



Global Justice Rhetoric: Observations and Suggestions*

Jason Del Gandio

abstract

This essay provides observations of global justice rhetoric and suggestions for improving it. First, I outline the scope of this paper by defining my understandings of global justice and rhetoric and then situate myself as an activist and communication scholar. Second, I provide ten observations of global justice rhetoric. These observations are not intended to be exhaustive and I am not trying to speak for other activists. Instead, these observations are intended as contributions to global justice thought and practice. At the very least, these observations can serve as a point of discussion among activists, and at the very most, help activists become more aware of and reflective about their rhetorical practices. Third, I provide five hands-on suggestions for improving activists' rhetoric and communication. These suggestions are of course relative to each activist and each situation. There is no one way to improve one's communication. However, concrete guidelines can help activists negotiate their speeches, essays, conversations, media relations, cross cultural dialogues, direct actions, etc. Fourth and last, I close this essay by encouraging other activists to make further observations and suggestions. More activists can and should collect, systematize, and share their experiences with rhetoric and communication. To start such a dialogue is the purpose of this essay for it will help to improve global justice discourse.

Defining Global Justice

This initial section does three things: first, it defines my understanding of global justice, second, it outlines my positioning as a global justice activist and a communication scholar, and third, it defines my understanding of and approach to rhetoric.

By global justice activism, I am referring to those activists, organizers, workers, peasants, teachers, students, staffers, farmers, and people in general who fight for a more humane and socially just world. Such a fight is by no means new, but it has definitely changed since the early 1990s. That time period witnessed the end of the Cold War and the rise of neoliberal global capitalism. Rather than being divided into capitalist and communist blocs, the world suddenly became open to an unfettered capitalism driven by neoliberal ideology. The foundation of neoliberalism was actually set after the Second World War with the establishment of the World Bank, the

* Much of this essay is adapted from my forthcoming book, *Rhetoric for Radicals: A Handbook for Twenty-First Century Activists* (Fall, 2008).

International Monetary Fund, and the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade, which eventually became the World Trade Organization. Then, in the 1970s, economic recessions and debt crises affected many of the world's countries. The United States and Western European countries began adopting neoliberal policies in order to increase international trade, which, in theory, would boost economic wealth for both developed and developing countries. Once the Cold War ended, these policies were applied the world over.

In brief, neoliberalism is a form of worldwide capitalism based on the deregulation of free markets and the privatization of wealth. It seeks to subordinate State control to the interests of private wealth accumulation. The State becomes an extension of economic activity with the sole purpose of increasing capitalistic competition and private wealth. Neoliberalism thus provides tax breaks for the rich, reduces social spending and social wealth fair, expands corporate control, and erodes labour rights, environmental protections, and even national law. This neo *laissez faire* approach allows private interests to own and control every aspect of the human, social, and natural world. Such things as food, water, farmland, forests, healthcare, education, prisons, militaries, political processes, and mass media are targets of neoliberal control. Even individual thoughts, plant seeds, mothers' breast milk, and human DNA are intended to be owned, controlled, bought and sold by free market capitalists (Mander and Goldsmith, 1996; Shiva, 2002). In theory, this private ownership allows for maximum efficiency, production, and exchange of products and services. In reality, it maximizes profitability for private interests. This latter perspective is evidenced by some basic empirical statistics.

- From 1960 to 1980, the rate of economic growth for all countries (excluding China) was somewhere between 5.5 percent and 3.2 percent. From 1980 to 2000, those numbers were somewhere between 2.6 percent and 0.7 percent. In other words, the general lot of economic growth has actually slowed during the age of globalization. (Navarro, 2007: 13)
- However, from 1980 to the mid-1990s, there was dramatic economic growth in 15 countries, raising the incomes of about 1.5 billion people. Over the same time period, approximately 100 countries experienced a decline in economic growth, lowering the incomes of about 1.6 billion people. In 70 of those countries, the average income fell below the 1980 level. Thus, some countries got richer while others got poorer. (Castells, 2003: 436)
- According to data from the year 2000, 1 percent of the world's richest adults own 40 percent of global assets and the richest 10 percent own 85 percent of the world total. (UNUWIDER, 2006)
- According to a 2007 study, the pay for the average American CEO was 364 times higher than the average American worker. In 1980, that difference was only 40 times higher. (Anderson, et al, 2007)
- At the turn of the twenty first century, approximately 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1 per day and approximately 2.8 billion people live on less than \$2 per day. There are about 6.5 billion people in the world, which means that close to half the world's population lives on \$2 per day or less. (Kerbo, 2006: 1)

These inequalities are not solely attributable to neoliberalism, but neoliberalism no doubt plays a major role. It's no coincidence that gaps in wealth have increased during the 'golden age of globalization'. Neoliberalism's sole purpose is to make money for the world's most powerful people, institutions, and constituencies.

These problems have not gone unchallenged. For example, on January 1st 1994, the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico stepped onto the world's stage by publicly announcing their direct – and if need be, militant – opposition to neoliberalism. This was the same day that Canada, the United States, and Mexico ratified the North American Free Trade Agreement, a neoliberal policy that threatened the livelihoods of the workers, farmers, citizens, and indigenous populations of those three countries. Other populations and actions encompassing various ideologies and spanning different geographical locations also emerged. In 1998, international activists, spearheaded by Canadian and French activists, challenged and defeated the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. In 1999, a broad coalition of activists shut down World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle, Washington. From 2000 to 2001, numerous international actions were taken against the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Economic Forum, the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement, and G8 Summit meetings. These few years were the 'peak' of what became known as the Global Justice Movement.

The visibility and fervour of the so-called 'movement of movements' has lessened since September 11th 2001 when terrorist attacked the United States. After 9/11 many activists focused less on global capitalism and more on George W. Bush's global war and the United States 'Empire'. The usefulness of the phrase 'Global Justice Movement' is thus questionable; it may or may not be appropriate nowadays. However, that doesn't mean that global justice issues have withered and the activists have disappeared. Instead, the Global Justice Movement has given rise to a new, decentered culture of activism: Indymedia news networks, World Social Forums, People's Global Action, No Border Camps, *Ya Basta!*, *Tutti Bianchi*, Black/Green/Pink Blocs, Reclaim the Streets, Critical Mass, the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, festivals of life, parades of resistance, *consultas*, convergence centres, neighbourhood assemblies, new types of anarchism, cyber Marxists, a do-it-yourself ethic, antiracist workers, militant researchers, activist philosophers, radical cheerleaders, postwave feminists, and experiments in direct democracy have all emerged from and in response to global justice. This essay is written for these activists and it is intended as a contribution to rather than as a study of global justice.

Positioning

I started participating in the Global Justice Movement in the spring of 2000. I happened to be watching the evening news and caught the coverage of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund protests in Washington, DC. Something hit me in that moment and I suddenly realized that I needed to be out there in the world, trying to change things for the better. I became an activist soon after. Since then I have worked on free/fair trade issues, antiwar campaigns, anti-Republican National Convention protests, Latin American solidarity actions, and have travelled to Venezuela to witness the Bolivarian Revolution. I have also contributed workshops on communication,

rhetoric, and radical theory at conferences, meetings, and local bookstores and free spaces.

My activism is coupled with my academic trainings. I was in graduate school as I began my activism, not earning my doctorate until May, 2002, approximately two years after becoming an activist. I was in the Department of Speech Communication and have since held university positions in similar departments. My academic trainings not only attune me to people's communication, but also follow me into the world of activism. I can't help but analyze the speeches, discussions, arguments, signs, symbols, and effects of our rallies, meetings, conferences, presentations, and actions. Because of this, I constantly see activists trying to articulate messages, audiences trying to follow along, petitioners trying to solicit attention, passers-by trying to avoid eye contact, the communicative effects of direct actions, the communicative dialogues of teach ins, and the embodied power relationships between activists and bureaucratic authorities. But I don't simply see areas for possible improvement. I also see people trying to evoke different realities; people trying to communicatively create different worlds. This is due to my professional interests, which involves the philosophy of communication.

The philosophy of communication argues that communication is not simply a conveyor of information; instead, communication actually creates our perceptions and understandings of that information. And, more profoundly, those perceptions and understandings are not derivations of or extractions from, but actually create, our lived-through realities.¹ Thus, I see activists' communication as the attempt to create new and preferably better realities. The very large majority of activists (and people in general) don't readily see this relationship between communication and reality. Communication is seen as a tool for talking and reality is understood as a cold, hard fact. People in general and activists in particular obviously believe in social change. But communication and reality are often excluded from the equation. It's more common for activists to talk about people's movements and social change or coordinated action and structural change. I totally agree with these equations, but I also see another equation: communication is the creation of reality; change the communication and you change the reality. This equation directly influences my approach to rhetoric and global justice activism.

Defining Rhetoric

The Euro-Western study of rhetoric began more than two-thousand years ago with the Ancient Greeks. Aristotle is sometimes considered the first rhetorician. He defined rhetoric as the ability to observe in any given situation the available means of persuasion. In other words, rhetoric deals with a person's attempt to persuade an audience. This association with persuasion anchored the study of rhetoric for the next two millennia. This began to change with the advent of twentieth century thought. Rhetoricians began incorporating ideas from such thinkers as Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, and later on, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and others. This is neither the time nor place to detail all these changes. Suffice it to say that the

1 For helpful overviews of the philosophy of communication, see Arneson (2007) and Radford (2005).

theory and practice of rhetoric has been altered, debated, expanded, and updated over the years.² Nowadays, rhetoric can be understood in at least three ways.

First, rhetoric can be understood as the study and practice of persuasion. This is obviously related to Aristotle's definition, and involves a rhetor's use of emotional appeals, logical appeals, credibility, and various other methods of persuasion. This definition allows us to study any form of persuasive communication.

Second, rhetoric can be understood as the science of discourse – in other words, rhetoric focuses on what people say, how they say it, and the effects thereof. This approach focuses on oral, written, and linguistic communication and may or may not address issues of persuasion. So, within this framework, we can study everyday, non-persuasive conversations, people's attempts to convey basic information, the voice intonations of speakers, the authorial voice and style of writers, the coordination of a teach in or direct action, the usefulness and effects of cultural labels like Asian American or African American, the political implications of 'second wave' and 'third wave' feminism, etc.

And third, rhetoric can be understood as the practice and study of how human beings create their realities. This approach helps us understand how human beings materialize their realities through immaterial means. Here, rhetoric is no longer concerned with persuasion, only, and it moves beyond basic analyses of oral, written, and linguistic communication. This definition involves both verbal and nonverbal communication and it approaches rhetoric as an 'immaterial labour' (Greene, 2004). In other words, our use of such *immaterial* means as language, signs, symbols, stories, ideologies, discourses, perceptions, worldviews, and understandings, as well as our gestures, movements, and bodily actions, *materialize* our lived through and socially shared realities.³ Rhetoric thus studies how human beings use communication to create, maintain, alter, change, dissolve, and recreate their environments. Within this framework, everything and anything is a possible site of rhetorical study: speeches by Subcomandante Marcos, books by Naomi Klein, the decentered communication of spokes councils, the open publishing system of Indymedia, the self organization of smart mobs, and the spontaneous uprisings of Argentina, 2001 and Oaxaca, 2003 are all approachable as rhetorical phenomena.

In the observations below, all three definitions of rhetoric are used. I do not detail which aspect of rhetoric I am specifically using at a given time; such details would be too bulky and complicated for this essay. But the idea that rhetoric functions within persuasion, oral, written, and linguistic communication, and communicatively created realities permeates my observations.

2 For a concise overview of rhetoric and its history, see Herrick (2004).

3 I need to make two clarifications. First, these immaterial means are grounded in the human body. The body is obviously material, but the symbolizations and communicative effects are immaterial. Thus, my hand gesture is literally material, but what that gesture communicates is immaterial. This whole process materializes – in other words, evokes and creates – reality. And second, very few if any rhetorical scholars use this exact wording of 'creating reality'. However, many do point in this direction (Scott, 1967; Charland, 1987; McKerrow, 1989; DeLuca, 1999).

Observations of Global Justice Rhetoric

Social movements, political cultures, and even small groups of activists exhibit rhetorical commonalities. For instance, the United States' Civil Rights Movement was laden with religious symbolism, expediency of the moment, and calls to racial justice. European antinuclear autonomous groups of the 1980s embodied counter-cultural and anti-capitalist sentiments and prefigured the Black Bloc tactic. And third wave feminism emphasizes anti-essentialist arguments, diversity of female identities, and the micropolitics of gender and sexual relations. The following section makes similar observations of global justice rhetoric. These observations are by no means exhaustive and I am in no way trying to speak for anyone. Instead, I am offering these observations as a contribution to global justice discourse. If these observations resonate with the experiences of other activists, then those activists can use these observations to improve their own rhetorical practices. If other activists happen to disagree with these observations, then this essay can be used as a point of discussion and debate. I believe that either scenario advances global justice discourse. Also realize that this is not a formal ethnographic study in which I go out into the field and collect research data. Instead, I am drawing from my own lived experienced with global justice activism, relying upon my absorption within that world. That absorption involves direct experience with organizing, activism, and direct action, as well as intimate knowledge of books, videos, magazines, websites, movements, etc.

Here is a preview of the ten observations:

- Global justice rhetoric is anti-authoritarian.
- Global justice rhetoric promotes diversity.
- Global justice rhetoric is idealistic and pre-figurative.
- Global justice rhetoric is multi-historical.
- Global justice rhetoric is anti-representational.
- Global justice rhetoric privileges complex interrogation.
- Global justice rhetoric is symbolically powerful.
- Global justice rhetoric is confrontational.
- Global justice rhetoric is visionary.
- Global justice rhetoric is self-righteous and self-critical.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Anti-authoritarian

Global justice activism is heavily influenced by antiauthoritarianism. This is not to say that all global justice activists are self-described antiauthoritarians, but many do at least borrow antiauthoritarian ideas and practices. For instance, social forums, conferences, protests, affinity groups, spokes councils, neighbourhood assemblies, and website clearinghouses often use bottom up, consensus type structures allowing individuals, groups, and organizations to create large, decentered networks. Rather than leaders and dominating ideologies, there are affinities of people coordinating themselves toward social change. Such antiauthoritarianism is not necessarily new; it has been long used by anarchists, autonomists, anti-capitalists, feminists, and counter-culturalists. But global justice activists have revived and updated anti-authoritarianism. David Graeber, an anarchist and Ivy League anthropologist, provides some excellent accounts of this revival, arguing that anti-authoritarian practices are the heart and soul of global justice

activism (2002; 2003; 2004). Similar arguments can be found in Starhawk's *Webs of Power* (2002) and Richard Day's *Gramsci is Dead* (2005), and in the anthologies *From ACT UP to WTO* (2002) and *We Are Everywhere* (2003).

While I wholeheartedly agree with these accounts, I want to make an additional argument, namely that the anti-authoritarianism of global justice activism engenders a unique form of rhetoric that is non-hierarchical, decentred, and dialogical. For instance, within global justice activism, no speaker, author, organizer, activist, or person is seen as more or less important or powerful; everyone is given the opportunity to communicate, is asked to respectfully listen, and is invited to respond and contribute; and people commonly dialogue (and feverishly debate) until mutual understanding and even consensus are reached. This type of anti-authoritarian *communication* occurs at spokescouncils, social forums, conferences, teach ins, organizational meetings, protests, and on websites, LISTSRVS, and blogs. This type of *rhetoric* is at the heart of global justice; subtract this antiauthoritarian *communication* and global justice activism disappears. Antiauthoritarian rhetoric, in addition to antiauthoritarian ideas and structures, underscore global justice. Take away that communication and global justice activism becomes something altogether different.

Global Justice Rhetoric Promotes Diversity

It is difficult to find a global justice publication, talk, speech, video, protest, or movement that does not in some way mention or at least imply diversity appreciation. There are at least three reasons for this. First, global justice *necessitates* diversity. Global justice, by its very nature, involves a plethora of actors, agents, and agendas all working toward global liberation. Because of this, no centralized command, ideology, tactic, or struggle is possible. Instead, there are multiple and overlapping struggles involving decentred points of resistance and liberation. This helps explain the different and even seemingly contradictory groups, ideologies, identities, and issues present at global justice protests, conferences, and forums. Different people have different understandings of and different methods for achieving global justice. No understanding or method is necessarily better or worse than another. Instead, each understanding and method is simply a different way of doing and accomplishing what we all want: liberation for all.

Second, global justice activists recognize that different people embody different politics. Because of that, no particular experience, standpoint, orientation, or identity is valued more or less than another. So, for instance, early twentieth century labour movements emphasized class identity, assuming that the working class proletariat is the rightful vanguard of the revolution. No such assumption exists today. While class is an important issue, so too is race, gender, sexuality, religion, culture, abled and differently abled bodies, etc. Rather than foregrounding one particular issue, global justice activists recognize, appreciate, and accentuate a plethora of experiences, standpoints, orientations, and identities.

And third, global justice activists believe that a multiplicity of individuals standing in relation to one another is the most productive and powerful way toward social and global change. Global justice activists have come to believe that single individuals

standing alone lack powerful numbers and that many people marching under a unitary ideology lack critical debate and discussion. Global justice activists thus recognize the importance of individual difference but also act in solidarity with one another's struggles. This approach of individualism *and* collective action has many precursory roots: it can be traced, in a preliminary way, to the New Left of the 1960s; it was significant in the feminist and LGBT liberations of the 1970s; and it became prominent with the identity politics of the 1980s and 1990s. Nowadays, this difference *and* solidarity is practiced through smart mobs, flash mobs, Black/Green/Pink Blocs, international days of resistance, festivals of life, and is an underlying motivation behind *consultas*, neighbourhood assemblies, and spokescouncils. It is also theorized by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of 'multitude' (2004), the Latin American concept of *specifismo* (Starr, 2005: 87) and Richard Day's interrelated concepts of groundless solidarity and infinite responsibility (2005). These concepts and practices highlight activists' ability to act together while maintaining their individuality. This approach often structures the look, feel, style, and content of activists' communicative interactions.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Idealistic and Pre-figurative

Global justice rhetoric is idealistic in two ways. First, global justice, by its very name, espouses social justice for all. It is an unspoken understanding that global justice confronts all forms of oppression and seeks liberating and egalitarian relations among all people. This idealism may or may not be overt and explicit. But at the very least, it is an unspoken assumption permeating global justice protests, demonstrations, writings, talks, symbols, and languages.

And second, global justice activists often privilege pre-figurative politics. In other words, activists try to use and/or create egalitarian structures, practices, relations, and values that do not currently exist. For instance, feminists prefigure gender equality and matriarchal values while living in a patriarchal, gender exclusive society. Racial justice activists prefigure equal appreciation and opportunity for all races and racial backgrounds while existing within a racist society. And 'fregans', who combine veganism and autonomism, prefigure non-capitalist consumption while existing within a consumer capitalist society. In each of these cases, activists are trying to evoke an alternative world; they are trying to create something that does not yet exist on the societal level. While such pre-figurative politics are based on what people do and how they live, I want to argue that these actions and lifestyles are also communicative and rhetorical phenomena. For example, pre-figurative actions and lifestyles obviously communicate outward to the world, effecting how others see, think about, and orient to, for instance, gender norms, race relations, and consumerism. Pre-figurative activists also craft their actions and lifestyles, trying to continually improve their attempts to evoke and embody alternative structures, practices, and relations. Such 'crafting' is inherent to rhetorical practice. Effective rhetors craft their communication over and over until they get it right. If these insights are accurate, then pre-figurative activists are ongoing, full time rhetors seeking to communicate new realities into existence. Global justice is thus personalized, concretized, and *communicated* by embodying pre-figurative actions and choices.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Multi-Historical

Global justice rejects the idea that any single history can encapsulate the antecedents of all people, of all places, and of all times. Global justice activism replaces the 'history' with multiple and diffuse 'low stories'. Each culture, movement, and idea emerges from a diversity of people, experiences, and narratives. This perspective obviously relates to the above issues of antiauthoritarianism, diversity, etc. There is too much going on to rely upon or refer to a single story, author, or speaker for understanding social justice and global revolution. This multi-historicism helps explain the difficulty of answering commonly asked questions: Where's your representational text? Who is your spokesperson? What is your goal? Who and what do you represent? These questions are difficult to answer from a multi-historical framework. This is because global justice activists commonly search for the intricacies and cross relationships and then seek to 'complicate' such questions. Global justice activists reject the idea that one narrative, or one person, or any *one*, can tell *the* story of worldwide decentred struggles.

For instance, Marina Sitrin's *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina* (2006) collects many different narratives from many different people about Argentina's post 2001 popular uprising. She recognizes that even a single event within a single country encompasses many different 'low stories'. This desire for inclusion rather than exclusion is an underlying theme to such anthologies as *Globalize Liberation* (2004), *A Movement of Movements* (2004), and *Another World is Possible* (2003). These anthologies draw upon different authors, ideas, and perspectives in order to widen rather than narrow global justice discourse. A similar sentiment even applies to Indymedia. Indymedia, strictly speaking, deals with current issues rather than history, but it still recognizes that no single story can capture the totality of an event. People are thus invited and even encouraged to relay, report, and post what they see and experience. This decentred practice transforms the monolithic *history* into a variety of *low* stories.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Anti-Representational

Global justice rhetoric is anti-representational in two ways. First, most activists recognize that no rhetoric can fully represent another's experience; all personal, cultural, and political representation is inherently limited. Activists thus avoid representing others and allow others to represent themselves. That's the whole point of direct democracy: to allow people to speak for themselves and to make their own political decisions. At meetings, people of traditionally underprivileged or marginalized backgrounds are invited to speak first and longest; meeting responsibilities like facilitation, stacking, and note taking are commonly rotated; and everyone's concerns and ideas are heard and respected. At large events like protests and social forums, many different groups, agendas, and ideologies are invited to help organize, speak, and participate, ensuring that no single voice dominates. These directly democratic procedures consciously resist totalizing representations.

And second, global justice rhetoric seeks to create rather than merely represent socially just realities. In other words, global justice activists often seek to personalize, concretized, embody, and evoke global liberation in the immediate moment. This is the basic idea behind pre-figurative politics and it is exemplified by the array of decentred,

antiauthoritarian, directly democratic procedures and structures of spokescouncils, cooperates, squats, community gardens, free stores, free spaces, and the ‘really, really free markets’ in which everything is shared and/or freely given away. These practices do not simply represent but actually create, in the moment, ‘global justice’. And, similar to my comments above, I argue that these practices are communicative and rhetorical.

First, activists must communicate with one another in order to coordinate their activities and practices. This is true even if there is only a single activist coordinating a single, individual action. That activist must communicate with him/herself in order to plan, execute, and follow through with the action. This is known as *intrapersonal* communication, which is different from *interpersonal* communication. Second, activists discuss and then decide upon the nature, look, title, slogan, duration, time, place, and effect of actions, protests, conferences, meetings, and so on. These organizational concerns parallel basic rhetorical considerations, such as: Who’s your audience; what’s your message; and, what are the communicative effects? These questions are continuously addressed either explicitly or implicitly while organizing events and activities. And third, these events and activities create alternative realities. Such alternatives realities are often referred to as ‘temporary alternative zones’, a phrase attributed to anarchist Hakim Bey (2003 [1985]). While I am definitely sympathetic to this phrase, I prefer to use ‘alternative realities’. This latter phrase, I believe, places our alternative realities on equal footing with all other realities. In other words, spokescouncils, community gardens, and free stores are not simply liberated zones. Instead, they are actual *realities* that are communicatively created into existence and that stand in contradistinction to other, more widely accepted realities like top down representational democracies, wars, strip malls, consumerism, etc.⁴

Global Justice Rhetoric Privileges ‘Complex Interrogation’

Global justice rhetoric privileges complex interrogation rather than simple answers. This is evidenced by many different practices. For example, activists often challenge one another to reflect upon their own taken for granted assumptions; teach ins, spokescouncils, and organizational meetings commonly end with temporary and tenuous consensus rather than final answers; and rigorously informed, substantive analyses are often preferred over quick, pre-packaged answers of corporate media. Such ‘complex communication’ is not necessarily cumbersome, indecipherable, or over-intellectual; in fact, most activists prefer to communicate in ways that are clear and accessible. But global justice activists see the world as a complex process involving interconnected systems and they seek to break open and interrogate these complexities. This helps explain the often long and laborious nature of meetings and spokescouncils and the many debates that occur on LISTSRVS, blogs, and Indymedia sites. A single issue leads to a web of relations, a simple assertion leads to a whole set of questions, and a basic inquiry leads to discussion and debate. These complex interrogations can often be tiresome and difficult to deal with, but there’s an underlying political point: to challenge

4 I fully recognize that I am splitting hairs here, and that much more can and should be said about the differences and/or similarities between ‘temporary autonomous zones’ and ‘alternative realities’. Suffice it for now that I am simply trying to use a phrase that accentuates the communicative and reality creating nature of global justice activities.

all taken for granted assumptions that may (or may not) lead to oppressions, inequalities, and injustices. Patrick Reinsborough, a global justice activist, makes a similar point when discussing the need for ‘post issue activism’. As he states:

[Post issue activism is] the recognition that the roots of the emerging crisis lie in the fundamental flaws of the modern order and that our movements for change need to talk about redesigning the entire global system – now. Post issue activism is a dramatic divergence from the slow progression of single issue politics, narrow constituencies, and Band Aid solutions. . . . Post issue activism is the struggle to address the holistic nature of the crisis, and it demands new frameworks, new alliances, and new strategies. We must find new ways to articulate the connections between all the ‘issues’ by revealing the pathological nature of the system. (Reinsborough, 2004: 163–164)

Reinsborough nails it on the head: global justice activists recognize the manifold entanglements of the current global order and seek to change it piece by piece. No stone is left unturned and no issue is left unchallenged. That is complex interrogation.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Symbolically Powerful

Global justice activists seriously consider the use, effects, and oppressive and liberating powers of symbols. For instance, it is common to critique and reject particular logos, labels, brands, and corporate symbols. It’s also common to practice culture jamming, ad busting, and billboard liberation, and to investigate and explore the nature of mental ecologies, psychological environments, and art and protest. Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* (2000) and Kalle Lasn’s *Culture Jam* (1999) have been best sellers. The ideas and activities of Guy Debord and the Situationists, with their emphasis on cultural/aesthetic detournement, are commonly referenced. And demonstrations are saturated with symbolic significance: signs, placards, puppets, colours, costumes, drums, dances, slogans, and chants are strategically chosen in order to communicate particulate messages. The same is true for direct actions. Any good direct action strategically plots its symbolism: What is the action, where will it take place, at what time, for which audience, and for what purpose? A direct action often seeks to physically intervene in the daily operations of an institution or group of people. Activists might clog a traffic intersection, occupy a building, or shut down a business district. Such actions directly interfere with systems of power. But such actions are also symbolic, and that symbolism may be more important than physical interference. A direct action will last for a few hours, maybe even a few days. During that that time all operations cease. But the operations will most likely resume. However, the symbolic force of that action carries on, circulating through the communicative engines of society. That message hopefully catches wind, motivating other people to take similar actions. This is one of the motivations behind Stephen Duncombe’s book, *Dream: Re – Imagining Progressive Politics in the Age of Fantasy* (2007). Duncombe is a professor of Media Studies at New York University and a hands-on activist oriented to global justice issues. In his book he argues that ‘spectacular communication’ speaks to the public imagination. In other words, rhetorically powerful symbols can mobilize people’s dreams and desires toward radical endeavours. I believe Duncombe’s argument both reflects and contributes to the practice and theory of global justice rhetoric.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Confrontational

Global justice rhetoric is often confrontational, involving yells, screams, shouts, stomps, claps, drums, fists, Black Blocs, exclamation points, loud slogans, passionate manifestos, and declamatory speeches. A now defunct post 1999 Seattle magazine, *Clamor*, said it well: “An iconoclast among its peers, *Clamor* is an unabashed celebration of self-determination, creativity, and shit stirring”. While this passionate and unapologetic attitude permeates global justice rhetoric, it should not be reduced to negativity or militancy. Activists might be loud and angry at times, but activists are also quite, solemn, cheerful, romantic, happy, celebratory, and even festive. Many activists use silent die-ins, peace vigils, pacifism, meditation, and humorous antics. Many activists are also approachable and inviting, preferring dialogue over verbal duel. These subtler attitudes are confrontational, too, but in different ways. So, for instance, the protest tactics of global justice activists range from militant direct action to petition drives; from property destruction to spoken word poetry; from building occupations to humorous street theatre. In the end, confrontational rhetoric is about speaking truth to power and eradicating all forms of oppression. The tactics used to accomplish these goals are relative to each activist and situation. Sometimes activists are upfront and aggressive while other times they are laidback and subtle. Regardless of the approach, it is confrontational, and such rhetoric is a marker of global justice activism.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Visionary

Global justice rhetoric is driven by visions of a better world. Most activists realize that what they do now creates a better and presumably more democratic future. But it must also be noted that very few activists think of themselves as actual visionaries. Such loftiness contradicts the antiauthoritarian, diverse, and multihistorical aspects of global justice. Most activists are also sceptical of utopianism. No one thinks we can right *all* the wrongs and live happily ever after. But activists do believe that we can do better; that we can replace current systems and structures with better ones; that we can become more ethical and humane social beings; and that we can do a better job of respecting ourselves, each other, and our social and natural worlds. These are not simply ideals, but envisioned realities of the future. We can see these realities in our hearts and minds. Many of us have even caught fleeting glimpses during protests, conferences, gatherings, forums, and festivals. Those glimpses may be brief, but they are there nonetheless – momentary experiences of something new, exciting, and radically democratic. These experiences point to a different world, one composed of self determination, interpersonal and collective support, and egalitarian relations. This visionary rhetoric helps explain the privileging of prefigurative politics: global justice activists intuitively sense an improved social world and they walk toward it by embodying alternative ideas, structures, and relations. That walking embodiment is not perfect, but it is the first step toward something better. I believe that the following quote by Irish anarchist, Andrew Flood, captures this sentiment well. He is describing his experience of the ‘Second Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism’:

Those on this road have gathered from all over the world, over 50 countries in all. They have come here [to Spain, 1997] to dream of a new reality together. Here the weather-beaten features of a male campesino from Brazil are found beside the sunburned face of an 18-year-old female squatter from Berlin. Do you feel you are imagining something impossible, something from a Hollywood

blockbuster, or the past? Then add one more detail: a gasp goes up from those on the road, for overhead a shooting star briefly appears. Were it not for the collective gasp each of us might have imagined this was a vision we alone were seeing. But no, we look around and realize we are marching, seeing, and dreaming together. (Flood, 2003: 75)

This statement, and many others like it, underscores the visionary rhetoric of global justice activists.

Global Justice Rhetoric is Self-Righteous *and* Self-Critical

Global justice rhetoric is simultaneously self-righteous and self-critical. Everyone wants to change the world and everyone thinks they know how. Such righteousness is common to most activists, organizers, and social movements. That's understandable: people obviously need to believe in themselves if they are going to try to change the world. But such righteousness resists over inflated self importance. There are no easy answers and there are no straight and narrow paths. Social justice takes many forms and posits no final or foreclosed utopian results. Global idealism is coupled with a brutal realism: we are everyday people fallible and subject to the whims and mistakes of being human. While we are calling out injustice, we also realize that we might be perpetuating other injustices that we have not yet understood or recognized. It is common to look back upon previous social/political movements and reveal and analyze particular wrongdoings: the self destructive tendencies of North America's Weather Underground and Italy's Red Brigades, the sexism of anti-Vietnam era organizing, the racist exclusions of second wave feminism, etc. This leads to the realization that future generations will look back upon the movements of today and make similar assessments. They will ask, 'How could they not have realized that they were...?!?' We cannot foresee how future generations will assess us, but such critical awareness humbles us nonetheless. So yes, global justice activists are self-righteous, but they are also self-reflective. This critical righteousness is one reason why vanguard parties are met with scepticism. We all want a revolution and we all think we have the answers, but we realize that our answers are locally specific and temporally based. We thus conclude that each person and each community must revolutionize their own realities. We can and often do help each other whenever and however possible; but no one person, group, or rhetoric beholds the answer for all people of all places and times. Self righteousness is thus buttressed against a self reflective criticality. This sentiment is evidenced by some concrete examples: John Holloway's *Change the World Without Taking Power* (2005 [2002]); Starhawk's distinctions among power over, power from within, and power with (1987: 8-27; 2002: 607, 174); and the call by Subcomandante Marcos to listen to rather than lead the indigenous populations of Chiapas, Mexico (Jordon, 2004). Critical righteousness obviously overlaps with many of the tendencies mentioned above: antiauthoritarianism, diversity, multihistoricism, anti-representational, complex interrogation, etc.

Suggestions for Improving Global Justice Rhetoric

This section provides hands on suggestions for improving the rhetoric of global justice activists. Such suggestions are awfully difficult with such a brief essay. A thorough account would provide suggestions for a variety of situations and outline different

strategies for persuasion, speaking, writing, direct actions, street theater, and of course for 'creating reality'. Such details are not possible within the framework of this essay. The following suggestions are thus limited to five broad considerations and are grounded in the previous ten observations. In other words, the suggestions help global justice activists improve their antiauthoritarian communication, their promotion of diversity, idealism, and multihistoricism, etc. My hope is that activists will discuss and adapt these suggestions as needed, learning the 'strategic ins and outs' as they are applied. The suggestions include the following five points:

- Understanding the Three Basics of Message, Audience, and Craft.
- Using Rhetorical Categories to Manage Connections.
- Using Rhetorical Frames for Clarity and Accessibility.
- Strengthening Intercultural Awareness and Understanding.
- Taking Personal Responsibility.

Understanding the Three Basics of Message, Audience, and Craft

Good rhetoric begins with a message that is being communicated to other people. People cannot be moved if they cannot understand that message. Communication is not always about sending specific messages or about moving people to action. But messages and action are common goals for activists. It is thus important to create clear and articulate messages that others can understand and respond to. This can be done through four steps. First, articulate your message into a single sentence that clearly expresses your thoughts and intentions. Second, be able to clearly and confidently explain your message in the equivalence of one or two paragraphs. Third, be prepared to have an extended conversation about your message in which you explain your thoughts and intentions and are able to address questions and debates. Fourth and last, turn your message into a catchy soundbite. This last step may seem backwards, as if it should come first. But saving the soundbite for last ensures that you truly understand your own message before you condense it into a couple of words. Doing the soundbite first may actually hinder the clarity of your message. Generally speaking, these four steps formalize your message, preparing you for multiple situations and audiences.

Good communicators always construct their messages for specific audiences. This involves at least two things: identifying your audience and then adapting your message to that audience. First, identify your audience to the best of your ability. Figure out who you are trying to communicate with. Be as specific as possible and avoid generalizations like 'the general public'. Such generalizations are too broad and thus unhelpful. For example, large antiwar protests often target four particular groups: policy makers, supporters of the war, people who are undecided about the war, and people who are against the war but not active. These four targets *do* include just about everyone and, in a sense, then, the protest *is* targeting the 'general public'. But that classification is too loose and undefined; it doesn't help you create a rhetorically effective protest/message. You can concretize your rhetoric by specifying those four target audiences. This gives you something concrete to work with, allowing you to fine tune your message and to address actual people rather than amorphous masses. And second,

adapt your message to the identified audience(s). In other words, create a message that fits the wants, needs, and perspectives of your specific audience. For example, a group of young, moderately liberal college students is very different than a group of older, more conservative military veterans. There's no way that the same exact message will work for both of these audiences. You are thus forced to adapt your message to the demands of these two audiences. This is not about selling out or falsifying your intentions. Instead, it's about considering the biases of your audience and seeking to effectively communicate across barriers and differences. That's good rhetoric.

These comments about message and audience highlight the need for rhetorical craft. In other words, you want to craft your communication for maximum effectiveness. Most activists do this to some degree already. For instance, there are plenty of debates about the look and designs of demonstrations and direct actions; the wording of slogans, speeches, and communiqués; and the usefulness of ideologies, philosophies, analyses, and manifestos. Such debates help activists choose the most effective means of communication. This process can be enhanced by carefully adapting your message to specific audiences. It can also be enhanced by improving your speaking and/or writing skills; learning to communicate across cultural barriers; finding ways to adapt your rhetorical style to different communities; asking people to translate your message into other languages; improving your ability to defend your ideas and actions in adverse or chaotic situations; learning to adjust to the situational constraints of busy street corners, large auditoriums, or a strong police presence; etc. Developing these skills and abilities involves time, thought, practice, and patience. In other words, it involves craft. That craft is laborious, but it improves your ability to create social change.

Using Rhetorical Categories to Manage Connections

Global justice rhetoric often highlights the connections among diverse people, ideas, voices, issues, etc. There are three common pitfalls when highlighting those connections. First, it is easy to forget to highlight the connections for others. We, as global justice activists, see the connections and (falsely) assume that others will, too. But not everyone sees the world through decentred, interconnected eyes. It is thus imperative that activists highlight those connections for everyone else. Literally explain how the different issues are connected. Second, it is common to *over* emphasize the connections. This is problematic because the audience gets confused; they're not clear on the purpose or focus of your message. Too many connections obscure the clarity and accessibility of your rhetoric. And third, highlighting connections can take up a lot of time, thus testing people's patience and attention spans. People won't listen forever. They will tune out and walk away if it's taking too long. This can be avoided by sticking to the *major* connections and cutting out all the secondary or minor connections. This shortens your time, keeping people interested and mentally alert. These pitfalls of over highlighting, under highlighting, and taking too long can be solved by using 'categories'. These categories, also referred to as 'rhetorical topologies', help highlight and manage the connections.

For instance, addressing corporate globalization can be organized into the following categories: multinational corporations, transnational institutions, free trade agreements, and political/economic ideologies. These categories can help you structure speeches,

essays, workshops, or teach ins. These categories can also be used to organize protests, with different participants focusing on different aspects. This can obviously be done with speakers. But it can also be done with different groups creating different signs, performances, or mini actions that symbolize the different categories. While organizing the protest, put out a call asking affinity groups to take on different categories. These categories help onlookers get a better sense of the different connections that drive 'corporate globalization'. These categories also ensure that 'all the issues' are covered during the protest. And perhaps most importantly, this approach creates a more readable and thus audience friendly protest, which potentially attracts more people to global justice issues and actions.

Using Rhetorical Frames for Clarity and Accessibility

Generally speaking, good rhetoric strives for as much clarity and accessibility as possible. What constitutes clarity and accessibility is of course relative to each audience, community, culture, activist, situation, and goal. Clarifying the intentions of a sanctioned demonstration is different than clarifying a three-point logical essay, which is different than a teach-in, which is different than a militant action, etc. This is all true, but the bottom line is the same: Confusion alienates people, and due to the variety of issues involved with global justice, activists should work against confusion and work toward clarity.

Rhetorical frames are one way to clarify your communication. A rhetorical frame is a slogan, statement, theme, phrase, title, or word that ties all the pieces together. A frame gives people an anchoring point for understanding the issue, action, or conversation. It also sets the conditions for discussion, conversation, and debate. You thus want a frame that highlights your political orientation to the issue. For example, neoliberalism can be framed as economic globalization or as economic imperialism. These two frames establish different conditions for discussion. The first is benign and non-political while the second is politically charged. Depending upon your audience and the purpose of the situation, either frame will be more or less effective and useful. Identify the audience and situation, and then choose a frame that helps you accomplish your goals.

Larger events such as forums, conferences, and protests are inherently framed – the framing is created by the stated purpose or title. For example, the World Social Forum of 2001 used 'Another World is Possible!' And the United States Social Forum of 2007 used 'Another World is Possible, Another U.S. is Necessary'. These slogans inherently frame the forums, allowing people to understand the underlying relationship among individual workshops, talks, and speeches. There is always room for improvement, but generally speaking, large collective actions are usually well framed. However, individual presentations don't always fair so well. This is not always the case; rhetorically oriented activists know how to frame their works. But less experienced activists can miss the importance of framing. Below are two suggestions for creating a good rhetorical frame.

Rhetorical frames can be created by summarizing the underlying aspects of an issue and choosing a single word, phrase, or title that highlights your own political orientation to that issue. This is similar to the use of 'rhetorical categories' mentioned above.

However, framing refers to an overall ‘lens’ that emphasizes particular aspects of the issue. So, for instance, speaking about U.S. foreign policy, international relations, war, capitalism, and the Middle East can be summarized into ‘The Geo-Politics of Oil’. This frame helps people understand the underlying connections of your presentation and it implies some type of left leaning critique. Such a frame should be created before the presentation begins. That helps structure your talk, speech, essay, teach in, meeting, etc. Then, during the presentation, continuously emphasize the relationship between the individual issues and the overall frame. This helps others follow along.

A good rhetorical frame is also concrete, catchy, and general enough to attract wide audiences but narrow enough to highlight the important aspects. A good frame is like a good title – it helps prepare the audience and it keeps both the audience *and* the presenter anchored in something specific. Drawing upon different ideas, debating various issues, and making political critiques can get confusing, especially for people who are unfamiliar with the intricacies of the issues. A good rhetorical frame makes your rhetoric more intelligible and accessible and it favours your political orientation.

Strengthening Intercultural Awareness and Understanding

Global justice activism involves transnational alliances with people from different regions, nations, cultures, and communities. These alliances raise issues of intercultural awareness and understanding. Most activists are already aware of this and consciously work toward intercultural sensitivity. That’s great, but such sensitivity must become a primary aspect of global justice activism and organizing. This can be done by conducting more workshops and teach ins on the following issues: intercultural exchanges, intercultural communication, culturally specific rhetorics, translation issues, and creating transnational rhetorics.

- *Intercultural Exchanges*: Inviting activists from different cultural backgrounds to share their histories, traditions, and forms of resistance broadens our horizons and allows us to understand how different people live, love, and struggle.
- *Intercultural Communication*: Holding workshops on how to communicate across cultural differences helps us understand how certain words, languages, actions, symbols, and gestures mean different things for different cultures. This increases cultural sensitivity and helps activists work past cultural tensions, confusions, and barriers.
- *Culturally Specific Rhetorics*: Asking activists from different countries to share and explain their culturally specific rhetorical tactics expands international dialogue. This helps activists understand what’s occurring outside their own immediate communities and generates ideas for creating more interesting and effective rhetorical tactics within their communities.
- *Translation Issues*: Teaching one another the proper etiquette of translation is extremely important nowadays. This involves at least two sides. First, teach one another how to translate from one language to another. It’s one thing to speak two languages, but it’s another thing to be able to translate between two languages. Instructing one another on how to do this obviously aids cross cultural communication, thus strengthening global justice endeavours. And second, we need to teach one another how to speak in the presence of a translator. People

often speak too fast for the translator to follow. Much of the translation is then lost. Becoming more sensitive to the translator is not only an issue of respect and appreciation, but also strengthens cross cultural solidarity.

- *Creating Transnational Rhetorics*: Creating transnational rhetorics is not a new endeavour. Transnationalism and internationalism have been ongoing themes for well over a century and have been revised and updated with the rise of globalization. But balancing autonomy and connection within and among diverse movements is a fairly new challenge. The trick is to emphasize both the uniqueness and similarity of each movement. This is not simply a political issue, but also a rhetorical issue. We need messages, slogans, languages, and ways of communicating that maintain, express, and create the balance between autonomy and connection. The Latin American concept of *specifismo* is a great example (Starr, 2005: 87). *Specifismo* denotes the creative tension between diversity and unity, between autonomy and solidarity. Basically, each movement is autonomous, but each movement also works with other movements. Together, all the movements work for collective gain. This type of rhetoric captures the spirit of twenty first century global justice and helps activists better frame and explain their movements, actions, and politics. Such framing and explaining can attract more people to global justice, thus creating an even wider and more diverse 'movement of movements'.

Taking Personal Responsibility

The communicative backbone of contemporary activism is now networked through the tiny capillaries of diffuse and decentred movements spread across the world. The era of *the* rhetorical leader is thus over. No single person, speaker, face, idea, or movement can or should represent the diversity of global justice. However, for this approach to *rhetorically* succeed, each activist must assume personal responsibility. We don't have to agree on every issue, message, or tactic. But we can (and should) make concerted efforts to continuously improve our own rhetorical labours. The rhetorical successes and failures of London based activists travel the media channels and affect the successes and failures of Argentina based activists. Global justice activists are thus called to rhetorical responsibility. This is disputable, of course. Some activists may reject everything that is being said here. That's fine and simply enriches the discussion. But many activists will agree, and I encourage those activists to take responsibility for their communicative effects. This is not a conservative, go it alone logic, far from it. Instead, it is about activists sincerely considering and seeking to improve their communication in the service of social and global change. This approach eliminates the need for rhetorical leaders and moves us one step closer to a decentred, leaderless world.

Conclusion: Making more Observations and Suggestions

The observations and suggestions of this essay are by no means finalized. Much more could and should be said. I also admit that I personally struggled with the contents of this essay. For instance, what should I include and exclude and what phraseologies should I use? How do I characterize and frame the different aspects of global justice rhetoric? What suggestions are most helpful and what can I fit into this essay? I could

have easily described global justice rhetoric as processual, meaning it seeks no final answers or destinations, and as interpersonal, meaning it privileges the personal and subjective voice over the scientifically detached voice. I could have given guidelines on public speaking, argumentation, street theatre, and the use of credibility and emotion as rhetorical strategies. I could have done several things differently, but I didn't. This admittance highlights the relativity of my observations/suggestions and implies the need for other activists to go out, look around, and reflect upon what they and others are doing. Then, together, we can share our insights, helping to improve the general lot of global justice rhetoric.

Some individuals and groups are already doing this. For instance, the U.S. based *SmartMeme* Collective provides instruction on narrative storytelling, culture jamming, and media relations, helping grassroots organizations to create and package messages of social change. As mentioned earlier, NYU professor Stephen Duncombe, discusses the relationship between communication and social change in his book *Dream* (2007). He argues that costumes, humour, popular culture, bright lights, and media spectacles strengthen rather than contradict or dilute radical causes. David Graeber, who was also mentioned earlier, argues that such famous slogans as 'all power to the imagination' and 'be realistic, demand the impossible' need updating. We need not only new slogans, but also new ways of communicating our political desires (2007). This relates to the work of Alex Khasnabish, a Canadian based sociologist of political imaginations. He argues that successful political insurgencies involve political struggle *and* collective imagination (2007). I completely agree, and add only that the collective imagination is created, altered, and communicated through effective rhetoric. Good rhetoric is thus part and parcel of successful political struggle. The Argentinean based group, *Colectivo Situaciones*, tries to do this by liberating thought and experience from the abstractions and constraints of language. They often use open ended, unfinished, and entangled aphorisms, metaphors, and theories to break past reified understandings (2007). And of course there are the small pockets of discussions and debates that occur at conferences and forums, in coffeehouses, bars, and basements, and through emails, blogs, and websites. These discussions and debates *are* rhetoric and often involve issues *of* rhetoric. That is to say, activists are rhetorical practitioners always and already. It's simply a matter of systematizing these practices into 'formal' observations and suggestions.

To aid this process, I close this essay with some very brief guidelines for collecting and sharing your observations and suggestions.⁵ As usual, these are not exhaustive but rather beginning points. The actual practice of observing and suggesting must be grounded in the demands of each situation.

First, try to be as respectful as possible. This means respecting your fellow activists whom you are observing as well as respecting the fact that other activists may disagree with your observations. Realize that your observations are just that – *your* observations. Thus, be reflective and cautious and recognize that other people are affected by and implicated in your observations. Second, spend time in the world you are observing. Be an activist who observes rather than an outsider who simply watches. This is probably

5 For related guidelines, see Uri Gordon (2007: 276 – 287).

not a problem for most activists, but it is good to keep this in mind when writing and/or discussing your observations and suggestion. Try to reflect upon and discuss your own experience of activism, rhetoric, and communication. This grounds your observations and suggestions in personal experience rather than the objectification of other people. Third, be honest and avoid over exaggerating what you see. We sometimes want to romanticize our experiences. Such romanticism is helpful for creating radical mythologies and mobilizing the collective imagination. But here, you're trying to improve our hands on practices. Thus, tell it like it is rather than how you imagine it. And fourth, provide *supportive* criticism. There's nothing wrong with providing feedback, debating the utility of a message or rhetorical approach, and commenting upon what you see. But be supportive. Realize that most activists make sincere attempts to do the best they can. Sometimes those attempts succeed and sometimes they fail. But the effort is there, nonetheless, and that must be acknowledged. Such recognition usually creates more supportive rather than judgmental comments and provides constructive rather than destructive criticism. This approach helps global justice activists become better communicators, thus increasing the possibility of social and global change.

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the author

Jason Del Gandio lectures in the Department of Strategic and Organizational Communication at Temple University (Philadelphia, USA). He specializes in the philosophy of communication, rhetoric, and critical studies and is currently interested in developing new forms of radicalism.
E-mail: jdel@temple.edu