

# Mapping Social Relations of Struggle: Activism, Ethnography, Social Organization<sup>1</sup>

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*\* I dedicate this chapter to Dr. Jennifer Keck 1954-2002, a friend, colleague and social justice activist who taught in the Social Work Department at Laurentian University, and my dear friend left gay liberation activist Greg Pavelich 1951 – 2003.*

I think of investigating a politico-administrative *regime* as an ordinary part of the day-to-day work of challenging and transforming a ruling apparatus (G. Smith, 1990, 646).

## **Political Activism and Institutional Ethnography**

Institutional ethnography (IE) and political activist ethnography (PAE), have been vital to me in the sociological work which I produce in relation to struggles against oppressive sexual and gender regulation, national security, and ruling relations (Kinsman, 1995, 1996, 1997; 2000; 2003a, 2003b, 2004). Central to this work is developing an analysis that helps to produce the conditions for more effective activism for changing the world. Making visible and critically analyzing social organization is central to this project.

A political commitment to taking up the side of the oppressed and exploited is key to IE and PAE. The world is investigated to disclose its social organization so that it can be transformed from these standpoints. This connection between investigating social organization, activism, and social transformation is what attracted me to IE as a left queer activist and graduate student involved in resistance to the bath raids in the early 1980s. This is also where I came to work with and to learn from George Smith.

George Smith's work more generally (G. Smith, 1988, 1998), but especially in "*Political Activist as Ethnographer*" (G. Smith, 1990 and this volume) extended IE more

systematically to developing sociology *for* social movements and *for* activists. He builds on the insider's knowledge of social movement activists and uses political organizing and confrontation with ruling regimes as valuable resources in developing sociology. PAE builds upon the research and theorizing about the social world and how it is organized that is already "going on" in social movements (see Clarke and Thompson this volume). While there are often limitations to this research, it is an everyday/everynight part of the life of social movements whether explicitly recognized or not -- whether in relation to attending a demonstration, a meeting, a confrontation with institutional forces that a movement is up against, planning for the next action or campaign, or planning a squat or the occupation of a building. Activists are thinking, talking about, researching, and theorizing about what is going on, what they are going to do next, and how to analyze the situations they face.

Social movement life is not separate from research, although this is often the way it is posed in academic circles, and mirrored in movement circles. This position replicates theory/research and theory/practice divides. Instead there is always and already grass roots research going on. In a Gramscian democratic sense (Gramsci, 1971), movement activists are also already intellectuals (with an organic relation to social movements and struggles), researchers, and theorists. There is much to be learned from movement organizers and activists and from their confrontations with ruling regimes. PAE makes these practices more explicit, critical and focused on social organization and its transformation extending the capacities of movement activists to do more effective forms of research – which are at the very same time more effective forms of activism. This also breaks down the distinctions between activism and research that pervades the

sociological and established discourse on social movements. PAE requires working against the standard binary oppositions of theory versus practice, research versus activism, and researcher versus activist constructed through academic disciplines, professionalization, and institutionalization (D. Smith, 1987, 1999).

In this chapter I push further the insights of *“Political Activist as Ethnographer”* developing one line for elaborating this work through mapping the social relations of struggle in which movements are involved. Following a sketch of aspects of PAE I outline what mapping the social relations of struggle is about. I point out how insights drawn from autonomist Marxism can aid in explicating the social capacities of struggle and I use the resistance to the bath raids and the global justice movement to begin to explicate how this can be done. As an integral part of this I point to connections between social movement activism and the ethnomethodological practice of breaching experiments in the production of knowledge through disrupting ‘social order,’ and to activist language in relation to the effectiveness of activism. Finally, I raise questions and draw some conclusions regarding overcoming binary oppositions between research and activism and the need to develop an activist pedagogy for social transformation. This is intended as a beginning point for dialogue and not the final word.

PAE also requires challenging the “common-sense” theorizing that can often be ideological in character – uprooted from actual social practices and organization<sup>2</sup> – put forward in movement circles as George Smith points out in *“Political Activist as Ethnographer”*. For instance, we need to challenge approaches that lead us away from addressing the forms of ruling social organization we are up against, such as the

disappearance of class relations from mainstream gay movement analysis, or the obscuring of gender or race relations in the union and other movements.

In some movement theories, as in the one's George Smith addresses conceptualizations of 'homophobia,' 'AIDSphobia,' or 'red-tape' are given agency as the social world is reified and fetishized (Lukacs, 1968; D. Smith, 1999, 45-69; Holloway, 2002) and social relations between people are transformed into relations between thing-like concepts that seem to act on their own in the world. Reification and fetishization are major problems not only in ruling discourse but can also limit and contain the theory and practice of social movements. George Smith was profoundly committed to an anti-reification approach constantly making visible social organization and how people can resist and transform social relations. We have to constantly resist giving agency and power to things.

*"Political Activist as Ethnographer,"* despite its many insights, marks only a beginning point for developing PAE. Remaining questions include how to build this type of research into the everyday organizing of social movements, how to make doing this research more participatory, and how to build dialogical,<sup>3</sup> multi-voiced, and non-monological discussions into movements which can link diverse research, analysis and perspectives discussions. There are also major questions about how to get funding for PAE research since it develops knowledge for movements and for activism which many official funding bodies will not be interested in funding. I return to some of these questions in the conclusion.

## **Mapping Social Relations of Struggle**

Mapping out the social relations of struggle in which a movement finds itself is crucial to developing knowledge *for* social movements. This is the relation between activism and research that John Clarke argues for in this volume in relation to struggles against homelessness and poverty in the context of the capitalist re-organization of urban spaces. ‘Mapping out’ I take both from Dorothy Smith’s use of ‘mapping’ and Marie Campbell’s and Fran Gregor’s use of ‘mapping out’ in their primer on IE (D. Smith, 1987, 1999; Campbell and Gregor, 2002). It is a mistake to see this mapping out of social relations as simply a technical matter since it is also very much a political and social undertaking. There are also problems with the possible colonialist, imperialist, or orientalist connotations of ‘mapping’ developed as the white European-derived powers mapped the world from their standpoints. The mapping I am arguing for is not a ‘neutral’ or disinterested mapping but is instead an engaged and reflexive map making from the standpoints of the oppressed and the social movements based on addressing the social contradictions these movements organize around/within and against. This mapping out maintains an indexical (context-dependent) and reflexive (mutually determined) relation to social movement organizing and confrontations with ruling regimes. Activists must be able to locate themselves within these mappings of social relations of struggle and be able to use them to further their analysis of the situations they face charting paths forward for their/our struggles. Later on in this chapter I provide ideas for doing this in diagrams of the social relations of struggle involved in the resistance to the bath raids and for the global justice movement. You may wish to briefly explore them now and come back to them in more detail later (see diagrams later in chapter). .

Mapping out the relations of struggle is crucially about the mapping out of the ruling relations that oppressed people and movements confront. But it is not only an analysis of ruling relations. This can be a danger in some strands of IE work, as in much Foucauldian oriented work which remains fixated on the operations of ruling relations (or official discourse in Foucault (1978)) obscuring from our view possibilities for resistance and transformation, and sometimes becoming trapped within ruling relations. As Clarke suggests in this volume we also need to examine our own capacities and resources. Mapping out the relations of struggle quite centrally also needs to be an analysis of the social organization of the social forces of opposition, resistance and transformation – of the sources of agency that can bring social transformation about. This aspect of PAE, however, remains underdeveloped.

### **The Social Organization of Struggle: Composition, Cycles, and Circulation**

In elaborating this aspect of PAE insights from autonomist Marxism can be very useful. Autonomist Marxism is a current within Marxism that learns from workers struggles and focuses on developing working class (in a broad sense, including the work of domestic, reproductive, and student labour) autonomy and power in a capitalist society that is constituted by and through class and social struggle (Cleaver, 2000; Dyer-Witheford, 1999, 62-90, G. Kinsman, 2005a). Autonomy in autonomist Marxism can be seen as autonomy from capital; from the official leaderships of the trade unions and political parties; and the capacity and necessity of groups of workers who experience different oppressions acting autonomously from others (blacks from whites, women from men, and queers from straights).

Autonomist Marxism shares with IE and PAE a deeply rooted revolt against political economy readings of Marxism (D. Smith, 1999, 29-44; Cleaver, 2000) that reify the social world, give all power to capital and ruling relations and that reproduce the focus of capitalism on the 'main business' of making profit, instead of making visible the agency of workers and the oppressed. They also share a wider notion of 'work' that is not reducible to labour power as a commodity in a capitalist society. For both approaches this is influenced by the theoretical discoveries leading up to the wages for/against housework struggle. The analytical basis for this was created through the work of autonomist Marxist feminists like Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (1972), and Silvia Federici (1975), who point to the significance of the work of housewives in reproducing the commodity labour power for capital (also see D. Smith 1987, 165-166; Lilley and Shantz 2004). There is also ontological compatibility since both approaches view the social world as being produced through the social practices of people. These areas of overlap and similarity despite tensions make this a productive approach to learn from in extending how PAE can map out the social relations of struggle relating to the agency, capacities, and power of the oppressed.

Autonomist Marxism develops a number of useful tools for thinking through class and social struggles. As long as these terms are not understood as monolithic in character and are used in the concrete social and historical sense of pointing to social relations that need to be investigated, they can be very helpful to us in our struggles and theorizing. They also need to be extended and complicated, to deal more fully with struggles over race, gender, sexuality, ability and other lines of oppression.

Autonomist Marxist theorists and activists use the expression working class composition (which we can extend to social struggle or movement composition) to point to the specific forms of social organization of the working class in relation to capital and ruling relations in particular social and historical periods. For instance, they ask: how integrated is the working class into capitalist relations, how internally divided is the working class, how autonomous is working class activity from capital or how subversive of social relations is working class struggle in a particular context? Unlike in some Marxist uses, the “working class” is not a thing, an object, or classification; it is always in process and exists in struggle (Cleaver 2000, Dyer-Witheford, 1999; D. Smith 1987, 1999). It is continually changing and in the process of remaking itself and being remade. History and shifting forms of social organization therefore become crucial to grasping working class and social struggles.

Capitalists actively struggle to decompose the capacities of working class composition through exacerbating and re-organizing internal divisions in the working class, through ripping apart sources of working class and oppressed people’s power, through fragmenting groups and struggles, through extending social surveillance, and through the transformation of ‘training’ and ‘skills’ (D. Smith and G. Smith 1990). These attempts to decompose working class struggles produce new conditions for the possible re-composition of working class struggle and power. The process of class composition, decomposition, and re-composition constitutes a cycle of struggle within autonomist Marxism. It is crucial to grasp where we are at in these cycles of struggle to evaluate our own sources of power and weakness and how to move forward.



For autonomist Marxists circulation of struggles gets at the ways through which different struggles have an impact on each other, sometimes circulating the most ‘advanced’ forms of struggle. For instance, we can look at how early radical and socialist feminist struggles had impacts in multiple movements and settings, including within union movements. We can also see this in terms of how certain tactics of direct action, and forms of organizing including affinity groups (small groups that are organized along a basis of affinity through which people participate in direct actions) and spokes councils (where representative of affinity groups come together to make decisions), were spread and mobilized around the globe in the years following the Seattle protests against the WTO in 1999 (Notes from Nowhere, 2003; Yuen, Katsiaficas, Burton-Rose, 2004; Hurl, 2005).

This mode of analysis gives us useful ideas on how part of mapping out the social relations of struggle becomes addressing our own powers and capacities in relation to the social composition of struggles, the cycles of struggles we are located in, and the circulation of struggles between different movements. I clarify how these notions can assist us in concrete social investigations in the next sections.

### **Within and Against Ruling Relations**

This also points to ways in which PAE mapping of the social relations of struggle is not the same as critically investigating the set of ruling relationships that oppressed people confront that IE more typically focuses on. It is instead a mapping of the social struggles themselves, a relational mapping that sketches out the conflicts between ruling relations and social movements. Social movements and class and social struggles are not simply

outside of capital, or ruling relations, but are also internal to them reshaping the ground upon which ruling strategies are deployed. Social movement activism and organizing closes off options of rule and governance for ruling agencies forcing the adoption of different strategies. This can be seen in the classic example from Marx's *Capital* of working class revolt and organization closing off the option of raising the rate of the exploitation of surplus value from workers through the lengthening of the working day (the absolute strategy) and forcing the capitalist class to develop a new relative strategy (based on the application of technology to production, speeding-up production, and 'scientific'-management technologies) (Marx 1977, 307-672).

The bath raids that George Smith writes about were themselves a response organized through ruling relations to the growth and public visibility of gay men's communities and of queer sex which had moved beyond the 'private' realm to which the 1969 criminal code reform attempted to confine them (Kinsman, 1996, 288-345). The massive resistance to the bath raids and the composition of struggle built around this pushed back the forces regulating queer sexualities opening up social space for the emergence of broader gay and lesbian community formation. This resistance and cycle of struggle made widespread use of the bawdy house legislation and mass police arrests very difficult for a period of time forcing the police to re-focus on more individual and dispersed arrests on 'indecent act' and other charges (Kinsman 1996, 344-345). Social movement activism undermines previous strategies of regulation forcing the elaboration of new strategies of management that create new terrains of social struggle.

PAE allows activists to map out the social relations that they are engaged with in their struggles. This is a mapping out of the various institutional relations and obstacles

that movements are facing, identifying the contradictions that exist in ruling relations, and the weak points that can be actively challenged by social movements. But it also means mapping out possible allies and how to develop alliances with other social forces that are in motion that can be effective in transforming the relationships that movements confront. This begins from where movement activists are with their practices, insights, and questions, what they are confronting, what they are learning, what their knowledge is. It is not, however, to begin from the speculative or ideological perspectives that sometimes hegemonize movements.

### **Mapping the relations of struggle of the bath raids – a sketch**

In elaborating on mapping the social relations of struggle I first look back at one of the sites of struggle that George Smith writes about – the resistance to the bath raids in Toronto in the early 1980's. I picked this instance because I was involved in it and it happened in the historical past and we can look at it in a somewhat different way than some of the current struggles that we are now engaged in [see diagram].

The starting place for this mapping is the rupture in experience between gay men in the baths, who were arrested in the early 1980's, and the police who were directly engaging with them, along with that between gay men and supporters and the police at the demonstrations against the raids. As the doors were smashed down by the cops (Nicol, 2002), what the gay men who were sitting in the cubicles or having sex, in the bath houses experienced directly were these individual cops and what they were doing. The analysis that some activists produced that it was the individual homophobia of these cops that was the problem often had something to do with people's immediate experience

of, and reading of, what happened to them on that particular evening. But this experience was socially organized through and connected to a broader set of social relations of the criminal code and police organization as George Smith points out. Taking up the experiences, the standpoint, of gay men in the bath houses that night, and those resisting the raids in the streets, what can we begin to see using PAE about this process of social organization?

First I paint in the ruling relations that are implicated in this struggle. There is the police force themselves, and there is a whole process of social organization here, not just the individual officers who would be most visible to the men being arrested, or on the demonstrations, as George Smith excavates in *Political Activist as Ethnographer*. There is the criminal code, and its bawdy-house section, which ties together the police, the courts, the criminal justice system, the work of lawyers and the social organization of the law and how this is tied into a broader series of state relations.

Regarding the legal system it should be clarified that lawyers are on different sides, at different points of time and in different positions, of/in this divide. There were not only the Crown Attorneys and their agents who were working trying to convict these men. There were also many defence lawyers, who worked with the RTPC, trying to win victory for these men in their court cases. Much was learned from these lawyers about the social organization of the law and the criminal justice system. The whole defence campaign, with major public and fund-raising activities outside the court room, was remarkably successful but it should be pointed out that there also were tensions, at times, between the defence lawyers and the Right to Privacy Committee (RTPC). Sometimes the lawyers came up with legal strategies such as making deals, that were politically

unacceptable to the RTPC. The relation with defence lawyers itself could also be a terrain of struggle since the work of lawyers is articulated with a legal system and a legal ideology that is part of the organization of oppression and exploitation.

Another site of struggle was the mainstream media and how they portrayed/framed (Fishman, 1988) the bath raids and the resistance to them. This is on the border line spanning the line of disjuncture between the gay movement and ruling relations. As George Smith points out the mass media become an important terrain of confrontation and managing (or attempting to manage) media coverage can be crucial to activism in communicating with broader layers of people (1990 643). The massive resistance and composition of struggle of the gay movement was able to win types of framing in the mainstream media that facilitated the extension of the struggle.<sup>4</sup>

These are some of the institutional relations that the RTPC was up against, and sometimes implicated within. The initiatives of the RTPC, challenged these relations but this was also simultaneously part of researching and learning more about these relationships. What George Smith examines is this field of struggle, this political confrontation as a major site of research and knowledge production.

Even though George Smith in *Political Activist as Ethnographer* tends to write about this research as almost individual in character, it had a more collective character. It was not simply that George Smith was coming to these conclusions, many other people in the RTPC were as well and this was hooked into the political development of the RTPC. At first in the RTPC following the bath raids, many people wanted to simply argue that bath houses are not bawdy houses and had nothing to do with prostitution and therefore that this police campaign was just totally invalid. What other people began to realize, and

George Smith in particular, was that it was the organization of the criminal code that allowed the police to engage in these types of raids and activities. If we did not grasp what the 'bawdy-house' law in the criminal code allowed the police to do we would not be able to combat the police repression. Popular education was conducted in the RTPC and an analysis was developed that it was the bawdy house laws themselves and especially the construction of gay male sex as acts of "indecent" that had to be directly challenged. The ability of the cops to be able to engage in these activities had to be removed if the struggle was going to succeed. Skirting the issue of the criminal code and the bawdy-house legislation would not get at the way in which the attacks were socially organized and would severely limit the composition of struggle the RTPC could mobilize and co-ordinate.

The actual organizing of the RTPC and its strengths and capacities is also key to mapping out the social relations of struggle. The tactics the RTPC engaged in included organizing marches to go onto Toronto's Yonge Street when it was then illegal to have marches on this street, along with other rallies and demonstrations, media conferences, deputations, fund-raising for legal defence, and other activities. We learned, for instance, that by organizing hundreds of people in compact groups, including through the linking of arms that we could prevent the police from trying to confine us to the sidewalk when we turned onto Yonge Street. In the orbit of the RTPC a new gay and lesbian self-defence street patrol emerged to work against violence against gay men and lesbians that also assisted in the marshalling of demonstrations. There were important public action, fund-raising, legal support, and communication committees of the RTPC. The communications committee monitored the media, organized media releases and conferences, and also

produced *Action!* the publication of the RTPC. Major decisions were made in large assemblies that after the major raids in early 1981 could have more than a thousand people at them. The first meetings of the public action committee had hundreds of people in attendance.

### **Beyond ‘outside’ and ‘inside’**

We encounter and map a series of social relations that are not always entirely distinct. This comes back to the discussions at the conference that this book grows out of about ‘us and them’ and ‘inside and outside’ distinctions and how these can often times change in relation to people’s implication and complicity in institutional relations. While we may be in rupture with ruling relations on one front we may be fully inside ruling relations on another. The RTPC itself was an alliance of different social forces coming out of the gay and to some extent lesbian communities. It included the bath and bar owners themselves and it had to to be effective, and middle class professionals and managers. What is interesting is that when there was a mass movement and the RTPC was a mass organization, with hundreds of people involved in its discussions and activities the interests of the bar owners, professionals, and managers that were sometimes quite distinct from the larger number of working class, bar, and street gays in the RTPC, were held in check and subordinated to this mass struggle and organizing. When it became much less of a dynamic organization, when the cycle and circulations of struggle had died down with only dozens of people involved, the interests of these strata began to becomes much more distinct. You then have a process of class stratification taking place, or what I refer to as the queer professional managerial strata emerging out of the

resistance to the bath raids, and shifting the political character of the RTPC (Kinsman 1996, 5-6, 381-382).

There are also links with other movements and allies that strengthened the RTPC's composition of struggle, including the feminist movement, the anti-racist movement and the union movement. But it is also important for us to analyze concretely how these alliances and circulations of struggles were made. For instance, it was not spontaneously, without any organizing behind it that Wally Majesky,<sup>5</sup> then head of the Metro Toronto Labour Council, came to speak out against the bath raids. Because I knew activists in the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), I learned that it was gay postal worker activists who raised at the Metro Toronto Labour Council that the council should be opposing the bath raids. They got the Labour Council to adopt this position. The self-organizing of gays in the union movement is also quite important to flesh out in terms of strategizing around this activism.

Another vital aspect of the circulation of struggles at the time of the bath raids was that many people from the black and South Asian communities who were also facing police repression came out against the police repression of the gay community. A limited common front against police repression was formed between a number of groups experiencing police arrests and violence. You also had the largest ever contingent of gay men organized by the RTPC and by Gay Liberation Against the Right Everywhere (GLARE) in the Toronto International Women's Day march in March 1981 following the bath raids and the initial resistance to them. Important connections were able to be made by many gay men in this context of the need to support the feminist movement since the feminist movement was supporting them and they were also in motion challenging social



forces of oppression. This was a social context far more facilitating of the circulation of struggles than when large numbers of gay men and other groups are not in motion.

### **Beginning to Map Struggles against Global Capitalism**

The mass resistance to the bath raids that George Smith writes about took place in the early 1980s. As Dorothy Smith points out in the Introduction ruling relations have been transformed since then, becoming more extensively extra-locally organized. I suggest that PAE and IE analysis is now even more important than it was in the past since the development of new forms of capitalist globalization increasingly mean that social power is organized on a more international level and no longer in local communities or in regions or sometimes even within nation-states. The nation-state has been superseded in important respects as a framework in which capital is organized and as a framework in which working class and social struggles can be contained (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004) . We have seen the generation of a whole series of new ‘global’ and ‘regional’ organizations through which capital and ruling relations come to be organized. At the same time capitalist globalization also works through an intensification of aspects of nation-state formation and this includes the tightening up of border restrictions against migrants, immigrants, refugees, and people of colour and assaults upon the poor and the rights of workers (Sharma 2000, 2001; McNally 2002, Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004). Crucial to the current waves of capitalist globalization is the attempt to convert more aspects of our social and ‘natural’ worlds into commodities (including water, seeds, education, services, and even our emotions in emotional labour) and a further colonization of the global commons. We are witnessing a new enclosure movement

which is extending the commodification of our lives while pushing more and more people off the land and separating people from access to various means of production (McNally, 2002, 69-92.). New forms of poverty *and* proletarianization are being produced through this process.

We desperately need PAE and IE work on the social organization of capitalist globalization and struggles against it. Developing this analysis on a more global level, however, presents difficulties. We need to always link the local and the global in processes of social organization accomplished by people and to see the importance of these mediating linkages. At the same time it is vital not to reduce the ‘global’ to the ‘local’ or the ‘local’ to the ‘global’ but to develop an analysis that sees the links between social relations moving from the multiple local interactional worlds we live and struggle in to the more extended social and institutional relations that are produced through these multiple local interactional relations. Protests organized against a meeting of the WTO in a particular city, for instance, are not simply ‘global’ events but also occur in particular local settings just as ‘global’ relations are always accomplished in local settings and have impacts in people’s local everyday worlds. Global ruling relations are directly linked into more regional and local forms of “rationalization,” and “restructuring” which have direct impacts in people’s local everyday/everynight lives (Sears, 2003 1-29; Kinsman 2005b, and Roxana Ng this volume) We have to move beyond abstraction both in relation to the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ (see Conway 2004; A. Thompson forthcoming). Both the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ are accomplished by people, even though it is often harder for us to grasp translocal social relations.<sup>6</sup> Below is one way in which making these local/global connections can be seen in a preliminary sketch of social organization:

A study by Dawn Currie and Anoja Wickramasinghe (1998) begins with the everyday experiences of women garment workers in factories in a Free Trade Zone in Sri Lanka. [They] ... describe the long hours, the stress, the effects on their health, job insecurity and 'the growing casualization of work' as women experience them. They go on from this account to locate such experiences in economic policies of Sri Lanka in the changed global economy and the complex of communication and management created by transnational corporations specializing in textiles. The latter locates Sri Lankan textile factories in a worldwide hierarchical division of the labour of fashion production articulated to different markets (Cheng and Gereffi 1994). From there connections can be made with the organization of design and advertising in the fashion industry that establish the perennially changing and market-differentiating norms of style, colour and so on. (D. Smith 2002,39)

This analysis needs to be developed beyond the language of 'economics' and 'markets' but it connects the local and global through social organization and relations. Another illustration of how this is done is in Roxana Ng's contribution in this book.

Since I have been involved as an activist in the global justice movement I outline a very preliminary sketch of some of the social relations of struggle that this movement faces [see diagram]. I only address aspects of these relations of struggle here and I hope others will take this analysis much further (on this see Thompson this volume and Choudry 2004). Most crucially for me the more radical – radical as in getting to the root of the problem – currents in the global justice movement have once again made the naming of capitalism as the problem possible and also made resistance to the social relations of capitalism actual again, starting with the Zapatista revolt (Midnight Notes 2001; Notes from Nowhere, 2003). The protests inside and outside the WTO meetings in Seattle in 1999 and in Cancun in 2003 were also highly effective in obstructing the progress of capitalist globalization (Independent Media Centre/Big Noise, 2000; Independent Media Centre, 2003; Yuen, Daniel-Burton-Rose, Katsiaficas, 2004, 48-71, 109-125).

The line of fault this investigation begins from is the disjunctures between the commitment of global justice activists to work against poverty and exploitation and to try to expand democracy into new areas with the actuality of capitalist globalization which intensifies exploitation, poverty and major areas of oppression and restricts the limited forms of democratic participation currently existing (Choudry, 2004). The social relations of struggle that the global justice movement finds itself within includes the emerging international bodies of global capitalism such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the Group of 8 (G8), and more regional agreements such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the North-American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC). We need more IE work for activists done on how these institutions operate and the linkages between them.

These international and regional forms of capitalist organizing rest on the organization of state, corporate, professional and other ruling relations and the identification of ‘national security’ with defense of these institutions of global capitalism, especially in the context of the new “war on terrorism.” Years prior to 9/11 it became common for police forces in Canada to use pepper spray and to engage in new forms of criminalization of global justice protests, beginning with the Vancouver protests against APEC in 1997 (Pearlston, 2000; Pue, 2000).

Given the increasing criminalization of political dissent which is an integral part of capitalist globalization activist currents within global justice movements find themselves up against the police and the criminal justice system in a major way. The use of direct action by thousands of activists in Seattle in 1999, combined with mass

demonstrations, caught the police off guard and they responded violently when they were ordered to clear the streets. The composition of struggle mobilized in Seattle was based on the development of a series of skills and capacities mobilized through internet communication networks, affinity groups, spokescouncils, street medics, legal support teams, and a series of alliances and solidarities built between networks of activists coming out of different movements (ecological, feminist, anti-racist, international solidarity, anti-poverty, with some connections to radical union activism) (Hurl 2005). Direct action protests have led to the creation of a great deal of useful and insightful analysis of police, jail and criminal justice system organization and this could be extended much further using PAE (Thompson, this volume). The police and authorities, however, also do their own research and learn how to respond to try to neutralize the impact of direct action protests and to decompose this social organization of struggle, such as arresting people prior to the actions even starting, attacking or shutting down convergence centres where activists gather (Thompson, this volume), or encircling people in the 'green zones' where people gather for non-direct action festivities.

At the same time protestors used tactics such as snake marches to try to outmaneuver police responses. These are marches that can move in any direction to avoid the police and police encirclement to try to disrupt events or parts of cities. While activists have learned a fair bit about police and criminal justice organization and how to resist these more focused PAE work linked to these forms of activism is required.

The global justice movement has been at its most effective when a series of different social forces and modes of struggle have intersected. For instance, in Seattle and Cancun you had the coming together of direct action protests (including in Cancun within

the security zone); large mass protests by trade unions, and peasant organizations (in Cancun); creating a space for protests by representatives of some 'third world' countries inside the meetings. This composition of struggle is what led to the breakdown and cancellation of these meetings. Global justice mobilizations have been at their weakest when direct action protests have been able to be isolated and separated off from the actions (or more likely inaction) of larger mass organizations which has often led to the mass arrests of activists.

### **Activism, which activism?**

Some of the reasons for the difficulties of global justice organizing, especially after 9/11 in the US and Canada has been the different social interests and forces that compose the 'movement' and the success achieved by ruling strategies in trying to decompose the composition of this social struggle. The global justice movement has a range of strands and possible allies including unions, feminist groups, community organizations, ecological groups, "third world" organizations, and NGOs. Forces engaged in global justice organizing range from mass organizations of struggle like the Landless Rural Workers Movement of Brazil, or the Piqueteros in Argentina, or the Zapatista communities in Mexico, to radical union movements in South Korea and other countries; to direct action activists in the North; to the union movement in the North which has a much more moderate and limited agenda than many of the previously mentioned movements; to various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) which can have rather divergent tendencies but most often have more moderate, often pro-capitalist perspectives (Choudry 2004). At times these diverse and somewhat contradictory currents are able to

maintain certain types of alliances and push struggles forward. At others the differences between groups comes to the fore usually isolating the more radical of these groups and leaving them more vulnerable to state repression. State, corporate, and professional regulation can enter into and transform the character of NGOs converting them into professionalized, bureaucratic and pro-capitalist forms of organizing (Ng 1996, Walker 1990, Kinsman 1997). Choudry describes how:

Another disjuncture exists between the language and priorities of a professionalized NGO stratum which privileges particular forms of activity such as lobbying and policy analysis, and the dynamics and aspirations of many grassroots movements. In turn a disjuncture exists between experience and claims to speak for the interests of communities and people for whom NGOs have no mandate to represent (Choudry 2004, 6).

This produces the basis for some of the major differences within global justice organizations which are divisions over how far to go in resisting the policies of capitalist globalization and divisions over the forms of struggle that should be used. Often times the mainstream union leaderships in the North along with the major NGOs based in the North attempt to reform the relations of capitalist globalization rather than attempting to radically transform them. Our mapping out of the social relations of struggle facing global justice organizing has to include the differential tying in of ‘oppositional’ social forces to state and capitalist relations. The global justice movement needs more focused IE and PAE work on the social organization of unions, NGOs and other organizations starting from multiple and varied social locations, and trying to hook up this research into a more overall transnational analysis. As Choudry also suggests, we:

need to uncover and understand the antagonisms and conflicts which exist between and within NGOs and social movements, and to identify the ways in which these are organized, and in whose interests. But, in order to do so ... we need to extend institutional ethnography, to transnationalize and

democratize it, in order to explicate an increasingly complex and transnational web of actors involved in “anti-globalization” activism (Choudry 2004, 5).

As Choudry points out many NGOs are regulated through state legislation, or through subcontractual relations with state agencies, or through developing consultative relations with bodies like the World Bank or the WTO (Choudry 2004, 12) which leads to the mobilization of very different interests than those mobilized by more grass roots activist movements. Choudry suggests that there is no common ‘we’ of a global justice movement and the divergent class and social interests need to be recognized as different social projects. The same tensions and conflicts exist within other sites of social and class struggle, as John Clarke illustrates in his contribution to this book, where the moderate and social democratic left has at times been complicit in attacks on the homeless and the poor, and have attempted to undermine and isolate the radical anti-poverty activism of groups like OCAP.

This addresses questions that emerged at the Sociology for Changing the World conference and that Marie Campbell raises in her chapter in this volume. In some of the sessions there was ambiguity and controversy over what ‘activism’ is. Activism can refer to a range of different activities, different relationships to social struggles, and we have to begin to realize that some people are talking about NGO’s and service organization when they talk about activism and other people are talking about the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) and global justice organizations that organize in an anti-capitalist fashion. How can we develop knowledge that understands that certain parts of ‘movements’ are much more implicated in ruling relations than other parts of movements



are? And what does this entail regarding the types of research that we are doing and for whom?

One way sections of the global justice movement have tried to address the need to build alliances between different groups and to link the global and local is to move beyond a politics defined by ‘summit hopping’ to get involved in local organizing against the everyday impacts of capitalist globalization including poverty, homelessness, deportations of immigrants and refugees, social service cuts, and the defense of health-care and education. This is vital but this needs to be combined with the continuing circulation of struggles based on more central confrontations with the emerging institutions of global capitalism (Hurl 2005), such as those in Seattle, Prague, Quebec City, Genoa, Cancun, Santiago (against APEC in Nov. 2004).

### **Attempting to rip apart the movement – ‘bad’ versus ‘good’ protestors**

The declared “war on terrorism” has been rather effectively used to decompose the composition of global justice struggles making it a much more difficult terrain to organize on, especially in the US and Canada. One line of the undercutting of the composition of this struggle has been the generation of a division between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ protestors, and the division between ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ forms of protest. We need more critical work on the social organization of this “war on terrorism” which is also a war on dissent.

A major ruling response to the composition of the global justice movement struggles that came together in Seattle (that started during the first day of the actions themselves) was the division of the movement between ‘good; and ‘bad’ protestors, often

coded as being between ‘non-violent’ and ‘violent’ protestors. The ‘violence’ in this case was the breaking of some Starbucks and Nike windows. For many people who did not attend the Seattle protests, or had no access to alternative sources of information, the only available media framing of these protests was the ‘violence’ of the protestors smashing a few windows. The mass police violence and the use of tear gas and pepper spray that day conveniently disappeared.

The global justice movement confronts problems with increasingly concentrated corporate ownership of the mass media which has often framed up the global justice movement with this focus on its ‘violent’ character focusing on the small amounts of property destruction that have occurred at some demonstrations. This ignores the socially systematic forms of social violence that are organized through capitalist globalization including poverty, homelessness, cuts in social assistance and social programs and the actual forms of police and state violence that are mobilized against protestors (McNally, 244-249). To suggest that the small-scale and targeted property destruction that some activists engage in is the introduction of ‘violence’ into this setting forgets that capitalist social relations are already saturated with social violence. Along with some state and other political forces the mass media attempts to divide the movement between ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ protestors which attempts to associate global justice organizing with political and social ‘deviance’(Fishman, 1988). The media and official framing of the global justice movement as “violent” and as being composed of “bad” protestors is in part an attempt to prevent alliances from being built between different activists and movements and global justice activists need to work to overcome these divisions. This is

an attempt, sometimes successful, to separate young direct action activists from more ‘mainstream’ currents in union leaderships and in NGOs.

In response the global justice movement has facilitated the creation of independent media sites around the world which are important sources of information and for hooking people up that people cannot get from the mainstream media. This is an important resource that needs to be extended to become a basis for continuing recompositions of struggle in relation to the mass media and the internet (Dyer-Witheford 1999,116-129; Cleaver 1998; Kidd 2004 ). While the generation of independent media has been very important it unfortunately does not get through to a mass audience.

At the same time the mainstream media is sometimes understood as too monolithic and corporate controlled in character by global justice activists deriving some of their analysis from the too-structuralist analysis of the news media associated with the ‘propaganda model’ of Chomsky and Herman (Chomsky and Herman 2002), with little grasp of how journalism is socially organized as a work process (Fishman 1988). Despite the growing concentration of ownership of the media there are still spaces for intervention and media activism into these relations that can disrupt them, or at least seize some momentary media coverage. Action grounded in an analysis of the social organization of journalism and media leads to more effective forms of media activism intervening into the social organization of the mainstream media as well as building more effective alternatives.

### **Activist Breaching Experiments: Disrupting Research and Disruption as Research**

Part of what the RTPC engaged in its political confrontation and research, part of what the radical currents in the global justice movements engage in, and a day to day part of many activist movements, is similar to an ethnomethodological breaching experiment. Breaching experiments in ethnomethodology were developed by Harold Garfinkel to learn more about how social organization is put together through disrupting it and learning from the social reactions produced (Garfinkel, 1967). For instance, he asked his students to go home and to act as boarders with their parents. Part of what was learned was the fragility of ‘social order’ and how this depends on a process of continuous social accomplishment. It was also through these breaching experiments that ethnomethodologists were able to learn about the indexical (context-dependent) and reflexive (mutually determined) character of the social world. For these breaching experiments, and for its opposition to the portrayal of people as “cultural dopes” in mainstream sociological theory, ethnomethodology came to be labelled as a ‘subversive’ current within sociology.

In activism these breaching experiments are situated in the life and cycles of struggle of movements that are confronting social and institutional relations. Through disruption the objective is to learn more about how these relations are socially organized so they can be more effectively challenged and transformed (also see Andrew Thompson in this volume). This could include demonstrations at a police commission meeting combined with an official deputation inside and seeing what can be learned from troubling these institutional relations. Similarly direct action protests aimed at disrupting organizations like the WTO have learned a fair bit about the social organization of the police, the criminal justice system, and the organization of the WTO itself. This is a

concrete way of learning more about how ruling relations are organized, and what their weak links might be. If we can begin to see social movement activism as a more political, and collective practice of breaching experiments this becomes another way of thinking through how knowledge is produced within social movements. Action and research can be directly linked together. These breaching experiments are not simply done on local interactional levels, which was the situation in Garfinkel's proposals to his students, but can also occur on a more extra-local basis, when you look at the extended social relations that the global justice movement confronts. These are breaching experiments that occur in a rather different context that are based on troubling social relations and learning from disrupting the institutional relations that we are up against.

Politically situated breaching experiments become a central way of mapping out the social relations of struggle from the standpoints of organizing and activism. The very capacity to undertake these forms of research are tied to the composition and cycles of struggle involved in social movement mobilization and organization. There is a radically different relationship here between theory and practice than in traditional academic constructions. Sometimes when we talk about research and activism in the academic world we replicate distinctions around notions of consciousness and activity that are detrimental to our objectives. We can fall back on research as being an analysis, or a particular form of consciousness, and activism as about doing things "out there" which leads to a divorce between consciousness and practice when they are bound up together in the lives of people and movements. If we begin to recognize that consciousness always has a direct living relationship to what people are doing we grasp ways in which theory and practice, consciousness, and knowledge production are connected. We are talking

about actual relations, research, knowledge, people, and bodies involved in cycles and compositions of social struggles. Social movement breaching experiments are attempts to do research and to simultaneously alter the relation of social forces in favour of movement struggles. We produce knowledge as we change the world.

**The Social Organization of Language and Activism: “Whose Streets, Our Streets” Versus “Whose Cops, Our Cops”**

This also leads us to think through the politics of language and its relation to activism. As George Smith suggests in another context “In every instance, language was social organization. Thus, the study of a form of social organization became, in part, a study of its language” (G. Smith 1990, 645). While George Smith was writing about the social organization of ruling relations I am turning this to explore the ways in which language can co-ordinate and push forward (or not) the social organization of activism. George Smith in his critique of the limitations of the language of homophobia and AIDSphobia already focused our attention on questions of language and activism.

The slogan of “Whose Streets, Our Streets” chanted on global justice and other demonstrations as people actually take over the streets is on one level a breaching experiment. It is usually violating the law and also ruling definitions of social space by demonstrating that people ourselves have the capacity to take over the streets. It also allows movements of people to exert more collective social power by taking over the streets rather than being confined to sidewalks. It is directly linked to practice and captures an incredible amount of power and energy with people taking more social space and engaging in more effective forms of political activism. This slogan is performative since it accomplishes a social act, that of taking the streets.<sup>7</sup> People learn in practice that

they have the power to violate laws and social normality and that they can exert their own power much more effectively when they establish some control over the streets. On the other hand by disrupting social conventions and the law a police response can also be called in to arrest those people taking over the streets or to move them back onto the sidewalks. When people are seizing the streets, when people are organizing demonstrations, they are engaging in research and activism at the same time.

In Seattle and at other demonstrations since then people have tried to use the same formula to approach other questions. Another slogan I have heard is “Whose Cops, Our Cops”<sup>8</sup>. This is usually chanted when activists are confronted by a massive wall of riot cops and some activists are chanting “Whose Cops, Our Cops.” It just does not work! It doesn’t work as a slogan, it is not linked to practice, and it also does not work as any form of analysis because it is not reflexively tied into the same type of social practice as “Whose Streets, Our Streets.” It is a slogan that entirely misunderstands the social organization of the police who are not organized in any democratic fashion (Scruton, 1985) and certainly are not accountable in any way, shape or form to global justice protestors who are one of their central targets.

We can see here very different illustrations of the dialogical and reflexive use of language in relation to activism. “Whose Streets, Our Streets” is an affirmation of counter power as people do it. “Whose Cops, Our Cops” while it is based on the same linguistic formula is divorced from practice and does not develop a useful analysis of social organization. This slogan and activism around it is not going to get the police to defect and come over to the protestors side, at least not in current circumstances. This slogan can also lead to some disorientation in global justice organizing on those occasions when

the police are not violent which can lead to an ideological distinction of “good” cops and “bad” cops – an analysis which is not grounded in how the police are socially organized. The reflexive and dialogical relation of language to our organizing, and what it can or does not co-ordinate in our compositions of struggle, becomes an important terrain of the social relations of struggle we need to investigate.

### **Challenges, Questions, Pedagogy**

Activists in movements are searching for new ways forward. What is often most visibly on offer from the academic world these days is postmodernism and poststructuralism which despite major insights provide little grounding for social movement activism and with their focus on interpretation and re-interpretation are unable to map out the social relations of struggle movements are engaged in. These approaches tend to produce a ‘theory’ disconnected from practice. In contrast as activists and researchers we need to move beyond the binary oppositions between theory and practice. We need theory connected to and constantly transformed and enriched by practice that can assist us in mapping out social relations of struggle, identifying sites where progress is possible, and developing strategies for fighting to win in the various struggles people are engaged in. PAE can be very useful in extending the capacities of activist researchers and in clarifying that these activists in movements are already doing research, that they are already intellectuals when they are active in social movements. In all these areas (and others) there is an important need for PAE and IE work *for* activism. We need to identify the questions and areas of social organization that need to be researched further for the progress of movements and struggles. PAE and IE as alternative ways of doing sociology



that are not fixed or dogmatic are also able to be continually open-ended and remade as new voices and new movements come forward to join in struggles for social transformation.

PAE builds on and extends the research capacities of movement activists and aids in subverting the binary oppositions of research versus activism and of inside/outside distinctions that often ensnare activists and researchers in attempting to produce knowledge for social transformation. We need to move beyond the inside/outside dichotomy mentioned earlier in this chapter – beyond the position arguing for either absolute ‘externality’ outside ruling relations and also a position of absolute ‘internality’ inside ruling relations in doing activism and producing knowledge. By starting instead inside social relations and social organization we avoid this inside/outside binary since we start with our double and simultaneous engagement with social relations of ruling and resistance to them allowing us to grasp the social relations of struggle we are involved in (Also see Afterward).

We also have to figure out how we can democratize research and knowledge creation and distribution practices within social movements. This is something that George Smith raised but was never resolved in the RTPC or in AAN! How can we make doing research much more democratic, much more linked into collective forms of analysis, much more linked into effective forms of activism? How can we transform doing research from a monological enterprise organized around the university-trained and connected researcher to becoming much more a dialogical project with many centres and many voices weaving together an analysis of the social relations of struggle movements face?

This also raises the pedagogy of activism and teaching. We have to think about education and teaching as much broader than what we teach in the classroom if we are university professors or graduate students. What is going on in social movements is also very much about pedagogy, teaching, learning, and is about knowledge production. We can actually begin to democratize our notions of education and knowledge creation in a more profound way. If we are committed to developing a sociology for changing the world, it is vital that it is not just about developing a brilliant analysis in the university world, it also has to be about developing a relationship to social movements that can actually change the world. These movements are the social forces that can provide the composition of struggles – the resources, the energy, the dynamic and the initiative to change the world.

Moving beyond interpretation, ideology, and speculation, to actual social organization and social relations a sociology for changing the world can produce more effective knowledge for activism organically linked to movements capable of changing the world. As Marx once put it “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point, however, is to change it”(Marx, 1975, 423).