable practice of thought. Unreasonable, of course, from the point of view of the status quo. It’s the not-given possibility - within the given field of possibilities - to transcend them. The not-given possibility is the offering of an unicum which no-one wants to buy, something free from the exchange rationality. It is not a “process” with its mechanical causality, but a “discontinuous systematicity” that introduces ‘alea in the production of events’, (ibid, p.69), and “aura” in the creation of meaningful human face-to-face relations. Hic et nunc, here and now, is the time and space of action and human relations, not the time and space of science and knowledge. A critical activity therefore must be founded on a “crossing” attitude, that necessarily includes the incidental occurrence to cross swords, an attitude to pass through, to wander, to make a detour, to diverge, to depart from the given path, and, at the same time, the attitude to follow for a while without being troubled or disturbed by the mainstream, the river flows, having the capacity even to stop and pause in it. Its geometric figure is the circle, the ellipse, not the straight line or the segment. From an epistemic point of view, this means to be homeless but not lost or unable to find the way not knowing where one is, because, as the poet Thomas Dylan said, ‘the windows pour into their heart / and the doors burn in their brain’.

The “crossing homeless” attitude is the “unreasonable” discipline of a critical activity aimed at putting culture in the circle by systematically discontinuous events of subjectification. This unforeseeable, “useless” and “unnecessary” conceptual activity (from the technical-rationality point of view) is at the same time theoretical, intellectual and practical. Its practical side is educational, concerning the developing of Paideia, in the Greek sense. And encyclopaideia is the name of it.

Technologisation, institutionalisation and bureaucratisation effectively ensure that education is now construed as a species of “poiesis” guided by “techne”, and hence an instrumental activity directed towards the achievement of externally imposed outcomes and goals (see Carr, 1968). A critical activity is not instrumental. Instruments are non-neutral, they are not only the means of making something happen even when conceived as the purest of means at our fingertips. They are, in a subtle and attractive way, “ideological fragments” in our hands, promptly available and user friendly.

The approach to knowledge of a critical activity is not a bare empiricism that, at its most extreme level is simply a recording of individual facts. Without an apparatus of generalization or theory, these bare facts though recorded in the proper or expected manner, lead nowhere. They do not even provide a practical guide for future experience or policy. The links between “knowledge”, and the one hand, and power and control, on the other, are equally strong within both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms, albeit the nature of the connection is different (see Pring, 2000). Things remain as they are, there is no real change, no real development but only the dull stasis of a perfect and disciplined life. A very busy life, of course, full of activity, filling in questionnaires, accumulating information and data about perhaps the organization and management of protest, social movements, political structures - or in other fields - of schools, school systems, methods of teaching, and so on, but devoid of serious theoretical thrust.

The critical activist is a researcher that lives in this time but whose speed is different. He is a researcher, unquiet, ill at ease, one who carefully studies and investigates himself and others and the things in the world, trying to make new orders of sense, while at the same time condemning anti-traditionalism as a futile (and today ideological) attitude. His space of life and action is the space of real and human relationships, but his perception is different, divesting itself of prejudged convention and setting the relation to the subject or to the object in place of the majority decision.
His attitude is not solipsistic, he is not a hermit. The critical activist’s research is interested in others viewpoints and perspectives, he is not suspicious of ideas that do not come from his own tribes and trades. To answer the question - “What is the right way to look at this situation?” - a practical judgement is needed, there are no useful rules or algorithms. The wisdom of the phronimos must live in the epistemic researcher’s wandering mind which apparently seems to be without any special purpose.

References


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The role of the reflexive self in Mailer’s protests

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Abstract

In *The Armies of the Night* (1968) and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1968/2008) Norman Mailer details the exploits of the anti-Vietnam war protestors and his role in the protests. With an ethnographer’s eye for detail and a novelist’s eye for imagery, he constructs a picture of youthful fear and exuberance, a totalitarian reaction to protest, and documents an America which he realises is slowing eating itself. In these nonfiction novels, he places himself at the centre of events, interpreting the data through his own frazzled, drink-fuelled, mischievous self. This article utilises Pierre Bourdieu’s methodological framework of reflexive sociology to both critically analyse Mailer as an ethnographer and qualitative researcher and ask whether inquiry into social protest can be adequately conducted through the autobiographical gaze of a novelist. It is argued that by using such literary resources and techniques, we can, in the spirit of C. Wright Mills, move to a more public sociology where literary techniques are valued, rather than dismissed as unscientific.

Keywords

Bourdieu, literature, Norman Mailer, qualitative methods, reflexive research

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The author wishes to thank Bob Jeffery and the two anonymous reviewers for the comprehensive and helpful comments they provided in the development of this article.
Mailer may have been a misanthropic bastard, but Holy Toledo, the man could write. He was a chronicler, a first-rate observer, and a commentator the likes of which we may never see again. In his coverage of the Miami and Chicago conventions, he kowtowed to no one.

‘Maureen’, June 1st 2009

Paying attention is precisely what the literary journalist in his nonfiction writings [sic], and what Miami and the Siege of Chicago...shows is that for all his self-obsession, Mailer was no mere narcissistic punk considering the world his realm and its inhabitants his subjects.

‘Ted Burke’, March 27th 2009

[T]his book [Miami and the Siege of Chicago] is lumpy and tangled and has mailer's [sic] heart and testicles all over it.

‘brian’, September 24th 2008

The above quotations from Goodreads.com¹, the book review and information website, give an insight into the world of Norman Mailer, and what he attempted to achieve in his accounts of the October 1967 march on the Pentagon attended by 400,000 protestors (Akatiff, 1974, p. 30), and the US Presidential nominating conventions of 1968. These books, The Armies of the Night (1968) and Miami and the Siege of Chicago (1968/2008) respectively², detail the enormous social and political upheaval in the US in the late-1960s, brought about by intensifying anger and revulsion at America’s military role in Southeast Asia, widely decried as imperialist and inhumane. Mailer’s reporting of these events was to be a highpoint of a long and varied career, earning him the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award for Armies, as he sought to establish himself at the centre of both the burgeoning New Journalism movement, and satisfy his intellectual and egotistical craving for appreciation (H. Mills, 1985).

This article seeks to argue that there is a substantial amount that social science research into social protest can learn from Mailer’s style and approach in these two books—and that producing a social science ‘with heart and testicles all over it’ is not a challenge to shy away from. Specifically, I argue that Mailer’s process in these texts is actually a prescient and accessible application of Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of ‘reflexive sociology’ (Bourdieu, 1990, 1999, 2003; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), a methodological approach where researcher subjectivities and positionality are laid bare, and are used as explicit windows through which reading publics experience the generated data. If an ethnography is to know that the study of human relations is ‘necessarily an embedded one [where] to pretend otherwise obscures more than it illuminates’ (Kahn, 2011, p. 201-2), Mailer presents an ethnographic study in which he honestly presents his own predilections, faults, and internal contradictions and confusions, in order to aid understanding (both his own and the general public’s) of the torrent of crises engulfing American institutions in the late 1960s. Further, this article considers the language and literary notions Mailer applies in his analyses, adding literary perspective to current sociological debates about egalitarian approaches to the communication of (social) science.

Qualitative studies of protest, particularly those which utilise participant observation

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² To benefit the reader, these texts shall henceforth be referred to as Armies and Miami and Chicago.
The Reflexive Self in Mailer’s Protests

or ethnographic methods are unavoidably grounded in visceral experience. The emotional and physiological experiences of the researcher, from anger, to adrenaline, to fear, to the sound of blood rushing through the ears, are all part of the subjective state of data collection. People make sense of their world through the stories they tell about them (Sikes & Gale, 2006; McAdams, 2008; Polletta, 2008), and the stories which Norman Mailer tells about the anti-Vietnam war protests, and the methods and literary techniques he uses to tell these stories, are a more than creditable way to understand the processes behind social action and political protest. The stories told in and about social movements have power, a power which comes not necessarily from the clarity of their moral message but the often time ability to generate ‘narrative fidelity’ (Polletta, 2009), reinforcing a message of movement coherence and resonance that is allied with popular narratives. Since Jasper’s (1998, p. 397) assertion that ‘emotions have disappeared from models of protest’, there have been a growing number of writers who have tackled the role of emotional connection in their study and understanding of social protest (Woods, Anderson, Guilbert & Watkin, 2012; Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013), set within the cultural turn in the social sciences. Emotions have been seen as a reaction against the conceptualisation of participants as rational actors (Jasper, 1998; Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2001), and often as factors which accelerate and intensify social movements (Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2007). It has been articulated that anger and guilt are the emotions most likely motivators of action, as opposed to shame, despair, or fear (for an overview, see Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013, p. 893).

Gould’s (2009) Bourdieusian work argues that it is the emotional habitus within an AIDS coalition movement which, in moving from shame to anger to despair, is responsible for the movement’s development and eventual breakup. Woods et al. (2012) propose a ‘ladder of emotions’ that are foregrounded as movements proceed, drawing on their qualitative work with the campaigns of rural communities in England to show how emotions contributed to change. These works and more (for example, see the discussion of Adair [2005] below) show that the importance of understanding the emotions of protestors and social movement participants cannot be overstated. Yet this article seeks to draw attention to the principle communicating the emotion of researchers as a methodological necessity, not as an indicator of movement behaviours amongst participants. It is believed that the incorporation of Bourdieusian reflexivity as the rationale for such a necessity is an original contribution, as may be the significance of seeing Mailer as a role model for such an approach, especially as we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the conflict in Vietnam.

The Road to ‘68

1968 is often considered the most tumultuous year of the second half of the twentieth century. The assassinations of Martin Luther King in April and Robert F. Kennedy in June (coming a mere five years after that of President John F. Kennedy) had savaged the mood of an already frayed nation. After King’s death, rioting erupted across American cities as Black citizens struggled to maintain King’s commitment to non-violent protest, a moment which for some indicated the death of 1960s liberalism (Risen, 2009). With the diversification of life brought about in part by the social changes of the 1960s, a nation with domestic strife found little sanctity abroad.

By 1968 the war in Vietnam had been active under various guises for 13 years, with the US government moving from supporting the South Vietnamese through military ‘advisors’ under Eisenhower, to a consignment of 16,000 personnel under Kennedy. After Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963, and his election in November 1964, President Lyndon Johnson escalated
American involvement in the conflict from a defensive position of protecting and advising the South Vietnamese to an offensive strategy aimed at wiping out the northern Vietcong. By December 1965 184,000 US military personnel were stationed in Vietnam, which increased three-fold over the next three years (American War Library, 2008); at its peak in 1968, over 540,000 American troops were serving in Vietnam (DoVA, 2011).

With the US operating a policy of conscription since 1947, these troops included a large number of draftees. As a leading anti-war activist and founder of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), one of the groups which organised the protests in Chicago, Tom Hayden said of the draft as an incitement to rebel and fight the state:

The first thing you learned in the Civil Rights movement was that fear was the enemy, and overcoming fear was the very purpose of the struggle...That carried over into the protests against the Vietnam war. And the draft had a way of focusing the mind of a young person. It was not just that you were fighting for an abstract cause, you were fighting for something all too real, something that thousands of your fellow citizens were dying senselessly for.

Hayden, in O’Hagan, 2008

While the sheer numbers of young men either being drafted or volunteering to serve made the Vietnam War a continuing and terrible reality for the US public, it was also the first conflict to be understood through television, making it a nightly spectacle. The power of images to elicit emotions was evident throughout the war, particularly the world famous, and Pulitzer Prize winning, photograph of a naked nine year-old Vietnamese girl running down a road after being burned in a napalm attack (see Faas & Fulton, 2000). In later consideration, Richard Nixon would claim that it was the fact that Vietnam occurred through camera lenses and in the public’s front rooms that contributed to the idea that America were ‘fighting in military and moral quicksand’ rather than any operation or aims of the war itself (Nixon, in Hallin, 1986, p. 3). Perhaps the most important media intervention was when CBS Evening News anchor Walter Cronkite, the ‘most trusted man in America’ according to one 1972 poll (Winfrey & Schaffer, 2009), decried the Vietnam War as unwinnable, asserting that America was in stalemate, and that ‘the only rational way out’ would be a negotiated settlement (Hallin, 1986, p. 170).

It would be churlish and inaccurate to say that Norman Mailer’s coverage of two non-mainstream protests against the Vietnam War was considered part of the turning of public opinion against the war. But the military, social, and political crises that America experienced in the late-1960s were to provide the established print media an opportunity to challenge the increasingly investigative and literal news reporting seen on television, an explicit aim of Mailer’s (Lourve, 1988, p. 76). As the lifestyle magazines and colour supplements of newspapers sought a greater role in American public life, Mailer formed part of a vanguard movement which sought to shift literary and journalistic horizons.

Norman Mailer and the New Journalism

The novelist has lost her/his naivety: no longer does the writer work within the purity of a formalized tradition, but within the disruptions of the volatile velocity of the space age.

Fair, 1988, p. 62

Norman Kingsley Mailer was born in New Jersey in 1923 and lived many lives before his death in November 2007. Not content with authoring two dozen fiction and nonfiction...
books, he was an actor, film director, essayist and reporter, playwright, and political candidate, standing unsuccessfully to be Mayor of New York in 1969. After a relatively normal middle-class upbringing, Mailer went to Harvard at age of 16 to study aeronautical engineering. He served in the Philippines in World War II, using his experiences as inspiration behind his most critically successful fiction work, The Naked and the Dead, which in 1948 launched him into the literary world.

By all accounts a complex and difficult character with a dangerous penchant for alcohol and violence, Mailer was a leading figure in American literature and wider society for six decades. Admired for his voracious appetite for work (H. Mills, 1985) and disdained for his ego (Rolling Stone magazine name checked him as part of the ‘most pretentious moments in history’ [Taibbi, 2012]), Mailer’s legacy is perhaps rather unfulfilled. As someone who saw himself as the greatest American writer of his generation, and, it can be argued, whose fiction career never quite again reached the critical peak of his initial work (H. Mills, 1985, p. 20), Mailer’s ego can be seen as bruised and bloodied, but never bowed, in his autobiographical reporting in Armies and Miami and Chicago. But this autobiographical style was not merely Mailer’s own, rather part of a much larger reaction toward literature in the 1960s and 1970s.

Norman Mailer’s name, alongside those of Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson, George Plimpton, Truman Capote and others, are remembered as key players in a literary movement called New Journalism. As the journalist Frank Rich said in the introduction to Miami and Chicago, the ‘American tumult of the 1960s required a new language to chronicle it’ (Rich, 2008, p. viii). Towards such an end, the commandments behind New Journalism were codified as ‘[a]ctivist, advocacy, participatory, tell-it-as-you-see-it, sensitivity, investigative, saturation, humanistic, reformist and a few more’ (MacDougal, 1971, p. v), a subjective and normative approach to exploring social events. Mailer himself came inadvertently to the movement earlier than most, writing ‘Superman Comes to the Supermarket’ (1960), an essay about an interview with John F. Kennedy for Esquire magazine before the Presidential election of 1960, which would later form the basis of a collection of works, The Presidential Papers (Mailer, 1963/1976). ‘Superman’ would contain much of the dramatic flair of Mailer’s later protest reporting, mixing his own personal opinions and experiences alongside his political investigations, utilising the imagery and metaphor of the novelist. For example, this was Mailer’s take on Robert Kennedy in ‘Superman’:

Bobby Kennedy, the archetype Bobby Kennedy, looked like a West Point cadet, or, better, one of those reconstructed Irishmen from Kirkland House one always used to have to face in the line in Harvard house football games. "Hello," you would say to the ones who looked like him as you lined up for the scrimmage after the kickoff, and his type would nod and look away, one rock glint of recognition your due for living across the hall from one another all through Freshman year, and then bang, as the ball was passed back, you’d get a bony king-hell knee in the crotch. He was the kind of man never to put on the gloves with if you wanted to do some social boxing, because after two minutes it would be a war, and ego-bastards last long in a war.

Mailer, 1960

Mailer perceptively noted that JFK brought the cult of personality and celebrity to American politics, and would later reflect on the vital role Jackie Kennedy played in US culture (Mailer, 1963/1976, p. 95-112). The challenge that this threw down to established political journalism, both the access that could be gained through Mailer’s own celebrity status and the resources that
could be offered by writing for America’s ‘lifestyle’ magazines, demonstrated that ‘Superman’ had cemented the possibility of a new kind of journalism, ‘filled with egotism, opinions, irreverence, and irrelevancies’ (Harry Ransom Center, 2007). Wolfe (1973) later further codified New Journalism in a collection of essay extracts from authors whom he felt had participated in the movement, living up to a manifesto which encouraged writers to witness events first hand, think of their participants as characters in a novel, and bring events to life through extended use of dialogue. This was in order to steer away from the ‘matter of fact’ approach to reporting deeply emotional events (Yilmaz, 2005, p. 251), which was seen in American political and social journalism in the 1960s (Rich, 2008). Instead, attempts to ‘tell the truth’ became ‘more self-conscious and the uncertainty of the dividing line between fiction and non-fiction was foregrounded rather than obscured’ (Taylor, 2003, p. 18).

This section has served to briefly illustrate to the reader Norman Mailer’s background and his role in the changing nature of American journalism in the 1960s, alongside the political context against which he wrote Armies and Miami and Chicago. The next section will expand upon the methodological and theoretical context for this article, that of the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and his call for reflexive sociology. The focus will then move to a close reading of the texts to demonstrate the clear overlap between this call and the autobiographical reportage of Mailer in Washington and Chicago, and how these can provide social researchers with guidance and inspiration to produce work which is far more literary and closer to the lived experience of data collection.

**Bourdieu: Negating Subjectivity through Reflexivity**

Bourdieu’s sociological investigations utilised advanced quantitative and qualitative techniques (Hamel, 1998), with no obvious pattern or rhythm established in his chosen approaches. His early studies of Algeria (Bourdieu, 1979) used ethnographic research and some statistical evidence, such as those exploring Arab marriage practices, and used photography (see Bourdieu, 2012) to develop his sociological eye as he trained himself as a fieldworker:

> He tried out a range of techniques: surveys, observations, in-depth interviews, sketches of village geography and houses, and even Rorschach tests  
> Calhoun, 2012, p. ix

In Distinction (1979/2010) the (qualitative) cultural tastes of respondents were (quantitatively) mapped in order to produce a hierarchy of cultural capital and awareness. In Homo Academicus (1988), Bourdieu draws on a biographic narrative of his own journey into the elite of higher education and French society, alongside the statistical evidence drawn from a study of higher education. This serves to advance his work highlighting the reproductive and reinforcing nature of education; rather than its promise to act as an instrument of social mobility, the originating habitus and social profile of students remains more determinant to outcomes than their academic capital (Bourdieu, 1988, 1989; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Yet despite this earlier methodological variance, later in his career Bourdieu concentrated his research processes around one methodological pillar: the need for reflexivity (Bourdieu, 2003; Bourdieu, 1999), most thoroughly documented in An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; see also Bourdieu, 1990).

There were three main facets to Bourdieusian reflexive sociology, spelt out by Schirato & Webb (2003). These required, firstly, a focus on the disciplinary and academic situ, the ‘scholastic
point of view’ or the intellectual bias and dispositions required by an academic field (Kenway & McLeod, 2004, p. 528-9); the second, an analysis of the researcher’s own position within the academic field; and thirdly, and most importantly for this article, the social origins of the researcher. It is this third strand, the focus on researcher positionality, which shall be examined now, and shall form the basis of this critique of Mailer’s work.

As Bourdieu (2003, p. 287) wrote:

"Nothing is more false, in my view, than the maxim almost universally accepted in the social sciences according to which the researcher must put nothing of himself into the research."

He argued that researchers must be reflexively aware of their own habitus, such as their own predispositions, knowledges and competences while undertaking research, in order to produce, if not objective, then honest and open research. Bourdieu drew on examples from his studies in Algeria and his home village of Béarn to demonstrate how ‘idiosyncratic personal experiences methodically subjected to sociological control constitute irreplaceable analytic resources, and that mobilizing one’s social past through self-socio-analysis can and does produce epistemic as well as existential benefits’ (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 281).

Famously, Bourdieu’s first lecture on entering the Collège de France was the ‘Lecture on the Lecture’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 177-98), where he deconstructed the issues he faced in giving such as esteemed public performance, in front of an audience of the most acclaimed academics in French society. In his final lecture of this series, entitled ‘Sketch for a self-analysis’, he subjected himself to the exercise of autobiographical reflexivity for which he had been a proponent. Republished as the book of the same name, it is his effort to codify his feelings on his own habitus and resultanty explain his work’s trajectory. The first half of the book is academically situated, continuing Bourdieu’s assertion that the contextual detail required for sociologists to produce sociology is the academic construct in which they find themselves: he later, for example, termed Homo Academicus a ‘very self-conscious “epistemological experiment”’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 67). He aims, against authors such as Sartre who Bourdieu dismisses with quiet anger as someone too comfortable in the established academic elite, and who refused to ‘call the intellectual world into question’ in the same way that intellectuals called the world into question (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 23), to create a ‘sociologistic interpretation of the sociological description of the intellectual world’ (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 25) - the sociology of sociology. This involves clarity about moving beyond the narcissistic researcher merely writing about themselves, to that of ‘participant objectification’ (Bourdieu, 2003), concerned with explaining the conditions in which the research intervention takes place.

In The Weight of the World, Bourdieu (1999, p. 608) explores and explains the social relationship which exists in all research, quantitative or qualitative, which renders impossible the ‘positivist dream of an epistemological state of perfect innocence’. He instead posits that a certain amount of compromise is required in defining the possibilities of social research. It is not possible to achieve an omniscient and objective insight into the behaviours and attitudes of social actors, but we must remember that the social researcher finds himself or herself better placed than most to study and comprehend the world around them. This point is well-made in Homo

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3 For more on Bourdieu's examination of the 'scholastic point of view' see Bourdieu (2000) and Kenway & McLeod (2004). It may be that as multidisciplinary journals grow in size and influence this examination of differing scholastic approaches, and differing ontological and epistemological doctrines increases, and may even see the need for separate disciplinary dispositions diminish.
Academicus (1988, p. 31), where Bourdieu writes that:

Marx suggested that, every now and then, some individuals managed to liberate themselves so completely from the positions assigned to them in social space that they could comprehend that social space as a whole, and transmit their vision to those who were still prisoners of the structure. In fact, the sociologist can affirm that the representation which he produces through his study transcends ordinary visions, without thereby laying claim to such absolute vision, able fully to grasp historical reality as such. Taken from an angle which is neither the partial and partisan viewpoint of agents engaged in the game, nor the absolute viewpoint of a divine spectator, the scientific vision represents the most systematic totalization which can be accomplished, in a given state of the instruments of knowledge, at the cost of as complete as possible an objectification both of the historical moment and of the work of totalization.

Social researchers can only do so much, but they are well positioned to do what they do. Accusations of subjectivity in social research are used to undermine its argument, its validity and accuracy, to posit that findings are not ‘true’. Yet Bourdieu is arguing that for a researcher to pretend they are an objective outsider, unaffected by their habitus and the experience of data collection, is a double untruth, misleading both about oneself and one’s findings. Being aware of one’s objectivities, and making them clear to the reader, is, he argues, preferable to pretending they do not exist. Mailer’s Armies and Miami and Chicago are examples of this approach when applied to social protest.

It is the central argument of this article that through this open, and some may say confessional, approach to research and writing, we can produce academic research which is far closer to the lived experiences of our research participants. It will be shown that Mailer’s awareness of his subjectivity, and his continuing self-exploration of how his relationships, biography, emotions and experiences before, during and after the protests affect his judgement, aids our understanding of these protests. What could be labelled a deficit of Mailer’s research, the honest admittance of the lack of objectivity, is beneficial and perhaps the only way to overcome accusations of subjectivity.

‘History as a Novel…’

In Armies, Mailer’s reportage of the 1967 protest begins inauspiciously. The book starts with an extract from Time magazine, detailing Mailer’s drunken and rambling performance at a pre-march peace rally at a Washington D.C. theatre. After the extract focusing on his lewd remarks and belligerent attitude, Mailer makes the rather pointed remark, ‘Now we may leave Time in order to find out what happened’ (Mailer, 1968, p. 14). Mailer is setting his stall out early, remarking that a politicised media, who he feels did not report either the confrontation at the theatre nor the march on the Pentagon properly or accurately, are biased reporters in favour of the conservative, pro-war establishment. His argument is instead that his voice, a voice which produces a narrative aware of his own foibles, is the most suitable and proper voice to explain to the reader ‘what happened’. He is more than aware his voice has the texture of ‘a Swiss cheese’ (Mailer, 1968, p.14), damaged by drink and drugs, but Mailer understands that he is a deeply subjective person and dominated by these substances and subjectivities. However, this demonstrates the willingness to subject his own behaviour to similar analysis to which he subjects other actors in his narrative. Conversely, in Miami and Chicago Mailer has less of a need to explain or give reason for his autobiographical approach to reporting, as Armies had already
been well-received and rewarded.

Armies proceeds to tell the story of the march on the Pentagon, the days leading up to it which included the night at the theatre and other events around Washington D.C., including a draft card burning. Later, the book concentrates on the days following the march, where Mailer was held in prison and went before a judge, seeking bail following his arrest for breaking a police line and trying to enter the Pentagon. The whole story is told through the third person, with Mailer referring to himself as ‘Mailer’ throughout (in Miami and Chicago he refers to himself as ‘the reporter’). Mailer realises that if the narrative were to focus on Jerry Rubin, Dave Dellinger, or other leaders of the anti-war movement the history of the event would be fatally flawed. Yet equally, a protagonist who had no connection to the events would leave the reader blind. Instead ‘…an eyewitness who is a participant but not a vested partisan is required, further he must not only be involved, but ambiguous in his own proportions’ (Mailer, 1968, p. 64). It could be argued that Mailer here is demonstrating the most incredible egotism, arriving at the conclusion that it is he, coincidentally, who is best placed to report these events. He meets this charge head on, stating the narrator should be ‘…an egotist of the most startling disproportion, outrageously and often unhappily self-assertive’ (Mailer, 1968, p.65) in order to access opportunities and to stimulate events around him. This would be tied to the self-reflexivity of the novelist who was ‘…in command of a detachment…(and so in need of studying every last lineament of the fine, the noble, the frantic, and the foolish in others and himself)’ (Mailer, 1968, p. 65).

In Miami and Chicago Mailer’s reporting has a less clear narrative and spatial structure, moving from the nominating convention centre to the Chicago parks where the protests and running battles with the police occur. He witnesses some of the battles with the police, but has to rely on the reporting of others to understand exactly what happens in others. The book is more fragmented as he tries to document the political machinations occurring across Chicago, concerning who will be chosen as the Democratic Party’s nominee in the wake of Johnson pulling out of the race, and who would be selected as their running mate. However he still uses the same literary devices as in Armies and analyses the events around him through the novelists’ gaze. Mailer remarks upon the literary import of symbols, how they are vital for protest because they inspire common cause. Without Lyndon Johnson to oppose, the protest in Chicago was fractured and disjointed (with some of the protestors such as the Yippies longing for such a disjointed mess). Mailer highlights these differences between the events in Armies and Chicago, and the consequence of lacking a symbol of oppression in the latter:

...symbol had the power to push him into actions more heroic than himself. The fact that he had been marching to demonstrate against a building which was the living symbol of everything he most despised - the military-industrial complex of the land – had worked to fortify his steps. The symbol of the Pentagon had been a chalice to hold his fear; in such circumstances his fear had even flavoured his courage with the sweetest emotions of battle. But in Chicago there was no symbol for him.

Mailer, 1968/2008, p. 144

Mailer had seen his personal symbols of American positivity and possibility, JFK and RFK, taken away, and he now used the negative symbol of Johnson as a way to centre his discontent. He reports his emotive cry as he learned of Bobby Kennedy’s assassination (Mailer, 1968/2008, p. 93), and the deep convictions he holds about Democratic politics, exemplified by his mistrust of the supporters of Gene McCarthy, is in stark comparison to his open confusion at the Republican
convention in Miami, where he freely admits to neither understanding their machinations nor their politics (Mailer, 1968/2008, p. 92-3). These themes, the emotional and oftentimes ignorant reporter or researcher are further instances of Mailer opening himself up, showing his weaknesses, and explaining to the reader exactly where he is coming from: his politics, emotions, biography, and preferences are made clear to the reader.

On the centrality of emotion, Jasper (1998, p. 421) writes that most emotions ‘far from subverting our goal attainment, help us define our goals and motivate action toward them’. Mailer’s emotions, and those along whom he was protesting, were key to his actions, just as they were in corollary for Adair (2005) in her study of what she learned as a result of her participation in the anti-globalisation protests at the ‘battle of Seattle’ in 1999. Adair attended as part of a welfare-recipients advocacy group, consisting mostly of women and ethnic minorities, many of whom had their children with them. Yet rather than being included in the main demonstrations of organised labour such as the steelworkers, Adair’s group were side-lined, insulted through sexist and classist language, and even sexually assaulted. Adair’s emotional academic reaction to this bullying was to look at the relationship between the traditional working-class and the poverty-class in the US. Her emotional response to the stigmatisation of her gender and income level at this protest openly affected her academic output, and as with Mailer’s work the communication and methodological rigour is improved, not lessened, as a result.

In Armies Mailer is also ready and willing to open up about his instrumental reasons for participating in certain elements of the narrative. For example, Mailer is aware that his arrest at the Pentagon offers an excellent source of access to protestors, marshalls, and the police, and as such is an opportunity for data collection. When in prison he furthers this, treating his own experiences journalistically, seeing the offer of breakfast in jail as a chance to ‘see a new locale’ (Mailer, 1968, p. 202) rather than as a chance to eat. He is honest and open about his own preconceptions about how events at the march would progress, assuming that he would be treated like the other prisoners. ‘Next to his vanity was a disproportionate modesty - he had actually believed he would be arrested and released with no particular attention paid to him’ (Mailer, 1968, p. 219).

Throughout his reportage, Mailer’s method is to provide passionate and literary opinions about events (‘the Democratic Party had here broken in two before the eyes of a nation like Melville’s whale charging right out of the sea’ [Mailer, 1968/2008, p. 172]), significant people (‘McCarthy looked weary beyond belief, his skin a used-up yellow, his tall body serving for no more than to keep his head above the crowd at a cocktail party’ [Mailer, 1968/2008, p. 95]), and America’s current state (‘Every day the average American drove himself further into schizophrenia...American needed the war’ [Mailer, 1968,p. 200-1]). However he also provides a largely dispassionate analysis of himself, an analysis which is central to Bourdieu’s reflexive project. This analysis demonstrates his awareness that he is not an objective reporter; that does not make his analysis wrong, but instead layers it with deeper meaning.

‘...the Novel as History’

>Battles are peak experiences. They represent a distillation of the environmental forces (both social and natural) that lead to them, and they provide an essential reality by which the observer of social phenomena might judge the causes of such phenomena.<br>

Akatiff, 1974, p. 26

Mailer understands the embodied subjectivities of ethnographic research, noting that
‘Revolutionaries for the weekend should never get hangovers’ (Mailer, 1968, p. 67), understanding that these biological and physiological emotions mess with the experience and interpretation of events. His psychological condition also comes under scrutiny, with constant questioning of his own position within the literary oeuvre, seen in his jealousy of Robert Lowell, the American poet who upstages Mailer at the pre-march rally (Mailer, 1968, p. 55-6), his invitations to other famous authors to join the march on the Pentagon, and his worry over the quality of his recent work, asking ‘His career, his legend, his idea of himself - were they stale?’ and describing his own activity as ‘getting a little soft, a hint curdled’ (Mailer, 1968, p. 69). This paranoia, made central in Armies, causes Mailer to obsess about the reception his arrest is making in the outside world, confident that the newspapers, purveyors of, he feels, twenty years of misreporting, would label him an aggressive agitator (Mailer, 1968, p. 152). This paranoia is commonplace in social research, but, as Shane Blackman (2007) has argued, stems from the researcher being afraid of revealing too much about themselves, aware of opening up emotionally and finding themselves subject to criticism.

Yet this obfuscation creates problems for the salience and accuracy of data. Mailer’s emotional welfare comes into play in Armies as he recounts the conversation he has with his wife, the one phone call he is allowed from jail. In it she recounts what his two sons had done that day, and how his four daughters from previous marriages would be visiting that weekend (Mailer, 1968, p. 177-81). This quiet reflection, on the quality of his parenting and tenderness of his marriage adds little to the explanation of the protest, but serves to provide autobiographical data, giving us a more precise understanding of the lens through which Mailer is interpreting events. This methodological necessity is further served, in a deeply political book about a deeply political event, by a passage where Mailer explains his political positions to the reader and their position within the wider context of American military strategy and international relations (Mailer, 1968, p. 196-201). These contrasting but complimentary approaches signify that Mailer knows that if he is to be successful in using an autobiographical approach to report on a significant national event, the reader has the right to be fully aware of that biography.

Yilmaz (2005), in an attempt to analyse Mailer’s autobiographical style, argues that Mailer uses his own experience of the protests as a lens through which to view them because he sees them as emblematic of the wider protest against the Vietnam war. Further, methodologically he recounts how Mailer saw events which were both public and deeply internal and intimate, and so uses the instinct of the novelist to recapture the precise feeling of the ambiguity of the events (Mailer, 1968), and therefore uses himself as the ‘means toward illuminating the events he is describing’ (Merrill, in Yilmaz, 2005, p. 253). As a result Holloway sees Armies as ‘an explicit attack on the objectivity and impersonality of the conventional media’ (Holloway, in Yilmaz, 2005, p. 253). Protests are emotional events where many conflicting thoughts and practices can combine in a maelstrom of anger and anguish (Woods et al., 2012). To try and write a narrative that aims to include the diverse range of opinions, worries, judgements of a large crowd of protestors, would often produce a practically impossible and unsatisfactory job. In trying to explain all the events, the researcher would explain none.

Mailer’s autobiographical and reflexive style overcomes this. By framing the events through just one lens - his own - we are told one version of events, one account of the overriding emotions and stories of the day. And yet, in order to counteract accusations of bias and subjectivity, Mailer employs the reflexive approach to make the reader fully and disarmingly aware of those subjectivities. By opening himself up, we get to see the full emotional gamut of one participant, a focus on depth rather than breadth.
Discussion: Protests as Biography

Tom Wolfe said of Mailer’s writing within the canon of New Journalism that Armies was his best work, with Miami and Chicago and *A Fire on the Moon* (1970), Mailer’s detailed exploration of the Apollo 11 mission, substandard in terms of New Journalism’s remit:

Because there was, in fact, no celebrity there in that march in Armies of the Night who was of any greater magnitude than he was. This put him at the center of the action, as so it worked. It did not work in Of a Fire on the Moon [sic].

Wolfe, in Bellamy, 1990, p. 66

Wolfe criticised Miami and Chicago because in his view Mailer had not encountered events which any standard news reporter could not have encountered. While it is true that Miami and Chicago relies more heavily on reportage, particularly that from The Village Voice (see Mailer, 1968/2008, p. 170-2), to say that Mailer has the standard protest and riot experiences is a disingenuous oversight. Mailer’s arrest and interactions with the police, his failed attempts to organise a separate march through Chicago, and how his novelist’s gaze falls upon central politicians, are a few of the many ways in which Mailer’s account goes above and beyond regular news reporting. ‘Mailer cannot play the role of the detached and omniscient author, any more than he can or will imitate the newspaper men, whose daily duty is to mask the self’ (Stone, 1982, p. 280).

But Wolfe is right to identify the problem with the autobiographical approach, where the detail required for the wider contextual setting of events cannot be studied in person. The autobiographical method suffers when the content is not based on personal experience: ‘Mailer always does better when he is forced to deal with new, real material’ (Wolfe, in Levine, 1990, p. 168). Mailer understood this. He knew that if he wanted recognition as both a novelist covering a protest and as a protestor documenting a protest in a novel, he had to express both his own experiences and his understanding of the march’s origins and purposes. Therefore, Armies concludes with Mailer’s history of the organisation and delivery of the march on the Pentagon, seeing it as part of a wider social construction, as part of a battle of ideas (Mailer, 1968, p. 231-300). Mailer saw this section as the part of the novel which can be put to use, a technical document based on interviews, official documents, and media reports; after the subjective exploration of data collection during the march, the data is framed and contextualised by secondary analysis and an absence of the personal. By completing these two projects, he felt the collective whole was so much more:

Then he began his history of the [march on the] Pentagon. It insisted on becoming a history of himself over four days, and therefore was history in the costume of a novel… Yet in writing his personal history of these four days, he was delivered a discovery of what the March on the Pentagon had finally meant, and what had been won, and what had been lost, and so found himself ready at last to write a most concise Short History…no, rather as some Novel of History, to elucidate the mysterious character of that quintessentially American event.

Mailer, 1968, p. 228

Mailer makes two central claims about the need for this approach in Armies: that intimacy with the narrator counters bias in the content, and that we must relegate ‘factual’ history and news
reporting behind the novelistic approach because the very structure of history is too accepting of the US's military industrial complex. In parallel with Bourdieu's recognition that the established academy fails to understand the importance of the 'scholastic point of view', Mailer comments on the crooked instruments of science and writing (including his own), 'constructed in small or large error' (Mailer, 1968, p. 231), that we continue to trust in only because of our familiarity with those who built them. In reaction to this assertion, and as a comment on the nature of reflexivity, Lourve (1988, p. 73) argues that Mailer manages to both challenge the primacy of historians and reporters and the novelist as sufficient reporters of events. In being willing to question his own legitimacy, Mailer communicates a rarely-spoken truism about the nature of research.

To construct and write social science reflexively is not to abandon the rigour of academic and scientific inquiry, to ignore the issues of sampling, bias and exaggeration. Instead it can be a cure for these problems, to address these issues honestly and thoroughly, to 'foreground rather than obscure' (Taylor, 2003, p. 18) the line between fact and (personal) fictions. There is no argument for reflexive work to dominate a piece of research, for it is important to remember that researchers are not the sole experiencers of events, but the reporters, cataloguers, and communicators of such events. As a final conclusion, it is in the communication of this work that we can perhaps learn the most from thinking of Norman Mailer as a social researcher.

**Conclusion: A Literary Future for the Social Sciences?**

C. Wright Mills in The Sociological Imagination (1959, p. 217) finds himself aghast at the quality of writing within the social sciences, wearied and worried at the prevailing 'turgid and polysyllabic prose', not for intellectual reasons but for emotional and personal ones. Most academics, he contends, are fearful of being judged and dismissed by their peers as mere journalists, who believe that to be readable is to be superficial. This is, he feels, a systemic problem of superiority, perpetuated through generations of academics in social science faculties across the world (pre-empting Bourdieu's [1988] own work on the academic field), rather than a belief in egalitarianism where everyone should have the benefit of being educated or of having access to the social research.

Human beings speak and write with all their experiences, all their faults, all their positives, and all their drawbacks. Their presentation may not be polished, but it will be accurate, of reality, and honest. The Mailer revealed in Armies and Miami and Chicago is dishevelled, at times drunken, forthright, self-confident, and fearful. Mills witnessed a growth in machine-like presentation of sociology, and states that to dehumanise the presentation of sociology is 'pretentiously impersonal' (C. W. Mills, 1959, p. 221). Those that understand research produced in such a way will be inward looking, and those who do not understand will be alienated. As Mills continued, '[a]ny writing...that is not imaginable as human speech is bad writing' (C. W. Mills, 1959, p. 221). Academics have a great responsibility to be a representative of a grand linguistic tradition and are expected to 'try and carry on the discourse of civilized man' (C. W. Mills, 1959, p. 222). As Les Back (2007, p. 164) has argued:

Mills was also clear that sociological imagination meant being self-consciously committed to affecting argument and writing creatively for a variety of what he called 'reading publics'. The danger he foresaw was that the sociological work might develop a technical language that turns inward on itself...To avoid this we have to aspire to make sociology more literary.

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5 Ironically, Bourdieu fails on this point, as discussed by Jenkins (1992, p. 9).
By utilising writers such as Mailer, who produce rather unedited, holistic, and confessional reflexive essays on real social events we may not be any closer to addressing concerns over subjectivity in qualitative research, but we may get closer to understanding social protests as biographical phenomena in an individual, who chooses to communicate their findings in an accessible, democratic, and engaging manner. Rich (2008, p. viii) remarks on how Mailer felt the reports of the New York Times on a racial confrontation in Miami were devoid of feeling and emotion, lacking any sense of the meaning of the event, a critique accurate of the coverage of the London riots of 2011. As social scientists seeking Weberian ‘verstehen’ (see Tucker, 1965), with a desire to uncover the meaning of protests for individuals and groups, rather than merely information about them, we must be able to see some parallels and some inspiration in Mailer’s work.

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Abstract

In current and future situations of trans-global crises, social dissent and related practices of resistance cut across conventional country boundaries. Expressions of dissent and resistance pursue change through unconventional practices not only to challenge current governance, but to re-invent participation. They seek to impact society by transforming acquired values, subjectivities and knowledge. Despite these transformations of people’s subjectivities, majoritarian theories examining social movements still focus on finding rational patterns that can be instrumentalized in data sets and produce generalizable theoretical outcomes. This paper problematizes how social theory makes sense of collective action practices on the ground. Everyday non-discursive practices prove productivity-led theories’ increasing disengagement with their object while challenging the excessive bureaucratization of scientific knowledge (Lyotard, 1997). That is, people experiment collectively with their capacities, and create their own initiatives and identities which do not follow determined patterns but do-while-thinking. The dichotomist approach of majoritarian debates in collective action theory is critically analysed by introducing the work of ‘minor authors’ and ‘radical theorists’. The fundamental purpose of this paper is to open a discussion space between the field of social action theories and activism knowledge, hence encouraging the creation of plateaus that blur academic boundaries and construct new subjectivities beyond “the indignity of speaking for others” (Deleuze in Foucault et al., 1977. p. 209). Drawing on the experience of the 15th of May 2011 in Spain, I analyse how radical theory reflects on current movements and collectives.

Keywords

radical theory, collective action, social movements, Indignados

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“(...) we are trying to reinvent and experiment as the best and more legitimate way to truly own our destiny, without the money dictatorship or the patronization of the politicians. (...) The streets and the squares create a new language in order to express desire and collective emancipatory power”

Abrasad@s de Sol in ¡Indignados! 15M (2011, p. 25)

Sometime ago I did a presentation where I spoke about the 2011 mobilizations in Spain. I described the background of the 15th of May encampments, focusing on the ways citizens without previous mobilization experience constructed and engaged with participatory decision making processes. A question formulated during the discussion time has remained with me since. One of the attendees compared 15-M movement with May 68. In his opinion, both movements led to the same problem of much ado about nothing. How could I say that this was not going to happen with the mobilizations in Spain? Perhaps – he presumed – I should have talked from an International Relations perspective, and name patterns, policies and quantitative outcomes. And he was probably right; I did not have an answer for his question with the exception that this was far from the pretensions of my analysis. I espoused an argument about peoples’ politics and participatory relations. Attempting to establish patterns and predictions within causality and rationalist theories would have automatically refuted my argument. I was talking about people’s acknowledgement of power (pouvoir) to experiment collectively with their capacities and construct their own initiatives and identities beyond rationalist analyses.

The question I was asked somehow summarizes the current problematic of social theory. On the one hand, it has become obvious how contemporary movements – especially after the 2010 protest such as the Arab Spring, the 15-M movement in Spain, the occupy movement, etc. – have widened and accentuated the legitimation crisis of representative democracy within the capitalist system. Following Foucault’s idea of positive resistance, these increasing de-socialization processes in which the state has embarked have opened opportunities for social mobilization and transformation. On the other hand, mainstream approaches to social phenomena insist on developing rational-thinking theories at the cost of neglecting minor perspectives, which walk hand in hand with the complexity and multiplicity of current movements.

I claim that current discourses are too static and lack in the necessary plasticity that characterises current social movements. People’s participation in recent protests has rather an experimental and nomadic character, encouraged by desires and possibilities opened by the ‘unknown’, with the certainty that any change will come from within peoples’ struggles. Dismissing what Foucault called “disqualified knowledge” (Foucault, 2001), as the remark made during the presentation mentioned above implicitly suggests, misses what the motor of these movements is, their metamorphoses of power or, as Deleuze puts it, “becoming minor” process. Social movements are composed by people’s experiences. They build political and cultural relationships, and recover discussion and participation spaces which overcome present democratic practices, whether these are formally recognised by those of us doing social theory or not.

In keeping with these ideas, I explore how a ‘revolt’ is not only a failed attempt to change the world by the means of ‘total revolution’ but also a composition of experiences that constitute the world, open spaces, create and transform subjectivities. In doing so, firstly I review some approaches to the study of social phenomena. Secondly, I present what in my opinion is the most problematic feature of social action approaches. That is, the excess of objectivization and
categorization in the search for operational patterns which dismiss participants’ knowledge and practices. The third section of this article analyses collective action in relation to opening moments/events/situations of action that cross-out the social. Collective action is seen here not as a mere reaction but as a creative continuity seeking to highlight the cracks at the edges of the capitalist system (Holloway, 2010), and to inaugurate passages within the collective thinking. In the case of protest movements in Spain, for example, I will argue that beyond the claims of 15-M ‘events, this movement embodied to a certain extent a legitimating shift within the society.

I focus specifically on the participation dynamics and discourses drawn from two platform organisations born between 2008 and 2011, namely PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca) and Iaioflautas (senior citizens’ platform whose actions/performances are directed against diverse objectives). I undertake this analysis by looking at current social theories and militant researchers whose analysis tries to humanize social theory (Chesters, 2012) and conceptualizes collective participation beyond the structural and rationalist debates, discovering “new possibilities with the present, turning bottlenecks and seeming dead ends into new opportunities of joyful insurgency” (Shukaitis & Graeber, 2007, p. 12). Following Deleuze and Guattari (2004), I call for the deterritorialization of majoritarian social action analyses if it wants to understand the transformational dynamics of today’s movements, which “modes of existence” go beyond the margins of rational objectification (Day, 2005, p. 175).

**Dualist Debates in Social Theory and Beyond: Re-claiming Spaces**

This section aims to critically examine the characteristics of mainstream approaches to the study of social phenomena and social movements. As mentioned in the introduction of this article, I argue that social theory is still strongly rooted in dualist debates despite recent attempts to promote a more inclusive framework. Thus, looking at the current protest movements arising since the 2010, including the ‘Arab Spring’ mobilizations, the encampments in Spain, the Occupy Movement, Wisconsin Wave, etc., one may be tempted to search for explanations within the ‘old’ social movement paradigm. Indeed, the idiosyncrasy of the political and social situation of some of these countries, together with the context of global crises, makes the search for behavioural and structural patterns very appealing.

Olson’s (1965) rational choice theory (RCT) posits that individuals’ mobilization is the result of utility maximization; mobilization is reduced to a goal-oriented behaviour determined by certain constraints. In contrast, collective behaviour authors, such as Gurr (1970), Smelser (1963) and Turner and Killian (1972) individuated in grievances, ideology and discontent are the reasons for protest behaviour (Opp, 2009, p. 127; Chesters & Welsh, 2011). Talcott Parson’s (1961) Structural Functionalism Theory reinforced this approach and together with Smelser’s theory of Collective Behaviour focussed on the structural conditions, such as political, economic and societal factors as determinants of the appearance of a social movement (Chesters and Welsh, 2011, p. 6).

These approaches influenced the resource mobilization model, the principles of which are still widely applied by many authors. Resource Mobilization Theories (RMT) was first formalized by McCarthy and Zald in an influential paper titled “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory” (1977). These authors stated that a social movement

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1 I will be referring at the protest in Spain during the 15th May 2011 as 15-M movement. I will also refer to them as the indignados as I consider this is the name received by the mainstream media seeking to relate this movement to Stephan Hessel’s book, “indignez-vous!” (2010). I consider that this concept is a metonym which does not represent the totality of the movement.
is “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represent preferences for changing some elements of social structure and/or reward distribution of a society” (McCarthy & Zald 1977, p. 1217-1218). A “social movement organization” refers then to that group capable of identifying its goals within the preferences of the movement and implements these interests consequently (ibid).

The above definition presumed to explain the emergence of collective action based on a rational-choice framework as well as the capacity for individuals within social movements to act as entrepreneurs capable of making cost/benefit analysis of their choices. In his social psychological expansions of RMT, Klandermans partially acknowledges these critics to RTM, while taking into account the socio-psychological reasons for an individual to participate in an action that might not be collective yet (Klandermans, 1984, p. 585). Moreover, McCarthy and Zald recognized in a later work that their theory is constrained by the acceptance of scope conditions which are supposed to be characteristic of a free society, such as voluntarism, freedom of speech and press, etc. (cf. Opp, 2009, p. 128). But to determine and categorize what scope conditions are and how they are combined in order to reach an outcome (as well as what fits into their definition) goes back exactly to the root of the problem. That is, excessive operationalization and categorization of social movement analyse.

Nevertheless, whether Social Movements are analysed from micro perspectives (by looking at agency), or from macro perspectives (by examining structural constraints), and in spite of RMT’s explicit efforts to change this view, Social Movements are still implicitly assumed to be something breaking the normality, a deviance from society (Chesters & Welsh, 2011, p. 6). Even if there is a considerable effort from approaches such as Oberschall’s (1973) breakdown theory, Tilly’s solidarity model or, from authors such as Tarrow (1998) to go beyond Olson’s rationality and to examine other macro and cultural elements, current movements’ diversity tends to elude classical sociological analysis in many cases.

The aim of these theories – mainly developed in the United States – continues to be providing a totalizing explanation by looking at foundational grounds of social movement. In some of these theories there is an implicit assumption of a free society, which ignores the underlying powers and discourses conditioning social structures. Even though collective actors act rationally at some stage, this rationality cannot be generalized and categorized in a single theoretical approach that pretends to represent finite subjects. Rationalist-based approaches presume the continuity of rational-thought as if these discursive processes would derive independently from non-discursive practices. However, thinking and reflecting subjects are not necessarily related to the “rationality” assumptions of instrumentalist-led theories. Neither are they necessarily related to tactical thinking, success, leadership or reward aspirations which characterize these analyses.

In the European context, the analysis of social movements was led by a structure/motivation position grounded in classical Marxist traditions (cf. Althusser, 1997). From the 1960s, by drawing on European social theory and philosophical traditions, social theorists attempted to explain collective action from a post-industrial and post-materialistic perspective. This approach was anticipated by Roland Inglehart as he argued that once society’s basic needs have been satisfied and “have attended a certain level of prosperity” (1971, p. 995) priorities and values change giving birth to a new type of social claims.

Other authors, such as Melucci (1989, 1996), Habermas (1976, 1985), and Offe (1985), introduced the notion of New Social Movements (NSM) to the study of social movements. NSM theorists argue that social movements, especially after the 1968, are characterized by ‘new’ strains and grievances typical of post-industrial societies. The NSM approach is not homogenous and there exist different variants, which give different weight to political and cultural elements (Buechler, 1995). For instance, Buechler differentiates between those authors that emphasise
culture, such as Habermas or Melucci, and those for whom political structures have a major influence, such as Castells or Touraine (ibid). Taken together, however, NSM perspectives attempt to explain ‘why’ individuals who do not come from a labour or peasant mobilization tradition and do not belong to marginalized sectors of society, decide to mobilize. In contrast to the more instrumentalist approaches briefly mentioned at the beginning of this section, NSM theorists focus more strongly on the analysis of frames, and on the construction of symbols and identities related to collective actions. Ultimately, while instrumentalist theories focus on ‘how’ social movements emerge, NSM theories emphasize ‘why’ social movements emerge.

Nonetheless, NSM approaches still examine social movements from an objective and neutral perspective. Social Movements are still observed from the outside, in order to find operational patterns that provide the world with a unitary theory. The complexity and multiplicity of subjectivities are compressed into general categories and variables imposed from an external and “neutral” point of view. NSM approaches ignore any form of knowledge coming from within the movements that breaks with the linearity of these patterns.

Agency and Structuralist Debates

As it is possible to note from this brief theoretical outline, the analysis of social movements seems to revolve around a series of dualist explanations, namely old vs. new social movement paradigms, micro and macro levels, agency and structure, North American vs. European schools, political vs. cultural approaches, rationalism and irrationalism, etc. Most of the debate among social theorists tends to be framed within agency and structuralist views. While utilitarian models presume that political and economic reality is affected by structural variables, models based on the analysis of the cultural contexts, question the type of society and its immobility (Martínez et al., 2012, p. 13).

Several authors have sought to put an end to this dualist debates between agency and structure. For instance, Habermas’ critical theory conceptualizes social action as the result of a disagreement between social structures and the democratic State. His structural theory of Communicative Actions centres on aspects of agency, albeit it relies on the capacity of individuals to intervene critically in their own socio-historical reality (Saidi, 1987, p. 252-254). His critics reproach him for assuming the capacity of individuals to communicate, act and choose rationally without entering in conflict as well as for overlooking the complexity of the social phenomena (ibid, p. 260; Buechler, 1995, p. 446). Others, such as Rorty, accuse Habermas of idealising reason and hope for enlightenment as opposed to imagination and ‘aesthetics’ (see Shusterman in Rorty, 2001, p. 135; Seidman & Alexander, 2001, p. 4). According to this view, Habermas’ approach cannot explain agency beyond rationalist explanations. Similarly to RMT, Habermas’ approach explains social action on the basis of the capacity of individuals to rationally identify, to set strategies and engage in achieving their goals.

Identity theorists, such as Alberto Melucci, on the other hand, try to fill the gap between structuralist and agency approaches and the process that brings peoples together by focusing on how actors construct their “meanings, communicate, negotiate, and make decisions” (Melucci, 1996, p. 331). As Melucci puts it, “how certain individuals come to recognize themselves in a more or less shared sense of ‘we’” (Melucci, 1989, p. 20). By doing so, Melucci moves beyond the dualism of the structuralist analyses and RMT to more epistemological approaches by explaining how collective action is constructed. The link between the previous approaches and the construction of collective action is maintained through the concept of identity. Identity is seen by Melucci as “an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientation of their action as well as the field of opportunities and
constraints in which their action takes place” (ibid, p. 34). In particular, Melucci examines three dimensions of collective action. First, mutual recognition of the actors; second, the existence of a conflict or consensus; and last a will to transgress the limits or to adapt the “decision-making” structures (Ibid, p. 28).

However, criticisms of Melucci’s approach, such as the ones coming from Opp (2009), and from Gamson (1992), point out the lack of clarity in the operationalization of the concept of collective identity. Interestingly, these criticisms show exactly what is the issue with social theory (see especially Opp, 2009), as they analyse his approach using a strongly rationalistic framework, and the concepts of efficiency, operationalization, and standard categories (or the lack these) as an argument. Firstly, these critics ignore the constructed character and the underlying power-related processes of the concept of identity; secondly, they presume that collective action is influenced only by one finite aspect of this identity; third, they accept cost-benefit motivation as a normalized measurement standard in the analysis of collective action; and last, the construction of this identity is presumed to be acknowledged a priori. That is, they assume not only the actor’s capability of recognizing these relations of the ‘we’ but also to exist as such before the action.

Other attempts to go beyond the agency-structure dualism may be found in the work of Giddens and Bhaskar. Giddens tries to overcome the structure-agency dualism, by suggesting a model that combines subjectivism and objectivist theories (Giddens, 1984, p. xx). In his structuration theory, Giddens argues in favour of the importance of recognizing the dialectical relation between structure and action (agency). Similarly, adopting a critical realism approach, Roy Bhaskar (1989, 1998) attempts to overcome this dualism through the idea of transcendental realism. Bhaskar’s ontological perspective tries to reconcile realism with anti-foundational criticisms. The real is then “stratified” and divided between reality itself, the actual, and the empirical world. According to this view, the empirical world mediates between supposed objective reality and the world of our perceptions, the actual. The empirical, which refers to the characteristic observed in a determined event, is assumed to contain both possibilities. That is, what “can be” and what “will be,” although Bhaskar does not pretend to exhaust or predetermine what “could” or “has happened” (Collier, 1994; Sayer, 2010). Bahskar is concerned with uncovering the power structures that affect social behaviour; however, he understands power as ‘capacity’ or potential of what ‘ought’ to be (Collier, 1994, p. 26). Thus, he aims to emancipate the ‘object’ from its falsity and exclude from the analysis anything that is not consciously organised.

Even if Giddens and Bhaskar manage to escape the agency-structure dualism, they centre their conceptualizations on the discussion of the object-subject relationship. Graeme Chesters argues that while these are seen as promising ontologies, which presuppose a relational understanding between society and individual, the link between their epistemology and their methodological explanations remains underdeveloped (Chesters, 2012, p. 4).

Ultimately, looking at the theories mentioned up to this point, some general criticisms may be formulated. In general, there is still a strong tendency to analyse social movements from a Resource Mobilization perspective by focusing on economic, rational and utilitarian explanations and operational outcomes. This issue has been pointed out by several authors. Burawoy, for example, differentiates between instrumental knowledge, which is founded on policy and professional sociology, and public and critical sociology, founded on reflexive knowledge (Burawoy in Scholl, 2012, p. 13). Donatella della Porta, on the one hand, recognizes “what is actually happening ‘on the ground’ [of social movements practices] is rarely studied” (2013, p. 2). On the other hand, Ross accuses rationalist choices as seeing themselves as the “tribunal” to decide and judge what is real (Ross, 2002, p. 4). Non-economical/rational choices are excluded from these decisions. Hence, majoritarian theories fail to provide real accountability
Likewise, Steven Seidman, points out that sociological theory “has lost most of its social and intellectual importance” due its increasing disengagement with conflict and debates taking place in the current public sphere. Thus, theory “has turned inwards and is largely self-referential” (Seidman, 1997, p. 43). For this author, sociological theory needs to abandon the idea of discovering a totalizing rational-model that explains society, in favour of a “social theory” that “opens present and future possibilities, detecting fluidity and porousness in forms of life where hegemonic discourses posit closure and frozen, natural social order” (ibid, 1997, p. 44).

In keeping with the criticisms illustrated here, I argue that there is a need for a shift in social theory studies that opens the debate to the knowledge-praxis that has been left unexplored. Current social movements escape the stratifications and categorizations required by classic ‘scientific’ academic knowledge. There is thus the necessity to break with these discourses in order to encounter different theoretical possibilities that would enable the explanation of the transformative processes of current social movements. The next section explores the work of authors that acknowledge this emancipatory necessity and argue in favour of an epistemological shift along these lines.

The Unsocial of the Social Theory

Building on Seidman’s and Della Porta’s criticisms mentioned above, the rest of this article will elaborate on the approaches claiming to abandon the underlying presumption of the finite and unity of collective subjects, in favour of the multiplicity that social movements show on the ground. Many critics have pointed out that there is an increasing disengagement of sociological theory from its object of study. Post-structuralist approaches such as those from Lyotard (1997), Foucault and Deleuze (in Foucault et al., 1997), post-modernism authors (Seidman 1997, 2001; Baudrillard 2000, 1983) as well as feminist theorists (Butler 1990; Braidotti 2012; Irigaray 2002) point out not only the self-referential and instrumental character of sociological theory, but also its stubborn pursuit of an ideal of normative regulation of knowledge in which difference and ambiguity have no place.

Luce Irigaray, in her work To Speak is Never Neutral (2002) dedicated a chapter to the scientific language (“Is the subject of Science Sexed?”). She asks the reader and herself what is the responsibility of the academic and institutional discourse in relation to the constitution of the subject and, more specifically, of gender. Foucault makes a similar remark, referring to the intellectuals as “agents” of the system of power, “the idea of their responsibility for ‘consciousness’ and discourse forms part of the system” (Foucault et al., 1977, p. 207). Intellectuals are no longer representative of people’s subjectivities. Individuals are capable of representing themselves in spite of the existence of “a system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and this knowledge” (ibid).

The dynamism of the transformative and reflexive knowledge of the social still requires analysis within the steadiness of majoritarian theories. The role of the intellectual is then to fight against the “forms of power” that convert him/her in part of this game (ibid). In order to do so it is necessary to creatively re-take power by re-claiming spaces and open social theory to the risk of having this discussion. This is precisely the object of this paper. Accordingly, I turn now to the work of authors such as Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari and feminist theory, and the work of those referred to as “minor authors” (Deleuze et al. 1983) whose approaches escape the structure/agency dichotomy (Fox 1998, p. 415) of previous theories. I attempt to unthink social science (Scholl, 2012; Holloway, 2002) by analysing theories on the ‘margins’ as situated on a multiplicity
of experiences. In this sense, I borrow from Foucault's notion of ontology the idea that power/knowledge is not only constituted by rules of discursive formations as something repressive, but also by “non-discursive practices,” which are, on the contrary, productive processes that enable the creation of human capacity (Fox, 1998, p. 416; Butler, 1990, p. 139). Foucault breaks with structuralist ideas by thinking of power beyond its coercive expression and, with agency-centered approaches that “de-centre the individual” (Fox 1998, p. 41. 7). Power/knowledge is then the link that puts in relation discourses and non-discursive practices (ibid). Similarly, drawing from Simone de Beauvoir’s work, feminist materialism (beyond the Anglo-American deconstructionist approaches from Butler and Scott (1992)) has overcome these dualisms by producing creative alternatives of a sexually “embodied and embedded kind” which Braidotti names “figurations”. These are “ways of expressing different subject positions” that “renders the non-unitary image of a multi-layered subject” (Braidotti, 2012, p. 13-15). The problem is then how to represent this non-linear fluidity “in-between flows of data, experience and, information” since in our thinking processes the idea of objectivity and linearity still prevails (ibid).

Deleuze and Guattari’s work expand on this point by seeing the social as an “abstract machine” which “draws lines of continuous variation” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 110). This machine refers to the dynamics through which transformations are produced. They name these lines of change and creation “lines of flight”. The “abstract machine” is then singular and does not contain the signs, interpretations and subjectivities to which stratification is human being bound (ibid, 2004, p. 148). However, it is necessarily bound to the “diagram of assemblages” which is collective and concrete, “treats variables and organizes their highly diverse relations as a function of those lines” (ibid, 2004, p. 111).

The assemblages are related to the level of deterritorialization, and determine which lines will form part of a set of rules or which will be part of the “fluid matter” (ibid). Social action should work from the inside to the outside, aiming to ‘become’ fluid matter, to metamorphose and to bring lines of flight to the margins of the plane of consistency by undoing the territorial strata. Experimentation then becomes a synonym of movement, occupying spaces, inventing lines of flight and passages fuelled by the desire and passion of ontological becoming. It is in this sense that movement is necessarily rhizomatic2, it has no beginning or end, is horizontal, multiple and non-hierarchical in opposition to the vertical relations of arborescent forms. This implies stripping the subject “of its old genderized, racialized, normalized straitjacket and relocated into patterns of different becomings” (Braidotti, 2012, p. 21).

However, the process of ‘becoming’ occurs from the interior to the exterior through infinite sequences of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, that is through conflictual processes between rhizomatic and arboreal (hierarchical) constructions. Accordingly, an action is rarely completely rhizomatic. It is the fluid matter mentioned before, that which escapes the arborescent stratification in order to move to the next sequence. The Body Without Organs (BWO) which represents the “absolute” deterritorialization, is constituted by infinite matter, is the result of a rhizomatic transformation, and hence, a multiplicity (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 148) in itself. These authors argue in favour of the nomadic behaviour of positive deterritorialization of the subject, which can only be achieved by becoming ‘minor’, pushing resistance and tensors to the margins.

Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of ‘nomadic’ and ‘becoming’ are referential for those authors who put movement at the centre of their thinking, such as Rosi Braidotti. For Braidotti (2012, p. 3), nomadic theory refers simultaneously to a “monistic vision of matter” and to the “no

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2 Deleuze and Guattari borrow the concept of rhizomatic from biology language. It refers to the characteristics the roots of some plants possess. For example, if separated into pieces any of the parts will give rise to a new plant.
unitary vision of the subject” which is defined by its motion. Monistic matter is here understood as the embodiment of mind beyond Cartesian dualism. Thought is not only composed by organic, human and rational consciousness (ibid) but by non-rational and inorganic elements whose relation is nomadic and transformative.

Contradicting this view, Badiou (2000) simplifies Deleuze’s multiplicity to a Spinozist’ theory of being(s), the One (true substance) in opposition to the many (multiple) (Roffe, 2012). However Badiou’s criticism is based on axiomatic interpretations of Deleuze’s multiplicity. While Badiou bases the concept of multiplicity on axiomatic sets dismissing the role of problematic (events), Deleuze defends the co-dependency of both. To adjust to the rigor of axiomatic sets necessarily implies to select and exclude and thus eliminate events.

These different ontological perspectives are at the heart of the social theory discussion pretended in this paper, what Deleuze refers to as “royal” and “nomad” or “minor science” (Smith, 2003, p. 3-4). The ‘royal’ perspective has been dominant in the analysis of social movements, degrading and eliminating “minor” approaches. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the event in its own right is leading the analysis of current movements to different more plastic and inclusive approaches.

This epistemological shift of the theory is being recognized by several authors concerned with social phenomena. For example, from the Latin-American perspective, Martínez et al. (2012) argue that movements’ practices on the ground overcome theoretical analyses. Movements engage in an emancipatory process and knowledge of reality of which the source is outside western academic influence (Martínez, et al. 2012, p. 18-19).

Martinez et al. situate the origin of this epistemological shift around the ’90s with the Zapatistas movements, the Piqueteros in Argentina, the Movement Sin Tierra (MST) or the indigenous and peasant movements in Bolivia. The difference, according to them, is due to the fact that these movements are “constructed at the margins of the modern world” through process of rupture and liberation from the western society (ibid). This process is not only limited to some specific fields but claims to have a multidimensional character that affects all the areas of the social and political life and therefore is seen as endless and in construction. Raúl Zibechi, to give a specific example, sees these theories underlying what he calls the ‘Aymara revolution’ (Zibechi, 2010, p. 7):

The Aymara experience is not only linked with the continental struggles but it also adds something substantial- the construction of actual non-state powers. By this, I am referring to powers that are not separated from or splintered off from society (…) in the Aymara world this capacity is distributed and dispersed through the social body and ultimately subject to assemblies in the countryside and the city.(…) The non-state powers of the Aymara were born in territories in which the community machine operates: social mechanisms that are de-territorialized and ‘de-communalized’ in order to be used by society in movement as non-state forms of mobilization and to create space where- far beyond mere rhetoric- the dictum ‘to lead by obeying’ functions.

I have briefly illustrated here some examples of how authors working from different angles have acknowledged the increasing disengagement of social theory from its object of study. These authors argue for an epistemological shift in the analyses of social movements. This shift is based on ontological perspectives closer to Foucault’s and Deleuze’s views on events and non-discursive practices as well as the multiplicity of the subject. In the next section, I explore further in which way these theories engage on the ground with contemporary movements and participatory dynamics.
in Spain. Specifically, I focus on the idea of deterritorialization, innovation and experimentation on social action. Similarly to other authors (Chester 2012; Day, 2005; Graeber & Shukaitis 2007; Martínez et al. 2012; Urry 2003), I argue that since the late 1990s social movements need to be analysed by looking at their differences and exceptions that resist categorization within social theory.

The Becoming of New Protagonism

To sense the dynamics of resistance and creations across the interlinked world space is to start taking part in the solidarities and modes of cooperation that have been emerging across the planet since the late 1990s. 

Brian Holmes (in Graeber & Shukaitis, 2007, p. 42)

“All of them must go” (“que se vayan todos”) was one of the most chanted slogans on the 19th and 20th of December 2001 during the Argentinian crisis. Likewise, 10 years later in Spain during the demonstrations of the 15th of May 2011, people repeated similar slogans: “they do not represent us” (“no nos representan”). Although 12 years had passed, there are plenty of activist knowledge-practices and meanings that link the two events. See for example, the protest methods between the piqueteros movement in 2001 and the Asturian (Spain) miners in July 2012, or the escraches that the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH is a platform that gives support to people threatened with being evicted from their homes as they cannot pay their mortgages) engage in. Even though, there were elements of spontaneity in the last protest mobilizations in Spain and in December 2001 in Argentina, these protests did not appear from nowhere; there is an extensive and diverse background of mobilizations that were transformed by these two movements. For example, in Spain we could refer to the demonstrations against the Ley Orgánica de Universidades (L.O.U.) (Fundamental University Law) of 2001, the movements Nunca Más (Never Again), born as a consequence of the oil spill of Prestige, a single-hulled oil tanker that sank in front of the Galicia coastline in November 2002, the campaign against the Iraq war in 2003; the demonstrations against the Partido Popular (Peoples Party) after the Madrid Bombings on 11th of March 2004, the movement against the Bologna Plan, and more recent movements in favor of a dignifying home, the Wikileaks phenomenon and the demonstration on March 2011 against the anti-piracy law known as Ley Sinde.

In this section I compare the 15-M events in Spain and the Argentinian crisis. I try to contextualize theoretically the vector relations that contain these events. That is, I attempt to de-construct the lines of transversal continuity that intervene in the production of subjectivities. This production of subjectivities is, according to Negri et al., the result of an accumulation and sedimentation of other subjectivities and events (Negri et al., 2008). Peoples’ reaction to the Argentinian crisis in 2001 and the protest of 15-M events taken as an example, represent two moments/situations that cut across the plane of consistency, lines of flight that go beyond the hierarchic elaboration of rational theories. To put it in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s words, I explore the multiplicity of rhizomatic assemblages that have deterritorialized and territorialized the Argentinian and Spanish social space multiple times.

Deleuze and Foucault, in their conversations about Intellectuals and Power, argue that “from the moment that a theory moves into its proper domain, it begins to encounter obstacles, walls, and blockages which require its relay by another type of discourse [...] No theory can develop without eventually encountering a wall, and practices are necessary for piercing this
wall” (Foucault et al., 1977, p. 2006). In that sense, these two events, and particularly the 15-M to which I will be referring later, inaugurate the visualization of alternatives, experiences and knowledge-practices innovations motivated from within the society. Thus, I will refer to these practices on the ground which “pierces the wall”.

Christian Scholl, in his work Two Sides of the Barricade (2012), analyses summit protests from a similar perspective, as “events that constitute possibilities” (2012, p. 6). He anchors his argument on Deleuze and Guattari’s idea that events cannot be outdated as they are open (or openings) to the possible (ibid). I shall take the same approach here and see these events as initiators of social transformative processes. These shifts, on the one hand, have translated into a different type of action where the politics of demand gives way to politics of the act. It seems then that there is a non-verbalized agreement of some scholars on approaching the analyses of the recent social movements from a different perspective, beyond traditional mainstream views. Scholl, as other materialist theorists such as Braidotti (2012), conceptualizes these politics as a “product of doing” (p. 7). Following once again Deleuze’s and Guattari’s concepts, it can be said that one of the main features of this doing is their horizontal character (at least at some point of their process) through which the construct of rhizomatic relationships is formed (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). As it has been said before no movement is purely rhizomatic, but determined by spaces and time. However, the event is the “situation” of cut, where non-discursive practices flow through the pierced wall and escape rationality.

This is the moment of absolute deterritorialization. What is “contained” in this situation and its outcome cannot be fixed in a theory, as it is movement in itself. Therefore, in the same way that talking about the present-time is part of linguistic agreement; diagrams of assemblages reterritorialize and rationalize movements just to deterritorialize again within a new event. Collectivo Situaciones calls this new type of movement new protagonism. This is not a “new subject” as it does not reach such a consistency. Rather, it moves within multiplicity but is delimited by its situations (Collectivo Situaciones, 2002, p. 38). As I shall later illustrate with examples, the difference between this “new” tendency and NSM theory lies in this heterogeneity and rhizomatic behaviour as well as in the more inclusive nature of these movements. Martínez et al. (2012) find the key of this difference in the emancipatory character of these movements. The action does not come from the outside but from within the margins, it has no concrete form and yet it is transformative. Such fluidity goes beyond rational claims influenced by capitalist views of the world.

Recently, researchers have started to make use of the term ‘rhizomatic’ in order to refer to the form that social movements take. Thus, Chesters and Welsh (2006) use this notion to refer to the manner in which anti-globalization movements engage with action. Following these authors, Castells also refers to the 15-M as a “rhizomatic revolution” (Castells, 2012, p. 110-155). Accordingly, these movements resist being branded and escape traditional strategies and tactical explanations at the same time that they reject acting through hegemonic forms of action (Day, 2005, p. 8-9). Richard Day argues “most interesting about contemporary radical activism is that some groups are breaking out of this trap by operating non-hegemonically rather than counter-hegemonically” (ibid). Hence, to understand these movements is to understand the ongoing shift of Gramscian hegemonic explanation by affinity forms. This means going beyond explanations for which the social struggle is conditioned by the concept of bourgeois hegemony underlying all spheres of the political and social life.

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3 The fact that there is no recognisable leadership confused the media, especially during the events of 15-M where “not even spokespersons were recognized” (Castells, 2012, p. 129). This was however not new; we need to go back to Seattle in 1999 to and remember how the media broadcast about what was happening in the streets.
On the other hand, the slogans mentioned at the beginning of this section embody the increasing disagreement between the State and the supposed sovereignty powers where political legitimacy rests. State sovereignty has been transferred to the market flows, which forces us to re-think the Hobbesian state of nature (Colectivo Situaciones, 2002, p. 34). Argentinean economist, Marcelo Matellanes said, “It is the failure of a socialization project which is very different to a simple economic crisis, even if someone insists in its structural characteristics” (Matellanes, 2003, p. 28-29). While the state has been involved in its own de-socialization, the market regulation technologies have conformed societies of control (Deleuze, 2004). Post-industrial societies have become enormously flexible towards differences and peoples’ demands, which have been transfigured in consumption capabilities. The system has no long term planning other than the accumulation of profit. However, the number of people excluded from consumerism's privileges has increased dramatically, thus breaking the necessary neo-liberal balance between market subjects and the invisible excluded (Colectivo Situaciones, 2002, p. 37). These consumer capabilities cannot be further guaranteed; neither can the state meet peoples’ demands any longer because its possibilities of action, especially in western societies⁴, are tied to those of the global market. The bourgeois hegemony guaranteed by the state and institutions cannot be supported any longer. Consequently, the disarticulation of social bonds leads to the opening of alternatives and possibilities. Societies take charge of their own struggle. This is what John Holloway has called the method of crack:

The method of crack is dialectical, not in the sense of presenting a neat flow of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, but in the sense of a negative dialectics, dialectic of misfitting. (…)

The method of the crack is the method of the crisis: we wish to understand capitalism not as domination, but from the perspective of its crisis, its contradictions, its weakness, and we want to understand how we ourselves are those contradictions

(Holloway, 2010, p. 9)

Holloway’s last sentence links with Foucault’s idea of ‘enlightenment’, understood as “an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critic of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them” (Foucault in Rabinow, 1984, p. 49). In that sense Collectivo Situaciones refers to “new protagonism” as an “ethical action” which, being restricted by the “space of the situation” is responsible for the emancipation from the bio-political networks (Collectivo Situaciones, 2002, p. 38). New protagonism then links mobilization to ethics and knowledge.

Thus, both the reactions to the Argentinian crisis and the 15-M produced a spatial-temporal interruption which cannot be interpreted beyond the limits of its experience and creations of possibilities, although it has opened the door to a transformational existence. The question is how do these events embrace the transformational experience of these encounters? And, how could social movement theories say something about these metamorphoses without falling into the results-led trap? I will attempt to answer these questions by appealing to a shift in peoples’ view of participation dynamics. In order to exemplify this shift, I will refer to two platforms in Spain: the PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca) and the Iaioflautas. I will analyse this shift by looking at the work of activist researchers and a ‘minor authors’ who, I believe, advocate for the co-production of knowledge between academia and activists. In doing so, these authors de-familiarize the space of social theory in order to understand the nomadic dynamics of current

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⁴ This argument should be contextualized because it is obvious that the state still plays an important coercive role in society.
social movements.

**Re-thinking Participation**

On the 15th of May 2011, people across Spain protested against the consequences of the crisis but also the generalized state of corruption, the electoral system, etc. The protest was organized by Democracia Real Ya (Real Democracy Now) but it soon became clear that nobody and everybody were under this name. After the demonstrations, a few people decided to stay in the city’s main square and soon they became thousands. Although many of them had some activist experience, most of the participants did so following their own will, not as members of any particular group. In that sense, at least during the first periods of the encampment, there was a general agreement on rejecting any type of hegemonic form (or structure) as also happened in the 19th and 20th December 2001 in Argentina. From the beginning until the end of the encampments a general assembly decided whether to stay and when to go. This assembly took place every day and everybody could participate, everybody could disagree; the point was to keep the discussion going until a consensual agreement was reached.

After a few days an assembly dynamization manual was agreed. People organized themselves in commissions: food, cleaning, infrastructure, communications, technology, security/mediation, library, strategy commissions, etc. All these commissions were at the same time organized in assemblies where decisions were taken by consensus in spite of time limitations. In fact, the different encampments were virtually coordinated in real time.

Towards the end of the encampments the general assembly and the working commissions reorganized themselves in the Barrios (neighbourhoods). The same practices that were developed in the encampment were transferred to the Barrios. This implies that the participatory languages were now visualized not only through the media. The political debate was taking place on peoples’ front doorsteps. The Barrios assemblies took place in the streets, squares and community centres, recovering thus public spaces. The claims of the encampments were re-shaped multiple times, acquiring different nuances in the Barrios where they were being put in place in keeping with the specific demands. This is consistent with the idea of thinking globally but acting locally politics. The concepts of participatory democracy, proportional representation and solidarity practices were debated publicly. Indeed, as Foucault mentions in his work, Discipline and Punishment (1977), people do not need intellectuals to represent their actions. This methodology of political participation is also consistent with the one used during the Italian autonomists movements in the 1970s.

Similarly, except for some theoretical differences, this type of autonomous zone in the centre of the cities has many relations with what Hakim Bey (in Day, 2005, p. 163) calls TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zone). Bey was not the first one to apply the idea of the encampments. A movable and constantly remodelled area was already developed by the Situationist International, which probably was better known under through the work of Constant Nieuwenhuis of New Babylon (Sadler, 1999). The model advocated by Nieuwenhuis consisted in the creation of a ludic society where movement becomes unpredictable and joyful; prompting the society to change the way life is perceived out of the thought-homogenization of the consumer society. Bey, however, refers to TAZ as nomadic, invisible and non-revolutionary driven encampments because according to him revolution already happened, even if it was during a brief period of time (ibid).

The 15-M events have been reinvented (and reinforced) in multiple movements that enabled the collective thinking of desire and composition. Thus the 15-M reterritorialised a multiplicity of

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5 If any agreement was reached, the assembly will continue with the discussion the next day.
subjectivities into a determined space and time, into a situation, just only to be de-territorialized back to the barrios and again into other collectives, ideas and experiences. To give an example, someone who was an anarchist activist in Barri de Sants (one of the neighbourhoods in Barcelona) and belonged to the Ateneu Llibertari Sants (traditional anarchist reunion space present in most of the Catalan Countries) may have taken part in the 15-M. Later on, s/he might have participated in the 15-M assemblies in his/her neighbourhood of Sants or even, in the general assembly where all the collectives get together to harmonize the actions affecting the community. At the same time, it is probable that this individual also participates in any of the other multiple community projects that take place in Can Batlló (nineteenth century industrial complex that was first occupied, and later conceded by the City Council and is now managed by the neighbours), which, despite it has been part of long term struggle, have gained supporters since the 15-M.

There are several points that need to be mentioned at this stage of the analysis. In contrast to utilitarian theories that conceptualize crises as an opportunity for social movements to claim their piece of cake, the 15-M may be seen as an experience, a crack in the wall of the capitalist system (Holloway, 2010), something that remains in people’s imagination. The 15-M is fuelled by peoples’ desires to construct new spaces and transforming the old ones. Puerta del Sol and Plaza Catalunya as well as other squares in many cities became not only physical spaces but also temporal ones, which have been deterritorialized in the squares, in the barrios, in platforms, in learning spaces at the neighbourhood associations and collectives. The 15-M changed and became something else. It is true that there has been certain disenchantment with the movement but this is more due to the simple fact that the 15-M movement was presented by the media as the representative of citizens’ resistance. This forced the core of the movement, which was composed by people whose activism was there before and beyond “the movement”, to reject the movement as a representation and to territorialize in other collectives and activisms actions.

Indeed, the 15-M however, has built the structures and has opened the space for non-experienced activists to pursue their own participation. Some social theorists, such as Carlos Taibo (2011), mentioned the fear that the movement was going to split and disappear between two types of participants: those that participated because of their personal circumstances, motivated by very concrete objectives, and, those whose participation was directed toward structural changes. In a similar vein, some activists manifested their scepticism on the movement’s continuation. Castells, for example, mentions a survey conducted by Simple Lògica in June 2011 (Castells, 2012, p. 119), where although 73% of the interviewees approved of the protest, only 53% thought it would help to improve the situation.

I argue however, that these views follow a traditional idea of social movement as homogeneous and organized in a top-down manner. The capacity to break and participate in other assemblies or movements or platforms is part of the rhizomatic behaviours of nomadic movements. The free ‘wandering’ from a social space to another following different needs and affinities instead of strategically prioritizing, is to accept transformation from diversity to multiplicity.

Transmutation of Values: Every Day Protests

As mentioned before, the 15-M evolved from previous mobilizations. In turn, the 15-M metamorphosed into other forms of struggles. In this section I discuss more specific examples about how these shifts are perceived by people6. Indeed, these changes were firstly reflected on individuals participating in the protests during and after the 15-M. Independently of their

6 It is important to note that these are examples of ongoing processes and therefore it is difficult to capture in article all the complexity of their activity. Thus, what I explain here is rather an overview.
previous mobilization experiences, individuals from different social background and age came together to demonstrations, flash-mobs, occupations of public and private institutions, boycotts, etc. A glance at any newspapers in Spain is sufficient to be confronted with cynical corruption, frauds committed by the banks, capital moves, jobs, poverty, police force’s aggressions, suicides and a general system of structural violence. However, in the newspapers there are also mentioned coloured waves of everyday forms of protest: white (health), green (education), black (public officials), orange (social services and their clients), and purple (woman associations). But also miners, fireman, students and their parents, feminist groups, the list is endless. Between January and September 2012 only, more than 2,732 demonstrations took place in Madrid, 97.97% more than in 2011 (Público on 27th of September 2012).

I analyse two examples of the transformation enabled by the experience of the 15-M, that is the Iaioflautas and the PAH. These specific examples are used for several reasons. First, both platforms are composed by heterogenic subjects coming from different backgrounds that cannot be identified with the typical activist stereotypes. Second, both platforms are characterized by a horizontal structure (i.e., decisions are taken through shared consensus). Third, many of the individuals have no previous activist’s experience. Fourth, importantly, their actions go beyond goal-oriented strategies – participation affects the political, the social and the psychological. Lastly, both platforms have gained support during or after the 15-M.

Iaioflautas

One of the most prolific platforms conformed already during the encampments of 2011 is the Iaioflautas (http://www.iaioflautas.org/). This is a collective of senior citizens that formed in opposition to the derogatory stereotypes that the right-wing media used to refer to the 15-M. These derogatory stereotypes consisted in relating the movement to the negative significant of those young people with anarcho-punk influences, the perroflautas, or the English word “crusty”. The collective re-signified the term and used it in a humorous way, with reference to themselves and their age.

The collective started in Barcelona and spread rapidly around the state gathering senior citizens who identified with the encampments. It demonstrated that these protests were not only a young-people fight, but also represented their new-old struggles. I have selected the Iaioflautas for illustrating my point not only because of the value of their actions, an example of how the 15-M events have transformed the perception of people’s political participation, but also because of the symbolism contained in their mere presence. On the one hand, the Iaioflautas broke with stereotypes and assumptions that these types of protest were characteristic of young people coming from a specific ideology. This was the position maintained by the majority of the media and even found in the analysis of recent demonstrations made by some social theorists. On the other hand, the Iaioflautas link their struggles with those of the Spanish transition to democracy as proven by the songs they sing during their actions. Although this would be a topic for another article, the fact that, in the case of the Spanish state, old and new protests are linked within people’s imagination leaves a question mark behind the transition to democracy. Thus these protests are not only linked to the current conjuncture of crises, but represent also a rejection of the Spanish democratic process.

Regarding their organization, similarly to the 15-M and all the other collectives and assemblies organized after the encampments, there is no visible head and their composition is heterogeneous. In order to organize their performances, the Iaioflautas makes use of old, and

7 Protesters wear colourful t-shirts according to which protest they feel belonging to.
modern social media, such as twitter, Facebook, production of memes, etc. Moreover, they also organize acts and events that are no different from those organized by other collectives (e.g., occupying buses, banks, shopping-centres, supporting anti-eviction protest, etc.). The members of this group do not have not specific objectives but multiple ones, nor have they any opportunity-led strategy. Rather, they are everywhere, and even if only a few, they are gradually constructing their everyday life and changing people’s views on the protests.

**Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca**

Another of these experiences is the one of PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca; platform of people affected by mortgage problems). This collective started from several initiatives such as V of Vivienda, which was constituted in 2006. Its aim was to denounce the corruption in urban planning in the Spanish State and how this was going to affect peoples’ degree of debts. PAH (http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/) emerged in 2009 in Barcelona. However, as recognised by their own constituency, they started to obtain more tangible results after the 15-M. The platform, as other grassroots collectives, is organized horizontally in assemblies (weekly meetings) where individuals experiencing problems with their mortgage gather. During these assemblies, people may get support about their situation and decide collectively how they are going to confront their issues. Starting from their personal drama, they decide on how to act, how to live, recovering their own autonomy and thus, introducing not only a personal change but a collective change in people’s consciousness.

They aim to provide alternatives and support concerning two main problems. First, they aim to create awareness of the structural causes that push people to alienation as they cannot keep on paying their mortgage. Second, they aim to find ways to fight the concrete situation of abandonment produced by the loss of people homes. There are currently more than 50 local assemblies spread around the Spanish State, which are in turn coordinated with other assemblies and neighbourhood associations. In order to face this situation, the collective has organized several campaigns. For instance, Stop Deshaucios (evictions) is the most urgent of their initiatives. Affected people, together with family and neighbours, negotiated collectively with the bank and boycotted evictions when the police arrive. Between the 2008 and 2012, 362,776 evictions have been ordered and 577 PAH have continued to mobilize until today. Moreover, several other initiatives organized by the PAH were aimed at finding alternative homes for people, offering structural solutions to the problem, engaging with local institutions and publicly shaming individuals considered responsible for the problem (escraches).

In my view, the two platforms mentioned above correspond to what Collectivo Situaciones has denominated new social protagonism. I have focussed on the afterwards of 15-M because I wished to analyse current protest in Spain beyond “the movement” of 15-M. I wanted to present the different nuances, beyond age, social class and ideology. I have preferred to look at differences among subjectivities and alienations as positive potentiality for the creation of alternatives. I believe, these platforms and initiatives cannot be explained through rational-functionalist theories because as the “new protagonism” explained by collectivo situaciones they “seek neither homogeneity nor models, it only raises questions. It exists as a counter-offensive expressed in struggles that are multiple and in forceful dilemmas” (Collectivo Situaciones, 2002, p. 27). These initiatives favour the construction of another discourse of what it is necessary, of what is different and opens possibilities that re-take spaces and construct another type of

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8 In Spain the law obliges people to keep on paying their mortgages to the bank even if they have been evicted and returned the keys.
common sense. Following up on the idea of becoming minor, or as Deleuze says, one has to become woman, not in the sexual sense but as a way of detaching ourselves of the majority and metamorphose in positive difference and thus, transmute. There are thousands of groups and initiatives which any theory could contain if it understands society via its minorities and affinities and through its processes of disembodiment. And in that sense, social theory is “to tie ethics of knowledge to the concrete forms of existence” (ibid, p. 25)

Conclusions

In this article I have tried to open a debate about the role of social theorists within society. In doing so, I have tried to highlight how social theory has approached the study of social phenomena. Moreover, I have also tried to emphasize how the system’s failure left the door open for people’s enlightenment and engagement in line with Foucault’s discussion. Thus, creating passages that allows lines of flight; from diversity to multiplicity, from becoming majority to becoming woman, becoming child, becoming molecular, transforming the social body from the inside to the exterior.

“The fundamental power struggle”, writes Castells, “is the battle for the construction of meaning in the minds of the people” (Castells, 2012, p. 5). To this I would add, in response to the question posed during the afore-mentioned presentation, can we measure this transmutation in people’s minds? And if we do, are we not obliged to territorialize, to categorize, to homogenize back these changes and thus missing the resistance that goes beyond rational objectification? Society does not plan and categorize, society acts while theory and policy-making forms run behind. In opposition to the need of rationalization, the social theorist has to become closer to what Deleuze calls the smith, a traveller who “experiences an irrational becoming-object, through jarring encounters with the social-political real-with modes of social existence which cannot, must not, signify” (Day, 2005, p. 175).

I am not trying here to deny or underestimate the benefit stemming from rationalist analyses, but to call for a dialogue between these theories, the approaches of militant researchers and activist practices. In other words, I believe that social research would benefit from co-producing knowledge with social actors and ‘minor literature’. In this sense, I argue that to take seriously this co-production of knowledge would push social theory to the plane of consistency and thus initiate a process of deterritorialization necessary to understand the nomadic dynamics of current social actions and movements.

I tried to illustrate this by presenting current debates in social theory through problematizing majoritarian approaches to the study of social phenomena. Militant approaches such as those from Holloway and Collectivo Situaciones present crack, relays, and situations of social protests as a possibility for inaugurating and creating new meanings. These new protagonism and rhizomatic movements have the potential of transforming people’s thinking. At the same time, this conceptual framework engages with the participation dynamics developed during the 15-M and inspires other collectives. Both platforms explained above construct their own autonomy and networks working from within, hence transforming and re-shaping people’s subjectivities. Against the defeatist arguments that some productivity-led perspectives see in these movements, I have argued here that the true outcome is the one that takes place in people’s minds (Castells, 2012, p. 142) or in what Foucault calls “the soul” (Foucault in Day, 2007, p. 135). Social (movement) theory should then decide if it wants to accompany these transformations or on the contrary remain alienated within its own discussions.
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POWER, KNOWLEDGE AND RESISTANCES IN THE STUDY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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Abstract

This paper will analyse the power relations involved in social movement research, exploring alternative epistemological practices that resist and subvert academic conventions in order to create new modes of knowing. I will critique the production of a knowledge that aims at liberation and emancipation by conducting research 'about' or 'on behalf of' social movements, and I will show how this approach might lead to their very subjection. It will be argued that, in order to avoid the reproduction of power relations they seek to resist, research practices need to go beyond dialectical modes of knowing, departing from assumptions of the subject/object of knowledge, of objective/subjective research and from the hierarchy between theory and praxis. A precedent is found in the research approaches of post-colonial, activist, and queer studies that seek to experiment different modes of knowing, based not on observation and participation, but on learning from the experience of resistance in social movements: in this way resistant practices become an epistemological perspective rather than an object of study, and research can become a tool of resistance.

Keywords

epistemology; resistance; squatting

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Many thanks to the Amsterdam squatters’ movement, to Hanneke Mol and Erika Doucette for letting me reflect on the strong entanglement between power and knowledge in academic research, and for introducing me to alternative modes of thought.
When applying for government and university research grants, social researchers have to comply with a number of requirements. One the one hand academics are asked to pursue scientific research projects that will bring innovative theoretical insight to the discipline; on the other hand they are expected to produce results and practical advice for policy-makers. As the attention of founding committees revolves around the relevance of research projects for science and policy, academics often research and write with one eye on academia and the other one on governments, but there seem to be little awareness on how these requirements embody politics of truth that confine research practices to specific modes of knowledge. Without neglecting the importance of engaging in projects that are both theoretically and policy relevant, working exclusively from an academic or policy perspective and audience often entails dismissing the effects of power exercised by academic modes of knowing on the social field that is analysed.

Ethical committees are supposed to ensure that the field researched is not harmed through the research process. However harm is a vague concept, not ease to measure, evaluate and operationalise. Concerns for the population affected mainly revolve around the protection of anonymity and confidentiality of sensitive information. As in a museum, or zoo, researchers may watch, observe and ask questions, as long as no direct harm is inflicted on the object of study; however, the process that allows academics to place 'research objects' within an observational cage remains unquestioned.

Besides the specific methodological tools for social movements studies, both the role and perspective of the researcher in the struggles taking place are worth reflection. Although there is much reflection on how the researcher's standpoint and subjectivity influences the knowledge produced (Crampton & Elden, 2007; Wray 2002), academics often lack reflection on the power exercised by their modes of knowledge and theoretical perspectives on the social movements researched. Most social movements scholars seem sympathetic with the movements they study, and aim to produce knowledge for emancipating and empowering groups struggling for social change. However it will be questioned to what extent these research practices that aim at producing social emancipation, still reproduce power relations that allow academics to exercise power on the reality analysed, thus resulting in the subjection, rather than the multiplication of practices of resistance.

As all modes of research have political consequences, and all forms of knowledge exercise power, a relevant question is how to transform these power relations through the very process of doing research? Or, in other words, how can research practices become tools of resistance not only for transforming society, but for subverting the very modes in which knowledge is produced and discursive formations become truth?

This paper will explore research practices that go beyond those traditional approaches that reproduce the scientific dialectic between object and subject of knowledge, and that aim at subverting the relations of power that place a hierarchy between theory and praxis, researchers and researched, and, in social movements studies, between academics and activists. This paper does not attempt to provide fixed answers nor solutions. Instead, it configures as an exploration in the field of epistemological practice, in order to problematise the power effects of different modes of knowing.

The starting point here is the research project through which these critical questions emerged; namely, the study of the criminalisation of squatting in the Netherlands. The resistant collectivities active in squatters movements aim to subvert the multiple modes of power that govern our societies, and the production of academic knowledge about movements is one such modes of power. Thus, when starting this research, it resulted important to explore possible epistemological practices that are not set up to produce scientific knowledge about squatting, but
that, instead, are situated at the vantage point of the squatting experience, and are thus able to contribute in understanding and subverting the relations of power that movements are resisting. In other words, it has been necessary to implement research practices that, rather than observing squatting, would entail looking at the current modes of government through the experience of those who try to resist them: yet not grabbing movements' knowledge, but learning from these perspectives how to know differently.

Drawing on Foucault it will be argued that in order to conduct research that is useful not only for understanding how power relations work, but also for resisting the relation between power and knowledge that is exercised through social research, it is necessary to subvert the rationality and truth formations at stake. In first place this entailed questioning the truth formations that govern our modes of thought and unlearning traditional assumptions on objectivity, and validity of academic research, which are still fixed into the scientific dialectic of object and subject of knowledge. In second place this process led to learning different ways of producing knowledge, and to do so from the perspective of practices of resistance that are engaged in problematising power relations and in uncovering their points of application (Foucault, 1998). Thus, it will be argued that is necessary to use theoretical and epistemological tools that do not attempt to conduct research about movements, but that work alongside movements, learning from the movements' modes of knowing, and using movements' experiences as theoretical and epistemological perspectives. This, not only for avoiding the representation and repression of resistant practices, but also for using research practices as tools of resistance.

What is Critical about Critical Methods?

Following Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach - “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (Marx, 1845) - it has been argued that the aim of critical research is to contribute to social change and political transformation. So called 'critical' research methods have attempted to put this thesis into practice. 'Critical ethnography', for instance, has often been addressed as an important method both for researching from within the field of interest, and attempting to contribute to political change. However, the main tools used by critical ethnography are those of 'participant observation'. Throughout this paper both concepts of participation and of observation will be problematised, and it will be argued that the task of critical research is not simply to change the world, but, in first place, to reflect on the how specific ways knowing the world become truth, and, in second place, to explore different possibilities of knowing the world.

The definition of critical ethnography provided by Jim Thomas (1992), referenced in most of the related literature, argues that “critical ethnography is like traditional ethnography with a political aim” (Thomas, 1992, p.11). This definition is highly problematic since traditional ethnographic research did have strong political implication, as it was used as a source of knowledge aimed at understanding colonized cultures and to extend colonisation further (Gough, 2008). The first ethnographic studies addressed the populations, cultures and histories of colonies within the British Empire, but defined themselves as unbiased and impartial account of the actual state of affairs. Affirming that 'critical ethnography is like traditional ethnography with political aims', seems to dismiss the fact that traditional ethnography did entail strong political effects and did serve as a tool for social transformation: namely the governing of colonised and indigenous populations by Western colonial powers whose aim was explicitly to understand in order to change, or to know in order to subject, to control, and to exploit the researched populations.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) addresses the colonial implications of critical social and
anthropological research on indigenous communities, which, even when they wave the flag of emancipatory research, still order, code, and objectify indigenous experiences, thereby imposing Western categories and modes of knowing: from her perspective "the word itself, research, is one of the dirtiest words in indigenous world's vocabulary" (Smith, 2012, p.1). However she does not claim that 'research' as such should be abolished; rather, she considers theory and analyses as important tools "to plan, strategise, to take greater control over our resistance" (Smith, 2012, p. 38). Therefore the problem does not lie in research as such, but in the ways 'proper' research and 'true' knowledge are defined by scientific (Western, white, male) standards which dismiss and silence different epistemological possibilities (Denzin et al, 2008).

Thus, it is important to question to what extent so called critical ethnographic practices had a role in effectively challenging and subverting traditional colonial discourses. If colonisation is intended as an ongoing process of grabbing and governing peoples, lives and knowledge formations, both traditional and critical research methods have to be de-colonised, and it is necessary to find new languages, tools, and modes of thought, for decolonizing theoretical apparatuses and epistemological devices (Sandoval, 2000). In order to be effectively 'de-colonised' research should not simply aim at producing tools for 'social transformation', but at becoming reflective on the power effects of the knowledge produced, and at finding different ways of knowing (Holloway, 1998; Shukaitis et al., 2007).

The situated nature of knowledge has also been extensively discussed by feminist epistemologies who made explicit the politics of research and 'science' and questioned the partiality and exclusiveness of truth formations that shape knowledge and thought (Smith 2005, Wray 2002). Feminist standpoint epistemologies challenge mainstream systems of research objectivity and ethics, and questions whose truth, whose knowledge, from what perspective and for whom is research produced (Harding, 1991). These subversive epistemologies have attempted to produce alternative ways of knowing, and experimented with modes of research in which researchers could situate themselves in a position that does not exercise power upon, while supporting the potentialities of the reality researched. From these perspectives the call for objectivity is replaced with an attention of the subjective dimension of the research experience. As most scholars still value rigorous detachment and distance, and the formulation of objective and scientific analyses and results as the main criteria for the production of truth, recurrent criticism of feminist subjective perspectives questions the extent to which these voices reproduce the very discourses that oppress them (Willis, 1977) and to the extent to which voices can claim to hold more truth than others (Hammersley, 2012). But is it possible to go beyond the dialectic between subjective and objective modes of knowledge?

These longstanding disputes have been discussed in the Becker and Gouldner debate, and they revolves around whether it is necessary to speak about or for the social reality one is analysing and which view point should be adopted while conducting research (Becker, 1967; Gouldner, 1968). While Becker (1967) argues, in his article 'Whose side are we on?', that the social scientist should hold the perspective of the oppressed, Gouldner (1968) has argued that this attitude entails the risk of acting as 'zoo-keeping' researcher, who stands on the side of the oppressed but keeps it in a cage, as this modes of research do not provide tools to transform the relations of power that lead to the very oppression. Hence, the effects of so-called the 'zoo-keeper' attitudes are to provide knowledge to understand, to manage and control the oppressed rather than to address the causes of oppression. In his view, the role of the researcher is not to give meaning to and make sense of the life-world of the oppressed practices, but to analyse and intervene in the causes of oppression.

According to Gouldner (1968), academics must therefore formulate theories that are able
to locate the various perspectives and actors involved within a broader political historical and cultural context. Despite the relevance of this approach for avoiding the zoo-keeping of the so-called 'other', 'vulnerable' or 'oppressed', Gouldner's argument assumes a clear distinction between the subject and object of research, the micro and macro levels, and claims to the maintenance of institutionalized distance between theory and praxis, thus reproducing classical scientific paradigms, and keeping the theorist at the centre of the epistemological practice.

Moreover, posing a clear-cut distinction between the powerful and the powerless, the dominator and the oppressed, silences and dismisses the capacity of non-academics to take action and challenge the power enacted upon them, and to grasp them as key forces within the power relations. Thus, posing oneself in a specific standpoint does not necessarily mean occluding the focus on the macro dynamics at stake. Rather, the vertical geometry and hierarchy between macro and micro can be challenged by looking at how relations of power traverse and resonate within each body (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004).

The Methods of the Eye: Research about Social Movements

Translating the above debate more specifically into social movements research methods, Becker's approach could be referred to as a 'methods of the eye', since speaking about/or of the movement entails observing the movement, its demands, strategies, repertoires of action and historical cycles from an external point of view (on this perspectives see among others: McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi et al., 1992; Giugni et al., 1999; Mcadam et al., 2003). Although these studies have been very important for understanding general patterns and common features of various forms of protest through time and space, they tend to be more popular among academics than in social movements, as they construct macro-theories and find general patterns of cause-and-effects relations that seem to be of little interest for social movements themselves (Juris, 2013). Through the use of qualitative methods such as 'participant observation', many social movement scholars position themselves as theorists whose roles are still limited at using movements as objects of observation, or as a case to test hypothesis. The researcher becomes an external observer who accesses the movement, grabs its knowledge and often leaves the scene without any substantial contribution (Graeber, 2009). Thus, too often social movements studies are aimed at describing the movement, producing general theories about movements, and make little effort to reflect on the the multiple and controversial ethical implications of these practices. Although researchers are often sympathetic or supporters of movements struggles, these modes of research produce representations, discourses and truth-formations about movements that more often than not play into framing, coding and thereby confining the practices studied.

The power/knowledge implications go beyond data collection and analysis, and extend to the dissemination of the data. Indeed, what I would refer to as 'the researchers of the eye' tend to claim the necessity of translating the research results to make them understandable for the movement audience (Chatterton, 2008). However, it could be argued that if academic work needs to be translated, this is frequently more due to the academic's rather than the activist's limited scope of understanding. When translation is needed, this is not because of a supposed incapacity of activists to understand research results, but mainly because academic language tends to close itself within the fortress of discipline-specific jargon. The writing task should aim at producing a different language rather than translating 'scientific' research, and at resisting the way the politics of scientific truth pass through academic discourse and shape the possibilities of knowing.
The Method of the Voice: Research for Social Movements

An alternative often proposed by critical researchers, instead to positioning oneself as an external observer of ongoing struggles, is to conduct research from within, to help movements elaborate their struggle (Croteau et al., 2005). Researchers often take the role of speaking for, or in the name of, a given movement. Such research aims at representing movements to give voice to the struggle, to bring subjugated voices to the outside. The political goal is to produce knowledge for the purpose of empowering rather than controlling the oppressed and marginalized (Brown & Strega, 2005).

Feminist critiques, for instance, often argue that taking the perspective of those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, of the oppressed and of the marginalised, is the only way to shed light on the dynamics of power at stake (Harding & Hintikka, 2003; Lather, 2007). But is it possible that these very efforts to liberate perpetuate the relations of dominance at stake (Lather & Lather, 1991, p.16)? What if the so called oppressed and marginalised already have the capacity to alter the relations of oppression and do not need to be empowered by the researcher (Juris, 2008)? These questions are intricately interconnected, and highlight important epistemological, ethical and philosophical dilemmas. Methods such as Action Research, or Participatory Action Research (PAR) place the focus on participation, in order to reduce power acted upon the reality studied (Selener, 1997). There are multiple paradigms and tools subsumed under the umbrella term PAR, but the common particularity lies in the shifting role and definition of the researcher, who becomes a facilitator, rather than an 'expert', and the process of research aims at giving power to the power-less. PAR differs from observational methods in that it does not attempt to reduce the complexity of reality and experience to mere representation, nor at making truth claims from an external perspective. Rather the political task of PAR practitioners is to let the 'researched' participate in the definition of the research focus, questions and objectives (Kindon et al., 2007). Such research practices aim at a bottom-up discovery of local, situated knowledges with methods based on inclusion rather than extraction, on participation rather than appropriation. These methods, have often combined feminist criticism with knowledge production, have put into question the traditional hierarchies and divisions between theory and practice and led to the acceptance of new modes of research within diverse academic spheres.

Despite their importance in paving the way for reflexive research practices, many of the research projects using these methods aim at including the power-less and voice-less in a participatory process of empowerment. By claiming to give power to the power-less, and at discovering the authenticity and truth of silenced voices, these approaches still use a language and a discourse that tends to position the researcher as the liberator or the emancipatory force of oppressed subjects. As discussed above, methods that call for the inclusion of the powerless, of the subjugated and of the vulnerable tend to reduce the complexity of power relations to a clear-cut distinctions between the powerful and the powerless, the power holder and the subjected. Moreover, although participatory methods tend to distance themselves from speaking 'on behalf of', the aim remains focussed on bringing expertise and tools and researching for, thereby failing to break with the hierarchy between activist and scholar, theory and praxis.

Paradoxically, attempts to represent resistant experiences and to raise voices imply that the researcher rarely joins the struggles (Kitchin & Hubbard, 1999, p.196) and, willingly or not, exercises power and acts upon their modes of knowledges and research practices. Following Cohen (1985), Kothari (2001) points out that the dynamic of participation functions as yet another form of 'tyranny' (Cooke, 2001) where the participants are fed the illusion of having a voice in decision-making processes that will eventually harm them or serve for their control.
In other words participatory practices have been criticised for exercising subtle methods whose effect is to tame the possibility of resistance, and to conceal relations of power/knowledge and outside agendas (Kindon et al., 2007).

To summarise, these research techniques involve an approach that assumes a clear-cut distinction between knowledge and practice, where the activist is the subject and object of research, and the academic its eye or voice to the outside: this implies that the researcher is the 'expert' on other's struggle, and, as such, remains the central source of knowledge (Chatterton et al., 2010).

Thus, the method of the 'eye' and 'voice' both entail a form of representation: in the former the researcher is an external observer who analyses the inside world of the movement and, although the knowledge produced is partial, it often claims that it is universal. While the force of social movements is often expressed by their intensity and variety (Chesters & Welsh, 2005) attempting at a general representation fixes and represses their multiplicity and complexity. The second approach entails researchers electing themselves as political representative of movements, representing movements' voices, speaking on behalf of, or as an emancipatory voice of movements. Researchers that position themselves as an empowering subject of the voice-less, reduce social movements to marginal and vulnerable populations, and classify political activists as passive subjects, unable to know, to speak and act for themselves. Therefore both approaches entail a form of repression: the former by enabling representations that often produces specific discourses about the practices, thus coding and controlling the struggle; the latter, by subjectifying the struggle, speaking on behalf of, and appropriating activists' voices with the presumption of giving them a voice.

In the collection of essays titled 'Rhyming Hope and History' (2003) academics conducting social movements research discuss their role as intellectuals, and their relation to activism. The questions raised relate to how academics, through the production of their knowledge, can support social movements. The authors call for closer connections and collaborations between activists and academics, and for collaborative practices where academics can learn from social movements. As Aldon Morris (2002) claimed at the “Hope and History” conference: "Maybe we could bring social movement theorists into the real world of social movements—to struggle and experiment with different tactics and strategies, to collect data on strategies, to analyse them, and think it all through [while] out in the field, in the actual heat of the struggle. Maybe the activists should say [to the theorists], 'Come out here and let's see what we can learn together".

Indeed contemporary social movements and resistant groups articulate, produce and disseminate critical knowledges in a way that does not need, and actually does not welcome, the intervention of external observers, experts or intellectuals willing to represent, code, or organise their practices. Rather, academics can learn from these different modes of knowing, and their research practices can serve as an additional tool, within a multitude of already existing tools. In order to stop observing, representing or repressing, researchers need to learn from movements experiences, and research need to be inscribed within the multiplicity of practices, of methods and epistemologies of the movement itself.

The Method of the Body: Research along Movements

To the Gramscian distinction between the traditional and organic intellectual (Gramsci 2010), Foucault adds the concept of the 'specific intellectual' (Foucault 1980), who does not make universal claims but works in specific contexts and on particular practices: “The intellectual's role is no longer to place herself somewhat ahead and to the side in order to express the stifled
truth of the collectivity; theory is an activity conducted alongside those who struggle for power and not their illumination” (Foucault & Deleuze, 1977). Thus, the role of the researcher is not one of the public intellectual who raises the voices of the movement to a virtual ‘outside’. Instead, the 'specific intellectual' will work in collaboration with movements, and will have a specific role in singular struggles. Here the position of researchers is immanent rather than external to the struggle, yet alongside the struggle rather than at its centre. The body and voice of the researcher relays the multiplicity of bodies and voices, and the sources of knowledge are collective research practices rather than an individualised researcher.

In order to avoid claim to universal representation, the role of research becomes one of bridging singular practices, isolating elements, understanding how the relations of power resonate traversing these elements and developing epistemological devices that give attention to the details and raptures rather than to progress and continuities, and to points of encounter between different elements rather than teleological views (Mahon, 1992; Tamboukou, 1999; Deleuze, 2006). This perspective implies that, instead of looking for an universal subject that embodies resistance, or searching for a general model, it becomes possible to individuate singular and situated practices that operate within complex relations of power, and that counter their capillary effects through tactical use and through a reversal of the relations in which they are embedded.

The aim of these research practices becomes one of producing tools that inscribe themselves within movement's struggles, to produce forms of knowledge that are neither extractive nor inclusive but instead collaborative (Brown & Strega, 2005; Shukaitis et al., 2007; Juris, 2013) and multiply the potential for collective political action, rather than for representation and repression. Following the feminist and queer approaches, this method can be defined as the 'method of the body', as research here is not separated from embodied experience, and theory is not situated on a different level from the affects and desires involved in the process of research. Here the body of the researcher and the one of the activist can coexist in a common space of theory and praxis, and become the starting point of epistemological practices.

From the perspectives of these critiques, Marx's thesis could been reformulated by arguing that in order to understand the world in first place, it is necessary to become directly involved in the struggles to change it. Only then it becomes possible to stop observing, to combine theory and praxis, and research becomes not only a gaze but also a mode of resistance.

This approach is mainly used by post-colonial, queer and activist researchers engaged in autonomous and alter-global politics (Escobar, 1992; Brown and Strega, 2005; Shukaitis et al., 2007; Denzin, 2008; Graeber, 2009; Browne and Nash, 2010; Smith, 2012; Juris, 2013). Here the main actors are not conventional movements that seek to gain power within traditional institutions, but ways of life and political organisation that, as with squatting, aim to unsettle and transform relations of power by opening up the possibility of different relations to emerge. With these research projects activism "becomes not simply an object of analysis but a politically engaged mode of research, which not only generates relevant knowledges, but also potentially constitutes a form of activism itself" (Juris, 2013, p. 9). The research aim is to contribute to rather than to objectify or subjectify the struggles, by considering movements as active producers of knowledge, and, from here, learning different modes of knowing.

An important contribution that aimed at going beyond classical scientific paradigms and at breaking the dialectic of objective/subjective research, can be found is Dorothy Smith (2005) 'institutional ethnography': namely, a method of inquiry for mapping the social relations mediated by texts that organize institutions. Dorothy Smith (2005) argues that the aim of critical sociology is not to use social groups and processes to test hypothesis or explicate theories, but to uncover how relations of power have an effect on the local sites of action, from an embodied,
situated standpoint in the everyday world (Smith, 2005). This rejects the productions of objective accounts, not in favour of subjective epistemology, but of reflexive modes of knowledge, not about people, but for people, where 'for' addresses a reflexive knowledge of the people (Scholl, 2012).

Similarly, post-colonial practices and research by indigenous populations have challenged the way the colonised are labelled as powerless communities 'at the margins' and considered as 'objects', rather than 'authors' of research, and developed methods that allowed to conduct research that aims nor at objectifying nor at empowering, but one that is done by experiencing indigenous conditions and, from here, problematising the relations of power that traverse these conditions (Smith, 2002; Brown & Strega, 2005). Throughout her work Linda Tuhiwai Smith searches for methods and conceptual tools that would decolonise research practices, namely projects locally conducted by members of the populations and where the research process has priority over the research outcomes. The aim indeed is not to produce data clusters and categories, but to contribute to processes of collective reflection, and to create relays between already existing knowledges. In this context indigenous groups are authors and conductors of inquiries that bridge local and embodied experiences with the global flows of power (Smith, 2002).

To summarise, while traditional research methods place the researchers on the outside, seeking 'objective' and 'scientific' analyses about a researched population, queer, post-colonial and activist approaches value embodied experience and reflexive accounts (Motta, 2009). These epistemological practices offer alternatives to the assumptions that theory must be derived from a process of abstraction, detached from everyday struggles. Rather, they consider movements as capable of producing theory through praxis. From queer, postcolonial and activists perspectives the aim is to unlearn traditional methods and to find different tools that contribute not only to the theoretical debate, but to experiment with different modes of thought. Rather than adhering to the binary opposition of speaking about, or for a movement, these radical approaches aim at researching alongside movements, therefore substituting observations and interviews with collective research practices and reflections (Henninger & Negri, 2005). Here the entire body of the researcher becomes entangled with the struggle, not just its eye or voice: thus the researcher does not merely observe or participate in the life world of the movement, but movements experiences become epistemological perspectives.

As discussed above, from a classical scientific academic perspective the 'methods of the body' can be criticised for lack of objectivity, for an exaggerated bias due to the embodiment of affects and experience, and for placing too much efforts on the micro, without relevant understanding of the macro dynamics of power. However, once more, concepts such as 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' are directly from the classical epistemological tradition, the politics and effects of which, need to be challenged (Smith, 2012) by going beyond the dialectics of macro and micro, particular and universal, empirical and abstract, and theory and praxis (Baugh, 1992). Here the viewpoint at stake is not related to subjectivity versus objectivity, but it seeks to problematise what sets of conditions produce specific relations, practices and discursive formations where life is experienced.

Deleuze and Guattari (2004) name haecceity as a method for the analysing an event in its multiplicity. Haecceity refers to the 'here and now' and assumes that the foreground and the background resonate within each other, as they are part of a multiple and complex assemblage that shapes the world'. Therefore, embodied practices of research, do not fail to understand the

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1 As in Deleuze and Guattari's passage on a poem by Federico Garcia Lorca (Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías): “It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity; it is this assemblage that is defined by a longitude
relation between macro and micro, as relations of power are understood to circulate transversally and not vertically, and to resonate in each body and event. By engaging with these perspectives and methods, going beyond the distinctions between object and subject of knowledge and between theory and praxis, it becomes possible to resist and erode the truth formations of academic research.

The Criminalisation of Squatting in the Netherlands

Squatting, in literal terms, means to occupy a space without the authorisation of the owner; however, squatting is not just about trespassing, as squatting functions by making creative use of the places occupied, transforming the relations of power that traverse these spaces. The Dutch word for squatting, kraken, refers to the very action of break opening a private space to which access is prohibited. As a practice, kraken, is a tool that can be used in a variety of ways: for solving a housing problem, for creating sites of urban struggle, or for opening spaces where a variety of practices of resistance can take place: from organisation of political action to experimenting with different modes of life, politics and ethics (Sqek, 2012).

In the Netherlands the practice of squatting has been tolerated and regulated since 1914, when the right to housing was considered to have priority over the right to property, therefore allowing the occupation of unused spaces to satisfy housing needs (Uitermark, 2004). In 2010, after many decades of so called 'regulated tolerance', a new law turned the occupation of unused properties into a criminal act. The law that criminalised squatting not only addresses the action of trespassing, but it specifically addresses the social and political movements that use squatting as a tool of resistance.

Despite the relevance of the criminalisation of collective practices of resistance for both criminology and social movements studies, neither fields have given much attention to these processes. Indeed social movements studies that take the perspective of criminalisation mainly focus on policing protests (Della Porta & Reiter, 1998; Fernandez, 2008; Lovell, 2009). However, as Alberto Melucci (1989) has pointed out, social movements are not only expression of protest. Protest is an oppositional episode that does not shed light on the creativity of movements, on the everyday practices of resistance that shape and transform the relations of power that movements resist. Movements do not stand outside power, as pure opposition, but instead, power and resistance form assemblages of relations that mutually compose each other. Squatters movements, as with many other resistant groups, enact modes of politics that go beyond protest and opposition. They constitute hubs for the production of different social and urban spaces, of critical knowledges, and of resistant modes of life (Adilkno, 1994; Uitermark, 2004; Hodkinson & Chatterton, 2006; Martinez & López 2012).

Just as squatting does not merely express opposition, the law that criminalised it is does not only entail repression: it is a complex process that involves a multiplicity of actors, techniques, and rationalities, on multiple levels. Here, other less visible, more subtle strategies are at play, which do not simply repress, but normalise, tame and conduct resistant practices and latitude, by speeds and affects, independently of forms and subjects, which belong to another plane. It is the wolf itself, and the horse, and the child, that cease to be subjects to become events, in assemblages that are inseparable from an hour, a season, an atmosphere, an air, a life. The street enters into composition with the horse, just as the dying rat enters into composition with the air, and the beast and the full moon enter into composition with each other [...] Climate, wind, season, hour are not of another nature than the things, animals, or people that populate them, follow them, sleep and awaken within them. [...] We are all five o'clock in the evening, or another hour, or rather two hours simultaneously...» (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p.262).
and discourses. Moreover the process of criminalisation is strongly influenced and shaped by squatters’ attempts to counter criminalisation, whether they take place in the streets, in court, or as the ‘hidden transcripts’ discussed by James Scott (1990). These resistant practices constituted a strong capacity for challenging how the process of criminalisation works, and for subverting its effects on criminalised movements (Dadusc & Dee, forthcoming). Hence, in this context, criminalisation is not to be understood as a top-down process, where those affected are passive subjects with no power of action: rather, forces of criminalisation and practices of resistance constitute a complex game of power, an assemblage of forces and relations that mutually influence each other. Therefore, the relations of power entailed in criminalisation are neither fixed nor static, but instead they are in continuous transformation, a transformation that comes from the possibility, and from the action of, resistance. This implies that the actors involved in resisting criminalisation entail a reflexivity, experience, analytical capacities, and modes of knowledge of the relations in which they are embedded that goes far beyond what can be grasped by the academic gaze of an outsider.

Learning from Resistance

The practices of resistance that take place through squatting are not only configured as an antagonistic opposition, nor are they marginal, oppressed, or ‘other’ to power. Rather, they traverse the relations in which they are embedded and problematise their effects. The people and collectives that are engaged in squatting actively bring attention to everyday struggles and confront mechanisms of power that exploit, conduct and produce specific truth formations. These resistant forces are not external but immanent to relations of power, and aim at subverting the effects of power by opening up different fields and possibilities for action and for thought.

Thus, these very struggles reveal points of rapture and contention which can unmask how power relations work (Simons, 1995). Resistant practices by transforming, but also in unmasking hidden, “normalised”, or taken-for-granted techniques of power and regimes of truth function as monsters, rather than models, of different modes of knowledges. Hence, the gaze of resistances to specific techniques of power enable an understanding of the sites and modes of operations, mechanisms, points of application and rationalities of power (Foucault, 1982). As Cadman (2010) has noted, practices of resistance (such as squatting) operate as 'transactional realities', as points of fracture between the smooth continuity of the work of power, and the possibility of different modes of doing things, of becoming, and of knowing. Thus, by learning from the perspectives of those practices and events that constitute difference and that challenge the 'normal ordering of things', it is possible to unmask and question those effects of power that shape our lives and to problematise how one should constitute oneself as a political, moral and desiring subject in the Western societies of our time (Foucault, 1990).

On the one hand understanding the mentalities and techniques of the criminalisation of squatting by aiming at resisting them, gives insight into how urban machine functions, with its practices of gentrification, dispossessions, housing policies, real estate speculation, and the disciplining and normalisation of what differs from the supposed 'normality'. On the other hand, using the methods of the body, brings to the surface dispositifs of power that not only work on the field of politics, but that also operate on the level of ethics. Indeed criminalisation has effects on affects, desires, and bodily experiences that can only be grasped by experiencing and resisting criminalisation through one’s own body.

Thus, the academic’s role is not the one of representing, but one of inserting oneself into these fields, of becoming part of resistant practices with her own body, thereby resisting the
effects of power that pass through academic modes of knowledge. Within this context the traditional boundaries between academic and activist are blurred, because research becomes a practice of resistance in itself, a relay between radical theory and praxis and, as such, an additional tool for the existing struggles.

Conclusion

Drawing on Foucault's conceptualisation of power and resistance this paper explored how different research methods for social movements have specific power effects on the reality researched and on the struggles taking place. In particular it has been argued that, in order to understand how relations of power work, it is important to use the gaze of practices of resistance that question and subvert the very relations of power one is analysing. It has also been questioned how the role and the standpoint of the researcher shape and affect the knowledge that is produced. By drawing on multiple research traditions and perspectives, it has been argued that academics have been engaging in attempt not only to understand the world, but also to change it. However, dislocating and acknowledging researchers' standpoints is not enough for challenging the relations of power entailed in the production of knowledge, as research methods frequently tend to reproduce the positivist dialectic between object and subject of knowledge, and hierarchical relations between theory and praxis, researcher and researched, academics and activists. Although it might be impossible to entirely step out of the norms that govern academic modes of thought, it is important to problematise the effects exercised by academic truth formations, and to reflect on how to engage in modes of research that are not only oriented toward universities and governments, but that in themselves function as practices of resistance.

By drawing on the experience of doing research on the criminalisation of squatting in the Netherlands, the paper has explored research practices that have been experimenting with alternative modes of knowledge production, and that attempted to challenge the relations of power entailed in social research. In particular, post-colonial, queer and activists approaches were addressed as techniques that enable research itself to be employed as a tool for resistance. Indeed, these epistemologies neither attempt to represent a social world nor to empower social movements. Instead, the aim becomes to learn from movements’ modes of knowledge, and to do research by embodying and experiencing practices of resistance. Here movements become active forces in the production of knowledge, and constitute an epistemological perspective.
References


GAUGING THE MOOD: OPERATIONALIZING EMOTION THROUGH ETHNOGRAPHY

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Abstract

This paper illustrates a case-study of an ethnographic research project in order to highlight the processes by which the project thesis emerged, the form of the knowledge on which it is based, and the relationship of that form of knowledge to other disciplines. The case-study is part of a larger ethnographic research project based in Jerusalem area between 2011 and 2012 on the sociality and affective processes involved in what is normally referred to as pro-Palestinian activism. Current anthropological concerns and debates are highlighted and discussed by following the ethnographic process from the development of a proposal based on a perceptual model of affect (Damasio, 2000), to ‘learning with people’ to the fieldwork phase (Ingold, 2008), to the analysis, interpretation of findings through the intersubjective faculty of judging (Arendt, 1968). Specifically, this work aims to clarify the form and validity of knowledge produced by an ethnographic engagement with phenomenological theory. Using an extract from field notes, from which I developed a thesis on role of weirdness in dissent, I highlight the intersubjective and emergent nature of knowledge production in ethnography through the development of trusting relationships with participants and the generative tensions and possibilities of being a researcher while also becoming an activist. In this process, the knowledge produced represents neither the participants’ nor the researcher’s understandings of the world but resides in what Arendt called a ‘third position’. Such a method of knowledge production should also be apposite to interdisciplinary exchanges within academia.

Keywords
ethnography, phenomenology, affect, Israel, Palestine

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The author whishes to thank Dr. Daniel Chernilo and Prof. Sarah Pink for their supervision and assistance in developing the ideas presented here.
This paper takes the form of a case-study of an ethnographic research project in order to highlight the processes by which the project thesis emerged, the form of the knowledge on which it is based, and the relationship of that form of knowledge to other disciplines. The case in question is my ethnographic research project based in Jerusalem area between 2011 and 2012 on the sociality and affective processes involved in what is normally referred to as pro-Palestinian activism. In this article, I attempt to clarify how the production of ethnographic knowledge is an emergent and negotiated process in which the researcher is engaged in an attempt to understand the worlds of others through what Hannah Arendt (1968) defined as the intersubjective faculty of judging. The main argument of this paper follows a roughly chronological path beginning with the formulation of a research proposal, followed by an outline of the fieldwork phase and its methods, and concluding with a discussion of how the engagement of ethnography and phenomenology produces knowledge. The thesis which situates the discussion and which I draw from the knowledge produced in the field deals with Weirdness and its relations to the emergence of dissent. I do not develop this thesis here but rather focus on certain methodological issues which lead to its formulation. Beginning with the pre-fieldwork phase I outline how the object and field of analysis were qualified and also the issue of objectivity and ‘engaged ethnography’. This is followed by a discussion of the fieldwork period, the ‘sampling’ of research participants, the role of qualitative interviews and their segue into participant observation.

The final section on analysis and interpretation ties together various elements of phenomenological theory, from affect as a form of perception, to the importance of sensual experiences of the world, to Arendt’s faculty of judging and Ingold’s (2008) notion of ethnography as learning with people. In this section, I suggest that the knowledge produced through ethnography represents neither the participants’ nor the researcher’s understandings of the world but resides in what Arendt called a ‘third position’. This third position is a product of the researcher-participant attempt to know each other through the ethnographic experience. I conclude that the intersubjective ethnographic experience reflects how people ordinarily attempt to understand each in a complex and ambiguous world. In sketching out this case I aim to facilitate a greater understanding of the phenomenological-anthropological approach, so that in turn new forms of knowledge may emerge and be negotiating upon through interdisciplinary exchanges across the social sciences, in ongoing iterations of knowledge of this third position.

It must be noted that the theoretical framework and methodologies presented here are not a definitive account of anthropology and ethnography, for there is none. Nor were the methods of knowledge production fixed in situ by the time I entered the field. As I learned with my participants how to be and feel as an activist might feel and be, I was also learning what it was to be and feel like an ethnographer. As such the practical and theoretical issues in this paper are a product of pre-fieldwork research, the practice of ethnography and the practice of dissent, and the attempt to situate my post-fieldwork feelings and analyses in contemporary social science. The principal theoretical perspectives I took to the field, constructivism and phenomenology, were roughly honed and uncertain in my understanding and my research question uncomfortably loose.

More than anything, I was interested in and guided by a desire to bring the work of cognitive neurologist Antonio Damasio and philosopher Jesse J. Prinz into the field. These authors propose a bio-deterministic model of affect as a form of perception and the essence of morality which infers an underlying universalism to core human processes as described in the theory section (Damasio, 2000; Prinz, 2004; 2007). Only a few decades ago this foregrounding of the individual and bio-determinism in an anthropological project could have exposed the scholar to the ‘denigrating label of being ethnocentric’ (Marranci, 2006, p. 158). However this work
is a contribution to the growing body of work engaging with cognitive models adopted from elsewhere to approach topics such as the subjective interior, sensuality and embodiment in social experience (Ingold, 2000, 2010; Irving, 2011; Marranci, 2006; Pink, 2011).

As is common in anthropology today the aim of the research project was not to describe what a dissenter is or why they do what they do, but to understand the processes of how they understand and make sense of their complex world. To situate this effort I will begin with a short extract from my field notes, which has been edited for readability. This represents an ordinary day’s work but one whose experience brought me to theorise about the role of weirdness in embodied judgments and emergence of dissent. Pseudonyms have been used for individuals named in the text.

Field Note Extract: 20/1/2012 Al Ma'asara, Occupied Palestinian Territories

I'm in a car with Rose an Israeli activist, her father Edward and a young woman I've never met before. We drive East around the large settlement of Efrata just south of Jerusalem and get to the entrance of the Palestinian village of Al Ma'asara. Israeli soldiers are gathered around a few jeeps but no one stops us going in, even though I'm told later the entire village is a 'closed military zone'. Though Rose has been here before she's not sure of the way to the meeting point. Sightings of a few non-Palestinians walking down the road shows us we're going in the right direction. We get to the meeting and there are about ten others here already. One car load of Israelis have locked there keys in the car and I strike up a conversation about their dilemma with Edo, the car's owner. People are looking for Rose by name. A man with Dubai plates on his car has been waiting and we follow him to a building. I see a man popping his head out from a window, shouting 'Rose' and hiding again. Another man, Fesal greets her and is delighted to meet her father. She seems well loved here.

…

The protest march begins. It's about twenty people, not moving as a block, but in small groups of two-to-five strung-out over fifty metres. Rose explains to us what will happen; 'We'll march down to the road and the army will stop us and we'll shout at them for a bit'. Edward is cold in the weak winter sun and loves complaining in jest; 'I came here to drill a few holes in the wall!', he jokes referring to his daughter's apartment as opposed to the separation barrier. I exchange background stories with him as we walk unhindered back to the entrance of the village. He's been on marches before in his youth and tells me a few stories about Greenpeace but this is his first time at a demo in the West Bank. We come to the line of soldiers waiting for us at the entrance of the village. They are ready and blocking the width of the road in a line, riot shields held-up in close formation. They stop the march from passing the junction. Across the road is a Palestinian quarry works and not much else. It is the local men who are at the front of the march. 'We want to get to our land' shouts Fesal in English, 'Yallah Shebab!'. There's a push forward against the line of soldiers and some scuffles. I see Gill, an Israeli, standing behind the soldiers. There's obviously some lee-way in who can move beyond the line. The scuffles stop and chanting ensues for a while.

…

Time passes with no movement, and then a call goes up from Fesal to move and the protest group jogs down the road to our right. I'm perplexed by the sight of the soldiers running and stumbling across the clay field just below the road we're on. They must get to
the other entrance to the village before we do. The protest is not a threatening or violent
group but the soldiers are determined that we don't reach the main road. It's farcical to
watch but they make it to the junction before us and stop us again. Not that the protest
leaders seemed to be in much of a hurry to get there before them. Edward can't understand
either. ‘It’s very formulaic, where’s the wall supposed to be going up?’ Rose doesn’t know.
‘This is just bizarre, Kafkaesque’, he keeps saying. I ask Rose what will happen or why they
won’t let us go to the other side of the road. ‘I don’t know. Let’s ask them [the soldiers]
’, she says but gets no answer. After about an hour Fesal calls the protest to a halt we turn
and stroll back into the village. Soldiers fire few gas canisters our way, a few stones are
thrown towards them.

I meet Edo back at his car. They’d called a lock-smith who came from one of the near-by
settlements and got them in, much to their amusement. ‘I'm surprised they [the soldiers]
let him in to the village’, laughed Edo. After tea at Fesal’s we drive back out of the village,
past the soldiers who are still hanging around the entrance. They pay us no heed.

On Hypothetical Concerns: Prep and Prejudice in the Proposal

To situate my anthropological project in relation to other disciplines we may use Robson’s
three-fold classification model of purpose, strategy and form of research. The purpose of enquiry
in my research is exploratory, rather than descriptive or explanatory. This is not to say that I
neither describe nor attempt to explain forms of protest in Israel and Palestine and indeed any
project may be concerned with more than one purpose. However, from the outset the purpose
was to explore the possible manifestations and role of the perceptual dimension of affect in
field without presupposing what those might be. In contrast to the research strategies of survey
or experiment commonly employed in sociology and psychology respectively, anthropological
strategy is normally a case study. Finally the form of enquiry is qualitative and aims to be
‘naturalistic’. Naturalistic enquiry, for Robson, is one in which researcher and participants are
the primary data-gathering instruments in a real-world setting, where tacit or intuitive knowledge
is legitimate, the research design and analysis is emergent, inductive and negotiated and final
interpretation is ideographic and tentative (Robson, 1993).

It is rare then for an ethnographic project to begin with a hypothesis, collect data and analyze
the results with a view to supporting or refuting the initial statement and it is almost unheard of
for a project to generate testable hypotheses (Dilley, 2010). This alone runs contrary to the classic
approach of Fisherian designs which have been so influential in the positivist tradition (Fisher &
Wishart, 1930; Fisher, 1951). There are though sound reasons for using this trajectory to produce
knowledge. Firstly and in relation to purpose, an exploration of the how of social processes is
difficult to frame as a testable proposition and the great strength of exploratory research is to
loosen the constraints of prior supposition so as to seek new insights. Secondly as a strategy,
ethnographic fieldwork occurs in a relatively uncontrollable social situation and one is almost
certain to encounter an unexpected social reality. In my particular case, the large and vibrant
Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity protests I wished to join in East Jerusalem were called to a halt the week
before I began fieldwork. Finally, given the naturalistic form of ethnography where intersubjective
relationships are fostered over the course of a year or more and in which the researcher learns
with participants, the emergent, inductive and negotiated nature of knowledge produced is itself
a product of the social relations in which it is embedded (Ingold, 2008). I shall return to Ingold's
notion and elaborate on if further in the later sections however, lest it seem that the ethnographer
just walks naked into the wilderness to see what happens, I shall give a little detail on my own pre-field preparations. Like most any research project one must answer what, where and why questions before asking how.

**What is to be Explored?**

The general object of analysis are emotional processes relating to social movements. Affect is a complex, contested and incompletely understood phenomenon. Communicating on concerns of mind, body, consciousness, cognition, affect and reason are all the more difficult since they are loosely defined and differently understood in various disciplines and everyday conversation. In anthropology and sociology affect has been variously seen as a mode of interpersonal exploitation and status acquisition, a culturally shaped code of behaviour, and a mechanism to reinforce identity control or produce collectivity. Underlying these various perspectives are often competing assumptions on the nature of humans and society. There are maximizing individuals and cultural constructs, analyses which proceed from the subjective or from social structure, deterministic experimenters and irreducible phenomenologists (Briggs, 1970; Durkheim, 1912; Gould, 2009; Hochschild, 1979, 1983; Lawler, 2001; Levy, 1973, 1984; Rodgers, 2010; Stewart, 2007).

In this project I utilize a model of affect drawn largely from the works of Antonio Damasio and Jesse Prinz, in which affect is a form of perception, a ‘wordless knowledge’ and an ‘embodied judgment’ on our relationship to the environment as we encounter it (Damasio, 2000; Prinz, 2004, 2007). Situating this model within the social sciences literature I do not attempt a totalizing definition of affect, rather I hoped to observe manifestations of its perceptual quality. Though this formal operationalizing of the object of analysis may seem reasonable to many disciplines, I concede that skilled phenomenologists may find such an abstraction to be reductive (see Stewart, 2007).

**Qualifying the Research Field**

The specific social field in which I wished to examine affect centred around pro-Palestinian activism in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank. Having found a both a spectrum of activities and historical continuity of peaceful resistance in the literature review, I chose to not to limit the project to a particular organization, form of practice, or particular hoped for outcomes with regard to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Furthermore having been trained in the transnational dimension of contemporary sociality I did not limit myself to working solely with Israelis or Palestinians. I allowed the research population to include anyone who was, or had been in some way involved in agitating against the discourse that violence and coercion are legitimate means to maintain, promote or resolve the regional conflict. I refer to this categorical imposition as transnational dissent. To understand the contours of dissent one must also relate to the discourses and practices which it opposes. Because the Israeli state and society are major producers and consumers of those discourses and the primary agents of their practice, it was also important to include – when possible – the beliefs and practices of non-dissenting and consenting agents. Given my personal and familial connections in Israel, the local dimension of the transnational filed would be weighed towards the Jewish-Israeli population. Moreover, at the time of proposal I had an interest in the tension between Israeli activists and their relationships to friends and family members who did not share their views. As such the research field was to include Palestinian, Israeli and international activists as well as ‘non-aligned’ Israelis. To actually conduct fieldwork I moved to a predominantly Jewish neighbourhood in West Jerusalem along with my Jewish-Israeli wife and two children, a research context which would have been radically
different had I lived as a single man in Ramallah.

Why this Field?

There are other major methodological concerns of ethnography, particularly relating to the reliability, validity and interpretation of data and findings which I will be discuss in the later sections. However, before moving on I wish to address the general issue of objectivity in research and the notion of ‘engaged ethnography’. The idea that academic research should be applicable to wider society is not unique to anthropology. Acknowledging the overt political orientation of social protest Bevington and Dixon have called for the production of ‘movement relevant theory’ to go beyond the traditional concerns of social movement theory, such as the deconstruction of framing processes or the identification of political opportunity (Bevington & Dixon, 2005; see also Goodwin & Jasper, 1999).

The debate revolves around whether this is best achieved through the discovery of objective truth or through some system of ethics. Probably the best known early proponent of the ethical school is Nancy Scheper-Hughes who proposed a ‘militant anthropology’ based on values (D’Andre, 1995; Scheper-Hughes, 1995). Again, there is no consensus on this position but given the tradition of working with sub-altern populations, and its history of radical critique many anthropologists are open to her call to ‘speak truth to power’. The anthropology of social movements in particular has seen an increasing number of researchers taking an engaged stance, through cultural critiques of power structures, participation in protest actions and in some cases organizational input in struggles (see Graeber, 2004; Hale, 2006, 2008; Juris & Khasnabish, 2013; Juris, 2008; Postill, 2013).

However, movement relevant theory requires a critical examination of the field not a fawning retelling of its ideals. Despite this sympathetic bias and the effort at full immersion in ethnography, the awareness of the researcher-participant power relationship is not just crucial, it’s also hard to forget. Between the related practices of participation and observation exists an ‘unnatural’ tension which the critically trained researcher should find productive. Despite the difficulties in inherent in such an overtly aligned approach, which I myself subscribe to, its potential lies in ‘research outcomes that are both troubled and deeply enriched by direct engagement with the complexities of political contention’ (Hale, 2006, p. 96).

Into the Field: Learning with People

Sampling and Participation

I began fieldwork on a sunny Friday afternoon in September 2011 by walking down to Kikar Paris in Jerusalem city centre where the Women in Black have been holding a weekly silent vigil against the occupation for over twenty-five years. I handed out project information sheets and introduced myself to as many people as I could, a task facilitated by my friendship with one of the women who is my wife’s aunt. Later that day I joined the weekly Sheikh Jarrah protest in East Jerusalem, handing out more info sheets, hoping to find some key participants and wondering what else I should be doing. There is no formal method for finding participants, as Philippe Bourgois would say ‘you just go up and ask people’ (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009). Conventionally ethnography was long associated with immersion in a single-site and a rich ethnography could have be drawn by living in a contested neighbourhood like Sheikh Jarrah. However, I choose to follow Jean-Klein’s (2003) ‘lateral approach’ in which my participants would lead me through the field. In this way I travelled the city and beyond to locations and events throughout Israel and the occupied territories. This then is a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995) not for the sake of
comparison but because it reflects the ordinary movements of my participants.

From tentative introductions my ‘sample’ of participants snowballed and the project names just over sixty individuals in my contacts list. The dissenting population are highly heterogeneous along significant indexable axes of analysis: age, background, occupation, degree of radicalism, dissent practice, history or intensity of participation, political ideology, cultural background etc. The duration and intensity of participation in the research project is also highly diverse. People come and go and over the course of a year the frequency and depth of participation depended on both my interpersonal relationships with participants and the ordinary constraints of busy lives. Eleven of the participants became ‘key’ intimate acquaintances who invested considerable time and reflection in the development of the research. Others are familiar with the project and have contributed directly in an informal and intermittent fashion. Some are once off encounters or people who I see regularly but have never exchanged more than a polite greeting. It must be stressed that the aggregation of research participants cannot be said to be ‘representative’ in the sense of the term used in quantitative or experimental approaches. It is too small and too heterogeneous to be of statistical significance. However, the purpose of the research is not to represent a group but to understand the role of certain processes in the sociality of dissent. More importantly participants cannot be said to have been sampled, in the sense that they are objectively selected from a given population. The inverse is closer to reality, for it is the participants that invite the ethnographer into their world of practice.

**Beginnings with Interviews**

Given the decades long conflict the Israeli-Palestinian the field of dissent is familiar with journalists, researchers, fact-finding missions and other visitors eager to understand the situation. The first consequence of this is an expectation that research is about interviews. The qualitative interview, which has many well developed forms, is commonly seen as a key method for unearthing qualitative meaning (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Seidman, 2006; Skinner, 2013). I too prepared an interview schedule to guide me through my early encounters. However, I soon discovered a second consequence of long running dissent was that the various causes, possible solutions and means of resolution have been heard, extensively discussed and contested by most every dissenter. As such, although I never felt deceived or manipulated, respondents’ answers often seemed automatic or worse - offered with ‘here-we-go-again’ fatigue. This sense that I was asking hackneyed questions was reinforced when in casual conversation about my work at a demo, Guri an experienced dissenter told me:

‘I thought about putting a list of standard answers on the [movements] web-site. So people could find the answers they wanted. They could click on - ‘How does your family feel about this?’ – and find what they wanted.

This particular question was a key concern of mine which I had brought into the field. I decided not to ask him about his family. An ethnographer has time to hone her interview skills and learn the situational complexities, so schedules and delivery can be revised in an effort to bypass the automatic answer and draw out the deeper process of the subjective and the social. However, sit-down interviews became a form of introduction, a way of fulfilling participants’ expectations and their genuine desire to provide useful information. More fruitful discussions came later in situations not defined or organized by the researcher but which emerged through the development of trusting relationships. Perhaps more than anything it is through trust that the validity of ethnographic data is based.
Such unscheduled interactions occurred not only during tactical or instrumental dissenting practices such as protests, vigils, meetings and events but also in the social movements and moments attendant to such performances; travelling to and from cars and buses and unofficial debriefings in homes, bars, and cafés. There were also a high degree of sociality not defined by the ‘struggle’ itself but by the friendships and obligations defined by the relationships of the dissenters and I realised that social gatherings, birthdays and dinner parties are also part of the performance of dissent. These exchanges known as ‘informal conversation interviews’ (Skinner, 2013) were controlled by me only to the extent that topics specific to the research interests might be raised by individuals curious as to what I was doing.

In the field of dissent, where debate, reflection and critique are part and parcel of everyday social practice, such informal conversations are routine and such conversations became very much a part of my participant observation. Indeed, this is part of the intersubjective process of knowledge production in dissent where discourses and frames informally disseminate and evolve. There was always a flow of new-comers through the field, particularly international activists and ‘fact-finding missions’ and of course other researchers. Quite often I was not the only person with much to learn about the unfolding stagnation of the situation. As time went by I found that I was being asked for my own appraisals and interpretations, particularly by the international visitors. I was becoming knowledgeable, experienced, trusted and engaged.

The significance of these exchanges and the insights offered by participants lay not only in their routine nature but also in that the issues raised were often dimensions I had not previously considered. At the protest in al-Maasara sketched out above, Edward openly expressed his confusion, not particularly to me but as much to himself, to his daughter, perhaps even to the world-out-of-kilter around him. His daughter, normally certain and knowledgeable was unable to offer a coherent answer and suggested ironically that the soldiers might know. Though I too had been confused by the protest performance I had been tempering my confusion with the detachment of a professional observer. As an ethnographer I was expecting and expected to find the field strange and so failed to consider that confusion stemming from strangeness might also be an affective perception that my participants were also engaging with. I was thinking like a researcher, not an activist. Once I had been enlightened by Edward I could turn to my participants and admit that I found it all a bit weird and so began a process of discussions with dissent practitioners and affect theory through which a thesis on weirdness emerged. This was no longer interviewing but participation, observation and the building of theory by a researcher with his fellow activists. Such is the kind of knowledge that emerges through the lived-experience of being in the field and building genuine and ordinarily complex relationships with ordinarily complex people, the methodology known as participant observation.

**Participant Observation**

The building of trust, the lines of enquiry and the discovery of insights described above came not from coding the texts of recordings transcribed but through participant observation. For Ingold (2008) this is not a tactic to learn from or about people, it is the practice of learning with people. I joined protesters in whatever activities I could, whenever I was invited. This included holding signs, joining chants, standing in the heat in the rain, receiving abuse, facing soldiers, running from tear gas and stun grenades, being variously unsure, tired, afraid, bored or depressed by the practice of dissent. I also provided transport to and from events when possible – a coveted instrumental resource with which I affected the field and an excellent environment to have and to hear informal conversation.

While protests and prayer groups are what Victor Turner (1988) called ‘performances’
of dissent, they are intermittent and short lived expressions of the social practice. For most of the week people are not engaged with such activities and there is no dissenting village or neighbourhood in which the researcher can live and observe and participate in their daily rituals. Dissenters are dispersed within a society that is at best apathetic to their distress and at worst hostile to the point of aggressive vitriol. Part of my participant observation included simply living in West Jerusalem, going to the shops, to Hebrew lessons, reading the paper, collecting kids from nursery, taking the bus to town or going to celebrate family occasions. This too formed part of my understanding and empathy with being a dissenter in this particular place.

One need not be at a protest to be actively engaged in dissent. My participants all spoke of seeing the occupation and inequality everywhere, in the Jerusalem Arabs on construction sites and pumping your gas most of whom are non-citizens of the state they are born in, in the apparent ease with which others ignore the situation. These are the ordinary affects of dissent (Stewart, 2007). Far from the rush and fear and retching at protests in the occupied territories, lives are also shaped the mundane encounters and experiences that would be almost banal were they not so difficult for the dissenter to accommodate. I too began to feel the isolation they spoke of within the flowing crowd of the city where almost no one feels the same way as you - at least that's how it feels. I learnt that my tongue is sometimes best held and felt the relief and small joy when I met a fellow dissenter on the street. For a moment the griminess of the situation is freely expressed and laughed off before we'd continue on your separate ways. Aside from protests I found myself at dinner-parties, birthdays, evenings out, holiday celebrations, sharing foods, laughs, backgrounds, reflections and hopes. These rich social exchanges are the stuff of ordinary sociality and are also always fully sensual experiences. The parching heat of the sun, the coolness of a breeze, the smell of jasmine or tear-gas, the steepness of the hill or the sharpness of a cold beer were all elements in which we participated together and reflected upon, part of what Pink calls the 'emplaced sociality' which shape our moods, emotions (Amit & Rapport, 2002; Ingold, 2010; Pink, 2008; Stewart, 2007; Wallman, 1998).

Such experiences were recorded and reflected upon in field-notes and daily journals. Being an exercise of memory and interpretation refracted through my personal and professional perspectives, such notes are an imperfect analogue of the actual. However, there is nothing unnatural about partial recall or skewed interpretations. This is how people commonly learn and become. More than any other method it is through participant observation of even the banal and the tedious that I came to feel and to be recognized as belonging to the research field. This is the long process of learning with that leads to a certain kind of knowing, one which for research purposes is relatively close to the ordinary and fluid (un)certainty of living. The purpose is to become intimately and experientially acquainted with being and becoming part of the field of inquiry (Anna Odland Portisch, 2010; Venkatesan, 2010).

No one is born a dissenter, one goes through a process whose outcome is not predetermined. You don’t have to be a researcher to go through the process of learning with other people. Observing and engaging with other practitioners is how people become dissenters or indeed how one becomes a researcher. What Herzfeld refers to as the fostering of ‘cultural intimacy’ is not just the art of national hegemony and local practice, it is also the aim of the ethnographer. It is not just learning what to say in local etiquette but also how react emotionally to certain situations and how to legitimately express or even manipulate those emotions. It is about becoming to belong to the research field (Herzfeld, 1997). The participant observer merely does it with an awareness of her academic worldview. This leads one to reflect upon dissenting practices in particular ways and the daily routine of needing to observe, remember, record, to write journal reflections and supervision reports maintains a critical tension between participation and observation. So it was
that I didn’t just enjoy and take comfort from the sociality produced by dissent, I also began to develop a thesis around its social processes and the role emotions play in shaping those processes.

**Analysis and Interpretation of Phenomena**

**On the Emotions of Others**

Clearly the analysis of the field began with issues and experiences that emerged in that field and the process of interpretation is not separate from but overlaps with data collection. Repeated encounters with a phenomenon begin to shape the line of inquiry. The researcher begins to discuss these issues with participants; do they see or experience these phenomena in the same way as the researcher? Do they feel these are significant experiences and what meaning do they assign to them? In this process the inputs of key participants are – well, key. I openly began to discuss my thoughts on weirdness both with individuals and in groups where my intuition that this was a significant dimension of affect was reinforced. As one participant said to me, ‘If you’re looking into weirdness you’ve come to the right place’. There comes a point though when data-collection comes to an end and sense must be made of the fieldwork experience. Can such a dataset, drawn from multiple sources, methods and in a way produced by multiple authors who are emotionally engaged with the issues at hand, be consistently and objectively analyzed, interpreted and represented? Furthermore, can such an embodied and subjective experience as affect be recorded, analyzed, interpreted and represented with academic rigour and validity?

We can say that much of the dataset are textual accounts; transcripts of interviews, journal entries, electronic communications and activist publications. There is also detailed information on participants’ backgrounds and occupations, their various relationships to other people in the field and the frequency and locations of their observed or reported interactions. Emotions may also be included in this same dataset, for they too are expressed in various ways and can be observed and textually recorded. Firstly, though experienced in the body and mind, people may also express their feelings verbally as well. Ricoeur (1991) has pointed to the ‘derivative character of linguistic meaning’ and for Heidegger such textuality not only represents but ‘discloses’ Dasein, the process of being and becoming in the world (Csordas, 1994, p. 42). To say ‘this is bizarre’ or ‘it’s just not normal’ are genuine linguistic components of affective phenomenon. This is not to say that people do not hide or manipulate the affective meanings they ‘report’ to the researcher (Hochschild, 1979). The long-term nature of ethnography fosters an intimacy which helps overcome this in two ways. Firstly, there is interpersonal intimacy with key participants from which genuinely reflective and honest exchanges proceed. Secondly, there is cultural intimacy where one learns the ‘emotional culture’ of the field, its affective structures as it were. As the researcher participates in being and becoming a dissenter she also feels the uncertainty, fear, anger, dejection, and fatigue. She laughs at the ironic in-jokes and looks forward to seeing her fellow dissenters next weekend. I came to understand the subtleties of the field and see the unvoiced emotions in the faces and bodies of people I knew. And they of course also read me. With a growing intimacy comes the capacity to empathize. This is true for any social field, indeed any sense of belonging or attempt to understand another necessitates the attempt to empathise (Arendt, 1968; Berezin, 2001; Hollan, 2008).

**Analytic Deconstruction and Phenomenology**

So emotions of others whether overtly expressed, clearly seen or half-sensed can be recorded and transcribed by the researcher with a relatively high degree of reliability. This is eminently
codifiable qualitative data and there are numerous systematic methods which can be applied to its analysis and anthropology has various intricate and robust variations of semiotics, discourse, network or situational analyses and other modes of analysis which may be applied to data-sets. However, as Ingold (2008) points out analyzing data and representing processes in such a fashion would be to deconstruct the whole in order to rebuild an abstraction and Jackson argues that the subjugation of ‘the bodily to the semantic is empirically untenable’ (Jackson, 1989, p. 122). 

My own analysis of being a dissenter builds upon the works of these and other authors in the phenomenological tradition on the basis that it is both eminently suited to the study of affect, the ethnographic methods described above and because it reflects the way in which meaning is made and remade through intersubjective experiences, in what Arendt (1968) referred to as the ‘third position’. It is not the discursive products of meaning but the processes of learning with people which lies at the heart of phenomenological anthropology and ethnographic methods.

In the first instance Damasio and Prinz’s models of affect as a form of perception are inherently phenomenological in that they establish the embodied essence of human consciousness emerging from the ‘organism-environment’ relationship and the awareness or feeling that the organism has been changed by that relationship. This is the notion of intentionality in which consciousness is always directed towards particular objects of experience. Affect is an unavoidable consequence of that unavoidable relationship and part of the process by which we experience and make sense of the world so that ‘even our most basic experiences of physical objects both evidence and entail a foundational intersubjectivity’ (Desjarlais & Jason Throop, 2011, p. 91). The ‘wordless knowledge’ gained in the immediacy of experience in Damasio’s (2000) model is essentially phenomenological, relating to the emergence of consciousness through intentionality. Prinz (2007) calls such feelings ‘embodied judgments’ and in the case of dissent I suggest that the feeling or experience of weirdness is an affective judgement that the world as we have just encountered is not the world as we were told to expect. Weirdness is an emotional encounter with our own ignorance. This emergence of doubt can lead to dissent – the feeling that something is wrong. Secondly, in relation engaging with another person rather than an object, Arendt (1968) distinguished between thinking, willing and judging as a triad of the mind in which judging is the most social and most intersubjective experience. This form of judging is much more wilful and complex than an embodied judgment. Jackson develops on this stating that to realise the ‘eventfulness of being’ is to discover that what emerges in the course of human interaction confounds discursive labels such as male or female, Israeli or Palestinian and that the faculty of judging requires ‘distance from subjective private conditions...through imaginative displacement – reconsidering one's own world from the standpoint of another’ (Jackson, 2009, p. 237). Despite the wilful act of imaginative displacement which occurs when we try to understand the worldview of another, we do not lose our own being nor can we suppose to know the minds of others. Rather our thoughts are influenced by the thoughts of others and so judging for Arendt implies a third position in which knowledge is produced, ‘reducible to neither one’s own nor the other’s: a view from in-between, from within the shared space of intersubjectivity itself’ (ibid, p. 238).

Clearly judging in this form is neither easy nor is it exercised with frequency or universality. However, it is a practice clearly evinced in the field of transnational solidarity protest in Israel and Palestine. In the movement towards each other in the field of solidarity protest Palestinians, Israelis and international visitors are forced to imagine and create the third position in which discursive prejudices such as oppressor and oppressed cease to have certainty. This movement may be experienced at first as confusing or weird as the patina of illusions start to flake and we being to
acknowledge the validity of the radical other. Not only is Arendt’s notion of judgment apparent in
the practices observed in the field, it is as Jackson points out the essence the ‘creatively estranged
attitude’ of the ethnographer and so the form of knowledge the methodology produces is also in the
third position between participant and researcher. As Throop (2010) argues, ethnography is most
often a thoroughly intersubjective affair, usually involving misunderstandings and ‘generative
forms of self-estrangement’ in which the researcher confronts unrecognized aspects of their
received assumptions and so the research methodology reflects the ordinary and extraordinary
practices of participants in the field of transnational solidarity activism.

Ultimately though as an academic it must be asked; on what basis can I claim reliability,
validity and any form of objectivity of my representations on the affective lives of my participants?
The simple answer is from participant observation. The development of participant observation
in anthropology is perhaps the best method by which phenomenological processes may become
‘known’ to the researcher. Ingold describes it thus:

that this world is not just what we think about but what we think with [is what] makes
the enterprise anthropological and, by the same token, radically different from positivist
science ...to ground knowing in being, in the world rather than the armchair, means that
any study of human beings must also be a study with them

Ingold, 2008, p. 83 orig. emphasis

In this the positivist ‘flaw’ of reflexivity is inverted and it is the researcher who is affected by
the field. Through the process of learning with people, tempered by an intimacy with academic
critique and refined by participant intervention, knowledge emerges and is negotiated upon with
participants - and perhaps a little of what Edmund Leach (1961) called ‘inspired guesswork’
is included. Ethnography thus produces a particular kind of knowledge which cannot claim
scientific objectivity and must acknowledge its interpretive nature. But such is the ordinary
ambiguity of the lived experience where being, knowing and meaning are always emergent and
negotiated in a world which we share with many others.

Conclusion

I have attempted here to demonstrate the utility and validity of ethnographic knowledge
though a discussion of my own engagement with its methods, the participants I learned from
and phenomenological and anthropological theory. The observations, analysis and intuitions
presented are not conceived to represent sociological determinants but to highlight the fluidity of
possible sociological outcomes generated in the complexity of contemporary life. Generalization
of a given ethnographic interpretation must be tentative and my thesis are particular to the their
case. Clifford Geertz’ admission is still relevant here: ‘Ethnographies are not scientifically tested
and approved hypotheses. They are interpretations, or misinterpretations, like any others, arrived
at in the same way as any others, and the attempt to invest them with the authority of physical
experimentation is but methodological sleight of hand’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 23). The knotty problem
of interpretation is not exclusive to ethnography and all knowledge production is a social practice
and subject to a wondrous array of structures, traditions and agencies. In any scientific endeavour
and particularly in the social sciences, objectivity and interpretation are relative terms and as
aspirations they are never fully achieved. Critical assessment is at the core of the scientific method
and must apply both to methodologies, underlying assumptions and published interpretations.
As Ingold (2008) points out this must be done with reference to and comparison of other cases and other knowledge, so that we may proceed from the ideographic to the nomothetic and the general concepts of human behaviour and sociality. Without doubt this should not only be an intradisciplinary but also an interdisciplinary endeavour. In order for the varied disciplines of the social sciences and humanities to critically assess and judge each others’ forms of knowledge we must understand their process of production and this paper is an attempt to foster such understanding. The generative possibilities of such understanding do not entail the loss of one discipline or its mergence with another but lie within the shared space of intersubjective judging.

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Abstract

This article seeks to explore the work of activist researchers located in social movements, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and people’s organisations with close relations to contemporary progressive grassroots struggles in a number of countries, mainly in the global South. Drawing from extensive interviews with these researchers on their processes and practice of research and knowledge production, located outside of academic institutions and partnerships, it documents their understandings about the theoretical frameworks and methodologies they employ. This article thus foregrounds articulations of actual research practices from the perspectives of activist researchers themselves. In doing so, it suggests that social movement scholars can learn more about the intellectual work within movements, including the relations between theoretical and methodological approaches and action, from a deeper engagement with the work of activist researchers outside of academia.

Keywords
activist research; methodology; theory; social movements; knowledge production

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The author acknowledges funding support from a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Standard Research Grant (No: 410-2011-1688), “Exploring the role of activist research non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in research and knowledge production for social action.”
This article engages with the growing scholarly interest in the politics, practices and significance of knowledge production within social movement activism by exploring the work of activist researchers located outside of university/academic institutional settings or partnerships. Discussing the practices of several activist researchers working in social movements, small non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and people’s organisations in the Philippines, South Africa, North America, and transnationally, this article foregrounds their reflections upon their own processes of research and knowledge production, documenting their understandings about theoretical frameworks and methodologies. These reflections emerge from interviews that I conducted with activist researchers between 2011-2013. These interviews emphasised the importance of research frameworks, ongoing relationships and dialogue with movements as central features of, and tools in the research process.

Recent scholarship which attends to the significance of knowledge production in social movements includes strands of critical adult education such as Foley’s (1999) work on informal learning in social action, and Holst’s (2002, 2011) contributions on social movement learning. Several authors, including Bevington and Dixon (2005), Maddison and Scalfmer (2006), and Choudry and Kapoor (2010), have highlighted the importance of engaging with knowledge being produced by, and internal debates within, social movements and activist networks, in order to more fully understand movements. As Croteau, Haynes and Ryan (2005, p. xiii) contended, “[t]heorists without significant connections to social movements can end up constructing elegant abstractions with little real insight or utility”.

In many activist and social movement contexts, research is a central and essential activity – whether or not it is recognisable to outsiders, including many social movement scholars. Such work is sometimes dismissed as ‘political’, as mere propaganda perhaps, or overlooked because it was not produced through the dominant modes and processes of academic research. Addressing critical anthropologists, Speed (2004) wrote that in activist research, tensions exist “between political–ethical commitment and critical analysis” (p. 74), those of universalism, relativism or particularism, power relations between researcher and researched, and of short-term pragmatics and longer-term implications. As she noted, however, these are also present in all kinds of research. Yet she suggested that “[t]he benefit of explicitly activist research is precisely that it draws a focus on those tensions and maintains them as central to the work”.

Critically engaged sociologists remind us that activists actively analyse and theorise. For example, Kinsman (2006, p. 134)) has suggested that research and theorising is a broader everyday/everynight part of the life of social movements, whether explicitly recognised or not. He wrote that activists “are thinking, talking about, researching and theorizing about what is going on, what they are going to do next and how to analyze the situations they face, whether in relation to attending a demonstration, a meeting, a confrontation with institutional forces or planning the next action or campaign”. Naples (1998) argued that specific methodologies employed are less indicative of what constitutes activist research than the questions asked and the purposes to which the analysis is put. While claims are sometimes made in scholarly literature about implicit or explicit connections between social justice, activism and certain methodological approaches such as participatory action research (see Jordan, 2003, for a critical discussion of such positions), a frequent assumption in much of the existing scholarship on activist research, research for social change, and community-based research is that university researchers with specialist academic

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1 The selection of these organisations arose from awareness of their contributions to research/knowledge production through the author’s longterm involvement in anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles. The author thanks Désirée Rochat and Nakita Sunar who transcribed the interviews, Michelle Hartman and two reviewers for their suggestions, and all those interviewed for this article.
training must frame and conduct research. There has been considerable academic focus on the involvement of scholars in forms of popular/community education, activist research, academic activism, engaged scholarship and research partnerships. Yet relatively little work documents, explicates or theorises actual research practices of activist researchers located outside of the academy, let alone takes the perspectives of their everyday practice as its point of departure - as this article seeks to do. I contend that we need to take the opportunity to learn about how others think, analyse and generate research beyond the sometimes self-referential loops of academic social movement scholarship. A commitment to listening to activist researchers reflect upon their work is one step towards addressing this concern.

Based on the interviews I conducted with a number of activist researchers, this article proposes that scholars have much to learn from a sustained and serious engagement with the approaches to research developed within movement networks. Those interviewed in this article included researchers from: (Canada) Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), a labour and women’s rights organisation that supports efforts of workers in global supply chains, mainly in the global South, to win improved wages and working conditions and a better quality of life; (South Africa) the Anti-Privatisation Forum which brought together community organisations, workers’ groups, activist groups and individuals to oppose privatisation; (Philippines) human rights organisation KARAPATAN (Alliance for the Advancement of People’s Rights), labour rights education and research organisation EILER (Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research), IBON Foundation, an independent research institute and databank which focuses on socio-economic issues confronting Philippine society, and its international arm, IBON International; and (international) GRAIN, a small organisation which supports small farmers and social movements in struggles for community-controlled and biodiversity-based food systems.

Framing Research in Theory and Practice

Analysing problems, systems and structures and proposing alternatives is central to the everyday lives and activities of many movements. While many of those interviewed noted differences between their approach to research and the protocols of academic inquiry, theoretical frameworks and methodology still clearly matter to them. The researchers I interviewed articulated these features of their research processes in different ways, sometimes making explicit reference to established categories of analysis and theoretical traditions, and sometimes in language grounded more in the everyday activities of their practice. Some offered critiques of both academic and dominant NGO research approaches which they believed to be disconnected from, and of questionable relevance and utility to, the communities and sectors of society most impacted by the issues investigated.

Those interviewed for this article emphasised the centrality of relationships of trust with organisations, movements and struggles that their work supports as resources for developing the frame of analysis and methodology of the research itself. MSN researcher Kevin Thomas argued that research needs a framework so that “people understand that you didn’t just draw the facts and ideas out of a hat”. Thomas said that this research starts with relationships with workers, trade unions or women’s organisations which have approached MSN with a problem, rather than beginning with a hypothesis or theory to be tested or proven. He explained:

“They talk with us mostly because there’s an ongoing relationship between us, because they know we have some capacity to assist in what they’re doing... That also means that the way the research gets done is divided up based on that relationship. They’ll have already done
a lot of ground work, they’ll have documented what’s occurred, not necessarily everything that needs to be documented but they’ll have started the process”.

After these organisations have identified problems and shared what they know, sometimes MSN will do “a research test”, asking: “what have you been able to get, how are you able to link that to a global company, have you found labels, do we know that those labels are not pirated, [that] we can trace them in some way that’s credible? And what are our options for action here?” Thus the research is very much grounded in relationships and dialogue between Toronto-based MSN and workers, unions or women’s organisations on the ground in countries in the global South, and focussed on informing effective strategy and action.

Relationships and dialogue are also central to GRAIN’s research process. GRAIN researchers suggested that the organisation can produce research relatively quickly because it has an analytical framework which, while not articulated as a ‘theory’, reflects “an internal culture in GRAIN where there is a common understanding of how these things work so we don’t need to put that on some pedestal, to say this is our methodology or theory”. One GRAIN researcher said that this frame is grounded in the organisation’s mandate of biodiversity, which places people – especially Indigenous Peoples, rural people and small farmers – as the source of agricultural biodiversity, which is sustained by local markets:

“Our organisation struggles against a really genocidal trend right now to wipe out those kinds of food systems… and the people who are supportive of them, the basis of them. That’s the frame where we start from. So if you look at it that way and say ‘what is really at the source of this and how do we explain it in that way?’; ‘how do we connect it in that way?’…and sometimes you might leap from that in order just to give more traction to an issue that you are working on where you see the connection and maybe you are not so much making it the focus of what you write but when you realise that connection is important”.

GRAIN’s research process is always ongoing, as one researcher explained:

“You are always connected with people that you are going to be working on the issue with and in developing the analysis and bringing in whatever information you see as important. … So it’s a matter of, early on, learning from what is happening there and also trying to [highlight] that experience … for others to use. Of course there is the publication of the research but what is happening all the time throughout that whole process is dialogue with other groups. … together trying to figure out what are the processes that we need to be a part of … what can we do next and what is possible, and then that will probably stimulate other research at a certain point because things will be identified”.

Paul Quintos of IBON International viewed a theoretical framework as very relevant, locating his work in a Marxist tradition, but not in

“very abstract, academic kind of views of that theoretical framework. For us, it was basically down to class analysis, who gains and benefits from the situation, who’s screwed by the situation and how do you change that, how do you turn the tables on that? It’s pretty much informed by a Marxist theoretical analysis or framework of analysis of classes and class relations, without necessarily using those terms and terminologies that you would
encounter in Marxist theoretical papers or books”.

Dale McKinley, who was an activist/researcher with the now defunct Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) in South Africa also referenced a Marxist, anti-capitalist theoretical framework. He explained:

“we weren’t trying to ... situate this research within a particular theoretical history, a theoretical construct that is out there in the research world and we just like that one the best, etc., but ...the theoretical underpinning was that it had to be participatory, hooked into our own struggles and politics”.

EILER’s head researcher, Carlos Maningat shared that

“during the research design process, we use specific frameworks for analysis at the back of our minds but we are not actually particular on the mainstream types of research framework used in the academe. What is important for us is to lay down the concepts that will be investigated, the causalities, the anticipated impacts of the policy or interventions we are trying to study, so we are coming up with our own approaches in terms of framework-setting. So we are not actually confined or limiting ourselves to what is readily available in the literature in terms of framework. We situate our framework of analysis on the particular subject which we are trying to investigate. One concrete example - we did research on the pineapple industry, commissioned by a sustainability NGO based in Europe [which] had predetermined sets of variables to be probed. There was a set of the sustainability indicators on political, economic and environmental aspects. But what we did was to situate those variables or indicators in the socio-political context of the Philippines. We tried to map out those three main categories of variables into the mode of production in the Philippines. [In the] pineapple industry, it’s basically contract growers and small farmers which constitute the producers in a semi-feudal setup in the countryside. So we have the issue of ownership – who controls these industries, who are the partners of these multinational corporations, what is the policy attitude of the state towards the pineapple industry investment promotion. We customise the framework based on the assumption we are trying to investigate but we keep in mind the labour- capital relations, the mode of production of the country being probed and the classes, the particular class relations. Aside from workers, we also identify who are the other marginalised groups, etc. Our framework of analysis is pro-worker, mostly Marxist analysis...We also get the side of the government who implements this programme, but at the start of every research, it is clear for EILER that we have a class bias”.

The human rights organisation KARAPATAN also frames its research in a socio-historical context. Such contextualisation is key to its research and advocacy on human rights violations in the Philippines, said its secretary general, Cristina Palabay. She explained that

“it can be described by someone in academe as the historical and dialectical framework of analysis. Because we look at the research subjects in particular contexts, connected to the other factors present in the society and looking at the state as the primary duty bearer of rights”.
In conversation, KARAPATAN researcher DJ Acierto continued:

“I’m working with particular sectors - a lot of sectors would like to know the correlation between mining and human rights violation. With the data we have, we try to compare areas of mining with areas where human rights violations occur…”

Palabay:
“...if there is no such context, any violation, whether big or small graver forms of violations we cannot explain it in any other way, how this incident occurred, so every fact sheet that we generate…it’s within and under that framework…”

Acierto:
“...because if we stick to a particular incident, the incident itself only it will just be…”

Palabay:
“...like a police report…”

Acierto:
“not a political crime…”

Palabay:
“Yeah, it will be like a police report”.

Thus, although this was articulated in various ways, theory, and the theoretical framing of research are clearly crucial to the activist researchers that were interviewed. All of them underlined the importance of theorisation and forming general principles (i.e., ones which are relevant to strategy and action) in connection to the practical work that they do. The ways in which this attention to theory was articulated ranged from researchers for KARAPATAN, EILER and the APF who clearly located what they do in an explicit theoretical/analytical tradition, to the more implicit statements and explications of research practice by GRAIN and MSN researchers which nonetheless attended to the dialectical/relational nature of knowledge construction in their processes. These insights into everyday activist research practices emphasised how they are grounded in long-term relationships within movement networks, and laid out how research was framed by political and social analysis developed within these organisations and the movement networks they belong to.

**Methodological Considerations**

It is not only theoretical frameworks that activist researchers develop in a dialectical relationship to their practice, but also the methodologies that they use. In the interviews, several researchers articulated how particular contexts led their organisations to use specific methodologies and approaches. One example in which this is very clear is the case of the APF’s research committee. Dale McKinley recalled that in the APF’s early days, a research committee was set up partly out of a commitment to building a cadre through basic skilling, so that activists could learn to do participatory research in their communities, conduct surveys, and document findings. Three large-scale research projects were set up and run from within the APF with full participation of all its constituent community organisations and those who had more formal research experience, perhaps undergraduate or graduate degrees, but who were not located within the academy.

At that time, the APF comprised about 23 different community organisations, said McKinley. Many of the community struggles concerned water, electricity, housing, and education - access to basic services. In a country believed to have the highest rates of HIV infection in the world, and with large amounts of money being poured into research, APF members could not see any
research being done on the links between HIV/AIDS and basic services. So they wanted to try to make this connection and base APF’s research on the link between access to water and people who were HIV-positive in order to see how not having access to water affected people’s quality of life and existence. McKinley recalled:

“All these academics, books being written and everything else, yet when you actually go onto the ground, most HIV-positive people, at least in the Gauteng\(^2\) where we were working, had no clue of any of this. It was this complete gap between what was going on there and people’s own experiences and actually a reticence on the part of formal researchers to make links with socio-economic and political-economy issues, in terms of their understanding of this epidemic and how it affected people’s lives. So we were trying to bridge this gap with the way in which, and a research product, so to speak, that was accessible and understandable to ordinary people - it wasn't in ‘academ-ese’, it wasn't in journals, it wasn't about those publications. It was about getting it around and having policy impact, partially, but also fundamentally being able to have a sense that people are our goal in this. We did another one on prepaid water meters ... and one on housing. The whole point was to hook into a component of people’s struggles - research can be one component of that. So it’s not just about marching and picketing and doing all the other kinds of direct actions and writing good analyses and critiques of government policy, but countering what was out there with research from the ground”.

Thus, for the APF and the community members who comprised it, the context for their research was the disjuncture and disconnect between the experiences of communities most affected by HIV-AIDS and mainstream research projects being carried out in South Africa.

The APF research committee supported community members to make the survey questions themselves as much as possible and to conduct the research themselves. McKinley continued:

“Of course, [for] an academic coming into a context and asking, the power relationship is completely, fundamentally different and the answers therefore and the engagement and the material that you’re going to derive is going to be fundamentally different. We wanted to try to make this so that people in the community felt very comfortable because it was people from their own communities doing the work, asking the questions because they themselves experience these things. So it is participatory much more than just simply methodologically, but in human and experiential terms. ... I think that lent itself to a much richer response and engagement with ... interviewees.”

In the Philippines, Cristina Palabay reflected on KARAPATAN’s approach to research in a similar way, emphasising the role people play in researching their own communities. She differentiated KARAPATAN’s research from that carried out by mainstream NGOs which is claimed to be participatory. “It’s easy to claim that your research has this participatory character”, said Palabay,

“But I think our advocacy is the kind of research that is democratic in the sense that the actors do not only participate, they themselves are knowledge formators [sic]. They generate this knowledge, this data analysis and they claim these numbers and these analyses as their own analyses, and the actions that they put forward are the people themselves …even in

\(^2\) South Africa’s most populous province of which Johannesburg is the capital.
the process of doing forensic work and investigation”.

KARAPATAN’s DJ Acierto echoed this, saying that the organisation uses a combination of methods, including interviews in investigating and documenting human rights violations, “partial forensic investigation when we are allowed in the scene of the incident”, focus group discussions with affected communities, victims and relatives, and statistical analysis.

In order to contextualise the organisation’s approach to research, IBON executive director Sonny Africa explained that IBON’s research takes the side of the oppressed, marginalised, and exploited. He said that the “decision point of consciously having a bias for the perspective of the marginalised is critical because this sets the direction of the sort of research we do, how we do it and what it’s used for. Secondly when doing the research we know how important it is to have a minimum of credibility, technical rigour, and data to support the positions we take. The strength and relevance of the research is tested by how far it can sustain a campaign – this is important especially for IBON because solid research is one of our most important contributions to the mass movement”.

Another activist researcher in the Philippines, Paul Quintos, had long experience working for both IBON International and also as an EILER researcher and trade union organiser in the past. He drew on these diverse experiences to reflect that the kinds of methodologies used typically include secondary research, Internet research, and daily conversations with workers. He recalled: “When I was in organising work it wasn’t like when I was in EILER, I’d go to a factory interview, I’ve got a survey instrument, that kind of thing: it’s just the daily interaction with workers that informs much of the analysis, what questions should be pursued further for more in-depth research, for more validation, so a lot of it came from that but has to be supplemented by secondary research, some focus group discussions with the informants, more structured kind of data gathering. In terms of sources, a lot of it came from workers but we also got a lot of information from the company, some of it confidential and that’s the good thing with working with, say unions, because some ... employees ... have access to some information, and tapping into solidarity networks as well, for instance, in the case of one factory where I’ve helped in terms of organizing, because it was part of a garment production network we got information from solidarity groups in Taiwan about the parent company’s financials ... about the family who owned it, which became useful for education work among the workers and uniting towards certain positions”.

Although operating in a very different context, the MSN in Canada also draws upon the experiences of people to develop its research methodologies for its campaign and advocacy work. Like the activist researchers discussed in the previous examples, Kevin Thomas outlined how MSN and local activists, organisations and unions in the global South work together to contest working conditions and other abuses in the global supply chain. He highlighted the ways in which research is developed out of people’s experiences and the sharing of their knowledge to develop research strategies. He explained that “the people we work with on the ground have developed a methodology of how they
document cases. They have experience of having done this time and time again – unfortunately, of having to do it time and time again. That’s not a good thing, but it does mean you develop the skills and tools to do it well. You know that if you put forward a case and make allegations about abuses at a particular factory, you’re gonna have to back those up with X, Y and Z and that’s where the research has to focus. For MSN, we tend to document the power relationships: where are the points of influence? A lot of local groups know about the local labour tribunals or other local tools that are available, or they know a lot about the local management of the factory, as well as the dynamics of the movement and actors in their own country, but they don’t always know how to link international buyers, northern consumers, or other institutions to that local reality. In many cases those outside links can be a real force to reckon with in a factory because we’re dealing with global supply chains based on decentralized and contracted production. These factories may depend entirely on foreign buyers to give them orders, and therefore those foreign buyers have a lot of sway. We always look into the buying relationships first because buyers have an ability to push the factory in a way that even the local government often doesn’t have”.

Returning again to Dale McKinley and the APF, it is crucial to link not only the contexts of research and the approaches and methods developed by groups through their engagement in different struggles, but also how the research is carried out and validated. In his interview, McKinley recalled the process through which APF members conceptualised, carried out and validated research collectively. This entailed all research, reports and updates being fed back into the APF’s larger democratic structures for discussion. He likened bringing research into a collective democratic process to internal movement planning and debates about different tactics for a march to confront the authorities:

“Everything was referred back into that organisation. When we say ‘participatory’, it doesn’t mean simply that members will participate in the research, but participatory of the membership of this group, of community organisations themselves, from the grounds, including people who lived in those communities where the research is taking place, so it’s community participation, not simply individual participation. The entire research project from the very beginning of the conceptualisation, to each of its stages, went through a democratic debate and discussion and that made it participatory beyond simply the researchers and those participating in the research project to those who were in the organisation themselves, this was an organisational project. The participation was of everybody. Every two months we had the coordinating committee which was 10 members of every single organisation that belonged to the APF. That’s 150 people, [if] you take 15, 200, if you take 20 organisations, sitting in a room, all weekend long discussing these things. When the research came, there were massive fights and debates about ‘no, now you’re asking the wrong question, why aren’t you doing this....’, and that is participatory, it’s constant feedback, constant shifting of the research project and the way you’re doing [it] as a result of the participation of those in that organisation, that was our understanding of participatory research in its fullest organic sense, as opposed to just saying, ‘we choose 10 of you to participate in this research because you’re from there’, which is a more functional relationship”.

A number of crucial insights can be drawn from the rich discussions of research practice by
these activist researchers. Their reflections derive from understandings about activist research as being a highly relational form of knowledge construction. Research and the construction and production of knowledge—in many different forms—are conceptualised by the researchers here as collaborative and done as shared work. Very often this research work is based on ongoing, longer-standing relationships with organisations, communities and movements. It is particularly important to note that this is not an isolated phenomenon but that this thread of collective and relational work typically runs through the research process from its very inception through to the way in which it is undertaken, defined and directed, how it is verified, and of course how it is connected to action.

Validation and peer review practices

The validation of research was raised in relation to method by the APF’s McKinley in the previous section. This is indicative of the reflections of the other activist researchers who were interviewed more generally, and who frequently discussed their concerns about credibility and rigour. ‘Getting the research right’ is crucial. If done poorly, such research can be easily and publicly discredited by better-resourced corporate or state protagonists and media, in turn undermining efforts to build a campaign through reaching a broader base of people. A central aspect of these kinds of activist research practice is the relationship of trust and engagement built up with social struggles and movements, and this can easily be damaged. Cox and Nilsen (2007) argued that activist theorizing is not always subject to peer review before publication, but undergoes a form of peer review after publication

“that brings together a far broader range of empirical experience and points of view than are found in any academic journal. It is also subject to the test of practice: whether it works to bring together an action, a campaign or a network – or to win battles, large and small, against its opponents and convince the as yet unmobilised and unradicalised” (p. 430).

Several researchers who I interviewed clearly described formal and informal peer review processes in their work. For Kevin Thomas, such review processes are key to validating MSN’s research. Operating in a movement which is comprised of many actors and shifting dynamics, he described a type of peer review process for the research produced. MSN sends a draft of its research to others engaged in the same work to ensure that it has addressed the questions that they would pose about the same issue,

“that our findings, conclusions and recommendations hold water with people who know the field really well. And usually we’ll share our research with experts on both sides of the table. That is, we’ll share something we’ve done with companies as well as with labour rights experts. That’s not just to make sure we have the facts right; we also want to see what the reaction would be for someone on the other side of the table. Sometimes that’s very useful to have - some people come back with things that you didn’t anticipate”.

For Thomas, a key part of writing up effective research is to anticipate and address potential counter-arguments. Outside reviewers – including those with opposing views - may bring up issues that MSN could not have anticipated. He added that

“there’s a sort of peer review process which we engage in for written work. But even before that, there is also an informal conversation between these groups where you begin
to develop research to address an issue that has come up for the movement in general. We tend to undertake research and writing largely because of that ongoing conversation amongst groups, where a problem has arisen that we haven’t collectively been able to answer. So the research process itself is based on a collective exchange where priorities get identified and mapped out, rather than just based on the interests of one person or organisation. I’m talking here about research that’s at a broader level than just a specific factory struggle, that’s not just about getting a set of facts documented. There’s research which is more about keeping our movement informed about changes in power relationships, for example. We do a lot of research around trade patterns, where the industry is moving, where sourcing is going, changes in wages, battles around wages in different countries. This isn’t just information for information’s sake, it’s part of the process of developing strategy.”

Echoing Thomas’s concerns, EILER’s Carlos Maningat also underlined the importance of bringing multiple sources of reviews into the validation of research. Citing the example of recent research which EILER had conducted on working conditions in Mindanao’s pineapple plantations, Maningat said that validation of initial findings occurred through consultation with workers, labour organisers, and industry experts. He recounted that

“the initial research design was geared towards soliciting accounts and inputs from Dole Philippines workers, but as a way to validate other experiences - because we are studying Mindanao, we also tried to conduct data gathering on workers from Del Monte because it is a different corporation but on the same island group – Mindanao. But we also try to validate that with secondary data - so government statistics, company reports, and other documentation and data source[s]. It could also be the other way around, when we had copies of company reports, financial statements of Dole Philippines for instance and other companies and entities we tried to validate those factual claims with the accounts of workers so it’s a dialectical process of validation. I don’t know if the academe would qualify that as rigour but we see that it’s an objective and holistic approach because we put primacy on the accounts of workers themselves, then later on we corroborate things under streams of available data.”

True to the same approaches articulated above in relation to setting up theoretical principles in which to operate, GRAIN researchers emphasised their research’s collaborative, dialogical nature through interactions with movement activists, farmers, and others. They underlined its forms of validation, through checking, testing and sharing material within the organisation and in networks throughout the research process, including what can be best described as a peer review process. A central question for GRAIN was

“how do people take what we write and how does that help them in the battles that they are fighting, the issues that they are dealing with at the local level? … You can’t just put anything there, our goal is not to be sensationalist, the goal is to provide solid material. the reputation of the organisation depends on it too and our relationships with our partners”.

GRAIN’s research practice involved analysis of information from industry and official

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3 Mindanao, in the southern Philippines is both the name of the country’s second largest island, and one of its three island groups.
sources, much of which is available online. Interviews are also important to how they build their research. As one researcher explained:

“The validation is [that] we test it and we share it with people, always. In GRAIN we never had [individual GRAIN researchers’] names in our publications, it is always collective material. It is an ideological thing but it also reflects that there is a lot of bouncing back and [constant] checking. There is a lot of that kind of circulation of material. Within GRAIN and also with friends and [other] groups. So you will call that a peer review I think … because in a way that is exactly how it works …you want to be challenged and you want to get serious feedback. So that’s a way of validating. But the real validation lies in what happens when we put it out”.

So while several of those interviewed stated that the use to which the research was put by social movements served as its major form of validation, Bevington and Dixon (2005) suggested that movement-relevant research cannot afford to uncritically reiterate the prevailing ideas of a favoured movement. They wrote: ‘If the research is exploring questions that have relevance to a given movement, it is in the interests of that movement to get the best available information, even if those findings don’t fit expectations (p. 191). The reflections of MSN’s Kevin Thomas and GRAIN researchers here highlight how informal processes of peer review, alongside the dialogical, collaborative nature of building the research, which all interviewees discussed, helped to hone research so that it became more effective, relevant and robust.

Conclusion: An Opportunity to Learn from Other Research Paths

The interviews that form the basis of this article expose a number of crucial points for building an understanding of how activist researchers articulate their own practice and how this relates to knowledge production within social movements. The activist researchers interviewed highlighted aspects of their practice, including theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches and the validation of research which describe relation-centred, materially-grounded understandings of constructing knowledge. They also demonstrated a commitment to research that is useful for struggles for social change, and an orientation to knowledge production that takes ideas, experience and analysis produced in movement struggles seriously. These approaches to research contest notions of “research as being an analysis, or a particular form of consciousness, and activism as about doing things ‘out there,’ which leads to a divorce between consciousness and practice”, as Kinsman (2006, p. 153) puts it. Much of the research discussed here is produced in, and from, a context of ongoing relationships across a range of movements, organisations and activists. Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell (2008) highlighted the valuing of receptivity and listening “to the explanations and arguments posed by movements, which may, in turn, entail various forms of engagement with, or participation in, the movements’ own knowledge-practices, locating them in relation to more conventional, “expert” theories (p. 26). Listening to people on the ground is a vital component of these activist researchers’ practice, built on a critical political, economic, social and ecological analysis developed over years of work in networks of social movements. A GRAIN staffer explained,

“it is important to listen to people because part of research is just learning …. So when you talk to people you have to listen to them and you have to integrate what they say … that’s
really crucial to not do this kind of out there pie-in-the-sky kind of stuff”.

Some researchers interviewed for this article, such as Dale McKinley from the APF and KARAPATAN’s Cristina Palabay, emphasised the different ways in which the research processes were participatory, while being critical of wider claims by other organisations and agencies about their participatory research. Others, while not explicitly labeling their research as participatory, emphasised the importance of active dialogue throughout the research, including in the ways it was validated and disseminated. In sum, the concept of research articulated by activist researchers was an inherently relational one. All noted the relationship between research and struggle/action, and seemed to eschew notions about research and the intellectual work of social movements that divorce knowledge production from action, emphasising that research is a component of such struggles.

Haluza-Delay (2003) suggested there was often an assumption “that knowledge uncovers the oppressive structures and confronts power. However, it is not the “knowledge” alone that does this, but the process by which the knowledge is taken up and used in the community, altering “common-sense” (p. 86). That means how it informs organising: Bevington and Dixon (2005) argued that a test of the quality of activist research is whether it is taken up by activists in struggles. As one GRAIN researcher put it:

“We know there are movements, people on the ground, either part of movements or NGOs or whatever who need to take our material and translate it, transform it in a way, so that it becomes much more relevant at the local level. It is not only about translating it to a certain language because of giving it a different shape or a different form or whatever … but that happens a lot. Much more than with more traditional academics with traditional research when doing research. I think our stuff is more relevant from their perspective than whatever I see coming out of academia. That’s the big problem with what is being produced on our issues in the academic world. It is not connected, some good researchers come up with good theories, and good materials but it stays out there in its corner of being scientifically, theoretically correct perhaps, but not very useful”.

In the examples discussed here, decisions about framing research were shaped and influenced by explicit political positions, sets of understandings and ongoing relationships with/in social movements. Many activist/movement researchers made decisions and developed research in dialogue with others based on experiential knowledge and analysis arising from active involvement in, and relationships, with struggles on the ground. We see this clearly in the approaches of EILER, MSN, and KARAPATAN as articulated by researchers interviewed here. As McKinley noted in his interview, taking movement knowledge seriously, and a commitment to democracy and participatory process can also necessitate that all aspects of the research be subject to intense scrutiny, vigorous debate and challenge within a movement, as was the case in the APF in South Africa. Such practices illustrate grounded approaches to rigour, knowledge production and validation of research which differ from the ways in which these notions tend to be viewed through scholarly lenses. I suggest that attending to actual practices and knowledge produced by activist researchers and the movements that they are in is key to extending our understandings about research for social change. Moreover, perhaps a deeper engagement with the various forms of movement research and theorizing which occur outside of university institutional contexts and partnerships with academics can expand social movement scholars' appreciation for the intellectual work which takes place in social movement struggles-- including
living relationships between theory, methodology and action.

References


A REVIEW OF:


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The World Social Forum (WSF) - the gathering of global justice activists, an inspiration for innumerable people worldwide, even hailed as “the world parliament in exile” in its early days - is in its second decade of existence. 14 years after its initial launch in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the Forum has materialized in numerous locations worldwide, getting ever closer to its global ideal. On the other hand, some surely wished to see it become a vehicle for institutional change by its teenage, a scenario which has not unfolded.

The moment calls for thorough and critical reflection to facilitate deeper understanding on the significance of the Forum. Here comes in Giuseppe Caruso’s book, Cosmopolitan futures. Caruso is a Helsinki-based scholar-activist, one of those best positioned to write about the WSF. Social scientist on the one hand, engaged activist on the other, Caruso manages to be deeply (even painfully) critical on some points of the Forum, though being very committed to the spirit of the movement.

The focus of Cosmopolitan futures is in the unique practices of the WSF, especially the “open space”, and how well the ideals and reality match. Thus it is an insider analysis of the WSF: a study on the Forum’s capacity to create new political culture rather than its capacity to impact mainstream politics.

The beginning of the book introduces these practices of the WSF in length. Subsequently, Caruso goes on to study the conflicts related to how the open space can be used. A particular case thoroughly studied is the Mumbai WSF of 2004. Mumbai is presented as both a case study and a generalizable example of persistent dilemmas of the Forum. In the end, Caruso aims at looking beyond the emerged problems.

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The WSF takes the stance against corporate globalisation, but clearly denounces any attempts to form a political agenda other than its “charter of principles”. Thus the political idea of the WSF is expressed in its very structure: a collection of horizontal networks; open communication; celebration of the multitude as the opposite to the “one-size-fits-all” logic of hegemonic globalisation.

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The main critical questions regard the practice of the "open space". Theoretically, the concept is unambiguous. Yet in reality, who can do what in the open space is always open to negotiation. Some participants have always been willing to stretch the implicit values of the space to promote their political agendas. On the other hand, there are concerns that the insistence on full openness of the WSF erodes the very political opposition the Forum was created to express: opposition to neoliberal globalisation. Clearly, the WSF cannot be inclusive without limits. Further, several activists have expressed concerns that by merely celebrating “openness”, the WSF ends up renewing existing relations of oppressions and exclusion (women, indigenous people etc). To some extent this might be inevitable, as the WSF cannot revolutionise the whole social existence at once, yet active promotion of excluded minorities could be more efficient.

The ideal of the "open space" was very much embedded in Brazilian activist tradition. Thus the big question in the early days of the Forum was, to what extent the "open space" is particular to the Brazilian scene, and to what extent it can be replicated anywhere? In Caruso's analysis, it was the Mumbai WSF where the tensions arising from the open space had to be dealt with, as this first materialization of the Forum outside Brazil was a major test to its global nature.

Caruso documents in detail complaints which arose before and during the Mumbai WSF. The documentation is a disconcerting piece to read for any idealistic champion of the process. It includes complaints about gender discrimination in the preparation process, exclusion of dalits and other India's marginalised minorities, and the Forum organisers' uneasy relation to religious minorities, which resulted in the exclusion of muslim groups.

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Apart from the open space, the WSF has always withheld a tension related to the question, how thoroughly committed to horizontality the Forum ought to be. Does horizontalism function in organisation? Are there not at least some technical issues which need to be handled managerially? And on the other hand, is the sharp distinction between "political" and "technical" ("just managing things"), not indeed one of the cornerstones of neoliberalism's self-legitimation?

Caruso analyses in detail a debate he sees as instructive, namely the dispute over using open software on Forum organisers' computers. In India back in 2004, open software was still very experimental. Seen as a foolhardy attempt by some, there was a lot of insistence on returning to Windows for getting things done. For others, open software as opposed to Microsoft was at the heart of what the Forum stands for. At the end, open software was used, but only after intense debates.

Disagreements also arise from acceptable sources of funds. Organising a global event is not costless. The Forum has received money from American foundations, development agencies of OECD governments, and other sources which, inevitably, are suspicious players to many minds. Further, the role of large NGOs has sparked intense debates. They work for poverty reduction and such issues, but are very North-dominated, sometimes patronising, and apolitical. They put in lots of money and expect visibility in return. For many, they are something of a Trojan horse of Northern domination and hegemonic development discourse. Others would invite the participation of any interested organization – and see the incoming funds as necessary.

Caruso does not stop at analyzing these tensions, but goes on to discuss conflict mediation. He could have devoted even more space to this topic, since here the book gets truly interesting and engaged. Indeed, getting beyond a conflict is one of the true arts of horizontal movements. Mediation at its best means looking creatively beyond a dispute rather than seeking an arithmetic
middle-ground between conflicting opinions. This art of living in a movement is a topic the author knows a lot about.

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The book explicitly aims at being in line with the spirit of the forum: the form and the method are inalienable parts of the content. Published by a Finnish radical publishing house with international readership, and distributed free of charge as an e-book, the book is in itself an expression of grassroots socialism. The author also wants to play with the ambiguous boundary between serious transformative policies and ridiculous jokes, by for example omitting the use of capital letters as “all letters are equal”. The point is, that we have to do experiments with equality, not to predetermine what equality consists of and how it is to be promoted.

Cosmopolitan futures is accessible and interesting, and surely is read amongst both WSF activists and social scientists. Caruso’s insider perspective is both its strength and weakness. While being able to discuss the issue thoroughly and provide a unique insider perspective, the book will hardly be of interest to people not familiar with the process. To the insiders, it is surely worth reading.
Articles

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Re-thinking social theory in contemporary social movements
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