

Beyond the politics of demand: towards a politics of the act

In this paper I will argue that there are (at least) two ways of conceptualising politics – what I will term the politics of demand and the politics of the act, and will outline both in the course of the chapter. I will suggest that an anarchist mode of politics is a best fit with a politics of the act, but that International Relations theory has given more prominence to the politics of demand.

At this stage I will give a brief definition of the politics of act and demand. Borrowing the distinction from Richard Day¹ I argue that a politics of demand conceptualises specific identity or interest groups who demand rights or recognition from the state, or other bodies such as international intergovernmental institutions. On the other hand, a politics of the act rejects the notion that the state is capable of ameliorating the suffering of particular groups or that it is desirable to interact with the state at all. Instead it calls for a direct action politics that is experimental, creative and pre-figurative.

I am not, however, suggesting that the politics of demand is incompatible with the politics of the act, indeed one doesn't have to look too far within the Global Justice Movement to see both modes of politics at work. Neither am I suggesting that one or the other is somehow superior. Rather my argument is that the politics of demand is the theoretical model more frequently used in IR theory to explain how politics is happening. This means that the conceptual resources one can draw on to explain the politics of demand is much greater than the resources that show a politics of the act at work; thus I

¹ Richard J. F. Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London: Pluto, 2005).

believe that there is a need to develop a conceptual language to capture what is different about anarchist practices (as a best fit for a politics of the act) that the politics of demand does not see.

This paper will start by setting out the politics of demand along three axes to create three indicators that I consider to be constitutive of a politics of demand: making demands of the state or other institutions based on individual interests, hierarchical organisation, and the need for education before action. The politics of demand will be fleshed out through the use of theorists from both International Relations and Social Movement Theory who I argue exemplify a particular aspect of the politics of demand. In section two I will look at the limits of conceptualising politics as the politics of demand by introducing some examples of anarchist-inspired activism and examining briefly how they disrupt the politics of demand, what excesses there are that escape this explanation of politics. The third section will set out the politics of the act along the same three axes used for the politics of demand as three indicators: withdrawal from the state, horizontal forms of non-hierarchical and decentralised organising, and equality of action. I will use theorists who belong to and who I would consider friends of, the (post)anarchist project to flesh out the concept in more detail. This will then provide us with some directions in which to pursue the creation of a theoretical framework that captures the main elements of the politics of the act.

Part 1 – The Politics of Demand

In this section I will outline the politics of demand, which conforms to a narrative that we are all familiar with. It generally involves two protagonists – a group of people who have a specific problem, who require to be given recognition by society or who require a particular right to be afforded to them or compensation for previous wrongs to be offered; and the state or other institution that can they perceive as being able to rectify the situation. IR theorists have variously identified such groups and their demands in a variety of ways, ranging from ‘identity groups’ like indigenous groups, women, gay and lesbian groups or students to those who want change on behalf of a larger or more diverse constituency based on more material interests such as trade unions, or groups which contest the limits of constituency for whom rights can be demanded such as environmental groups. I believe that this familiar narrative can be separated out into three areas that together make up a politics of demand.

The demands of interests

There are many theorists in IR who attempt to bring forward a Gramscian perspective to explain current political practices of the Left, and one such theorist is Adam David Morton, who applies a neo-Gramscian lens to the Zapatistas movement in Mexico. The Zapatistas have been a source of inspiration for many theorists and activists who are interested in new political movements, including anarchists and Marxists. Morton exemplifies a neo-Gramscian perspective that is predicated less on a purely class uprising than Gramsci, but advocates uniting class and other interests into a historic bloc to create a counter-hegemonic movement. This counter-hegemony can take two forms – a war of manoeuvre and a war of position. A war of manoeuvre is a rapid assault on the state or

institutions of the state, whereas a war of position is a longer-term ideological struggle in civil society to form a counter-hegemonic bloc that is capable of uniting diverse interest groups under one movement.

Morton believes that the Zapatista uprising exemplifies this Gramscian counter-hegemony through both a war of manoeuvre and war of position. He is more interested in a war of position, but acknowledges that the Zapatistas started with a war of manoeuvre when they declared war on the Mexican government:

It is within this crisis period that social class forces in Chiapas attempted to forge a 'counter'-hegemonic movement by publicly emerging on 1 January 1994 as the EZLN with a mass base of support and a well-organised army. It was this force of over 3000 initial combatants that occupied the towns of San Cristobal, Ocosingo, Las Margaritas, Altamirano, Chanal, Oxchuc and Huixtan with the demands of work, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace.²

This is not about taking state power, but accepting that demands are met by the state, and it is clear that making demands of the state features a heavily in the way any movement constructs its counter-hegemonic project.

Morton argues that the Zapatistas have formed this counter-hegemony to fight a war of position by creating a framework through which the economic interests of certain groups can be articulated, along with others such as indigenous interests. Hegemony 'involves

² Adam David Morton, 'Global Capitalism and the peasantry in Mexico: the recomposition of class struggle', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 34, no. 3 (2007): 457.

the mobilization of support behind a concrete programme that brings about a unison of different interests.’³ For Morton, the EZLN have created a narrative that joins together different struggles to form a counter-hegemonic bloc in order that resistance is shaped into one cohesive unit. This does not mean that all identities are subsumed under a single banner, but that narratives are carefully crafted to appeal to a wide range of issue based struggles, in the case of the Zapatistas centering on class-based and indigenous forms of identity where ‘the Zapatista movement has rearticulated issues of identity in order to appeal to a variety of identities and interests.’⁴ Thus class and indigenous interests still form the basis for the hegemonic bloc, and that if specific interests form the basis of the bloc then these interests are both representing certain constituents, and need to be directed at someone or something.

Although the struggle is also about changing attitudes and creating alternatives, there is still an element in which the balance of a war of manoeuvre and war of position are intended to result in the same outcome – the meeting of specific demands of interests, class or otherwise, by the state or others transcending the state who can ameliorate the struggles of all the constituencies involved. Morton sums up as follows:

It is clear from this study that the EZLN task to radically reconstruct organic links between different identities and interests in Mexico is principally grounded within the national context whilst, nevertheless, influenced by conditions in the global political economy. It therefore seems that the terrain of state-civil society relations remains the concrete location and framework for political struggle, although resistance to

³ Adam David Morton, ‘La Resurrección del Maíz’: Globalisation, Resistance and the Zapatistas’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, no. 1 (2002): 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*: 47.

globalisation cannot be successful unless it is also prosecuted beyond national boundaries.⁵

There is also a sense in which traditional forms of doing politics might have been replaced with this approach, but that concepts such as ‘the party’ have not been superseded but simply transformed into a different type of relationship: ‘whilst the EZLN has attempted to shift political action beyond modernist practices associated with conventional political parties, it is still possible to see the movement as ‘the organiser and the active, operative expression’ of a national-popular collective will.’⁶ So we see that although Morton engages sympathetically with a movement that is providing alternatives to the traditional understanding of politics, as many have suggested the Zapatistas are, it still relies in some way on a traditional understanding of a coalition of interests in which certain demands are presented to the state: ‘whilst efforts were therefore made to articulate forms of counterhegemonic resistance against the PRI, the Zapatistas were also compelled to strategically engage with the government on a number of issues.’⁷

The process of creating a counter-hegemonic project is also in some way a continuation of the principles of the politics of demand just in a different way, as it still involves constituents asking or expecting specific interests or demands to be recognized and ameliorated. Rather than placing their trust in the state, they trust the leaders of the counter-hegemonic bloc to represent their interests, whether by in turn petitioning the

⁵ Ibid.: 53-4.

⁶ Ibid.: 49.

⁷ Ibid.: 45.

state on behalf of all those in the bloc, or by solving the problems themselves through alternative society or institutions. For some theorists, this is why Gramsci or neo-Gramscian theories are not compatible with a radical rethinking of the political, and Antonio Negri sums up this position when he states that ‘in short, the concept of hegemony is not a concept of the multitude; to the extent to which the concept of hegemony is a concept of dictatorship of the proletariat, to that extent it is still a concept that is completely imbued with modern sovereignty...Ultimately, Gramsci is completely soaked in the modern concept of the state.’⁸

‘Vertical’ hierarchy

The neo-Gramscian perspective hints at the representation of the masses by a group which, if not a political party, offers some kind of representation by those articulating the interests/demands of the various constituents that form the counter-hegemony. Another expression of this need for some form of leader to articulate the collective interests of the group can be illustrated by the experiences of activists and academics involved in organising the London European Social Forum in 2004. The European Social Forums are a spin-off from the successful World Social Forum events that have taken place annually, and now bi-annually, and are considered by many activists and academics to be one of the most politically significant ‘moments’ or manifestations of this global movement, an experiment in political organisation that is attracting tens of thousands of activists from all corners of the globe. These Forums are organised according to the

⁸ Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri, *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 165.

World Social Forum charter of principles which calls for ‘an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism.’⁹

The deliberate lack of specificity in the World Social Forum’s Charter of Principles about exactly how this open space is to be organised indicates that a certain amount of negotiation between different and diverse activists and agents will need to take place with regard to planning and participation, and in order for the European Social Forum to take place there must be a lengthy planning process open to all who wish to be involved. The London ESF organising process was considered by those participating and observing to be controversial and difficult, and resulted in a significant, and somewhat bitter, breakdown in communication between different groups involved. Many activists found the process so painful that they broke away from the official process and organised alternative events across the city to coincide with the official ESF.

The clash between the different ways in which activists wanted to organise the process became very apparent during the Organising Committee meetings, and groups came to be identified as broadly belonging to one camp or another, dubbed as the ‘Horizontalists’ and the ‘Verticals’. This distinction relates primarily to different ideas about organisation, with the Verticals seeing democratic organisation as being led by chosen representatives within a pre-determined set of hierarchical structures and procedures where the main aim

⁹World Social Forum Charter of Principles, <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br>, visited 06/01/05

is getting effective results; and the Horizontals seeing democratic organising as an open, inclusive procedure with the focus more on the means, e.g. consensus decision making, as being more important than producing a polished end product.

This narrative was mainly generated by those who saw themselves on the Horizontal side, and thus the definition comes mainly from their perspective, but nevertheless is useful in demonstrating an aspect of the politics of demand. Indeed, it strengthens the claim that this politics of demand is the default way of understanding politics as arguably the 'Vertical's didn't engage in this discussion because they didn't understand what the 'Horizontals' were complaining about, as this was just the way it is done. Those identified by the Horizontals as being in the Vertical camp include the Greater London Authority, led by Ken Livingstone who were major funders of the ESF, some of the larger Unions, both British and international, members of Socialist Action, Stop the War coalition, the Socialist Workers Party, Globalize Resistance, Project K (a European network of Marxist journalists) and some of the larger NGOs. Eric Decarro, former national president of the Public Service Union in Switzerland and a Social Forum activist, describes the way in which the Verticals understand political process as striving for efficiency, structure, a certain degree of control, and results.¹⁰ Another way of putting this is that Verticals privilege the ends, the outcomes, over the means, or how these outcomes are to be achieved.¹¹

¹⁰ Julian Lee, 'The European Social Forum at 3: Facing Old Challenges to Go Forward', in *Centre for Applied Studies in International Negotiations (CASIN)* (2004).

¹¹ Emma Dowling, 'The Ethics of Engagement Revisited: Remembering the ESF 2004', *ephemera* 5, no. 2 (2005).

Alex Callinicos is one such 'Vertical' who is conscious of the distinction, and described the organising process as involving 'a coalition of significant social movements and a disruptive but socially weak autonomist fringe.'¹²

In his article 'Building on the Success of the London ESF' Callinicos gives his opinion as to why the organising process broke down. He is critical of the autonomous groups, or Horizontals, for failing to engage properly in the process and to take responsibility for the problems and breakdown of communication that followed. He suggests that they still remained critical and unwilling to engage, even though efforts were made to accommodate them through the provision of autonomous spaces and the inclusion of these spaces within the programme. This highlights the different approaches towards political organisation, as Callinicos thinks that problems can be resolved by the outcomes, or what each group in the negotiation can get at the end of the process, rather than the means by which the process is organised. The Horizontals complain about the lack of democracy and openness in the organising process, and the solution given by the Verticals is to offer a concession on how the final product will appear, as altering the process of getting to the end result simply didn't occur to them.

Les Levidow suggests that the types of groups considered to be Vertical are the type of groups that comprise the 'old Left'. He argues that these groups view mass mobilisations as the pre-condition to persuade people to support pre-determined political ideas and demands. They work on the idea that increasing mobilisation and support leads to a strengthening of the legitimacy of the leadership and the overall strength of the

¹² Alex Callinicos, 'Building on the Success of the London ESF', (2004).

organisation. Thus the support that it requires from its members is indirect, a resource that is less concerned with directly influencing policy and more with increasing the leadership's capacity to implement them.¹³

This hierarchical, centralised way of practicing politics means that participants in a movement are encouraged to be passive and to cheer from the sidelines as their leaders represent their interests. This could be seen as similar to the neo-Gramscian approach outlined above, in the sense that being a participant in the movement does not necessarily mean active involvement, but rather allowing one's interests or demands to be subsumed into an overarching narrative and pursued by the leadership on our behalf. This agreement to be represented and passivity of action means that if activists want to become more involved they have to be educated by the movement, which leads me to the third indicator of the politics of demand.

Education before action

For many theorists of politics and social movements, the role of leaders in the movement is to be the intellectual driving force, to lead the masses and to educate them as to the source of their oppression and the necessary solution. Social movement theory is a branch of sociology that has taken particular interest in the way in which movements organise themselves and act strategically to maximise their success. Political process theory is an exemplar of this need for leaders to shape the narrative and educate the participants, particularly through the practice of 'framing'.

¹³ Les Levidow, 'Making Another World Possible? The European Social Forum', *Radical Philosophy* 128 (2004).

The principle aim of framing in a social movement context is to create the conditions in which a movement can grow and become successful. Frames are created by self-identified leaders or shapers of an organisation an attempt to create a coalition of interests, in a similar way to Morton's account of the Zapatistas above. In its simplest form, framing defines a grievance, find someone to blame, and outlines how the grievance will be rectified. Snow and Benford explain the concept of framing as a verb in order to construct a narrative through which social movement activity can take place:

Activists employ collective action frames to punctuate or single out some existing social condition or aspect of life and define it as unjust, intolerable, and deserving of corrective action. But the framing of a condition, happening, or sequence of events as unjust, inexcusable, or immoral is not sufficient... Some sense of blame or causality must be specified as well as a corresponding sense of responsibility for corrective action.¹⁴

These frames function with both diagnostic and prognostic attributes – the diagnostic outlines a problem and who is to blame for it, and the prognostic outlines a line of action for ameliorating the problem and the assignment of responsibility for this ameliorating action. The framing happens in several stages. Firstly it is used to set up a grievance that is deserving of corrective action. This is the problem, without which activists will not be motivated to act.

¹⁴ D. A. Snow and R. D. Benford, 'Master Frames and Cycles of Protest', in *Frontiers in social movement theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 137.

Secondly, the frame is then invoked to identify blame for the grievance or problem that has been agreed upon in the first instance. This gives activists a focal point for their activity and also suggests that the particular problem or grievance that they have can be solved by a particular person or groups of people or an institution, and is a perfect example of the assumptions made by a politics of demand that politics is mainly about problem solving. The language that frame theorists use illustrates the way in which they see politics as articulating and solving problems: ‘the elaborated master frame allows for numerous aggrieved groups to tap it and elaborate their grievances in terms of its basic problem-solving scheme.’ Activists will only be motivated to get involved when they have a particular demand and can identify who can fix it for them.

The third stage is when movement leaders use the frame to outline action and assign responsibility. This involves both the creation of an agreed act to be carried out by the person who has been assigned responsibility (usually a government or other institution) while also setting out the agreed form of activism to be carried out by those in the movement in order to bring this about. Thus it is either a demand that needs to be addressed or an enemy that need to be overcome, and creates a collective self of ‘us’ and ‘them’ which binds the movement together.

Frames also create a sense of solidarity by using the binary of in-group/out-group in giving a movement its sense of legitimacy. Social movements make strategic decisions about how inclusive/exclusive they want their movement to be.¹⁵ This is also known as

¹⁵ Debra Friedman and Doug McAdam, 'Collective Identity and Activism: Networks, Choices, and the Life of a Social Movement', in *Frontiers of Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 165.

antagonist framing which ‘identifies enemies of a movement by villanizing those responsible for the problem.’¹⁶

Frames can be used to link different struggles together into a ‘master frame’, similar to the counter-hegemonic project put forward by Morton, as the Zapatistas create a meta-narrative that unites several different interest groups into an overarching project. Thus frames allow movement leaders to weave together certain events and experiences into an overall narrative, which connects events that have not previously been connected and offers a lens through which to interpret future events.

Frames have the capacity to organise and educate both those who are already activists in some way and those who are ‘bystanders’. In other words, activist leaders who create these frames are trying to educate both those already committed to action and those who do not yet ‘realise’ that they need to act and require enlightenment about a shared grievance first. Snow and Benford use the example of the peace movement in the 1980’s to illustrate this, arguing that the peace movement lay mostly dormant until leaders went beyond the diagnosis stage and came up with a prognosis – a concrete solution to the problem of a nuclear freeze. Without this, argue Snow and Benford, a mass mobilisation would not have been possible.¹⁷ Thus there were people who were willing to act but only after the leaders of the movement had educated them in how to do so: ‘the absence of such a frame, all things being equal, means mass mobilization is unlikely.’

¹⁶ Steven M. Buechler, *Social Movements in Advanced Capitalism: The Political Economy and Cultural Construction of Social Activism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 42.

¹⁷ Snow and Benford, ‘Master Frames and Cycles of Protest’, 143.

So framing theory exemplifies the politics of demand not only through its assumption that politics involves identifying a grievance and then identifying a course of action and responsibility, but also in the assumption that movements are created and developed by leaders by educating those members or potential members about a grievance and the course of action that must be taken. This then explains the principles of the politics of demand, whose assumptions I argue are widely used in IR and social movement theory to explain how politics takes place.

Part 2 – Limitations of the politics of demand

Although the politics of demand is more prevalent in IR in understanding the politics of social movements as I have demonstrated above, I will now argue that there are certain things that a politics of demand cannot explain when looking at anarchist-inspired activities made visible by the Global Justice Movement. In order to demonstrate this I will briefly introduce some examples of anarchist-inspired activism and examining briefly how they disrupt the politics of demand. These are all types of activism that are often cited as examples of the politics made visible by the Global Justice Movement, and are varied in their activities but share certain characteristics that I will argue can be explained by a politics of the act.

Critical Mass is the action of reclaiming the streets for cyclists by gathering together and riding through a city or town en mass, usually on the last Friday evening of every month. Critical Mass began life in San Francisco on Friday 25th September in 1992 as a group of cyclists met to protest at the unfriendliness of the streets for cyclists, and to reclaim the streets for cyclists for a brief period. This cycling event started to take place on the last

Friday of every month and numbers grew rapidly, so that by 1993 there were around 500 cyclists attending. The idea of a Critical Mass has now been taken up by many different groups in 32 countries and around 325 cities in the USA, Canada, South America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Asia and Africa. Some see it as a self-consciously political gesture, for others it is a pre-figurative act for a society with less emphasis on cars, for others it is social time for cyclists to get together.

There are many ways in which Critical Mass falls outside the remit of politics as explained by the politics of demand. The first thing to note is that Critical Mass doesn't demand anything from anyone. For some it is a protest against the unfriendliness of roads for cyclists, indeed the first group was set up in protest at how cars have taken over the roads, but the idea has been captured by many other groups without the protest element being the foremost reason for doing it. Thus Critical Mass does not have a target/enemy/interlocutor from whom it demands rights or recognition, it is not focusing its activity on making a demand or achieving a particular result outside of the few hours once a month in which they just go out and take back the roads for cyclists. Thus it doesn't fall into the categories of being 'political' set out by the politics of demand.

Critical Mass has been successful and now happens in cities all over the world.

However, this growth has not been the strategy of any 'leader' but has happened organically. The idea has been seen or spread through word of mouth and taken up by others who do not have any kind of 'qualification' to start up a ride. This confounds the notion that there has to be some kind of structured leadership for a movement to develop and to be effective. Critical Mass is different in every town or city, what marks them as

part of a whole is the name and the activity of riding bikes, but beyond that the tactic has developed in many different ways.

The lack of a leadership structure is evident at any Critical Mass ride, as there is no one in charge. Anyone can propose a route at the beginning, and if there is more than one route being proposed then Mass participants vote on the route. This has been termed 'xerocracy' by those involved as the maps are Xeroxed and handed out and decisions made as democratically as possible. This lack of leadership is carried on into the rides, as if there is not a proposed route, or even if there is, the Mass will often have no particular destination in mind, and will be directed by whoever is at the front.

As with many of these actions, there is no training or knowledge that one has to acquire before turning up and joining in. People have different reasons for taking part, for some it is just a love of cycling, for others it is purely a social event and for others it is an opportunity to pre-figure a world without cars. There are no boundaries of inclusion/exclusion for who is eligible to take part, and no set rules about how a Critical Mass ride must take place.

Another tactic or idea that has caught the imagination of activists worldwide is Food Not Bombs. FNB began in 1980 in Cambridge, Massachusetts by anti-nuclear activists as part of a protest about the Seabrook nuclear power station. The founders wanted to highlight the link between food scarcity and the amount of money spent on nuclear power and militarism. The basic premise of Food Not Bombs is to collect food that otherwise

would be thrown out and make hot vegetarian meals for those who need it. This idea has been exported to hundreds of chapters across the world, and Food Not Bombs activists have been active at protest events and provided hot meals to rescue workers responding to the September 11th attacks and Hurricane Katrina.

Food Not Bombs started as a protest against nuclear weapons, but evolved into something different. FNB chapters do not engage with state but with society around them, they see a need (people who are hungry) and act to do something about it. The state and other institutions are bypassed completely, again disrupting the assumption that politics is about making demands of someone else rather than getting on and dealing with a need on their own.

Like Critical Mass, FNB now has chapters all over the world but has not planned this nor had a leadership strategy that encouraged growth. They have a strong principle of non-hierarchical organisation, and they do have guidelines that enshrine the principle of non-hierarchy and consensus decision-making. Anyone can join a FNB group – they do not need any training or educating before they can start. FNB do offer some pointers for starting a new group but do not prescribe who should start one or what they should do. This suggests that instead of controlling who is active under the Food Not Bombs name, and how they act, FNB is merely a tactic or an idea which can be taken up by anyone, and carried out in any way as long as they are carried out in respect of the three guiding principles of non-violence, consensus decision making and vegetarianism.

Guerrilla gardening can also be done by anyone, anywhere. It is not a recognised movement as such, in that it has no founding members, headquarters or constituting principles, rather it is more of an idea or tactic, as we saw with Critical Mass and Food Not Bombs. Guerrilla gardening can be done alone, or in teams; as a planned event or a spontaneous planting of seeds with no idea whether they will germinate or not. Guerrilla gardening's basic definition is: 'the illicit cultivation of someone else's land.'¹⁸ Guerrilla gardening activity generally falls into two main categories. There are those who take vacant and abandoned lots or spaces and turn them into areas to benefit the community such as gardens, allotments and social spaces, and those who try to create beauty in an urban environment by planting urban features such as roundabouts, verges, raised beds that are neglected etc.

Guerrilla gardening also disrupts the politics of demand in similar ways to Critical Mass and Food Not Bombs as it doesn't present a demand or ask anyone for anything, rather gardeners just create gardens in order to create beauty or colour in a drab place. Many community gardeners are political, and some are protest responses towards certain government policies or absentee landlords, but they do not seek to engage the state in their political action but bypass traditional political mechanisms and carry out the action by themselves.

Guerrilla gardening is an example of pre-figurative politics, which is the creating now of a world or environment that they wish to see rather than waiting for some kind of utopian

¹⁸ Richard Reynolds, *On Guerrilla Gardening: A handbook for gardening without boundaries* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 16.

being something that will be fixed in the future. There are no rules for guerrilla gardening, and people express their own creativity rather than being educated in what to do or signing up to any kind of guerrilla gardening programme. This type of action privileges creativity and spontaneity over pre-determined outcomes.

The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) was founded in November 2003 to mark the occasion of George Bush's visit to the UK.¹⁹ This 'Clown Army' is a group of activists who seek to push the boundaries of activism and to engage in new methods of non-violent direct action that goes beyond the binary of protestor/police and to break down some of the hostility through laughter and absurdity. 'The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) is developing new methods of radical activism that bring together the ancient practice of clowning and the more recent practice of non-violent direct action (NVDA). CIRCA is not a just a street tactic but a deeper process that liberates people with weapons of love and laughter.'²⁰

Unlike the other tactics discussed above, the Rebel Clown Army does interact with authority figures such as the police at mass demonstrations and smaller local events, but they do so in order to subvert the bad protestor/good law enforcer binary. They squirt police with water pistols, tickle them with feather dusters and plant lipstick kisses on their riot shields. They confuse police by not conforming to the violent protestor stereotype and by making them laugh. Like the other forms of direct action they confuse

¹⁹ Kolonel Klepto and Major Up Evil, 'The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army Goes to Scotland via a Few Other Places', in *Shut Them Down! The G8, Gleneagles 2005 and the Movement of Movements*, ed. David Harvie, et al. (Leeds & New York: Dissent! & Autonomedia, 2005), 244.

²⁰ CIRCA, *Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army: G8 Briefing and Operations Information* (2005 [cited 14th December 2009]).

the politics of the demand because they do not demand anything, or acknowledge a grievance, and do not act in order to achieve a particular end or solve a problem.

One of most distinctive things about the rebel clown army is that they predicate their clowning on experimentation and self-transformation through action. Thus through the act of clowning they are educating themselves as they go along. Because they are learning as they go, they do not know the outcome of any particular action, either how it will change others or their relationship with others, or how it will transform themselves before they act. Thus like guerrilla gardening there is no sense of predictability or familiarity about action, and it is just as likely to turn out badly as to turn out well.

These brief examples show that there are certain types of politics that confuse or disrupt the politics of demand by acting outside its defining features. The politics of demand calls for activists to identify an interlocutor, such as the state, to whom activists can articulate their demands, but the activism introduced here doesn't in general identify anyone in this role. The politics of demand also implies that a hierarchical top-down leadership is necessary for a movement to grow and develop, but Critical Mass and Food Not Bombs suggest otherwise. Finally, the politics of demand calls for intellectual leaders of the movement to guide the masses, to show them how they are oppressed and to guide them in action, but guerrilla gardeners and clowns are creating their own actions, with no idea how they will turn out. If the politics of demand is unable to capture what is different about these movements, then how might we conceptualise what is happening?

Part 3 – A politics of the act

In this section I will elaborate on the features that I believe make up the politics of the act, along the same axes as discussed in relation to the politics of demand. To illustrate the three different attributes of the politics of the act I will refer to theorists who I consider to be friendly with the aims of anarchism, whether they align themselves as anarchists are not. The politics of the act can briefly be described as rejecting the notion that the state is capable of ameliorating the suffering of particular groups or that it is desirable to interact with the state at all and calling instead for a more experimental, creative and pre-figurative direct action as the main expression of politics. This can be theorised along three axes: withdrawal from the state, horizontal forms of non-hierarchical and decentralised organising, and equality of action.

Withdrawal from the state

The first attribute of a politics of the act is a rejection of the state as the principle interlocutor in the practice of politics. Although not necessarily arguing for the overcoming of the state, or denying the state's legitimacy entirely, a politics of the act does not assume that that state can provide the solutions for any problems or grievances that activists might have. Rather than taking the state as their main focus of political activism, those who practice a politics of the act try to build alternatives to the state that bypass the need for orientating action towards the state.

Hakim Bey is one postanarchist who has developed the theory of non-engagement with the state. In his essay entitled 'Post-Anarchism Anarchy' Bey suggests that the romantic

anarchist notion of total revolution has left the anarchist movement without a notion of the present, and instead stuck in the middle of a tragic past and impossible future.²¹ He suggests that there are many people out there who are disaffected and looking for a new type of politics, which the anarchist movement has not managed to attract because there is a lack of any ‘present’, any sense that struggle can happen in the here and now. He argues that creative, radical struggle should not be abandoned, but should also not cherish and aim for the goal of a totalising revolution. We need ‘radical networking’ among the disaffected, and this can be achieved by creating new spaces in which to live between the cracks of the state, as current conceptions of space cannot be separated from the mechanisms of control. These new spaces are developed in his conception of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ): ‘The TAZ is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush it.’²²

The TAZ not only rejects engagement with the state but it also tries to remain invisible to the state, as to be made visible and to be recognized is the first step in losing autonomy, in being captured by the state and used for its own ends. TAZs do not wish to become the state, or to engage with the state but rather attempt at all costs to stay off the state’s radar of power and political activity. It is a withdrawal from the state in every way. Of course a TAZ is generally a temporary rather than fixed act of resistance, although there

²¹ Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: the temporary autonomous zone, ontological anarchy, poetic terrorism* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2003), 61.

²² *Ibid.*, 99.

are examples such as the Italian Social Centre model that looks towards longer-term autonomous spaces.

But do these TAZs actually offer anything positive, or is it purely negative withdrawal from society and the state? Bey argues that these Temporary Autonomous Zones are a space for alternative ways of being, that are part of the ‘always-ongoing “revolution of everyday life”’.²³ This life is a creation, and this creative desire invades our consciousness at moments of uprising – but this “peak experience” although it subsides also changes things, causes shifts and integrations that give shape and meaning to the entirety of life.²⁴ Although TAZs are by their nature temporary, we are changed as a result of them, society shifts slightly because of them and as Day notes, ‘each moment living differently, each quantum of energy that the neoliberal societies of control do not capture and exploit, is indeed a contribution to the long-term construction of alternative subjects, spaces and relationships.’²⁵

Bey owes much to the Situationists, and it could be argued that the TAZ is a somewhat privileged type of resistance by those who are not constrained by jobs or families, or at least are able to leave it all behind for a temporary foray into the Temporary Autonomous Zone. The idea of withdrawal of the state is not limited to Bey, or even to anarchists for that matter. Hardt and Negri, whose seminal work *Empire* and its follow-up book

²³ Ibid., 126.

²⁴ Ibid., 98.

²⁵ Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, 163.

Multitude made a big impact on the academic world, are autonomist Marxists who are also sympathetic to anarchism and they also advocate a tactic of withdrawal.

Hardt and Negri argue that Empire is the dominant force in the current era, a neo-liberal capitalist hegemon that has no outside – thus any resistance or counter-Empire must take place within the Empire, in a relationship of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

This resistance is undertaken by the multitude, replacing the concept of the proletariat with something wider, in a move similar to Bakunin’s embracing of the lumpenproletariat (although not in this case by replacing the proletariat). They argue that this multitude, although creating and sustaining the conditions for the domination of Empire by desiring their own repression, also have the capacity to form a resistance, or counter-Empire – ‘an alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges.’²⁶ Even if it has not been actualised yet, there is potentiality in every event and could be transformed into actuality: ‘a horizon of activists, resistances, wills, and desires that refuse the hegemonic order, propose lines of flight, and forge alternative constitutive itineraries.’²⁷

Hardt and Negri argue that ‘democracy today takes the form of a subtraction, a flight, an exodus from sovereignty...every exodus requires an active resistance, a rear-guard war against the pursuing powers of sovereignty.’²⁸ This exodus is also positive, as they insist that we must create real alternatives, but these alternatives are based on a refusal of the controlling constituted power of Empire, and could include such diverse tactics as a

²⁶ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), xv.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁸ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: war and democracy in the age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 341-2.

refusal of work, consumerism, education, or of fitting within conventional norms in areas such as sexuality. At one point they argue that the task of the multitude is to create ‘a new society in the shell of the old, without establishing fixed and stable structures of rule’.²⁹ As Day puts it ‘constituent power...thus appears to involve primarily the construction of alternative...and, just as in Landauer’s formulation, these alternatives take the form of experiments which undermine Empire by draining its energy and rendering it redundant.’³⁰

Although Hardt and Negri’s project of the multitude and resistance of Empire is much broader and more complex than I have been able to reference here, and they declare that they are not anarchists but ‘communists who have seen how much repression and destruction of humanity have been wrought by liberal and socialist big governments’³¹, they have affinities with an anarchist position that I find helpful to develop this active politics of withdrawal from and refusal of the state or Empire, and along with Hakim Bey show how we might conceptualise the act of refusing the politics of demand by creating alternatives without the need or sanction of the state.

Horizontal forms of non-hierarchy

This creation of alternatives that advocates a withdrawal from state or sovereign forms of power and a refusal to perpetuate the state/Empire forms of constituted power leads us to our second attribute of a politics of the act; that of non-hierarchical organising of social

²⁹ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 207.

³⁰ Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, 149.

³¹ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 350.

movements or groups. This is in direct contrast to the hierarchical organising of groups in the politics of demand, as exemplified earlier in this chapter with the perspective of the 'Vertical' element of the London European Social Forum organisation group.

The terms 'Horizontal' and 'Vertical' first appeared in January 2004 in an email from Stuart Hodgkinson on the 'democratize_the_ESF' email list. Massimo De Angelis describes the situation in which the email arose as taking place 'after few months in which activists from loose networks and movements were growing frustrated of what they saw to be traditional devious and manipulative tactics to monopolize and push through pre-established agendas by the usual suspects of UK left-wing politics.'³²

Hodgkinson's email describes a process of organising a political meeting that is non-hierarchical, with decisions seeking to reach a common agreement and the way in which one Argentinean activist describes as a 'Horizontal' way of working in contrast to Trotskyist parties who work in a more hierarchical fashion which she describes as 'Vertical'. Hodgkinson draws parallels from this Argentinean example with the organising process of the ESF and suggests that the Socialist Workers Party, the Trade Unions, some NGO's and mainstream campaigning groups are 'Vertical', and the local Social Forums, anarchists and more independent grassroots activists as being 'Horizontal'. Thus the activists who felt the organising process to be exclusive and organised in a way contrary to the World Social Forum Charter of Principles had a way of articulating their differences by capturing the type of non-hierarchical decentred organisation under the term Horizontal.

³² Massimo De Angelis, 'PR like PRocess! Strategy from the Bottom-Up', *ephemera* 5, no. 2 (2005).

The Vertical approach stands in marked contrast to the rather different approach to political organisation held by the self-styled Horizontals. These distinctions have often been set up by Horizontals and other commentators alike as being diametrically opposed, thus it is stated that for the Horizontals, the means are more important than the ends, and the ends can only emerge through the means, or through discussion, negotiation, compromise and consensus. Participation and inclusivity of differences are the real opportunity, not producing an event and so ‘these newer forms of organising have to co-exist with the hierarchical structures of unions and parties currently dominating the process, they cannot be suppressed in the name of efficiency.’³³ For those identifying themselves as Horizontals, the ESF represents a process or journey rather than the 4-day event itself, the Horizontals statement argues that ‘the ESF is an ongoing political process of dialogue, not just a festival-type event as it seems to many of the ‘verticals’’.³⁴

The Horizontals believed that the most important element of political activism is the way in which relationships with others are enacted. Horizontals are ‘those who believe that the most important thing in the politics for a New World is how we relate to each other in making it happen. What this means is that we recognise and respect our differences and always strive to find common ways to articulate them in order to meet the challenges of the day.’³⁵

Graeber suggests that far from the Global Justice Movement not having a coherent ideology, these new forms of organisation are its ideology. He directly contrasts this

³³ Horizontals Statement, <http://esf2004.net/en/tiki-print.php?page=HorizontalsStatement>, viewed 15/12/2005

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

from traditional organisations, or the politics of demand, suggesting that this type of politics is about ‘creating and enacting horizontal networks instead of top-down structures like states, parties or corporations; networks based on principles of decentralized, non-hierarchical consensus democracy.’³⁶ He explains in some detail how these processes of consensus decision-making work, and what their purpose is, and it is worth quoting him at length:

The basis ideas of consensus process is that, rather than voting, you try to come up with proposals acceptable to everyone – or at least, not highly objectionable to anyone: first state the proposal, then ask for ‘concerns’ and try to address them. Often, at this point, people in the group will propose ‘friendly amendments’ to add to the original proposal, or otherwise alter it, to ensure that concerns are addressed. Then, finally, when you call for consensus, you ask if anyone wishes to ‘block’ or ‘stand aside’. Standing aside is just saying, ‘I would not myself be willing to take part in this action, but I wouldn’t stop anyone else from doing it’. Blocking is a way of saying ‘I think this violates the fundamental principles or purposes of being in the group’. It functions as a veto: any one person can kill a proposal completely by blocking it – although there are ways to challenge whether a block is genuinely principled.³⁷

Graeber believes that this kind of direct democracy, though painful at times and undoubtedly less efficient than the traditional political party at reaching a decision, has the capacity to profoundly transform how we understand human possibility, and that the

³⁶ David Graeber, 'The New Anarchists', in *A Movement of Movements: Is another world really possible?*, ed. Tom Mertes (London: Verso, 2004), 212.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 213.

relational aspect of equality of opinion is what is most different about this type of politics. This equality of all brings us onto the third attribute of the politics of the act.

Equality of action

The third attribute that I believe demonstrates the politics of the act is that of equality of action, and Todd May and his work on Jacques Rancière exemplifies this position. May takes the political philosophy of Rancière and argues that it is consistent with an anarchist commitment to equality. Rancière was a student of Louis Althusser, but distanced himself from Marxism during the uprising of May 68, where students and workers revolted together. While Althusser was critical of this type of uprising, Rancière wanted to distance himself from a position that was predicated on a division of labour between of the intellectuals who think and then direct political resistance, and the workers who actually carry it out.³⁸

Instead Rancière developed a conceptualisation of politics that was based on an idea that to be truly democratic, politics had to be based on a presupposition of equality. That is to say that democratic politics must be based on the understanding that all those who take part in struggle are equal to one another and to those who have domination over them. This is opposed to the form of politics that formalises hierarchy and the organisation of roles, which he terms the police:

³⁸ Todd May, 'Anarchism from Foucault to Rancière', in *Contemporary anarchist studies: an introductory anthology of anarchy in the academy*, ed. Randall Amster, et al. (London: Routledge, 2009), 15.

Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legitimization another name. I propose to call it *the police*.³⁹

The police is not a particular institution or body, rather it is the order that sets the roles and their normative framework to ensure that specific forms of domination are perpetuated. In other words, ‘the idea here is that social space is partitioned into specific roles that reflect a variety of presupposed inequalities, and that partitioning is policed (and often self-policed) in order to sustain the partitions.’⁴⁰ Thus most of what passes for politics today, e.g. social welfare and organisation, is actually humane forms of policing, as it does nothing to question or subvert the existing inequalities of society.

The type of politics that this presupposition of equality engenders is not one primarily of demand, as the demand for equality has already been presupposed. As May explains ‘simply to demand equality is to place the bulk of political power in the hands of those who are the recipient of those demands... To demand equality is to be a victim, even if an angry and organized one. Alternatively, to *presuppose* equality is to be active.’⁴¹ Thus people do not act *in order to* achieve equality, but rather *out of a presupposition* that they are already equal.

³⁹ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 28.

⁴⁰ Todd May, 'Equality Among the Refugees: A Rancièrian view of Montréal's Sans-Status Algerians', *Anarchist Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008): 124.

⁴¹ May, 'Anarchism from Foucault to Rancière', 16.

May asks on what basis can we be presupposed equal, and answers that for Rancière it is based on intelligence as human beings. That is to say it does not depend on what IQ we might have, but on our common ability to discuss, communicate and make sense of the world around us. Thus we do not need to be educated about our ‘false consciousness’ or led to understand our exploitation or oppression, because we start from a position of all being human, which allows us to make our own decisions.

This leads to a political subject who is free to act, and subverts the police every time she does so by rejecting the particular identification and limited demands or actions that she is granted by her characterisation in the system. May explains how this is consonant with anarchism, and I would extend this to say it is consonant with a politics of the act, when he states that ‘if equality is the touchstone of a democratic politics, this means that there is no avant-garde, no necessary divisions between those who think and those who act. It also means, concomitant with this, that the process of politics is essential – not just its results. This is a point that has often been insisted upon by anarchists.’⁴²

So this commitment to equality disrupts the politics of demand by challenging the assumption that some form of hierarchy and domination in society is necessary. Rather it starts from a presupposition that all humans are equal in the sense that they all have the qualities that allow them to act in some way. Every action is political in the sense that it subverts the dominant order simply through the fact that acting suggests that those who

⁴² Ibid.

are acting are equal to those who dominate, and it is through action that we become educated, and the process is as important as the result.

Conclusion: The demand/act synergy

In this paper I have argued that there are (at least) two ways in which we can seek to explain political practices, especially those of social movements – by the politics of demand and the politics of the act. I have argued that the politics of demand is more prevalent and has received more attention than the politics of the act. Having outlined the three main indicators of a politics of demand, namely orienting demands to the state or other governing body, hierarchical organisation and education before action, I then showed how some of the political practices made visible by the Global Justice Movement have exposed the limitations of the politics of demand to explain the different way of doing politics. The case studies introduced in this chapter will be further elaborated in part two of this thesis.

Having shown that there are some limitations to the politics of demand, I then turned to the politics of the act and examined how a theoretical framework for the politics of the act might be developed. I highlighted three indicators for the politics of the act, namely bypassing the state as the main interlocutor of those seeking change, non-hierarchical and decentralised ways of organising, and equality of action before education. I believe that these indicators are compatible with an anarchist imaginary, especially one that has taken on post-structuralist insights into a form of postanarchy, and used postanarchist theorists

or those with sympathy towards the postanarchist project to flesh out these indicators a little more.

The politics of demand and politics of the act are different ways of explaining what is happening on the ground, but there is not a relationship of superiority/inferiority, not do I believe that the two cannot and do not coexist. Rather the opposite – neither the politics of demand nor the act exist in isolation, one from the other. In the Global Justice Movement, for example, one can see both logics working in the same spaces. My final example of anarchist-inspired activism demonstrates how the two modes of politics can exist in the same space. It looks at how radical, alternative politics took place alongside more organised mainstream protests at the G8 summit in Gleneagles in 2005. This was an event of particular interest as alongside the usual GJM protests, a group of celebrities, big NGOs, moderate protesters, with the support of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, organised the Make Poverty History campaign that featured a peaceful march through Edinburgh city centre on the Saturday before the G8 summit. Many of the more radical protesters found themselves unequipped to capitalise on the massive amounts of global media attention that was focused on Scotland for the G8 summit. Because of their principles of non-engagement with the state or national media, decentralised organisation with no spokespeople for the movement, and not educating activists as to an agreed set of reasons for their activism, opportunities to engage with the media interest and explain their position was lost. The Make Poverty History campaign, on the other hand, had a clear set of three demands – drop the debt, more and better aid, trade justice – that those on the march could repeat and in most cases explain to any interested parties, and had

many who claimed to speak for the movement and a clear policy of engaging with politicians whenever possible.

This led many activists after the event to question the validity of a movement that refuses to engage with the state or other elements of the state apparatus such as the media, and questions whether there can be a movement that manages to engage with the state apparatus in some way whilst still maintaining its anarchist-inspired principles. This view recognises that one has to accept that the state and its mechanisms exist, however illegitimate one might think it is, and that engagement with state processes might sometimes be called for. I believe that any anarchist theory in the 21st century has to take into account the staying power of the state, and thus the politics of demand and the politics of the act will both be present in most movements.

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