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Critical Issues in Social Movement Research: Research Response

1) Briefly introduce the work in which you are involved, academically and/or activist-wise. Are there any “new” or “different” practices or observations you have been particularly struck or inspired by in the work of the movements with which you work?

My current work explores contemporary anti-capitalist struggles within the United States, from 1999 till the present, looking specifically at demonstrations in response to meetings of international organizations seeking to expand free trade (in particular the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization). This two-part analysis first examines a period of development within anti-corporate globalization struggles, during which the movement appeared to be gaining enormous momentum. This period, I argue, marks a disruptive moment in discourses of capital within the United States. Secondly, I examine how this momentum was diffused during the last five years, after the September 11th terrorist attacks and the ensuing “War on Terror”. I argue that a new conception of social movement practices was produced within anti-corporate globalization struggles, and that these understandings and activities were in part what made the movement vulnerable to dissipation post 911.

New forms of both communicative and organizational strategies have been employed in anti-corporate globalization struggles. These processes are indicative of the networked, rhizomatic, non-hierarchical nature of both the production and distribution of information generated in and around these struggles, and the congruent nature of the demonstrations themselves.

2) How are social movements rethinking the political? Do they offer any new articulations between the micro (cultural, everyday) and macro (politico-institutional, policy-oriented) political? For example: Do emphases on cultural and micro-political practices such as horizontality suggest a new understanding of political effect or effectiveness? Are experiments or struggles for autonomy that do not make demands on the state reconstituting “the political” or simply avoiding engaging in “real” politics?

Many anti-corporate struggles are rethinking the commons – expanding that notion as something both political and beyond government. As social constructs of power develop (from sovereignty to discipline to control according to Deleuzian thought) resistance to those power structures develop along congruent formations. To resist forms of control that surpass traditional forms of governmental power will necessarily involve operating along similar diffuse lines of social organization. This is resulting in an increased emergence of network structures and a reconfiguration of agency using non-traditional (non-governmental) means.

3) *What questions do you want to raise or point to as possible avenues of further discussion and research?*

- How can academic work/spheres of academia function on a broad based cultural level (affect general cultural change)?
- With this question in mind, how can we address concerns of elitism and vanguardism?
- What is the role of the intellectual in social change making processes?