"What have the Romans ever done for us?"
Academic and activist forms of movement theorizing

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Introductory[1]

We want to pose some questions about the relationship between social movements and 'social movement theories'. The questions reflect the sense of unease experienced by some 'academic intellectuals' who are also activists in movements, and the scepticism sometimes expressed by activists about the value of 'social movement theory.' Both of us having a foot in each camp, we share the unease.

1. ACADEMIC & MOVEMENT INTELLECTUALS

Academics and Movements

No one could sensibly argue that academic work - and journalism - is of no use to movements. When studies of the inequality of income and wealth distribution appear, for example, we often use them to strengthen our case. We gain usable technical knowledge from ecologists about the workings of pollution, and from geneticists about the dangers of GM foods. The knowledge we have of movements in the past - with which we sometimes identity, and from which we sometimes draw practical 'lessons' - is mostly derived from the work of academic historians. Journalists and academics provide vital information about movements in other countries. Anthropologists - and SF writers! - help us build vision of different ways our species has lived, might live.

However, more problematic questions arise in relation to a specific area of academic study, signaled by the title of the new journal: *Social Movement Studies*. Over the last few decades, a whole institutional academic apparatus - even including this conference! - has arisen, whose central focus is the theorization of movements and popular struggles. In North America, the Collective Behavior and Social Movements Section of the ASA has, reportedly, some 500 paid-up members. There are several journals devoted to this kind of work, and many other professional sociology and political science journals regularly carry articles in the field. Here there occur ongoing debates about how to theorize the (possibly changing) experience of movements, their ideas, their activities, their forms of organization, and their contests with the powerful. This is the area we want to ask questions about.

What should we say about this kind of work?

Let's begin with the slightly uncomfortable observation that academic work is in a sense *parasitic* on facts mostly produced by movements (and their opponents and allies). Social movement theory is not peculiar, of course, in this parasitism: the whole of the philosophy of science, for example, is parasitic in the same sense on the work of scientists.

It is sometimes suggested that the relationship between academics and movements is simple: academics provide 'knowledge' and movements produce 'access'. That this won't do is obvious: for movements and their activists also produce 'knowledge'. So, what perhaps needs more exploration is the nature of and the relationship between the two kinds of knowledge and between their two kinds of producers.

Two types of intellectuals

We owe to Gramsci (1999a: 134ff) a distinction between 'traditional' and 'organic' intellectuals. The former term refers to those who played an 'intellectual function', essentially as part of the *status quo* in early 20th century Italy, and the latter to those who played a similar function in popular movements and parties. By the first term, Gramsci denoted such people as university professors, lawyers, priests, and others; by the second, above all, activists of the Communist and other workers' parties. Gramsci emphasizes the 'directive' activity of intellectuals of both types - as e.g. engineers and small-town doctors but also as organizers. Eyerman and Jamison (1991) make a similar distinction between 'established' and 'movement' intellectuals. These distinctions seem quite useful. Here we will distinguish between 'academic' and 'movement' intellectuals, suggesting an initial polarity between them, in terms of the tasks they undertake and the goals they pursue, their audiences and their relationships with them, their accreditation, and - perhaps most important - the forms of knowledge they produce. And we can notice one immediate difference. To be an academic intellectual is, in a sense, always to be a member of the 'intelligentsia'; but a worker or a peasant can be a 'movement intellectual.'

In the real world, of course, the types are sometimes combined together in individuals and groups. Many of those who are drawn to this field of *academic* study are themselves former or continuing activists and participants in actual movements and movement organizations. It's been suggested (e.g. Morris and Herring 1987; Mayer in Lyman 1995) that part of the impulse to the American shift away from 'collective behaviour' to 'resource mobilization' and 'political process' theories was a

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response to the movements of the 1960s.[2] Those with feet in both camps are often aware of contradictions and tensions in their different roles. Thus Nancy Naples notes a demand placed on the authors in her collection on *Community Activism and Feminist Politics*, to 'find a balance between the passion they felt for the community action or activists they were working with and the detachment needed to present their analyses' (1998b: 7).

Nick Crossley (1999) suggests that sometimes academicism can cause problems in movements. Academics involved in movements, he notes, have their own style or *hexis* which is tacitly recognized by those who share it, and who are drawn towards each other. More to the point, that *hexis* is explicitly recognized by others who don't share it, and who find it strange and alienating. These may fear that the 'intellectuals' will turn the movement into a 'talking shop' (where *they* will be skilled and comfortable) rather than a place where things get done.

A more extreme but by no means unknown example occurs where academics' interest in movements is motivated primarily by an association with the forces of state repression. 19th century cases include individuals such as the Prussian theorist of police Lorenz von Stein (usually credited with coining the expression 'social movement') and the French police informer Gustav Le Bon (noted for his theories of 'the crowd'). More recently, Oskarsson and Peterson (2001) - in the wake of the shooting of three activists (one of whom was critically wounded) at Göteborg – came to the following practical conclusions:

* As far as possible police should avoid direct confrontations with activists because of the risk of loss of control;
* However, for dealing with 'packs' of activists, police should 'delegate considerable action authority to police officers in the field';
* negotiations with activists should be used as a 'preventive strategy';
* 'increased police training is required in order to better identify potential militant activists';
* 'police intelligence gathering and surveillance will continue to be vital'.

These conclusions suggest one extreme opposition between academic intellectuals and movement intellectuals, which can perhaps best be summed up in the theoretical question 'which side are you on?'

Provisionally, we can distinguish several dimensions of distinction between academic intellectuals and movement intellectuals: first, what kind of knowledge do they produce? second, what's their 'relevant community'? and, third, who plays the part?

Forms of Knowledge
Academic and movement intellectual work tend to demand rather different kinds of intellectual output.

So far as academic work is concerned, consider a couple of examples from leading social movement theorists. Lofland (1996:66-9) holds up as a goal ('the higher quest' to which the academic researcher should aspire) the formation of *generic propositions* - that is, propositions fitting several cases of social movement organizations, as distinct from mere *case propositions* which apply only to the case at hand. The search for generic propositions is also signaled by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, who seek forms of explanation involving 'the identification of causal chains consisting of mechanisms that reappear in a wide variety of settings but in different sequences and combinations, hence with different collective outcomes' (2001: 23). In both examples, the focus is on *explanation* of a normal 'scientific' type. Argument among social movement scholars, as in other areas of the social sciences, tends to focus on the nature of the explanations required.

As Geoghegan and Cox (2001) put it, academic theorizing is embedded in specific *institutional* relationships. It attempts to explain both individual facets of movement activity and to create or add to a 'field of knowledge' (such as 'social movement studies'). Therefore, it produces certain types of theorizing, whose strengths (at their best) include a broad conceptual armoury but whose weaknesses (from an activist point of view) lie in the tendency to treat what are, precisely, *movements* as static 'fields', to embed their understanding in an uncritical acceptance of the givenness of those institutions which movements often set themselves against, and to marginalize the position of the actor.

If the academic quest is for the well-formed generic proposition or the superior explanation, that is, for the theoretical concept or generalization which covers a set of seemingly dissimilar cases or processes, it is not the case that movement intellectuals have *no* interest in these. However, their *primary* interests do not lie here. Rather, generic propositions perform a subordinate function in their reasoning, not as goals in themselves but rather as merely parts of an apparatus of activist argument whose central concern lies elsewhere - in formulating 'case propositions' of a very definite and practical nature. These take the form, in essence, of *practical proposals*, i.e. propositions that '*This is what we should do*.'

Consider a couple of examples. The first concerns two treatments of the question of 'revolutionary situation' - in Lenin and in Tilly. Lenin (1966) argues that it is vitally necessary to recognize what is and what is not a revolutionary situation. And he offers a famous *generic proposition*: revolutionary situations involve the simultaneous presence of two crucial elements, the ruling class's inability to rule in the old way and the people's refusal to be ruled in the old way. If either of these is absent, says Lenin, there isn't a revolutionary situation. Lenin's definition, suitably adapted and developed, can be taken as the basis for an academic disquisition on revolutionary situations (witness Tilly 1978, 1993).

However, the *purpose* and the *meaning* of Lenin's definition cannot be separated from its context. It occurs in a pamphlet with the decidedly non-academic title, *Left-Wing Communism : An Infantile Disorder*. Lenin's is intervening in a practical argument within the newly formed Communist International, to argue that [a] the situation in 1920 is no longer as immediately revolutionary as it had been in 1919, [b] communists must know the difference between revolutionary and non-

revolutionary situations, since each requires different kinds of organization and activity and [c] communists in the new situation need to learn how to form united fronts with reformists. The *generic* proposition is subordinate to the practical case proposition, which is concerned with 'what is to be done,' in this concrete circumstance.[3]

The second example also involves the relation of theory and practice. Discussing 'mechanisms and processes', McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) propose that mechanisms 'concatenate into processes', which represent larger-scale objects for theoretical comparison. As it happens, Lukacs (2000), in his last 'Leninist' text), addresses related issues about theorization of processes. Only his case is, essentially, that processes 'concatenate' into what he terms 'moments of decision.' Lukacs's argument is not, of course, with contemporary American academic theorists, but with two representatives of what might be termed 'Second International Marxism', whose view of the historical process is rather inevitabilistic and 'processual'. The issue between them is how to explain the failure of the 1919 Hungarian revolution, in which the young Lukacs had been a committed participant. His opponents account for the defeat in terms of a set of 'processes' which were somehow beyond human intervention. For Lukacs, however, such general processes do no more than set the parameters, as it were, within which Hungarian communists could and had to work; indeed, these generated a variety of immediate 'moments of decision' when the actions of the Hungarian Communist Party leadership proved decisive.

In essence, Lukacs's opponents argued that the Hungarian Revolution was lost due to factors beyond human control; Lukacs's riposte is, 'No, comrades, we blew it!' Had the Hungarian CP leadership been better equipped theoretically, they would not have made the mistakes they did, and the outcome would have been - for good or ill - different[4]. Now, to return to McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, they never seem to provide a basis for saying, 'They blew it....' (or, of course, 'They got it right, for the following reasons'). They do get close, sometimes, but seem to stop inquiring just as the issue comes near to a head. They note, for example, following McAdam (1999), that the Civil Rights Movement 'socially appropriated' the Black church network, but talk about social appropriation as a 'mechanism' rather than a more or less deliberate *activity*. They record that the Communist Party in the Philippines effectively abstained from taking any active position during the 1980s revolution against Marcos, and even note that the Party had the capacity, had it intervened, to make a decided difference to what happened, but they do not further explore this interesting

abstention.[5] In short, they largely avoid concrete political judgment. They do not offer grounds for saying, 'That was a practical mistake,' or '(Ideally), had we been there, we would have spoken or acted thus....'

Contemplative and activist theorizing

All of this betokens a certain 'distance' between much social movement theory and actual social movement practice. To rephrase Marx's comments in the *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), social movement theory is essentially contemplative in nature, at least with respect to its subject.[6] Social movements, that is, are engaged with as objects of study to be observed, described and explained; not as active processes that people engage with, experience and transform.

The results of this are also recorded by McAdam:
Reflecting the influence of ... broad structural theories, most recent empirical work has tended to focus on the role of system-level factors in either facilitating or constraining movement activity. Consequently, we know comparatively little about the lived experience of activism and the everyday strategic concerns of movement groups. (1996: 339)

It's not at all clear that the 'new structuralism' proposed by McAdam and his colleagues, any more than the 'old', can overcome this limitation on its own knowledge. What we are arguing is that, at some point in its theoretical development, academic social movement theory must hit up against some such limit to its understanding of its object, because - perhaps because of its 'extra-knowledge' concerns and commitments - it denies itself the role of 'active subject'.[7]

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[3] Indeed, Lenin is sometimes rather careless in his offering of generic propositions, for they are not the centre of his attention. Rather, they serve only as part of his always practical argument for adopting a specific strategic position.

[4] For a more recent example of this approach, see Eamonn McCann's *War and an Irish town* (1974, 1993). The first edition chronicles the process whereby activists in and around the Civil Rights movement 'blew it', or more exactly were rolled over by the twin forces of the British state and the Provisionals. The foreword to the second edition offers a response in terms of what might have worked at the time.

[5] Similarly, while academic discussions of the Communist Parties in Italy and France tends to register how they did their best to bring matters under control, activist commentary tends to suggest that *because* the parties had turned out to be counter-revolutionary it was important, either to build a different kind of party, or to focus on non-party forms of struggle.

[6] Its authors do of course actively pursue a range of eminently practical objectives via the production of social movement theory: they seek appointments and promotions, achieve publication and funding, gain academic and (sometimes) public status and recognition, and no doubt succeed in meeting a wide variety of essentially private needs in the process. But their orientation to their *subject* is not that of practitioners – and this is marked even by comparison with e.g. other political scientists and social policy specialists, who take up the role of advisor (to states, but occasionally to movements) with a far greater frequency.

[7] Some (European) sociologists claim that their research methodologies get them beyond the position of the academically structured well-formed proposition, in that they explore movements' own self-understandings with movement members. See for example the work of Touraine and Melucci. However, these authors' work is marked, still, by a disjuncture between the forms of knowledge they produce and those produced by movement intellectuals. For at a certain point in their development, they cease to be 'critical'. They refuse, beyond a given limit, to make an intervention in the movement of a practical kind: to answer such questions as 'what should we do?' They can produce a sense of some contradictions and tensions within a movement's own current thought and practice, but not the means to resolve these. This research is thus marked by a kind of political abstentionism, which is very marked in the case of Touraine and his colleagues in Poland (Touraine 1983).

By comparison, the kind of knowledge produced by movement intellectuals tends to address different kinds of questions. In the terms of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, these questions are guided by their active engagement – not only with relation to movements, but also with relation to the social world within which those movements move, and which they seek to transform.

Thus, activists' theorizing is not necessarily dominated by the theorization of activism, and is not restricted to an alternative 'social movements theory'. Rather, their specific theorizations of movements proceed from a broader theoretical context with relation to the social world as a whole, and changes in one understanding are usually reflected in changes in the other. Taking the example of Irish working-class community activism, Geoghegan and Cox (2001) note that activist theorizing starts from specific *structural* relationships – of class and poverty, gender and violence, ethnicity and exclusion – and attempts to change these relationships through agency (which necessarily involves an implicit or explicit theorizing element). This theorizing attempts to explain *both* how the structures that activists grapple with work *and* how 'best practice' activism can change it. The famous 'structure / agency' problematic of sociology does not operate in the same way for agents who are challenging structures.

Activist thinking produces a particular kind of theorization *of movements*, which gives primacy to processes of self-understanding and attempts to start from the actor's perspective, while logically stressing fluidity and process (since actors in movements seek above all to *move*, not to carry on playing the same parts for the rest of their lives!) Its potential weaknesses include a tendency to reproduce accepted wisdom, to be embedded in unreflected cultural constructs, and a limited conceptual armoury – but one which is perhaps used more fluently and flexibly than the 'elaborated code' of academia.

Two kinds of argument are looked for in the theoretical contributions of movement intellectuals. The first is the ideological and moral justification of the movement, the promotion and elaboration of its ideas and their defence against attack. Here it is not only the content of ideas, but also their rhetorical form which is significant, for much of the ideological work of movements consists of ripostes to critics and answers to the doubtful. Indeed, much of the actual development and clarification of movement ideologies often occurs in dialogical exchanges with opponents and potential allies (Steinberg 1999). The linguistic and literary forms - and the settings - in which movement ideas are expressed are much more varied than is the case with academic ideas. They range from books and pamphlets to newspapers, leaflets and posters, from sermons and speeches to slogans and songs on demonstrations, from formal orations to informal conversations, and so on. Appropriateness of form depends much more on the actual and varied speech

settings. The underlying purpose of ideological justification is *practical*: it is an inherent aspect of movement mobilization and organization.

Second, movement intellectuals produce another kind of essentially *practical* idea: the strategic and tactical proposal. This is a complex proposition which links together a reading of the nature of the present situation (including its relevant history) with an action plan (including a risk-assessment etc) for the movement in the immediate future. It speaks to a 'we' with which the movement intellectual claims an immediate identification. That 'we' may be a formally defined 'movement' or 'party', or may be framed as 'ordinary people,' 'workers,' 'the Catholic community', 'Blacks', etc. Such propositions take a typical form: *Given the overall situation, and our purposes and resources within it, this is how we should act.* The argumentation for such proposals may indeed include a whole raft of what Lofland terms 'generic propositions' of different kinds: lessons drawn from previous movement experiences as well as pieces of folk wisdom and moral homily (e.g., 'when the going gets tough only the tough keep going'). The strategic proposal seeks to grasp a sufficient account of the totality of a current situation, in order to guide action, rather than to capture a single aspect of the situation in a form where it can be compared with similar aspects in different situations. Its persuasive force depends on its capacity to combine an explanatory account of the complexities and contradictions of the recent past and present with a proposal for active intervention in the immediate future. So generic propositions are useful, but only as more or less casual supports for practical arguments.[8],[9]

To push the contrast between types of knowledge towards a limit, let us propose that social movement scholars produce knowledge *about* movements, but movement intellectuals produce knowledge *for* and *within* movements. And the *practical* aspect of movement intellectualism connects it much more obviously with the function of 'leadership.'

This distinction is related to Gramsci's distinction between traditional and organic intellectual activity. The scholar acts as a traditional intellectual, carrying out directive and theoretical activity on behalf of already-existing, and already-powerful, social classes and groups. Their directive activity is entailed in the administration and development of an education system which is a central mechanism in reproducing class inequality and in legitimating the social order. The contemplative orientation of social movement scholars is thus that

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One practical benchmark for the ultimately 'academic' or 'movement' nature of research might be found in the social relations it is geared towards: peer reviewed papers, presentations at disciplinary conferences and the search for accreditation – or discussion papers, distribution at activist get-togethers or within movement organizations and workshops in movement contexts.

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[8] Sometimes the argumentation can involve quite long causal chains. Consider, say, Gramsci's discussion of the contradictory nature of everyday consciousness, a set of propositions which provide some of the architecture of his argument for a particular kind of communist party involved in a struggle for hegemony within wider movements. But the basic principle still applies.

[9] We might distinguish between 'strategic' and 'tactical' proposals in terms of their temporal orientation. As an example of the 'strategic' type, consider Marx's argument, in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions, that it may be ten or twenty years before European workers will have the capacity to move towards power. A 'tactical' proposal could be simply the utterance 'Charge!'

entailed by routine teaching, routine marking, and routine research – one essentially similar whatever the content of their specialization. Since the primary purpose is to reinforce the given, modes of description and explanation are quite sufficient in practice.

The activist, by contrast, *qua* organic intellectual, carries out directive and theoretical activity on behalf of subordinate classes and groups. These classes do not control institutions, resources and symbols in the same way as dominant groups. Though they are constantly creating such forms of self-expression and struggle, these forms are constantly being combated and colonized by the dominant. Organic intellectuals therefore find themselves constantly creating – not *ex nihilo*, but from social materials typically controlled or contested from above. Since the primary purpose is to create what is not yet in existence (hence, once again, *movement*), their modes of theorizing are those geared to engagement, conflict, and (importantly) discovery.

What's the relevant community?
For the academic intellectual, including the social movement scholar, the primary 'community' that validates her or his work *qua academic* is that composed of other academics, who form their own hierarchies of reward and respect, and their own criteria of success. Bluntly, getting past a PhD committee, an academic interview panel or the editors of the *American Sociological Review* is a different enterprise from gaining the ear of a strike committee or a campaign to save ancient trees from logging. Indeed, the former involves a kind of *sucking up* which is largely missing in the latter. For, in return for suitable intellectual performance, the academic world dispenses something which is largely missing from the world of the movement intellectual: material advantage. (The fact that the level of material advantage is on a different scale from that obtaining in, say, the world of finance or law does not make it unimportant; and it is of course attached to very significant symbolic advantages.) Criteria of academic success include such significant intangibles as 'citation' in other academics' work. Once achieved, status has a relatively high degree of permanence: PhDs and (the better) academic posts stick to the possessor for life; a successful book or article may still be cited thirty years later.

Another way of putting this is to say that there are important pressures at work in academia which constrain intellectual independence: the need to achieve a permanent post or senior lectureship (and so impress superiors), the pressures of research assessment exercises and performance-related funding (which involve a number of forms of 'horizontal pressure'), the increasing proletarianization of academic work, and so on.

The community that validates movement intellectuals is different: it is the movements themselves. To become in any meaningful sense a movement intellectual, one must be treated by significant others in the movement as playing that part, that is, as someone it's worth listening to, with whom it's worth conversing about the movement's past, present and future, its problems and tasks, its perspectives, its ideas and its practices. The movement intellectual's audience - those who effectively credential an individual or group aspiring to this role - is the network of movement activists, and it is through their actual practice that the movement intellectual's ideas are, to the degree they are accepted, tested.

The rewards for success are mostly intangible, though nonetheless valued: laughter, applause and the approval of fellow-activists are heady gifts. In a way that is far less true in academic life, some movement intellectuals may never achieve any kind of public prominence: it is not uncommon for individuals and groups to perform vital 'backstage' intellectual work (as strategists and tacticians, as 'bridge leaders' and mobilizers, as the anonymous designers of posters and slogans, etc) without ever gaining any kind of personal recognition. Moreover, while there is an important sense in which movement intellectuals are 'credentialed,' their credentials are awarded by the relevant movement, and in a manner which is in principle far less fixed and stable than is the case in academic life. The role of 'movement intellectual' has to be won and won again as a much more uncertain qualification. For the settings in which movements act and argue and the strategic and tactical problems movements they face, and in which movement intellectuals make their contributions, are such as to demand constant rethinking and innovation.

Who plays the part?
The making of an academic intellectual is a complex enterprise, involving the imbibing of formal education and a whole set of 'manners'. The academic must learn to write within a narrow range of literary styles, and to make plentiful reference to work by other academics (as well, in our field, as *some* reference to the work of movement actors). To become an academic is to adopt a middle-class professional *hexis*, a way of speaking, writing, a mode of dress etc., as well as a set of formal ideas. There is not much, in this respect, that differentiates 'social movement scholars' from academic intellectuals in other fields.[10]

Paths to becoming a movement intellectual are rather different. They vary according to the movement in question and the circumstances of its development. In the Civil Rights Movement in the US, for example, some of the most prominent 'public intellectuals' were church ministers (most famously Martin Luther King Jr.); the predominant sexism of the time excluded women from prominent public leadership roles, although (as Robnett 1997 has documented) both Black and White women from varieties of backgrounds played critical intellectual roles (as 'bridge leaders') in the movement's development. King held a Harvard PhD in Divinity, but Fannie Lou Hamer came from a sharecropping background. In some circumstances, a lack of formal educational qualifications may be a positive advantage: Lech Walesa's idiosyncratic speaking style added to his popularity among Polish workers in 1980, for he 'sounded like one of us.'[11]

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[10] We know of no systematic studies. It *may* be, on the one hand, that career paths in this field are a little more open to, say, women or members of ethnic minorities than in some older 'disciplines'. On the other hand, social movements studies *may* be more white, masculine and middle-class than the rest of sociology, thanks to its overlap with the more conservative discipline of political science.

[11] At the same time, Walesa's own view of the academic intellectuals is open to question: his swift cooption of a visiting delegation from the Warsaw intelligentsia into the strike

As to how people become movement intellectuals, acquire the necessary skills and confidence, present themselves, and become accepted in the role, we can only offer some scattered suggestions. Gaining the 'right to speak' may derive from a claim to represent a specific 'community' or organization, from demonstrated commitment to a cause, from being accredited by the media or from authorship of a well-known book, etc. Nancy Naples (1998a) discusses the *mentoring* of potential leaders, with 'old hands' proposing them as speakers, encouraging them to put themselves forward for particular positions, introducing them to informal networks of activists, apprenticing them, giving them 'the real story' behind given conflicts, interpreting statements for them and so forth. The birth of new movement organizations may provide opportunities for individuals who were excluded from leadership in older ones: Ella Baker played foundational role in SNCC after battling against the practical sexism of the Baptist ministers who headed the SCLC; militant shop stewards may play powerful roles in 'unofficial' union movements in opposition to existing union bureaucracies.

The range of skills required is varied, and they are commonly learned and exercised in varieties of social contexts: planning group actions; poster-making workshops, mass meetings, party newspapers, strikes, knocking on doors to canvas support. Movement intellectuals may have to prove their credentials by such activities as riding bicycles rather than driving cars, refusing to cross picket lines or to eat meat, being available for picketing and leafleting, being prominent in situations of confrontation, dressing in particular ways, making financial contributions, adopting definite speech styles, and so on. Family life and sexual practices can 'decredential' would-be movement intellectuals. All these matters may be - more obviously than in academia - themselves regularly topics for debate within movements, often in connection with movement debates about structures and forms of 'good practice.'

Although there is a sense in which we can see academic intellectuals forming 'schools of thought,' the chief focus falls on *individuals* and their career achievements. However, in movements, while the 'intellectual function' (Gramsci) may be played by a notable individual, it is commonly played by an activist group, a 'cadre organization' (Piven and Cloward 1977). If we ask, who gets 'cited' as the source of a movement argument or idea, it is commonly not so much named persons like 'Dave Spart' or 'Moon Blossom' or 'Naomi Klein' as movement organizations like 'SNCC', 'Earth First!,' 'the SWP,' or movement media like *Green Anarchist* or 'the *Manifesto* group' or even 'the anti-globalization movement' etc. Such groups possess and develop their own internal structures and divisions of labour, and their activist members regularly engage in ongoing discussions about the form and content of the ideas they should argue for within the wider movement, about the most effective means of their presentation (what Snow and Benford term 'framing'), and about appropriate

forms of activity. Such groups typically engage in mutual monitoring of the movement's responses to itself as a means of checking its own performance. Movements in turn validate such groups' collective outputs of ideas and their shared practice, rather than simply their individual performances; at the same time, of course, the individual performances of group members reflect on the general credit of the group.

Relating activist and academic theorizing

The relationship between activist and academic theorizing is not simply that of a static contrast. As social processes, they are closely intertwined, in processes of colonization and resistance which operate in both directions. 'Theory', in the sense of the symbolic languages generated by these processes, is then affected in important ways both by the primary social locations of activist and academic theorizing and by the processes of (conflictual) dialogue which occur between them.

Processes of colonization and resistance
Marx's observation that the means of intellectual production are normally in the hands of the ruling class has an important corollary: that social movements from below (as opposed to, say, 'class war from above') often need to conquer or produce their own means of intellectual production. Social movement *actors*, for their part, have to 'create a new language' (Marx 1852), another way of thinking which is more or less adequate to their new way of acting. Activist theorizing, then, is in important ways a process of cognitive liberation.

The starting point is often the practical critique of 'common sense'. All activists are familiar with the various ways everyday cultures and languages work to delegitimize their activity: comments parodied in the Irish activist joke, 'If youse were in Russia youse'd be fucked into the Liffey!' Their critiques of these are not simply external: activists, except where they grow up able to draw on oppositional cultures, also have to 'emancipate themselves from mental slavery', to quote Bob Marley.[12]

For many activists, for example, it is a turning-point to be at the receiving end of police aggression and to discover that an institution they have been brought up to see as underwriting their safety and the moral order is in fact prone to violence against 'ordinary people' (as they may still see themselves), pursuing what they understand to be eminently moral (and often altruistic) pursuits. (This has been documented extensively in relation to riots (Drury 1996, Reicher 1996, Waddington 1996): police violence breaches the moral order *not* in relation to those who already oppose the police, but in relation to people who do not expect it.)

Gramsci (1997; 1999b: 118–264) can be read as presenting us with a model of common sense which is essentially historical: an 'archaeology of knowledge' which mixes both 'the most archaic forms of superstition' with

leadership in Gdansk in August 1980 (Staniszkis 1981, Kowalik 1983) betokened perhaps an overly deferential attitude to 'intelligentsia experts'.

[12] Obviously enough, even oppositional cultures have histories of their own, and are subject to processes of defeat and decay (for example, into particularism and traditionalism) as well as continuity and development. The process sketched here is thus important beyond the small numbers of individuals who may need to go through the entire process in the first person.

'the latest discoveries of scientific knowledge'. If so, then activism would simply be a case of the development of the individual – or the class – paralleling that of the species as a whole, and eventually winding up in possession of Marx's 'highpoint of philosophical development'.

But of course the process of 'enlightenment' is not as linear as that – which is after all where Marx's critique of Feuerbach starts. When budding activists start to think their way out of 'common sense', or to break what Blake described as 'mind-forg'd manacles', there is often an interest in forms of generalized understanding that might offer clarity, justification and a broader vision to underpin their activity.

In these circumstances, Marxism may present itself as the summum of activist theory, a paramilitary organization may present itself as the peak of practical radicalism, or a new religious movement may present itself as the locus of all true knowledge. Along with these, university knowledge – perhaps particularly in peripheral societies – can also be of interest, not least because it can offer a practical and economic resolution to the problems people are struggling with, as well as an intellectual and emotional one.

Activist theorizing can thus present itself as a process of throwing off the contemplative 'muck of ages' gathered by traditional intellectuals within universities, or perhaps more exactly its creative reworking, its cultivating for other purposes (as with Marx and Gramsci themselves).[13]

It can also, however, find itself subject to a 'brain drain', in which people associated with movements 'migrate' to universities. This process is no doubt very different as between different movements and activists (class, for example, makes a major difference), and the nature of the migration varies: attempting to fit in to the new culture, making careers out of public critiques of ex-comrades, turning activist knowledge to academic uses, or (more positively) finding a 'day job' that enables particular kinds of activism to continue, or becoming a 'sympathetic expert'. We could then turn our initial question around and ask, 'What have activists brought to academia?'

What have we ever done for the Romans?
Arguably activist theory has been a major creative forces within the academy. To take a series of well-known examples: cultural studies and social history, area studies of various kinds and environmental studies, and arguably sociology itself, all owe major debts to activist theorizing and activist theories. In some cases, such as cultural studies or environmental studies, it is not too much to say that they owe their existence to the adult education movement or the ecology movement respectively. (We will come to Marxism and feminism shortly).

If our arguments about to the essentially *creative* role of organic intellectuals are accepted, it is perhaps clear why activist theorizing should have played this kind of role. Taken out of its original pragmatic context and turned to contemplative uses, however, this theory is rapidly recolonized and becomes a source of new, 'sexy'

courses and research subjects whose purpose is to attract students, funding and status.

Anti-capitalism between movement and reading list
Three recent borderline cases can highlight something of the ambiguities involved in this process. Naomi Klein's *No Logo* has become a major international bestseller, getting dedicated promotions in major chains of booksellers (an ironic fate for a book whose theme is the damage caused by transnational corporations). It is also increasingly used as an accessible introductory text in sociology courses.

Klein is herself a syndicated journalist working for the largest Canadian newspaper and reporting on the anti-corporate movement in the US. The core of the material, then, is generated by movement activism. The sections of her book dedicated to suggesting solutions, however, are by far the weakest – and stand out as particularly thin by comparison with the dramatic problems and movements she has documented.

This makes sense given her location between movement and mainstream media – but also perhaps explains the book's attractiveness to lecturers desperate to keep the attention of bored undergraduates. It is, one could say, sufficiently political in its subject matter to be interesting (to speak to students as active human beings), but not so political in its structure as to be unusable as a basis for examinations and essay-writing.[14]

A second example is Amory Starr's *Naming the Enemy*, a much less mainstream text in that Starr is straddling the gap between movement and academia without passing the 'Go' of the media. Not only is the content much less readable, but the publishing house (Zed) is a smaller one dedicated to radical academic texts and theoretically-minded activists (an area important to our discussion).

Arguably Starr pursues a double purpose in *Naming the Enemy*. On the one hand, she attempts to use her activist knowledge and background as a resource to achieve recognition within academia – and the fact that her book is the first work by a sociologist on the 'anti-globalization movement' is likely to stand her in good stead in this process. On the other hand, and more interestingly, she also uses the apparatus of academic research to argue for particular positions *within* the movement and against others.[15] However, we have yet to see any evidence of success in this. (Perhaps the book's strong defence of fundamentalist responses to globalization may explain something of the silence that has settled over it since September 11th.) Nevertheless, it is worth signaling *both* that some academics do try to break out of the 'contemplative' mode *and* that they are not necessarily very successful in doing so.

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[13] Geoghegan and Cox (2001) describe this process from the viewpoint of activists looking for resources in academia, getting 'caught' and looking for ways of breaking out.

[14] Klein herself, to give her her due, has been willing to speak at events such as the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, and arguably brings a certain degree of publicity to the movement in doing so, in that she is now herself a celebrity thanks to her reporting on it. Whether these relationships are entirely healthy is another question; see Gitlin (1980) for an analysis of how movement celebrity can go badly wrong.

[15] Joachim Raschke (1990) attempted a similar intervention within the factional conflicts of *die Grünen*.

Finally, Michael Hardt and Toni Negri's *Empire* marks a particularly complex practical relationship. Negri is orignally a left-wing academic who fell foul of the post-1968 witchhunts of 'terrorist sympathizers' carried out by the Italian state, a process which led hundreds if not thousands of Italians to seek exile abroad (Ruggiero 1999). Negri continued academic work in Paris, but returned to Italy – and jail - a few years ago to highlight the plight of less well-known exiles.

Coming as it did after the protests in Seattle, the book has attracted widespread attention (much of it critical) in academia and the media, but also among activists. Its curiosity from an activist point of view, however, is the explicitly 'hands-off' role it assigns to activists: 'the multitude', according to Hardt and Negri, will take care of matters, despite their purported inability to communicate with one another or build solidarity (see Cox 2001 for a more detailed critique). In other words, the analysis of structure is in some ways radical – in line with the traditions of Italian autonomy – but as a guide to practical action the book is almost empty.[16]

Klein, Starr and Hardt / Negri illustrate the complex *interactions* between activist and academic theorizing, and the tensions between their different purposes. These tensions appear above all in the *shape* of the theory – its active or contemplative form – rather than in its subject matter or ostensible political 'side'. Indeed, it could perhaps be said that the practice of the authors mentioned as individuals is at odds with their theorizing, to their credit as human beings and activists, if not as theorists. This is perhaps not surprising in a period of movement 'upturn', in which practice can be expected to outstrip theory. But what does it imply for theorizing itself?

The shadow lives of 'theory'
Let's return for a minute to the migration of movement activists to academia, and their creative contributions. Arguably two of the most creative contributions to the humanities and social sciences in recent decades have been those made by 'Marxism' and 'feminism'. Both of these are, in their origins, theories from and for movements.

'Marxism' represents a particular crystallization of the theorizing processes of the workers' movement. From the late 19th century it has formed one of the most important languages within which – and against which – movement debates have been framed (not only in left parties and trade unions, but also for example in the ecological and women's movements). Its most famous 'names' are those of revolutionary activists, heavily involved in the various Internationals and suffering exile (Marx, Lenin, Lukács), political murder (Luxemburg, Trotsky) or imprisonment (Gramsci).

'Feminism', similarly, represents a long-drawn-out process of theorization, which by the late 19th century had acquired some stability as a body of knowledge linked with 'the first-wave women's movement', and which shares with Marxism the experience of a creative revival in the West associated with the social movements of the late 1960s and subsequently. It also shares something else

with Marxism in this period, which is that of a migration into the academy. In part this is a reflection of movement success – the creation of departments of sociology and schools of women's studies undoubtedly reflects a need on the part of the university to respond to (and benefit from) perceived changes within society. It is also, however, a reflection of movement *weakness*.

This weakness is most obvious in the question of 'who controls' the institutions of Marxist and feminist theorizing. Both schools possess movement-controlled institutions, but the proportion of this theorizing which takes place within academic-controlled institutions, for primarily academic purposes and more or less according to academic rules, is striking.

As theories migrate, they come to operate according to very different rules and purposes. This is obvious, for example, in the question of *which* theorists are quoted and for what purposes. Within Marxism, the practical radicals of the 1920s (with the partial exception of a largely misunderstood Gramsci) are abandoned in favour of the isolationists of the Frankfurt School. On a subtler level, Marxism and feminism tend to lose their aspect as theories of *movement organization* within the academic context, and to act simply as explanatory theories of *social structure*: theories of patriarchy and capitalism which often induce despair in students. While stressing the systematic nature of these structures, as activists also do in order to encourage more radical action, their academic versions lose precisely this focus on active opposition and wind up as forces for demobilization.

Activist theorizing, then, produces a strange reflection – 'as in a camera obscura' (Marx and Engels 1846: 47) – of itself in academia. On the face of it, the language is often almost identical. But the things that are *said* in that language, and the kinds of conversations that take place, are very alien to its usage 'at home'.

The 'new social movements' debate
The 'new social movements' debate offers another illustration of this transformation of theory. In the 1960s and the 1970s, movement activists on the left struggled to engage with and understand a range of apparently connected phenomena: most obviously the rise of a 'new Left' which was critical both of Stalinism and of Social Democracy from a variety of anti-authoritarian standpoints; the increasingly obvious co-optation of the latter within the institutions of Cold War politics and their practical opposition to revolutionary movements (at least within the West); the growing significance of 'new social actors' – rural blacks in the United States, migrant workers in Italy, students in most Western countries; and the development of a range of movements and campaigns that were not easily captured by the institutional and intellectual frameworks of the Old Left – notably movements against nuclear power, women's movements, urban squatters and movements against nuclear weapons.

A significant body of literature was written in and around these movements, of varying quality and with varying political goals: in the 1960s its point was often an alignment with the revolutionary moment of '1968' against orthodox denials of its political potential; by the early 1980s the point was often to support the development of Green parties or the 'greening' of the left wing of social

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[16] It also incidentally illustrates why Hardt and Negri may believe that people cannot communicate with one another….

democratic and orthodox communist parties. In the course of the 1980s and 1990s, 'social movement theory' – itself often written in relation to some of the same movements – started to become aware of this literature, which (having lost its political significance with the increasing 'mainstreaming' of Green parties) now became worth recuperating.

Two important things happened to the theory at this point (Geoghegan and Cox 2001), both of them characteristic of what Alvin Gouldner (1971) describes as a 'scholastic' approach to theory, in other words one geared to the structural requirements of teaching, textbooks and literature reviews. Firstly, a contrast was constructed between 'new social movement theory' and 'resource mobilization theory', in the process homogenizing the former considerably (and often restricting it to suitably 'academic' authors such as Touraine and Melucci). This contrast, repeated *ad nauseam* in introductions to edited collections and 'overviews of the literature', was usually proposed as a debate between generic propositions à la Lofland: 'resource mobilization theorists argue that…' while 'new social movements theorists argue that….'

Secondly, the 'field' of social movements theory was expanded considerably (on a practical level, this enabled its construction as an 'international' field, since RMT was held to be 'American' and NSMT to be 'European') by the construction of a synthesis on the basis of the belated recognition that the two theories were in fact talking about different things. As Cohen (1985) put it, NSMT offered a 'why' and RMT a 'how'.

What was obscured most decisively in this process was the key political issue around which the literature had originally been constructed: the *failure* of social democracy to bring about revolutionary change in post-war western Europe, and the alignment of orthodox communism with the repression of revolution in Paris just as much as in Prague.

Where this 'historical background' – as it had significantly become from the viewpoint of academic theorizing – was recognized, it was used to say that NSM was a critique of 'Marxism' - thereby accepting the Stalinist claim to be the true guardians of Marxist authenticity, much as 'post-structuralists', reacting against the Althusserian legacy of PCF theology, often phrase their critiques as critiques of 'Marxism' *tout court*.

In the process, the banal but nevertheless significant point that by the 1970s the PCF was increasingly isolated *within Marxism* was conveniently forgotten. When teaching students, it is of course far easier to say 'Marxists said this, but new social movements theorists (or post-structuralists) said that', providing the illusion of an intellectual debate, than to recognize that what was originally at stake was initially a debate *between Marxists* over practical questions. For example: did 1968 represent a revolutionary moment in Paris or Prague? was it important to be present in student movements or should all energies should go into factory work? were movements against nuclear power a diversion from real issues or a significant new form of struggle? and did green parties represent a worthwhile strategy for expressing and radicalizing a range of struggles or a means for their co-optation.

To recognize this history would mean not only going into far greater depth in the history of ideas than one could expect of undergraduates – or political scientists! – it would also mean dethroning of purely cognitive analysis and recognizing that these theoretical struggles were organized not in terms of the clash of generic propositions but of conflicts over practical choices facing activists and movements.

2. ACTIVIST THEORIZING

Having sketched out some of the contrasts and relationships between academic and activist forms of movement theorizing in the first part of this paper, we now want to look more closely at activist theorizing on its own terms. What is it? How does it relate to its social context? Why is it 'theory'?

The dimensions of activist theory

Eyerman and Jamison (1991) famously offer an analysis of social movements in terms of 'cognitive praxis' . An integral aspect of social movements, in other words, is the combination of skills and intentions which mark them as truly human. In Marx's words:

> What distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in in his mind before he constructs it in wax…. (Marx 1867: 283-4)

This is, however, not unique to social movements. Eyerman and Jamison argue, with examples from environmental movements, that activist theorizing falls into three categories: a cosmological dimension, consisting of worldview, historical meaning, emancipatory goals, etc.; a technological dimension, consisting of specific movement relationships to technological and technical activity; and an organizational dimension, consisting of the structural and communicative forms that movement activity takes (66-70).

These concepts ultimately derive from what they describe as 'ahistorical, or transcendental' concepts in Habermas' sociology of knowledge, which they claim to have 'transformed … into historical terms … specifiable interests or types of knowledge that particular movements could be seen to have articulated' (68). But have they been successful in this?

Are all movements divided in three parts?
Two out of their three dimensions are in a sense 'necessary' aspects of social movements. First, movements as social institutions necessarily involve some form of *organizational dimension*, whether theorized as a separate skill (see Cox 1998) or thoroughly embedded in existing cultural forms. Second, if we are right to say that reflexive intentionality, thinking about what you are doing, is in some way characteristic of human activity (however badly or indirectly it may be carried out), then presumably some kind of *cosmological dimension* is also present.

'Common worldview assumptions' may not be stated explicitly, but any social science notion of 'rationality' (Weber 1984) implies that at some level we can usefully describe actors as holding implicit assumptions about the nature of the world that they operate within. Certainly it is a normal part of activist life to argue about how the world works: to point to assumptions about e.g. 'ordinary people', 'the media', 'the police', 'our members' or whatever as a foundation for claims about what we should do. Some level of cognitive praxis related to the 'cosmological', then, is certainly present in the experience of activism, even though it is often manifested in *disagreements* about the nature of the 'cosmos' activists operate in.

Does not compute, captain!

But what of the technological dimension?

Eyerman and Jamison have no difficulty showing its relevance for environmental movements, which of course routinely involve critiques of technological projects, to such an extent that movement activists often become 'alternative experts' as well as calling on mainstream scientists to lend their voices; such movements also often involve proposals for 'alternative technology'. What of the other movements they discuss?

In relation to nineteenth-century workers' movements, they have to rephrase what they actually mean by 'technological', thus:

> the problem was not technology itself so much as the organizing principle of technology… As Thompson put it, 'What was at issue was not so much the machine as the profit-motive'. (83)

In other words, although there was critical thought about the *uses* and *control* of technology, it is stretching a point to describe the early workers' movement as having a separate dimension of technological cognitive praxis.

When they come to describe the Civil Rights Movement in the US, the phrase becomes even more metaphorical:

> The technical dimension of the civil rights movement's cognitive praxis consists of the specific objects of opposition and, even more importantly, the tactics, the techniques of protest, by which those objects were opposed. (123)

It is at best forcing a point to equate interest in alternative technology, critique of the profit motive, and training in non-violent direct action as equally 'technological' – particularly when this is *contrasted* to e.g. the 'cosmological' dimension. Environmentalists' critiques of technology are often inextricably linked with their 'cosmological' analysis of what is wrong with the current industrial system and what an alternative society would be like (for a classic example, see Croall and Sempler 1978). Similarly, the 'cosmology' of the workers' movement and the critique of the profit motive can hardly be separated. Unsurprisingly perhaps, Geoghegan's (2000) research on Irish working-class community politics found it difficult to operationalize Eyerman and Jamison's 'technological' dimension on their own terms.

Cosmology and organization
Returning to the other two dimensions – cosmology and organization – are these necessarily and always separated from each other? The short answer is no, in that movements often seek to embed the one within the other: to create a 'beloved community' of activists, or to carry out 'a revolution within the revolution'[17].

In other movements again, the relationship between ends and means is a matter for significant contention, and one which (in for example *die Grünen*, or the workers' movement in the early 20th century) may itself be a central structuring principle for movement divisions. To take a

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[17] For the activists Geoghegan (2000) talked to, the way in which they organize couldn't be separated from an informed critique of the institutions they opposed. By contrast, there is a sharp gap in environmental movements between 'how to lock on' and 'the importance for biodiversity of this particular SSI', in terms both of the structure of knowledge (crudely, bottom-up versus top-down) and of audience (activists versus the public).

classic example, while the 'Kautskyite' line in German Social Democracy may have represented a divorce between a cosmological 'theory' and an organizational 'practice', both Bernstein and Rosa Luxemburg sought, in very different ways, to create a more coherent unity.

Contra the Michels – Weber assumption of an essential conflict between ends and means, we might suggest that the *abstraction* of a cosmological and moral dimension from other elements of movement activity is related to the situation of a movement seeking to co-opt (or be co-opted by) the state. In such a situation, a sharp division may occur between an increasingly instrumental technology of 'organization' and the appeal to the 'mediation' of the state – whether by an appeal to 'enlightened despots' or 'the public'.

There is then an extent to which Eyerman and Jamison's compartmentalization reproduces – to take an example not entirely at random – much of the postwar history of European Social Democracy, with its attempt to juggle internal 'machine politics' with the 'media gurus' deemed necessary to attract the floating voter.

In more active movements, rather than 'cosmology' *determining* 'action', people often *radicalize* their understanding of how the world works through the process of conflict with adversaries and the attempt to convince the unconvinced; the 'programme' similarly is something which is often *implicit* in the choice of particular battles over others, the formation of particular alliances, and the creation of alternative social relations – what Fantasia (1988) has memorably called 'cultures of solidarity'.

To abstract the 'cosmological' is of course also to present movements in the form in which they can be most easily appropriated by 'traditional' intellectuals of all kinds – not only the academic discussion of e.g. the 'philosophy' of the ecology movement, but also the policy-maker's cooptation of a 'green agenda' when environmentalists push strongly enough.

The boundaries between Eyerman and Jamison's 'dimensions of cognitive praxis', then, are themselves as 'ahistorical and transcendental' as Habermas, albeit attractive from a particular 'contemplative', 'traditional' position which is interested in categorizing movement behaviour. Real-life thought, however, is a complex process of struggle which does not always sit neatly within these separate boxes.

Are movements themselves separate?
There is perhaps also a deeper criticism to be made: that it is itself a historical and sociological question whether it makes sense to distinguish a separate dimension of the cognitive praxis of *movements* from the rest of life. Lichterman (1996), contrasting the largely white and middle-class US Greens with black and Latina anti-toxics campaigners, noted that the former in effect constituted and understood themselves as an intentional community', alienated from their own social background and in conflict with important aspects of its assumptions. By contrast, the latter understood themselves as part of broader ethnic (and class) communities: they did not, that is, necessarily separate the thought processes involved in 'being activists' from those involved in e.g. 'being black'.

Similarly, Irish working-class community organizers may refuse the term 'activist' as referring to something *alien* to the everyday life and culture of the communities they see themselves as part of – while nevertheless being involved in processes of discussion, disagreement, conflict and education within those communities. In these cases, people are involved in a struggle over the meaning of everyday culture, and may set limits on the extent to which movement discourses are allowed to develop independently.

What kinds of jobs does activist theory do?

In order to begin answering this question, we consider three examples: an anarchist website, a couple of studies of strikes, and materials from the history of SNCC.

(a) The Anarchist FAQ

The Anarchist FAQ (2000) is a specific document of 'activist theory'. An FAQ is a list of 'frequently-asked questions', often developed for newcomers to an Internet newsgroup or mailing list by more experienced participants. It is a tool for the transfer of skills and understanding, of a kind which Berger and Luckmann (1967) identify as fundamental to the successful creation of a social institution.

The Anarchist FAQ, in fact, goes rather beyond this. Its primary location is not a newsgroup but a website <www.anarchistfaq.org>, and printed versions are sold by anarchist groups and distributed by anarchist publishing networks. Rather than introduce people to a mailing list, it introduces people to anarchism. The document itself is produced (it is in constant development) by a number of reasonably well-known anarchist activists.

In its production and distribution, then, it is activist theorizing rather than academic, and this also holds true for its reception: academic discussions of anarchism (including those by anarchist activists) tend to prefer to focus on 'dead classics' or the more abstract-minded activists such as Murray Bookchin or Hakim Bey; by contrast, the Anarchist FAQ is quoted in discussions on newsgroups and mailing lists unrelated to anarchism or academia[18], in the context of essentially *political* arguments about anarchism.

We have taken the Anarchist FAQ as a site which assembles in one place a range of issues which are very familiar to activists and which are also addressed differently in a host of literature produced by other styles of thinking and activism.

What do activists do when they theorize?
In fact, the answer is 'lots of things, many of them simultaneously.[19]

Firstly, there is a very explicit original purpose; according to the intro the document mushroomed from the need to argue that 'anarcho-capitalists' ('libertarians' in the American sense of the word) are not true anarchists at all, and that anarchism necessarily involves a rejection of

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[18] Thanks are due to Anna Mazzoldi for this information.

[19] The analysis below is restricted to the first section of the FAQ, which runs to 107 pp. and is printed as a separate book.

capitalism. Here is then a struggle over movement boundaries, located primarily on the Internet, where these two kinds of 'anarchists' are most likely to conflict (since anarcho-capitalists are unlikely to be found in the same struggles as anti-capitalist anarchists).

A second kind of purpose is evidently to distinguish anarchists from Marxists, in particular Trotskyists, who in Britain and Ireland at least are often the closest 'competitors' for anarchist activists – both sharing an orientation towards radical struggle, but competing for members and the attention of other activists, conflicting over the direction of campaigns (in e.g. arguments over the role of the state and violence), and so on. These, then, are conflicts which are in a sense internal to movements (and the FAQ argues that both Marxism and anarchism are to be understood in the context of working-class opposition to capitalism).

This involves a rather different kind of argument and material: not to argue that Marxists are not really on the left, but more along the lines of 'where have Marxists and anarchists come into conflict?', with much discussion of Kronstadt, Makhno, Spain, etc. From the way this is presented, it makes most sense as training material for newcomers: a sense of a history of opposition, long-standing grievances, reasons why Marxists shouldn't be trusted, etc. Interestingly, it is not primarily posed as a *cosmological* argument; in fact the section of the FAQ devoted to analyzing the theoretical disputes is still in progress. The arguments are those designed to convince radically-minded activists to throw in their lot with anarchists rather than Trotskyists, rather than to convince postgraduates to align themselves with anarchist theory.

A third kind of purpose is to provide material for arguing in favour of anarchism in general, with people who are neither self-identified 'anarchists' nor necessarily activists of any kind: this consists of responses to common objections (e.g. human nature, the need for leaders etc.), put in the form of short, 'ready-to-use' arguments.

Lastly, a fourth kind of purpose is to give people a sense of the differences *within* the anarchist tradition (or, we might say, the 'legitimate' anarchist tradition, given the first purpose), and simultaneously to encourage people who think of themselves as anarchists to locate themselves within that tradition. This is achieved not so much by rejecting e.g. individualist anarchism in favour of social anarchism (the authors' own position) as by showing that social anarchists can agree with the educational, project-building side of individual anarchism while also including revolutionary elements. A similar operation is carried out with 'cultural anarchism'.

Activist theorizing as dialogue

So here, within a single bit of activist theorizing, are four separate purposes. They do not split neatly into the cosmological', the 'technological' and the 'organizational', but in fact routinely combine these within a single passage. All are *dialogical* – they are all geared towards *conversations* – and they are all *active* – these are all conversations with a purpose.

Some of the material in the FAQ is oriented towards 'movement insiders', whether as newcomers (the history of conflict with Marxists) or those already involved (the different branches of 'legitimate' anarchism); some are

meant as fodder for arguments with 'movement opponents' (arguments against anarcho-capitalism) or with the uncommitted (arguments about the viability of anarchist societies etc.).

These are of course not neatly separated, but rather run through the whole document, as different kinds of rhetoric drawn on at different times for different purposes. However – and here the scholastic separation of different forms of 'cognitive praxis' breaks down – in practice most activists find themselves needing to do most of these at one point or another. Within any given campaign, there is a work of persuading the uncommitted to take sides, which is often linked to countering the arguments made by opponents. There is also a process of conflict over the direction of a movement, which involves countering 'internal opponents' at the same time as trying to sway other activists with looser factional or organizational commitments.

Positions and practice

Most importantly, as Thompson (1977) observed, all of this has to be *done* by real people, and it is no surprise that activists who are trying to argue on so many different fronts simultaneously feel a need to clarify their own basic position (the strands within legitimate anarchism) while retaining an ability to draw on other positions when the situation demands it. The process of dialogue is not simply one between isolated individuals, but is one that goes on within activists' own heads (and lives!), as they move from being uncommitted (or indeed actively hostile) to taking part, making choices and working out where they themselves stand – in a constant process of movement dialogue.

Forms of theorizing such as the Anarchist FAQ represent *one* aspect of this process. Necessarily, the FAQ covers general arguments rather than concrete ones. Some of the sharpest arguments at present within campaigns in Britain and Ireland are about who is permitted to participate in decisional bodies planning events, whether decision-making should be monopolized, who should be included or excluded at meetings, etc. These present another side of the 'anarchists versus Trotskyists' argument, presented now in terms of the situationally-determined question 'What is to be done here and now?' rather than the more general question 'What are good ways of doing things?'[20]

Activists themselves have to respond to both kinds of questions. On the one hand, they draw on general ideas of best practice, historical precedents, organizational principles, the relationship between ends and means etc., to think how they should respond to immediate questions. On the other hand, their sense of what the present situation demands often stands in tension with the general ideas that they officially give allegiance to.

Movement histories often prefer 'top-down' versions of events, in which the 'anarchist line', 'feminists', 'Marxist organizations' etc. are presented as the crucial actors. Arguably, though, this is to put the cart before the horse. Over time, people *become* anarchists, feminists or Marxists *because* they give particular kinds of answer to

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[20] Another contemporary situational example of this conflict appears in arguments over the 'Black Bloc'.

the question 'What is to be done?', and find themselves agreeing with some activists' suggestions and disagreeing with others.

This is particularly important to understanding two central processes in social movements. Firstly, movements *mobilize* people who were not necessarily previously active. Of course those people do not come to activism with a blank slate – they may be from Christian or trade union backgrounds, republican families or liberal universities, and these facts are certainly important in their response. But it is a mistake to think that people simply impose their previous understandings on the situation they encounter as activists. They may draw on them as a resource, but inevitably those understandings will be lacking in answers for at least some of the problems that activism presents them with, and more importantly they may not be carriers of a 'how-to' knowledge of practical skills.

Secondly, social movements often *radicalize* people who were previously content with a view of the world designed for situations of relative quiescence. When people are by and large accepting of the world and their place in it, what they need are stories that justify this and tools that enable them to survive without making concerted challenges to the world and their previous ideas. When people find themselves confronted with structures and institutions that they see as immediately and actively hostile to them, these stories and tools become less than useful. This is a well-known aspect of movement experience, worth exploring in slightly more depth.

(b) Striking stories

Fantasia (1988) and Dix (1999) offer detailed narratives of what happens when workers decide to change things in the workplace. We draw on these to suggest the need to shift attention away from the 'general' level of theorizing to the more concrete problems activists face situationally, when they have to decide what to do. Both studies show what Klandermans (1992) terms 'consciousness raising during episodes of collective action'.

From Fantasia's three studies of American strikes we look at a moment in a wildcat strike in a New Jersey foundry. Dix examines a single day during a three-month civil servants' strike in Leeds. The situations vary enormously, but they share something in common.

Most participants are not expecting the scale and the nature of the conflict they encounter. Their inherited knowledge is useful, but does not tell them 'what is to be done' in the specific situations they find themselves in. Rather, they have to argue about this, fumble their way forward, listen to different proposals – and then make their minds up. 'What should we do?' is anything but an easy question to answer in the circumstances of social movement struggles.

Fantasia describes the ten to fifteen minutes before the decision to strike:

> The break-room atmosphere was noticeably sullen during lunch in the finishing department … there seemed to be a general feeling of resignation. But during the lunch break the maintenance department workers apparently had discussed the possibility of a walkout … a finishing department welder … was

moving from work station to work station, motioning and shouting, 'Shut it down'… [T]here was definite hesitation on the part of many at this initial stage of the action. A walkout was clearly 'illegal' according to the union contract, and the men faced certain dismissal if they were unsuccessful. (82–3)

He goes on to discuss the way workers moved physically so as to align themselves with those walking out, to stay close to their machines or to adopt positions of partial commitment, along with the theoretical activity carried out not only by the committed workers but also by the foreman. Thus those committed to the strike plan engaged 'in almost desperate coaxing and pleading to [partially committed] workers, as well as heated explanations of the issue going on … to show those who were 'hanging back' that they could challenge the company and that the group was strong enough to express its defiance' (84–5). Meanwhile the foreman 'was dealing with different groups differently at this point in an effort to dissuade the more hesitant, isolate the more committed, and prevent unity' (83).

Dix (1999) shows different groups within the union arguing for different strategies, two weeks into a strike: the Deputy Secretary General, the Section Executive Committee, members of the Socialist Workers' Party, a member of the Broad Left 84 faction, three separate branch offices – and over 100 active strikers! She describes the different and shifting answers offered to the question 'What is to be done?' in this context:

> The SEC were in the driving seat and we were passengers. We were happy to be passengers until it became clear that the SEC plan to save the strike did not involve the majority of the rank and file…. The Stockport office however took our plans further…. We decided to jump on their bandwagon… A different 'what is to be done?' meanwhile was taking shape on the opposite side of the strike office… (4–5)

She illustrates the workings of this in concrete practice:

> The SEC, to ensure that key activists missed the lobby [of the Deputy Secretary General], so containing its size and impact, had deliberately delayed this meeting…. It appeared that the role of the rank and file in this matter was over. Until, that is, the SEC inadvertently threw the reins back to the rank and file activists…. A smaller lobby raged on outside section office as the SEC debated with Churchard [the DSG] over the fate of the strike. This was followed by an occupation of section office when Churchard failed to show for the audience with Leeds, culminating in approximately 30 strikers marching the union 'leader' across town, back to the pub where more strikers lay in wait. Here, a top union official was made to answer to his members, a lonely man surrounded by over 100 tired, angry strikers cramped into a smoke filled room. Churchard was made to make a dramatic U-turn. The strike had been saved…. (2–3)

In both examples, we see 'leadership' – and thus intellectual activity - almost being tossed from hand to hand and mouth to mouth. Different people and groups offer different answers to the question 'what is to be done?', involving different interpretations of the situation, attempts to create different kinds of interaction, attempts to assert different kinds of organizational reality, etc.

Nor are these fixed – while some actors remain committed to a particular 'line' throughout, others change their position as the story progresses, create new alliances, talk in different ways in different contexts, etc. What determines the outcomes in each case is not abstract principles, but the way in which participants draw on these, more or less convincingly, to win others to agreement, propose counter-possibilities, go one step beyond, follow hesitantly, etc. The intellectual interplay is furious, engaged and creative.

Within social movement studies, our impression is that there are few systematic accounts of the ways that activists actually develop ideas.[21] We turn to the history of SNCC to explore this question a little further.

(c) The case of SNCC: a 'borning organization?'

SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was born out of a wave of sit-ins organized by black American college students across the South during the early months of 1960. Bernice Johnson Reagon (cit Payne 1995) called the US civil rights movement the 'borning movement' of the 1960s, and Payne suggests that SNCC itself was 'the borning organization' of the same period. Out of it came, first, attempts at new models of activism, leadership and organization, which themselves influenced the practice and thinking of the early student movement (notably SDS), the anti-war movement, the women's movement, and others. Later in its development, SNCC also played a major part in giving birth to the idea of 'black power'. Within SNCC, too, one of the first position papers announcing the birth of 'second-wave feminism' was written. It is thus doubly possible to trace the roots of 'identity politics' within SNCC. Although never a very large organization, SNCC's history represents a critical hinge in the development of radicalism after 1960, and in that sense we are still living in its wake. SNCC thus certainly conforms to Eyerman and Jamison's idea that movements themselves engage in 'cognitive praxis', and contribute largely to the remaking of ideas across the whole of society, including the academic sphere.[22]

However, that 'external' emphasis tells us little about the theoretical problems that SNCC activists themselves faced, and how they attempted to solve them. Rather than attempt a history of SNCC here, we pick out a number of illustrative themes.[23]

A philosophy of activism

The students and former students who were attracted to SNCC in its early years were drawn by its *perspective on activism*, especially as enunciated by Ella Baker (and, Payne 1995 adds, Septima Clark). Baker had been working for Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and persuaded that body to fund publicity for the student conference in the spring of 1960 which gave birth to SNCC.

What was needed, Baker urged, was an organization involving 'the development of people who are interested not in being leaders as much as in developing leadership among other people'[24] [20]. Baker's ideas about practice stressed the need to involve others in developing their own ideas about the struggle, its forms and its goals. Payne offers a brief characterization of what he terms the 'community-organizing tradition': 'the developmental perspective, an emphasis on building relationships, respect for collective leadership, for bottom-up change, the expansive sense of how democracy ought to operate in everyday life, the emphasis on building for the long haul, the anti-bureaucratic ethos, the preference for addressing local issues' (Payne 1995: 364). This tradition was thus distinguished from other models which, for example, sought to mobilize people behind an already developed programme of activities, which substituted an organization's own activities for those of the oppressed, or which engaged chiefly in propaganda. The approach demanded a high degree of patient discussion with people who were often fearful and doubtful of their own capacities, entailed a notion that people involved in steering their own struggles could develop their powers and self-confidence, and thus required a fundamentally facilitative style of leadership.

SNCC's adoption and development of these ideas would make it distinctive within the civil rights movement as a whole, both in terms of the activities it undertook and the form of organization it adopted. Their application would push SNCC in specific directions, open up new lines of conflict within the civil rights movement as a whole, and set up a whole series of practical-theoretical problems for SNCC itself.

Such a perspective is not adopted in abstraction from existing practices and social relations. Baker herself developed her ideas partly in contra-distinction to her experiences with the practices of the 'top-down' SCLC (see also Robnett 1997). From the start, SNCC distinguished itself and its methods from other models of activism within the movement. James Lawson called the student sit-ins of 1960 'a judgment upon middle-class conventional, half-way efforts to deal with radical social evil', criticizing the NAACP in particular for its 'fund raising and court action rather than developing our greatest resource, a people no longer the victims of racial evil who can act in a disciplined manner to implement the constitution' [23]. SNCC thus adopted 'community organizing' in a self-aware theorization both of itself and also of other bodies against whom it measured itself, and

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[21] Are there studies which explicitly focus on the question of how activists theorize in the course of their struggles? The only work we can immediately think of that comes at all close to this are Marc Steinberg's studies of early 19th-century weavers and spinners' struggles (e.g. Steinberg 1999) and Robin Wagner-Pacifici's (2000) studies of, of all things, the FBI faced with 'standoff' crises like Waco.

[22] As we suggested above, without the movements of the 1960s it is doubtful that academic study programmes would include such disciplinary fields as 'Black Studies' or 'Women's Studies'.

[23] The key source used here is Clayborne Carson, 1995, *In Struggle. SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2nd edition. Page references to this work within this section of the paper are denoted by square brackets. Other sources are indicated in curved brackets.

[24] This, she suggested in a sideswipe at King and the SCLC, would protect activists against the disillusionment that comes 'when the prophetic leader turns out to have heavy feet of clay.'

with whom it was involved in complex combinations of collaboration and conflict.

SNCC's 'theory of practice' was partly shaped by its view of the basic nature of the problem facing black people in the deep South, that they were denied not simply 'rights' but the self-enhancing attributes of full citizenship.[25] As Polletta (1994) suggests, SNCC's aims could be encompassed neither by the (essentially liberal) idea of securing integration, nor by the notions of 'prefigurative' politics: 'SNCC workers saw their goal .... as organizing and securing recognition for disenfranchised, 'unqualified' southern blacks as legitimate political leaders. Such a recognition, they believed, would compel a fundamental alteration of national and local politics by toppling institutionalized understanding of legitimate black leadership' (1994: 88). That implied a goal of assisting poor local black communities to *empower* themselves by engaging in self-organized forms of collective struggle. Activists as well as those they encouraged to mobilize could be expected to make gains in dignity and self-respect as well as in rights and material advantages.[26]

Thus the style and goals of SNCC's activism were predicated both on a specific reading of American society and its problems, and on a search for a collective actor (initially, poor southern black communities) whose practical agency should be fundamental to solving them. This philosophy of activism, itself at once a critique of other way of organizing and a model to be followed, would be put to severe practical tests over the next years, as activists explored its possibilities and also its limits.

An organizational form
Inspired by this theory of practice, SNCC adopted a particular organizational character. On paper, it remained for a time a campus-based student body founded in the sit-in movement of 1960, but in practice it became what Piven and Cloward (1977) term a 'cadre organization' composed of full-time organizers, working on very low pay, who fanned out in small groups across the deep South and involved themselves in mobilizing local struggles. While the student movement proper had gone into decline, SNCC was transforming itself into a body composed largely of former students who were now full-time field secretaries functioning as spearheads of militant anti-racist struggle in the deep South, and developing its own autonomous ways of recruiting personnel, acting, thinking and organizing [31-50].

After its October 1960 conference - smaller than that in the spring, but composed more of 'hard-core activists' - SNCC took on a clearer organizational shape, establishing a delegate-based Coordinating Committee (CC) but at the same time insisting that local groups would remain autonomous. From the start, SNCC was marked by a resistance to the forms of hierarchical control that marked other civil rights organizations, insisting that SNCC could speak for the movement 'in a cautious manner in which it is made quite clear that SNCC does not control local groups' [30].

As Robnett (1977) suggests, SNCC's activist philosophy and organizational form had an important side-effect. While it provided less space for 'big leaders', it opened a larger organizational space for the development of 'bridge leaders'[27] - including women who were rather excluded from formal leadership roles by the predominant sexism of the SCLC (see also Johnson 2001). It was Baker and Clark, black women activists, who provided much of the early theorization of SNCC's perspectives, and women organizers played a much more prominent part in SNCC's activity and debates than, for example, in the minister-led SCLC.

Implementing Baker's ideas entailed the development of an autonomous and increasingly self-directed leadership organization, developing its own theoretical practice in dialogue with southern blacks and at some distance from the cultural pressures of student politics. Its form permitted the promotion and development of 'movement intellectuals' drawn from social categories whom other forms excluded. Its relative independence would give it a capacity for swift learning and flexibility of response, but also a capacity to crumble quickly.

Changing leadership rhetorics, finding an activist identity
SNCC would then, proceeding through the fire of the black liberation movement of the 1960s, test out its ideas in practice, and several times reshape itself and its practice. In that process of development, leadership would pass from one grouping to another.

In the first phase of development, an already relatively experienced grouping of students from Nashville played the leading role. They insisted on SNCC's adoption of nonviolent direct action as a method, establishing rules for the conduct of such action. This group tended to develop a religiously-based rhetoric to account both for their actions and their goals.[28] Later in 1960 the Nashville group's influence waned, and SNCC speakers deployed a more secular and more political tone, though without any reduction in radicalism or in the stress on nonviolent direct action. It took some time, in any case, for the fledgling organization to find its wings, and to establish its own direction.

SNCC volunteers went to join a student protest in Rock Hill and get themselves jailed, they joined in the CORE-initiated Freedom Rides on Greyhound buses, and began to involve themselves in voter registration drives in Mississippi and elsewhere. Nominally, policy was still

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[25] Robnett (1997) notes the kinship between these ideas and those of the radical educationist, Paolo Freire.

[26] The movement should liberate not only those it addressed, but also its own activists. As Marion Barry of SNCC explained, '(I was) not a free man... not a man at all... only part of a man... I felt that in order to become a whole man I must be an American citizen as anybody else' [21]. See also Robnett (1997) for discussion of the complex implications of male SNCC activists' search for manhood.

[27] 'Bridge leaders' were the vital connecting links between national movement organizations and their grassroots constituents, giving voice to the latter's needs, mobilizing and motivating them through close interpersonal work, promoting the radical tactics national leaders could or did not.

[28] Diane Nash saw the desegregation movement as 'applied religion'; James Lewis, a ministerial student, saw King as 'a Moses, using organized religion and the emotionalism within the Negro church as an instrument... towards freedom'; Lawson suggested their purpose was to force white southerners to face their 'sin'. [21-3]

being made by the CC, but in practice it was being determined on the ground through the actions of the field staff. Their activities were drawing them together into a new sense of group identity, founded on mutual respect and trust among the developing layer of professional militants who organized together, got beaten up together, went to jail together, sang and joked there together, and who both gained victories and suffered setbacks together.[29] Their collective stance against the federal government became more radical, as they simultaneously charged it with hypocrisy and became aware that, as a determined minority, they could sometimes throw it into crisis [37-8].

An argument about strategy
It was this increasingly cohesive group which faced its first significant argument over strategy. One wing, which had been central to the student protests and Freedom Rides, urged continuation of direct action protest tactics. The direct action group, possibly, was influenced by its own experience to date. The second group was drawn increasingly to the idea of pursuing voter registration in the deep South. One of its key spokespeople was Bob Moses, who - before he had even joined SNCC formally - went to Mississippi and there met Amzie Moore of the local NAACP. Moore got Moses to promise to return to Mississippi to help with a voter registration drive [25-7]. This meeting signaled the start of a turn towards the black struggle in Mississippi that would shape SNCC's future. Almost imperceptibly, initiative and innovation was being generated by new recruits, and by activists outside SNCC's own ranks.

The direct action group was concerned that SNCC might be 'bought off' by federal government and by private foundation moneys, which were offered for voter registration work. Moses's grouping, by contrast, was taking note of what people on the ground were telling them about the importance of their issue. This second group saw an opportunity to 'transform small-scale non-violent protest activities into a massive political struggle for racial advancement', and to win funds that might otherwise go to older and more moderate civil rights bodies [39]. The proponents of voting work were, says Carson, 'more articulate and had more of certain kinds of contact', and they had in any case already begun to take up voting registration work in Mississippi [40-1].

The argument might have been the occasion for a split within SNCC. In practice, however, the issue was resolved through two parallel developments. Ella Baker made what was, for her, an unusually deliberate intervention in the debate, suggesting that SNCC form two wings, each pursuing one aspect of a shared strategy; and James Forman was appointed as an executive secretary who managed both to gain both sides' confidence, and to put fund-raising on a more secure footing. For the time being, SNCC had found a workable organizational form, and the

issue that divided the two groups rather faded away in the light of further experience. 'The direct action proponents... discovered in McComb that their nonviolent tactics were not always effective and sometimes ruinous when used against a determined white establishment. They also discovered that voter registration in the deep South offered as much of a test of militancy and courage as did direct action protests.' As SNCC member Reginald Robinson put it: 'if you went into Mississippi and talked about voter registration they're going to hit you on the side of the head and that's as direct as you can get' [50].

The argument over strategy involved a complex of practical-intellectual issues: the risk of cooptation by federal and funding agencies on the one hand, as against a sense of opportunities for making advances in conjunction with local communities on the other; the organization's readiness to explore new tactics proposed by sections of the movement outside its own immediate ranks; the relative capacity of different groupings to formulate and persuasively articulate their arguments; the degree to which differences within SNCC could be argued without a falling out between proponents of different positions. SNCC was still finding its way forward, and the essentially experimental resolution of its debate both depended on and permitted a further development of mutuality and trust among the participants in the discussions. However, if that mutual trust, among activists fired by very moral commitments, were to break down, then strategic debates could - indeed, later would - take a very different turn.

Learning by Doing - and its possible limits
As it happened, the initial voter registration experiment in McComb, Mississippi, largely failed, but the experience taught the young activists, in Bob Moses's words, 'something of what it took to run a voter registration campaign in Mississippi. We knew some of the obstacles we would have to face; we had some general idea of what had to be done to get such a campaign started.. And we began to set about doing this' [50]. Their largely defeated effort at intervention in McComb taught them better how to appreciate the difficulties faced by local blacks, the strength (and brutality) of their opponents, and some sense of the kinds of tactics by which the worst difficulties might be overcome. That learning process continued over the next period. SNCC activists were meeting and having to deal with fear among those they sought to mobilize: Charles Sherrod reported black people who would cross the street to avoid contact with SNCC organizers. Their objective included removing 'mental block in the minds of those who wanted to move but were unable for fear that we were not who we said we were' [57]. They were learning that they had to talk patiently to people on their porches in rural areas, in poolrooms and bars as well as churches in the towns, and thus they needed to get to know the social structures and inner class and other tensions of black communities as a condition of doing their work.

The acquisition of skills and judgment, about how to relate to those they were seeking to mobilize but also how to relate to each other, about what might 'work' and what didn't, about how to relate means and ends effectively, was achieved through a reflexive method of 'learning by

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[29] Charles Sherrod said about imprisonment: 'You get ideas in jail, You talk with other young people you've never seen. Right away we recognize each other. People like yourself, getting out of the past. We're up all night, sharing creativity, planning action. You learn the truth in prison, you learn wholeness. You find out the difference between being alive and being dead.' [33]

doing' very characteristic of the 'craft' of organizing. James Forman later recalled:

> So long as we were working on voter registration and public accommodations, there was a broad consensus under which everyone could move. It seemed important then just to do, to act, as a means of overcoming the lethargy and hopelessness of so many black people. Also, we had no adequate models for what we were doing, for how we should proceed. Rather than set up rigid definitions of goals and tactics, it seemed best then to experiment and learn and experiment some more and draw conclusions from the process.' (Forman 1973: 238, cit Carson [54])

SNCC began to develop, by sharing and reflecting on its activists' experiences, a kind of 'cook book' of accumulated tactical lessons - of the practical kinds of theorizing that regularly mark movement intellectual activity. They developed a set of half-formalized 'standard operating procedures' of the kind that, as Wagner-Pacifici (2000: 149) notes, are commonly 'the calling cards of organizations'.

Looking back, with the benefit of hindsight, Forman also noted that, on their return from McComb for discussions, SNCC activists were marked by a lack of discipline and political sophistication, notably in their refusal of any need for a programme of political education [50]. They were radicalized by their experiences - they now described themselves as 'revolutionary,' were more open to socialists who offered genuine aid and were exerting an ideological pull on white radical students [51-4]. But few, as yet, saw any need for a general revolutionary ideology. They relied on the intense struggles in which they were involved to provide them with the necessary insights to continue their work. Thus their learning pattern was very different from, say, campus students coming to radical politics through exposure to general revolutionary ideas: they were, rather, testing and forming their ideas against the harsh realities of the Mississippi freedom struggle, learning about their collective abilities and about southern blacks of all classes. There's a case to be made that their 'refusal of political education' (rather like the 'refusal of strategy' that Breines attributes to the American New Left in the same decade[30]) would, later, contribute to SNCC's difficulties. Polletta (1984: 103-4) suggests that SNCC tended to adopt a 'mystified, unitary notion of the black community' in ways that skated over some important questions about class divisions within actual black communities. Would a political education programme in SNCC have weakened this populist tendency in its members' thinking? It all depends, surely, what *kind* of programme, who prepared and delivered it, and how....   SNCC was building relationships with the (predominantly white) student New Left, but that New Left was very uncritical and adulatory about SNCC (Carson 177-9) and thus unlikely to provide useful sources of sympathetic criticism.

Learning from setbacks?

Movements, and their constituent organizations, often meet particular opportunities for theoretical development when they face new conditions, and especially setbacks. McAdam (1999) and others have pointed to the civil rights movement's experiences in Albany, Georgia between 1961 and 1962 as just such a learning experience. SNCC organizers laid much of the groundwork for the Albany Movement, talking to local people and organizing small protests at the train station where numbers of students were arrested, then launching their first mass meeting in a church, followed by a mass rally in support of the arrested students. Working now in a significant urban setting, they now had to face new issues, not least concerning their relationships with other civil rights organizations. King came to Albany and led a prayer march to City Hall, where he was arrested Having first said that, like SNCC members, he would stay in jail, King allowed himself to be released on bail as part of a truce negotiated with the city authorities. The whole movement lost momentum as city officials stalled on the implementation of agreements. Efforts to revive the demonstrations achieved little but arrests and jail terms.

Police Chief Pritchett was very ready to use official force to stop the demonstrations, but did so with politely controlled overt violence.[31] A SNCC worker, Bill Hansen, commented, 'We were naive enough to think we could fill up the jails.... We ran out people before [Pritchett] ran out of jails' [61]. The Albany experience proved a serious setback for the whole civil rights movement. It showed that, by itself, a readiness to suffer through nonviolent direct action, even on a mass scale, was not sufficient to ensure federal intervention. The SCLC, as McAdam (1999) has shown, learned the lesson well, and applied it by going for a mass campaign the following year in Birmingham, Alabama, where public exhibitions of police brutality compelled the Kennedy administration to intervene. Birmingham was a turning point in the national struggle for civil rights, but SNCC was not involved in the Birmingham events, and they seem to have learned less strategically from Albany. Julian Bond of SNCC proudly claimed that when SNCC left an area, it left behind 'a community movement with local leadership, not a new branch of SNCC' [62]. After Albany, SNCC workers became more hostile towards King, calling him 'De Lawd' [63]. They distinguished the way they worked from the SCLC, who had come into Albany and taken charge, dispensing patronage and the like. As Carson comments, however, while SNCC's methods endeared them to local blacks, they also 'reflected the tenuousness of SNCC's role in the expanding protest movement' [64]. In an important sense, SNCC partly flunked a test that King's SCLC rather more triumphantly passed after Albany, in that it was slower to learn 'something new' from significant events.[32]

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[30] See Barker (2001); on a not dissimilar theme, also Epstein 1991.

[31] Coretta King described Pritchett's tactics: 'He would allow the protestors to demonstrate up to a point. Then he would say, "Now we're going to break this up. If you don't disperse, you'll be arrested." Often they would refuse to disperse, and would drop on their knees and pray. Chief Pritchett would bow his head with them while they prayed. Then of course, he would arrest them and the people would go to jail singing.' (cit Bloom 1987: 170)

[32] Shanin (1986) suggests the test of 'learning something new' to the thinkers (of left and right alike) who grappled with the implications of the 1905 Russian Revolution.

Needing to re-think

The years 1962-3 saw SNCC consolidating and developing its work. It established permanent projects in many southern communities, gaining the support and trust of local black residents. Still possessing its characteristics of openness, informality and impetuousness, its contacts with poor southern blacks had developed in SNCC workers a new sense of commitment and social responsibility. At its national office, in Atlanta, James Forman ran a small-scale but effective office operation, organizing aid for the local field secretaries and spreading SNCC's publicity operation to reach hundreds of thousands of supporters. However, if SNCC's primary role was as a stimulus for mass protest in the deep South, efforts to register voters were 'cruelly unsuccessful' (Polletta 1984: 93). Local campaigns met with constant harassment and intimidation. Increasingly SNCC activists were recognizing that sporadic, local, small-scale nonviolent protests, accompanied by lengthy jail terms for members and active supporters, were not going to succeed by themselves. They needed to think more widely, and to become some kind of political organization [69, 79]. Local events impelled them in this direction. The Leflore County (Mississippi) supervisors stopped supplies of food to poor blacks from the federal program, and SNCC organized a food drive involving its northern affiliates. Faced with extensive violence in Greenwood, they called in civil rights workers from outside to demonstrate in the city. Both these tactical innovations involved a shift away from local self-reliance and leadership [79-81]. Bob Moses and other SNCC members were coming to recognize that they must find ways of pressurizing the federal government to intervene in their support [81]. (In their own way, they were learning the lessons King had drawn from Albany.) Moses was also concluding that SNCC must modify and expand its goals: it was necessary, he argued, to begin a struggle for education in southern communities *now*, and to begin fighting not simply for the right to register as a voter under existing legislation but for 'one man one vote.' It took no large step for them to begin to see the necessity of economic goals as well. SNCC's experience on the ground was pushing it to move beyond the limits of the conventional civil rights agenda.

As SNCC workers, faced with the slowness of their progress on the ground, became clearer that federal intervention was a vital requirement for success, they became ever more critical of what they saw as the Kennedy administration's 'hypocrisy' and lack of moral commitment to the civil rights cause. SNCC adopted more combative tactics, for example organizing sit-ins at the Justice Department in Washington. John Lewis's hard-hitting draft speech at the 1963 march on Washington was censored in order to keep the Archbishop of Washington on the podium [93-5]. At the same time, though increasingly disillusioned with official white liberalism, SNCC's activist leaders were not yet ready to offer a coherent alternative worldview distilled from their practical experiences in the southern struggle [83-8]. SNCC's character was changing. What had been an organization of nonviolent activists seeking to appeal to 'the nation's conscience' was now developing into 'a cadre of organizers seeking to mobilize blacks to coerce the federal government into using its power to achieve civil rights goals' [95] - an evolution paralleled in part by thinking in King's SCLC (McAdam 1999).

Up to now, Bob Moses's strategy had involved relying chiefly on local black organizers, but recognizing that existing methods were not sufficiently successful[33], he proposed that, in the summer of 1964, SNCC organize a massive invasion of Mississippi by northern white student volunteers. The proposal, when was taken up by a wider coalition of organizations, became 'Freedom Summer' [96; see also McAdam 1988].

Disappointments and radicalization

The intention behind 'Freedom Summer' was to force a confrontation between the Mississippi state authorities and the federal government, and thus to prevent the open intimidation and violence that had stymied civil rights work. Moses explained his plan as 'an annealing process. Only when metal has been brought to white heat, can it be shaped and molded. This is what we intend to do to the South and the country, bring them to white heat and then remold them' [98]. The organizers knew that there would be violence, and there was thus an element of 'cynicism' in the project [114]. (A former white student who did not join Freedom Summer told us, 'We all knew that some white students were going to have to die.') Indeed, even before the project was fully underway, three student volunteers (James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, one black and two white) were murdered near Philadelphia, Mississippi.

From the start, the Freedom Summer proposal met with opposition within SNCC. Some black members complained that whites tended to take over leadership roles, and that their involvement would reinforce traditional patterns of racial dependence. SNCC had become a magnet for a radicalizing layer of white students, who formed some 20 per cent of its staff by the fall of 1963. While the radical historian Howard Zinn (1965) saw this development in highly positive tones, others saw something darker occurring: there were racial outbursts at SNCC meetings, foreshadowing later developments [100-1]. Although efforts were made to recruit black volunteers for the summer project, the need for participants to pay their own way meant that Freedom Summer was dominated by white middle-class students. From the start, there were tensions between the white volunteers, whose experience of actual conditions in the South was minimal, and their black teachers and leaders [112-4].

Parallel with the involvement of student volunteers, SNCC promoted two other projects: a quite successful system of 'freedom schools' in black communities, and the promotion of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), set up to challenge the Democratic party's racist machine. Freedom Summer did not succeed directly, in that no open confrontation between state and federal government ensued, though the project achieved wide news coverage. SNCC still hoped to make gains through the MFDP challenge at the Democratic Party convention in Atlantic City, but this failed when moderate civil rights leaders agreed to a 'compromise' which excluded the black

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[33] The Voter Education Project withdrew funding from the Mississippi projects, because of their low success rate.

delegates from Mississippi. SNCC veterans, especially, were embittered and disappointed. Stokely Carmichael commented that the whole experience showed 'not merely that the national conscience was generally unreliable but that, very specifically, black people in Mississippi and throughout this country could not rely on their so-called allies. Many labor, liberal and civil rights leaders deserted the MFDP because of closer ties to the national Democratic party' [128].

Freedom Summer had involved very ambitious projects that strained SNCC's human resources and relationships. The shift away from the slow bottom-up practice of 1962-3 to a large-scale attempted intervention into the national political agenda was in no way automatic: Moses' proposal had won support because it connected with numbers of activists' own experience of failure and frustration. Its relative failure sharpened SNCC's criticism of liberal America, pushing its workers to seek new kinds of solutions.

Bitter experience can radicalize activists. But the general lessons they learn from it depend on theoretical developments which are not, directly, the outcome of their hardwon knowledge. Turning points in struggle, even when potentially favourable, can disorient as much as they can inspire creative new thought.

Opportunity and crisis
The years following Freedom Summer witnessed a heightening radicalization of movements in the United States. Black protest in the cities grew in intensity, peaking in the Detroit insurgency of the summer of 1967. Impulses from the civil rights movement, and especially from SNCC, lay behind the rise of the student movement that flared across the campuses from the fall of 1964.[34] The student revolt rapidly provided the impetus behind a rising movement opposing the American war in Vietnam, a movement whose spread into the active armed services themselves contributed hugely to the biggest shock the American military machine has ever experienced. Interwoven with that history was an immense revival of the women's liberation movement, which itself inspired the gay and lesbian movement in the 1970s.

One might have expected that the later 1960s, when the 'cycle of protest' (Tarrow 1998) rose to its greatest peaks, would provide a setting where SNCC's young radical activists' organization and influence would flourish and expand. Yet SNCC's history after Freedom Summer is better characterized as one of slow inner collapse. The 'opportunities' beloved of structural theories are not, it seems, sufficient: a suitable combination of ideas and practice is required to seize them.

Losing their way
At meetings in the fall of 1964, SNCC met to evaluate its organization and its future tasks. The existing organization needed to be reshaped. A position paper in November 1964 (probably by Bob Moses) described SNCC as a boat afloat on the ocean needing repair: to stay afloat they must repair it, to repair it they must stay afloat. One staff

member commented that they had never decided if they wanted to be agitators, demonstrators, or organizers - 'and we can't fool ourselves into believing that we can be all three because we can't do it effectively' [142]. Payne's summary of the host of new questions that thrust themselves upon SNCC over the next couple of years if anything under-estimates their difficulties:

> SNCC was trying to resolve a staggering number of questions, many of them products of the organization's disillusionment with American society. What did 'integration' mean, and was the country worth integrating into? How would it be possible to accommodate both the need of individual members for freedom of conscience and action and the need of the organization for discipline? What was the proper role of whites in the context of increasing race consciousness among Blacks? How is it possible to provide leadership without being manipulative? Is it possible to be both moral and politically effective? How could the organization speak to economic inequalities, rural and urban? If neither the federal government nor liberals could be trusted, where were the movement's allies? Could allies or models be found in the Third World? How should the organization respond to the anger in the urban ghettoes and the periodic violent uprisings it generated? What are the limits on what local leadership can accomplish? Should existing social structures be reformed or new ones created? What was to be the role of women in the movement? What should be the movement's position on Vietnam? (Payne 1995: 366)

Those attending meetings in the fall of 1964 were tired - like people returning from wars, said Cleveland Sellers [138]; many were angry, suspicious, losing their perspective and their humour, and even their former trust for co-workers. The former mutual confidence and commitment was never recovered. Discussion of a Forman-Moses proposal, for a Black Belt Program to succeed Freedom Summer, was dominated by fractious procedural arguments about who had initiated the idea and what their motives were. Its proponents retreated: Forman never fully set forth a rationale for his actions, and Moses was reluctant to exercise open leadership [138-40]. Arguments dragged on, and at later meetings very contentious decisions (the replacement of the chair, and the exclusion of whites) were taken by a weary vote of those still remaining in meetings in the early hours of the morning. As the atmosphere of generalized mistrust grew, the possibility for SNCC to make creative advances shrank. 'Time and again, the substance of ideas could not be discussed because of a climate of suspicion and emotional strain, that the organization was unable to implement any new projects of even effectively maintain old ones. The climate would become progressively more debilitating.' While Forman reminded them of their initial character as 'a 'band of brothers, a circle of trust', the emotional bonds among them were weakening [146]. There emerged a situation of 'rigid, politicized factions, each quick to suspect the worst of the other factions.' This occurred in a context where SNCC 'was trying to reassess its entire program, respond to the morale problems caused by disillusion with liberal America and by the lingering

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[34] The first speaker from the police car roof during the sitdown in Sproul Plaza at the Berkeley campus was Mario Savio, who had only recently returned from Freedom Summer.

resentments over whether there should ever have even been a Summer Project' (Payne 1995: 368-9).

For many SNCC workers, the core of their motivation for involvement lay in their membership of a very loosely structured community of activists, built round the activist philosophy of building popular confidence in struggle. SNCC's identity had been based, not on material rewards (SNCC workers received only ten dollars a week) or even political effectiveness, but on its life as a 'morally consistent activist community' [154]. Payne cites Bob Moses's important suggestion that its roots in the lives of local people had kept SNCC from going off on tangents; those roots provided a form of discipline, for they made activists behave in a manner acceptable within the moral code of rural and small-town communities of Mississippi (Payne 1995: 372-3). But after 1964, these relationships began to rip apart.

Within southern black communities, local leaders began assuming control over local movements - as SNCC had always assumed it wanted - except that those emergent local leaders were often parochial and pragmatic. SNCC workers were becoming aware that local people were often motivated by apparently less idealist but concrete material issues like paved streets and better jobs [154-5]. Quite often, Payne reports, there were charges of 'selling out', but it had anyway become more difficult to define what the movement was trying to achieve. 'Skipping the cases of outright dishonesty, some of what was called selling out in 1968 would have been called progress had it happened in 1963.... What was selling-out from one perspective was just moving on from another, becoming a part of the structure so that one could change it even more.' (Payne 1995: 358). Federally funded welfare bodies were appearing on the scene in Mississippi, with a different ethos from SNCC's freedom schools and other projects:

> The original intention... was that [educational] centers would be connected with movement activity and imbued with movement values - a spirit of volunteerism, recognition of the need of the poor to represent themselves, minimal hierarchy, respect for the ability of the untrained to be trained, concern with teaching people how the issues that touch them are impinged upon by wider social issues. What they got under MAP [a federally supported programme] was an educational program dominated at best by a traditional-social-welfare mentality. Let's-have-some-experts-do-something-for-poor-people.

Reform, one might say, brought its own problems, creating 'a more morally ambiguous climate' surrounding many of SNCC's projects, and a sense in which cooptation and demoralization went together: 'It simply became harder to know what to believe in or whom to trust. Had it not been for the demoralization, it might have been more difficult for outside elites to coopt so much of the movement's energies.' (Payne 1995: 347, 360-1)

While some SNCC members stayed with their projects, dissociating from SNCC, others responded to the sense of displacement by 'floating', searching for more meaningful roles while 'high on freedom', in turn causing others to demand more discipline within SNCC [154]. Internal disputes became more frequent. Cleveland Sellers opposed what he saw as a flamboyant faction of 'stars,... philosophers, existentialists, anarchists, floaters and freedom-high niggers,' who brought a disruptive element of what he saw as a fake intellectualism into planning meetings [155-6].

Later in the 1960s, the slogan 'the personal is political' would be coined. It could be usefully reversed: in radical movements, the political is often very personal. To lose a set of moral bearings and the confidence these induce is deeply disorienting. The strains of political engagement with shifting practical problems and working understandings demand, from those who would lead, both a coherent understanding of the changing ground and an attention to activists' own needs, along with a capacity to draw together the multiple and contradictory threads of hope and disappointment, altering alliances and organizational tensions into some convincing new trajectory that will maintain consent and continued participation. Many movement bodies founder under such conditions, as their activists 'burn out' (Cox 1997).

The collapse of existing practice and theory
SNCC attempted, not least under the inspiration of the growing black revolt in the cities, to re-orient its activities to urban projects. But its activists were ill-prepared for the new environment. Black urban residents were more socially differentiated, they shared no common institutions comparable to the black rural churches, they were more alienated and angry and more anti-social. Mobilizing urban blacks required the definition of new issues, for many of the civil rights reforms had already been carried in the cities. Racism was as real, but its targets were less easily defined. SNCC activists soon realized that their previous victories in the deep South had exaggerated their sense of their own power to confront the entrenched, resilient institutions responsible for the social problems of urban, capitalist industrial society [168]. Few of the urban projects made much headway.

Previous assumptions now came under criticism. A group called the 'hardliners' started criticizing 'local people-itis', the notion that local people could do no wrong, that no one from outside could initiate any kind of action or assume any form of leadership [156]. Non-violence, a previous principle, was undermined by SNCC volunteers' discovery that many militant black farmers took it for granted that they should carry guns for self-defence, and numbers of SNCC workers followed suit [164].[35] More radical critiques of the civil rights movement itself began to be voiced: "The TRUTH is that the civil rights movement is not and never was our movement' [195]. At the December 1966 conference, a few black separatists even ridiculed Fannie Lou Hamer, the Mississippi activist who had been central to the MFDP struggle and much else, saying she was 'no longer relevant' or not at their 'level of development' [240].

SNCC entered into a growing organizational crisis. It was losing people, some of them formerly very prominent.

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[35] After violence against the 1966 march following the James Meredith shooting, King commented: "The government has got to give me some victories if I'm gonna keep people non-violent. I know I'm gonna stay non-violent no matter what happens. But a lot of people are getting hurt and bitter, and they can't see it that way any more' [210].

There were crises of discipline and of morale. Funding became more difficult, as SNCC's northern offices floundered, as SNCC lost favour with northern liberals for the militancy of its rhetoric and as accusations of 'communism' were voiced more often in the liberal press, and as white radicals were turning their attention elsewhere, above all to the anti-war movement. The response of the leadership to movement events, both at Selma in 1965 and over the James Meredith march in 1966, suggested a tendency for SNCC's decision-making processes to break down in a crisis, as its leaders and members were pulled between a strong desire to encourage mass militancy and yet to avoid actions that would disrupt ongoing projects and interfere with the development of long-range programmes [159, 206-8].

The conditions for creative collective responses to the crisis in SNCC's orientation, and to the pressing political problems these involved, were ever less favourable. That a radical reshaping of SNCC was required was obvious, but the direction it took ultimately broke the 'Beloved Community.'

Black power and identity politics as responses to despair
During the Meredith march in 1966, Stokely Carmichael publicly espoused the rhetoric of 'black power', in part as a response to the growing racial militancy of American blacks. 'Black power' was a deeply ambiguous slogan, which sounded radical and militant, but the political conclusions that might flow from it were never clearly defined, and it was open to mis-representation on the one side and to capture and use by forces far more 'moderate' than SNCC on the other [215-227; see also Shawki 1990]. Certainly SNCC was unable to shape the evolution and use of the idea. Some SNCC members noted that the stress on black power meant a diversion away from notions of 'class' that had previously inspired their activist style and political aims [217, 227, 236].

Black power was not without its critics. Harold Cruse attacked the mystifications in the notion of a unitary black community: 'When one talks bravely about developing political and economic black power one had best start clarifying which class is going to wield this power. Better yet - which class among Negroes has the most power now? And which class will benefit from black power when it arrives?' (Cruse 1984, cit Polletta 1994: 103). Bayard Rustin called the black power perspective 'simultaneously utopian and reactionary', but combined an essential strategic point - that one-tenth of the population could not liberate itself alone - with a weak and unattractive alternative, that SNCC should return to the Democratic Party fold [220].

A more rhetorical and dogmatic style of politics went along with the turn to Black Power, and with it a more hierarchical form of organization (see also Robnett 1997). The adoption of Black Power did give sustenance to those who were moving towards ideas of black separatism within SNCC itself. The shift reflected a new pattern of recruitment. New members had joined since SNCC had begun to turn away from desegregation struggles to attempt a new focus on economic and political goals. Their ideas were more often drawn from sources outside SNCC (notably from the increasingly popular literature of third world liberation) rather than through common

struggle with people in local communities. But with SNCC in strategic and ideological disarray, 'Their brash self assurance, based on their sense of rectitude rather than political accomplishments, promoted their influence among staff members who were searching for a coherent view of their changing world' [192].[36] The separatists declared that all whites were necessarily racist, that SNCC and its internal debates were 'contaminated' by the presence in its ranks of white members, and they demanded an all-black organization. Though they were probably in an overall minority, they wore their opposition down and white members were all expelled. A few months later, the Atlanta group who had been most prominent in urging this development were themselves expelled.

SNCC's 'beloved community' of activists had been transformed into a condition where, as Ella Baker sadly observed, 'They began to sort of eat on each other.' (cit Payne 1995: 367). SNCC itself, from being a distinctive group with its own style of organizing among the dispossessed, declined in resources and influence, becoming 'merely one of many organizations seeking to speak on behalf of black communities' [234]. SNCC had become, whatever its rhetoric, an ever less relevant location of theoretical leadership.

Throwing off the 'muck of ages'

Having examined the weakness of Eyerman and Jamison's static theorizations of cognitive praxis, we began proposing alternative perspectives – via a dialogic perspective on the *Anarchist FAQ*, a situational reading of Fantasia and Dix's strike stories, and a historical account of SNCC. It is now time to bring these different views together, and attempt to offer some answers to the three questions posed at the start of this section: What is activist theorizing? How does it relate to its social context? Why is it 'theory'?

We want to propose an understanding of theorizing as a part of work: thought, in other words, is grounded – directly or indirectly – in activity, and forms an integral part of human agency.[37] Returning to our earlier dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'organic' intellectual activity, within divided societies we find a tension between those forms of thought expressed by traditional intellectuals and those expressed by organic intellectuals The first forms are interwoven with the agency of already-dominant social forces, and the second with the agency of social movements attempting to develop themselves in this already-occupied terrain.

In this perspective, movement theorizing is an aspect of the work that people do as they try to create institutions (movements) that will enable them (indirectly, through a change in the social order) to meet needs that are not currently being met. This section explores the usefulness of this metaphor for 'thinking movement theorizing', and offers possible answers to the three questions above.

Forces and relations of movement production

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[36] A not dissimilar pattern can be seen in the later evolution of the student radical movement, SDS, later in the 160s, when it fell apart into a 'system of sects' (Friedman 1984-5).

[37] See Young (n.d.) for related arguments.

Movement creative labour involves two kinds of relationship. One, equivalent to the 'forces of production' of Marx's *1859 Preface*, is the way in which movement workers interact with the equivalent of 'nature' – including other people in the society (who may be recruited into the movement), institutions which oppose the movement, forces which might be possible allies, and so on.

In this context it is reasonable to see something of the logic of technique: people attempt to discover 'what works', in demos, in strikes, in dealing with the media, in public hearings, in collecting signatures, in forming soviets, or whatever else it is. Part of this involves Tilly's (1978, 1993) 'repertoire of collective action' (which people have to create or appropriate), and part of it entails conflicts about how to *use* the repertoire of collective action (e.g. the arguments after Genova about the use of violence of various kinds, as well as – in a different key – about demonstrations versus 'dialogue', etc.)

However, this logic of technique is constantly contested from above: many people are not lucky enough to imbibe these 'forces of production' at their mother's knee, but have to 'reinvent the wheel', or painstakingly discover the new continent of movement skills. The reasons for this are varied, but include the difficulties faced by movement institutions in surviving and providing continuity in a world they do not control; the undermining of oppositional cultures, and their 'retraditionalization'; and the 'costs of defeat' on the individuals who might have passed skills on.

On the other side, the 'relations of production' might cover how movement workers cooperate with one another in the production of 'social movements' – including formal and informal structures, conflicts and alliances internal to and between movements, the languages that are drawn on to enable the co-production of even something as straightforward as a public meeting, the forms of solidarity and mutual support as well as forms of isolation and ousting, etc.

Base-superstructure problems

This analysis could then be read in at least three ways. One, 'Second International Marxist', reading would be to draw a distinction between 'scientific', 'technical', 'neutral' knowledge (relating to the forces of production: the history of revolutions, media framing, conflict dynamics, military expertise etc.) and 'political', 'ideological' knowledge (concerned with the relations of production: theories of appropriate movement structures, discussion about the kinds of language which are helpful to activist thinking, 'movement moralities', etc. It is perhaps a bit obvious to say that this distinction doesn't work well in practice, not least because the 'relations of production' are usually created in political arguments about *what to do* with relation to the outside world ('forces of production').

A second, 'base-superstructure' possibility would be to say that theorizing is unambiguously part of the relations of production. If so, it would involve not just how activists coordinate their interaction with each other, but would include the knowledge they bring to their interaction with the external world. Unfortunately, the analogy breaks down a bit at this point: because the interaction with the social world is also a social interaction, it also entails various forms of thought. Furthermore, labour is itself a knowledge-generating activity: people learn about wood by working it, and only part of that knowledge can be codified and 'taught' in isolation from actual interaction with wood – or in terms of our analogy, forces of production necessarily include technical knowledge.

So a third reading might start from looking more closely at the indirect relationship between movement work and 'needs'.[38] Movements exist, almost by definition, as part of a learning process of interaction with the outside world.

A simplified model, by way of example: people experience a need, try to meet it through 'appropriate channels' (or try to find such channels), and find that they don't get anywhere. In the process, they meet other people, and discover that this is a general situation, not just a reflection of their own inadequacies. They form an organization and try to lobby, but run up against increasingly systematic opposition. This experience brings it home to them that the problem is not simply ill-will on the part of misguided individuals, but has deeper roots. Though only an example, it illustrates the two-way nature of the learning processes involved in *movement*.

Movement theorizing and unofficial knowledge

Gramsci (1991; 1999a; see Cox 1998) discusses a related situation in the course of his analysis of knowledge and the labour process. In essence, he argues that intellectual activity is double: on the one hand, the official forms of knowledge, which we are typically presented with in general and articulated form and often deeply socialized into, and on the other hand, the unofficial knowledge that we start to generate for ourselves as we struggle actively to resolve the practical problems involved in trying to meet our own needs (see Scott 1990; Wainwright 1994).[39]

The term *struggle* is appropriate here: movement activists are not the Robinson Crusoes presented by individualist rationalisms, nor the beings of pure thought presented by idealist constructivisms. It might be more appropriate to think of them as people who do not always *know* what needs are driving them, but who are engaged in *finding out*, through struggle and through solidarity.

Similarly, they do not necessarily know where they are going, or who their opponents are: these two are problems that they are working on and arguing about, and to which they may give very different answers at different stages of a conflict. Finally, they do not always know who and what they are as social actors: it is in the process of exercising their social muscles, *struggling* in the power-filled and uncertain darkness of the social world, that they come to find out 'what they can be'.

Movement theorizing

Such knowledge cannot be divorced from the process of movement activity. Although (by contrast with official

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theorizing) it is often concrete rather than abstracted, implicit rather than explicit, and 'bundled up'[40] rather than analytic, it can be usefully understood as theoretical because it is not simply a product of 'the situation' or 'folk culture', but is rather a process of ongoing intellectual engagement, whose results (as we have shown with SNCC) shift over time.

More formally, movement theorizing consists of the processes of unofficial thought that movement activists constantly work with – geared primarily towards the practical question 'what should we do?', but including all sorts of related questions, such as 'who are we?', 'what do we want?', 'who is on our side?', 'who are they are what are they doing?', 'what can we do?'

These processes may at times be formalized into what Gramsci describes as 'a vision of the world and a rule of conduct in conformity with that', but the important thing to stress is that both of these – in his language, the 'theoretical' and the 'directive' aspects of intellectual activity – are *achievements*, and subject to constant revision as movements develop and change in interaction with opponents and allies.

Movement theorizing, then, is grounded in the process of producing 'social movements' *against* opposition. It is always to some extent knowledge-in-struggle, and its survival and development is always contested and in process of formation. Its frequently partial, unsystematic and provisional character does not make it any the less worth our attention, though it may go some way towards explaining why academic social movements theory is too often content with taking the 'cream off the top', and disregarding – or failing to notice – everything that has to happen before institutionalized social movement theorizing appears in forms that can be easily appropriated.

Processes of movement theorizing

We conclude this section with some brief illustrations of this process of movement theorizing, which should go some way towards illuminating what the above discussion means in practice.

Folk and other forms of knowledge
Firstly, we can note the existence of a significant level of 'folk knowledge' within activism – understandings which are circulated between activists and between generations, but which do not necessarily find any formal institutionalization.

One obvious such example is the 'repertoire of contention' itself. As Fantasia and Dix's examples show, people can create significant strikes without having any past experience of how to do so, and in some cases without being union members or coming from 'political' backgrounds. Although the role played by more politically aware strikers is significant, ordinary workers have enough 'folk knowledge' – even in previously non-union

occupations – to organize strike action, and on occasion even to win.

This particular part of the 'repertoire' had to be created (see e.g. Linebaugh 1991 on the development of the 'strike' in 18th century London), but once developed it has become part of folk knowledge, capable of circulating even without official institutional supports.

Another example is the symbolic use of history. Just as union officials have often been formally trained in labour relations (for good or ill), so too activist organizations often put a significant effort into transmitting knowledge to their members about 'teaching points' in history: the Russian, Irish and Spanish revolutions are all well-known examples.

Beyond this institutionalization, however, *people remember* – family stories are transmitted, pieces of 'official history' are reread in critical ways, and significant oral histories (P. Thompson 2000) of activism circulate locally, often without ever having achieved the dignity of the printed page.

That so-and-so came from this organization, or did that in 1995, or won this campaign, or has a drink problem, are crucial pieces of the local organizing context, albeit often fragmentary and not necessarily accurate in their own terms. They circulate, though, because in some ways they *work* as tools through which activists grasp the world they work within. Much is forgotten, after all, because it is not usable in the present, or illustrates no significant point.

Finally, straightforward *urban legends* – for example, stories about the denial of US Green Cards to activists photographed on demonstrations – serve to make moral, rather than practical points: in this case, perhaps, that activism has its costs (the story is occasionally told to justify not taking part in demos), or, more positively, that there really is a 'them' as well as an 'us', and that 'we' are significant enough – and worry them sufficiently – to be photographed and excluded.

Movements have their folk knowledge, then; while bearing a variety of relationships to more institutionalized forms of movement knowledge, it is capable of surviving and being passed on outside the printed page or the party school, and being drawn on by actors who have never yet themselves become politically involved.

The different 'levels' of movement theorizing
The relationship between the different levels of movement theorizing is an important question in itself, being one which varies dramatically between different movements as well as (as our SNCC example suggests) within the same organization at different periods in its own development.

On the 'bottom', movements have not only their own 'folk' varieties of movement knowledge, but all the 'muck of ages' that Marxists have had to engage with, in the shape of dominant ideologies, fears and doubts about their own abilities and the like, which weakened people's capacity for action, or simply blocked them from anything 'political'.

On the 'top', movements not only have their own most articulated forms of theorizing – the formalized ideology, the book, the 'line' – but also the forms of knowledge within 'official' intellectual activity, whose proponents are engaged in a constant process of criticizing, colonizing, and undermining movement knowledge.

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[40] This is a rather clumsy way of saying that movement knowledge often involves a single answer, proposal or idea which contains within it *all three* of Eyerman and Jamison's dimensions, and sometimes more.

A significant question has then been how to relate the two. Gramsci's model of the organic and traditional intellectuals – which argues in effect that the 'top' level of movement theorizing should be increasingly driven by processes of intellectual activity coming 'organically' out of the classes in movement, rather than by those coming 'traditionally' from opposing classes – proposes an implicit strategy for one side of the equation.

He also, though, offers a less-well-known model for thinking the other side of the equation, which is the relationship between 'movement intellectuals' and 'ordinary participants' (Gramsci 1997: 163-4; 1999a: 638-41). Here he contrasts Catholic and communist models of movement education. In practice, he argues, the Catholic church since the Counter-Reformation represents a model of stasis: 'intellectuals' are kept within tightly policed boundaries in order to prevent their losing touch entirely with the 'simple' – who are themselves, however, to be left where they are.

In the communist model, the role of the (organic) intellectuals is to be geared towards the *development* of the 'simple': both are members of the same class, involved in the same process of political development, and distinctions of leadership between the two are seen as something temporary and to be overcome through struggle.

Both sides of this equation are brought together in what is in effect a process of 'adult education', not in the sense of university professionals teaching 'ordinary people', but in the sense of adult *self*-education, within which who learns what from whom is something that may shift over time (Mayo 1999).

It is possible, then, to show that movement activists themselves have theories of movement theorizing, which share with our account the sense of dialogue and development and a refusal to recognize academic theory as the only good.

3. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has been a pig to write. If nothing else, its production illustrates the tensions that exist between the processes of activist and academic theorizing! Because of the situational and pragmatic nature of activist theorizing, it is no easy matter to attempt even a slightly systematic exposition. In effect, we are thinking about one mode of theorizing within the processes of another – even while criticizing the latter. In the name of manageability, this conclusion tries to offer a brief summary of the paper, and some questions for discussion.

Summary of propositions

1. There is a significant contrast between academic and activist modes of theorizing, due above all to their different social contexts and purposes.
2. This can be understood in terms of 'organic' and 'traditional' intellectuals, two social positions which can be analyzed sociologically.
3. There are significant, but conflictual, relationships between the two kinds of intellectuals and the two modes of theorizing, and an exploration of these can be illuminating for both.
4. Existing academic analyses of the 'cognitive praxis' of social movements are unconvincing, because they reify particular divisions as given.
5. An examination of activist theory shows that it is *dialogical* and *developmental*, as shifting groups of activists attempt to find answers to the question 'what is to be done?' in situations which they do not fully control.
6. Activist theory can be understood effectively as an aspect of the work involved in 'doing' social movements – implying that it is formed in a process of struggle.
7. This developmental aspect explains something of the different forms taken by activist theorizing as an activity.

Questions for discussion

1. Personal / political: how do 'we' (activist / academics) live our contradictions? Should we be doing something else, and if so what?
2. Strategical: what are the implications of this for movements' theorizing processes, and what are the best ways they can invest in these?
3. Academic: what does 'social movement theory' miss by sidelining movement theory in this sense, and is this blindness a good thing or a bad one from an activist point of view?

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