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Networking Futures: The Movements against Corporate Globalization - Jeffrey S. Juris

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Review

Networking Futures: The Movements against Corporate Globalization
Jeffrey S. Juris. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. 378 pp.

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Networking Futures represents an important contribution to research on transnational organizing, social networks, and on the effects of technology on social relations. Juris, an anthropologist, draws from several years of field research that is part of his multi-sited, global ethnographic study. His experiences in the field lead him to offer, in addition to insightful analyses of contemporary organization and activism, important insights into the practice of social research in a networked, global age.

Juris explores the relationships between radical anarchist networks in Spain and the larger network of national and international actors that make up the anti-corporate globalization movement. He worked most closely with radical activists who were part of the Movement for Global Resistance, which helped organize protests at major sites of struggle against global financial institutions in the early-2000s. Juris's interest is in both the forms that activism takes as well as the relationships among activists and groups with different ideological leanings. Through the lens of a participant-observer, Juris offers an analysis and critique of contemporary movements, including the radical wing of activism in which he was immersed as well as the more "mainstream" and "reformist" elements. This tension

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has often been expressed as a conflict between the more informal, participatory, and network-like "horizontal" and the more established, representative or "vertical" elements of the movement.

Through case studies of particular episodes of contestation, such as the militant protests in Genoa in 2001, analyses of networks such as People's Global Action and Indymedia which were important in the early years of the anti-corporate globalization movement, and explorations of intra-organizational dynamics at anti-G8 and anti-World Bank/IMF protest and the World Social Forums, Juris illustrates how micro-level conflicts and ongoing activist practices contribute to the creation of new movement ideas, forms, and tactics. What we get is a succinctly presented account of how a highly diverse set of activists create and re-create new ideas and practices in the course of their activism. In addition, we see how global processes have transformed the spaces in which these interactions happen.

What Juris uncovers is a fascinating dynamic in which the interactions among diverse organizations and ideologies helped shape activism and organization in this movement. While radical groups tended to be more intense and unstable, they were better able than some "mainstream" activist groups to energize and mobilize activists and actions among youth and other marginalized groups. They also generated new, creative, and participatory forms of activism that helped fuel the movement and gain wider public attention. These groups' commitment to direct democracy and direct action, moreover, helped hold other activists and groups accountable to shared values of equity and participation.

More formally structured and often hierarchical organizations that tend to make up the "mainstream" elements of the movement helped provide sustainability and continuity. However, their representative structures and organizational requirements often inhibited their ability to realize core movement values such as democracy and equity in their actual practices. It is here that radical networks of activists played an important role in defending and prefiguring the ideals of the movement as activists struggled together within the existing political and social context to advance social transformation. Thus we see conflict being articulated at two levels: first, movements help give voice to conflicts in the larger political discourse, as was seen in the mass protests against global financial institutions. Once these larger conflicts were at least visible in public discourses, the activities of

radical activists shifted to hold more institutionally-oriented groups accountable to movement ideals and transforming local practices.

Particularly revealing is the analysis of how radical networks engaged in the World Social Forum process, where their direct actions targeted not political elites but rather the "reformist" organizations that were behind the organization of the forums. At the 2002 World Social Forum, radical groups stormed the VIP room to give voice to the WSF's stated principles of opposition to hierarchy and elitism. "We are all VIPs," activists proclaimed as they doused surprised media and parliamentary delegates with bottled water. As was also true with subsequent interventions, radicals have helped the WSF evolve over time by forcing organizers to address the contradictions between the ideals envisioned as part of "another world"[1] and the realities of engaging in political work within the existing political context. Juris refers to this as "dual politics," whereby activists intervene in dominant publics while generating decentralized network forms that 'prefigure' the utopian worlds they seek to create.

This account of how movements and activists change over time is particularly helpful for our efforts to understand the current political moment, which is characterized both by crisis and by expanding mobilization across diverse movement sectors. Today perhaps more than at any other time in history, activists from many different places and social contexts are seeking to build alliances across difference. Juris's work helps show us what happens when activists engage in this work.

As the book's title suggests, the idea of networks and networking is central to the story Juris tells. What I found especially interesting was the explicit ways the activists Juris worked with understood networks and networking, and how their commitment to network forms shaped their engagement with other movement organizations. There is a very sophisticated approach to activists' thinking about organization and organizing forms in this movement that few scholars have uncovered so clearly.

While the network is seen as an organizing technology by the activists with whom Juris worked, it is also *performed* in concrete spaces (such as global protest sites and social forums) and through communications practices. Juris considers throughout the book the ways technology and innovations in communications

technology affected activists' ability to create relationships that were consistent with their ideological commitments. The chapter on Indymedia, for instance, considers how the principles guiding the Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) movement were articulated in particular movement campaigns. FOSS advocates have explicitly sought, with some degree of success, to replicate the decentralized and participatory forms of collaboration found in virtual spaces within the concrete spaces where activists gather.

The network has become an important and frequently used metaphor in contemporary analysis of globalization and social movements, and Juris's work contributes a great deal to our understandings of networks by stressing the point that networks must be "performed" in actual spaces and that these performances have lasting impacts on networks' evolution. In the sites of mass protests against global financial institutions, at World Social Forums, and in campaigns to coordinate mass pressure on governments and corporations, diverse movements come together and explore modes of connection/collaboration/cooperation. They experiment with new forms of communication and technologies of exchange. They fight. And they learn new ideas and perspectives that shape their future courses of actions both as individuals and organizations.

Juris's writing is engaging and colorful, and one feels as if s/he is on the streets of Genoa during the 2001 protests against the G-8, where activists faced surprising levels of police repression that left one protester dead. The reader can almost hear the samba music being played by the "pink march" at the World Bank meeting in Prague. And I was cheering and laughing as I was taken back to sites that were familiar to me where "white overalls" activists and an anarchist "pink fairy" used street theatre to mock authorities' militarized response to nonviolent protests, challenging their legitimacy.

Another key contribution of this work is Juris's method of *militant ethnography,* which requires him to take an active role in the activist networks he works with. He argues that to fully appreciate the experiences of activism and how this experience shapes participants' understandings of the issues at stakes and affects their ongoing participation in the movement, one has to use one's own body as a research tool. His stance led Juris to the admittedly uncomfortable position of being asked by his activist research participants to read their organization's statement at a

meeting of the World Social Forum's International Council. By contributing his skills and resources to the work of the movement, he was able to gain access and trust that would otherwise be denied and to understand his subject in a way that is not possible through detached observation. As he notes, activists' "fierce dedication to egalitarian, collaborative process, […] demanded of me a politically engaged mode of ethnographic research."

This value of such engagement is most clearly apparent in the chapters on the Prague and Genoa protests, where activists' "diversity of tactics" strategy allowed a flourishing of diverse and creative forms of participation in the first instance and where police repression turned the euphoria of earlier protests into fear and confusion. Without the trust of fellow-activists, Juris would not have gained the insights he did into how such experiences affect participants. Without experiencing these emotions himself, he would not appreciate the importance of these kinds of movement engagements to long-term struggle.

Having gone through these extremes of emotions, radical activists may have been more open to the invitation of World Social Forum organizers to engage with a process they explicitly critiqued as "reformist." Those attending the forums were moved by the experience of seeing themselves as part of a huge global movement. As Juris observed, "[e]ven anarchists would have a hard time resisting this magnetic attraction" (238). Radicals increasingly saw their role as helping "contaminate" forum spaces with more radical/transformative thinking.

But we see that it is their engagement with the social forums that contributes to the collective articulation of new movement norms and practices that have subsequently become routinized through the WSF process, making it more participatory and responsive to less powerful groups. Thus, Juris concludes that movement success depends upon a diversity of organizational forms that are devoted to the hard work of building structures for long-term collaboration and contestation as well as for radical mobilization and critique.

The story Juris tells in this book is about the development of a "cultural logic of networks" through ongoing engagement among diverse movements and actors and competition among organizational logics. He drives home the point that "anti-corporate globalization movements involve growing confluence among networks as computer-supported infrastructure (technology), networks as

organizational structure (form) and networks as political model (norm), mediated by concrete activist practice" (11). This network logic, in turn, has helped disseminate and institutionalize practices and norms that support horizontal connections among diverse actors, facilitate open communication and information exchange, aid collaboration among decentralized groups, and encourage innovation and leadership among rank-and-file activists. The network logic contrasts the "command logic" of earlier movements and parties, and indeed we see how the enactment of networks has expanded movements' strategic thinking and analyses of how best to further struggles for social change.

In contrast to earlier movement waves, the longevity of organizations is less important than the cultivation of activism and activist norms and networks. As Juris traces the dissolution of several of the network organizations he observed for several years, we see that the ideas and lessons continue to be tested and applied in new settings. Activists in People's Global Action and Mobilization for Global Resistance, consistent with practices elsewhere, have flowed out of these earlier networks to focus their work in localized struggles and settings. Juris's research participants expressed to him the idea that their work to make conflicts over globalization visible has succeeded, and that they now see a need to work at advancing changes in practices and thinking at local levels. Consistent with the fluid forms of networks, activists could flow into new local efforts and experimentations—such as grassroots culture jamming, digital activism, and building alternatives to capitalist institutions—while maintaining their global connections. Networking itself has become a goal as well as an outcome of activism, a tool for the large-scale social transformation these activists seek.

NOTE

1. The slogan of the World Social Forums is "Another world is possible."