THROWING BRICKS AT A BRICK WALL: THE G20 AND THE ANTINOMIES OF PROTEST

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In fact, a given agent’s practical relation to the future, which governs his present practice, is defined in the relationship between, on the one hand, his habitus with its temporal structures and dispositions towards the future, constituted in the course of a particular relationship to a particular universe of probabilities, and on the other hand a certain state of the chances objectively offered to him by the social world.¹

Introduction When the leaders of the world’s most powerful economies descended on Toronto in June 2010, they were met by a state that had spent nearly $1 billion to host the event (including building an infamous $9.4 million security fence and mobilizing thousands of police officers); a chief of police willing to misrepresent the law in the interest of maintaining peace; thousands of so-called peaceful protesters; a contingent of property-smashing Black Bloc activists; and a population that was largely unaware of the political, economic, and ideological stakes involved in the confrontation provoked by the G20’s descent.² Fallout from this struggle included the arrest of 1,000 protesters, lawsuits against the Toronto Police Services, and several investigations into police behaviour during the protests. Nonetheless, the G20 reached an agreement to introduce aggressive austerity measures, the impact of which—if history is any indication—will be most directly felt by those who are already most vulnerable economically and socially.

For activists and researchers interested in contentious politics generally and the alter-globalization movement specifically, conflicts at the Toronto G20 summit brought into relief tensions between proponents of divergent protest tactics and the challenges of “respect for diversity of tactics.”³ In
particular, a small but well-organized group of anarchists making use of Black Bloc tactics were accused of undermining the mainstream People First demonstration, organized largely by the Ontario labour movement. Taking up Adorno’s observation that “wrong life cannot be lived rightly,” I argue that, to a significant extent, debates about the relationship among divergent protest tactics risk neglecting a central feature of domination: the impossibility of adopting a “right” form of protest in a “wrong” political field.

To make this argument, I adopt a critical theoretical perspective and thereby move away from the search for positive causal mechanisms that is currently dominant in mainstream social movement studies. I focus attention on a negative characteristic of the political space of the Toronto G20 and argue that the structure of symbolic power constituting that space produced what I call political antinomies for the G20’s opponents. In logic, antinomies refer to contradictions between two logically necessary conclusions. In this paper, the term antinomy refers to the contradictions exposed by the necessary failure of equally plausible but mutually exclusive approaches to protest politics.

The normative grounding of the project is both a critique of neoliberalism and a concern that decades of neoliberal restructuring and intensification have diminished the viability of large-scale radical projects to reduce or eliminate the inequalities, the modes of exploitation, and the antidemocratic impulses at neoliberalism’s core. My theoretical framework will be the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, which I summarize in the next section. Bourdieu, like many critical theorists, was interested in developing not a positive vision of the future or even of democratic practice, but a vision of democracy “as a historical process of negation of social negation, a never-ending effort to make social relations less arbitrary, institutions less unjust, distributions of resources and options less imbalanced, recognition less scarce.”

Extending Lawler’s persuasive analysis, I argue that the operation of symbolic power as described by Bourdieu forces dominated actors into either strategies that conform to dominant schemas of legitimacy and are therefore unable to challenge those schemas, or those that render actors unintelligible within symbolic space and therefore hopelessly marginal within the political sphere. This operation of symbolic power brings to light a
central challenge for politics as a negation of social negation: to the extent that efforts at negation are undercut by political antinomies there is a very real possibility that these efforts will not make relations less arbitrary or less unjust, but entrench precisely the modes of domination that provoke efforts at negation in the first place.

This analysis looks at only one aspect of domination and should not be taken as an assessment of the possibility of successful protest generally. Rather, it is intended as a warning flag, as a single but integral node in the larger network of possibilities and constraints within which collective actors struggle against exploitation and marginalization.

Pierre Bourdieu: *Habitus, Field, Capital, Symbolic Power* In an effort to overcome the opposition between subjectivism and objectivism, Bourdieu developed three interrelated thinking tools: the *habitus*, fields, and capital. The *habitus* is a deeply embodied, generative set of dispositions by which individuals perceive social space and formulate judgments about actions to take within that space. In Bourdieu's words, *habitus* are “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.”

The *habitus* contributed to Bourdieu's break from objectivism by allowing him to conceive of action as practical strategy oriented towards struggles to accumulate material and symbolic profit. *Habitus* are incorporated through repeated exposure to various social fields, an exposure that confers varying amounts of “capital” available to agents in social fields and that therefore creates a close relationship between field, capital, and *habitus*. By “capital,” Bourdieu means the structured combination of cultural know-how or knowingness, official qualifications, economic resources, social networks, and symbolic advantages that actors mobilize and make use of within social fields. Such fields are always hierarchically organized and contain distinctive divisions of labour and methods for classifying the people, groups, and objects that fall within them. Once incorporated into the *habitus*, these hierarchical systems of division and classification become the cognitive and
affective bases for future actions. Put more concisely, the *habitus* is structured by the fields that it encounters and subsequently becomes a structure according to which judgments about social practice are made. Because these judgments and actions are oriented towards success within a given field, they tend to act in accordance with that field’s system of division and classification, and therefore tend to reproduce those divisions and classifications.

The immanent, practical demands of fields mediate the dispositions comprising the *habitus* in at least two ways. First, the overall amount and structure of capital that an actor bears—an objective measure—significantly affects the likelihood of that actor’s success in taking action in social space. Second, the actor’s subjective perception of a field as available for successful intervention introduces judgments based on practical reasoning rather than on mechanistic determinations produced by the structure of the field itself. Actors assess the field, their position within that field, and their capital, and make corollary assessments of other actors within the field. Because these judgments are always undertaken from the actor’s concrete position from within a field, they are always made from a partial perspective. Partial, that is, both in the sense that the actor is psychically invested in the assessment and in the sense that action is never the result of a rational evaluation based on full knowledge of opportunities and constraints as per rational action theory, nor is it undertaken in conscious keeping with a norm or rule and with full awareness of the meaning and implications of that rule as per objectivist thinking. For Bourdieu, action is based on immanent strategies and is the product of a context-specific but nonetheless structured encounter of field and perception.

Bourdieu’s notion of a symbolic power provides a conceptual means of connecting the unequal distribution of a particular kind of capital—symbolic capital—to practical assessments about the field and particularly about the resources one brings to the field. It therefore allows social movement analysts to focus on how symbolic violence mediates between *habitus* and field, and to specify the ways in which this mediation hinders successful mobilization. The symbolic in Bourdieu’s work is the shared and structured system of distinctions that renders social space, distributions of capital, and rules of accumulation intelligible to subjects within that space. These shared symbolic
structures are the grounds for “consensus on the meaning of the social world” and therefore produce logical and moral integration and ultimately logical and moral conformity. The preconscious, prelinguistic mimetic process through which objective structures are incorporated into bodily dispositions (habitus) tends to make habitus-bearing actors misrecognize (or fail to recognize) the morally (though not historically) arbitrary nature of the distribution of resources, authority, and benefits objectified in any given field. As a result, the habitus is disposed to perceiving arbitrary inequalities as both natural and inevitable (“doxic” in Bourdieu’s language) and therefore to misattributing the cause of suffering or benefit produced by hierarchically organized social space to the merits or shortcomings of individuals within that space rather than to those individuals’ unequal access to various material, social, and cultural resources. Symbolic power is the ability to take advantage of unequal distributions of various forms of capital to impose or maintain the system of distinctions that support that distribution. The central feature of Bourdieu’s conception of symbolic domination, therefore, is that dominated groups adopt the point of view of the dominant precisely because the two groups share a doxic misrecognition of naturalized arbitrary distinctions.

It would be a mistake, however, to treat these naturalized distinctions as giving positive content to specific elements within the symbolic. As I illustrate in my discussion of neoliberalism below, symbolic classifications operate via a system of distinctions rather than ascribing nominal meaning to isolated objects. The meaning of labour unions or anarchists, for example, is not derived from a positive ascription of their characteristics but by situating them within an interconnected system of distinctions between freedom and constraint, public and private, legitimate and illegitimate. Thus, while protesters clearly disagreed with the G20 state representatives on the meaning of substantive policy issues, the degree to which they adopted doxic understandings—the point of view of the dominant—about norms of communication, protest, and the public-versus-private nature of property marked out the terrain and strategy of the symbolic struggle they waged through divergent protest tactics. It also marked out, in different ways, the constraints on effective symbolic action.

To conclude this overview, I note that effects of these arbitrary but natural-
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ized schemes of classification are no more neutral or evenly distributed than the distributions of various forms of capital on which they are based. Indeed, Bourdieu was very interested in the concrete forms of suffering that symbolic violence produced among dominated groups and actors. While Bourdieu emphasized the psychological and economic manifestations of symbolic domination, social scientists can benefit from going further to articulate a specifically political form of suffering—distortions and failures produced by political antinomies—by analyzing protest within a field of symbolic domination, as I do in the final sections of this paper.

Efficacy and Antinomies What I have been calling a political antinomy exists when a political field is structured in such a way as to make it impossible for dominated actors to gain sufficient position within that field to alter its basic structures and therefore the relations of domination that are structured by the field and ultimately to alter the social construction according to which the field is reproduced. This impossibility is bound up in the misrecognition of arbitrary distributions of capital within social space. Bourdieu refers to practical “double binds” in The Weight of the World to indicate a situation wherein the contradictory demands of a social field are impossible to satisfy simultaneously.\(^\text{12}\) Importantly, this double bind is found in the relation between an actor, the resources she carries with her, and the field in which she acts. Lawler draws out the implications of this relation in terms of efforts to overcome symbolic violence. She argues that Bourdieu's framework allows us to perceive a paradox wherein someone who is dominated may find a legitimate strategy in accommodating herself to the very relations that do her harm. In such cases, by conforming to unjust relations of power an actor might achieve a certain amount of individual liberation but without challenging those dominating relations.\(^\text{13}\) Moreover, there is no reason to believe that the ability to accommodate oneself to relations of power is a skill that is evenly distributed among dominated groups and individuals. For Lawler, conforming to the dominant strictures of a field allows an individual or group the space to exert a certain degree of agency, but because this agency is purchased through submission to rules of the game that unevenly distribute opportunities for success, the actor is
never able to gain sufficient hold to alter the rules themselves. My intention in this paper is to apply Lawler’s analysis to the G20 protests in Toronto, but pay equal attention to the conformist and marginalizing strategies deployed in the People First and Black Bloc actions, respectively.

Naturally, claiming that the “wrongness” of the political field and the structures of symbolic power G20 protesters faced meant they had available to them no “right” way to protest demands an account of what constitutes a right protest. As rough shorthand, I suggest that right protest would be both ethical and effective. I will leave a discussion of what constitutes ethical protest to my analysis of the G20 protests below, but an account of efficacy is surely warranted here.

A central difficulty of the critique of domination I am attempting here lies in the need to parse out what constitutes efficacy. Simply measuring efficacy by identifying an action’s goals would be a problematic strategy for a number of reasons. First, goals were almost certainly multiple, both within and among groups and protesters. Individuals and groups almost certainly had ambivalent and possibly conflicting goals, and part of most organizations’ pre-protest discussions and internal disputes would have centred on exactly this ambivalence, possibly without resolution. Put simply, domination is neither so simple nor so direct that it provokes univocal and unidirectional resistance. I suggest, therefore, that any analysis of the G20 protests must necessarily be selective about what it considers to be relevant outcomes.

An obvious measure might be whether the protesters were capable of stopping the G20 meetings or at least having marked influence on its decisions. There was some of this efficacy in the 2001 protests against the FTAA in Quebec, so one might assume that it could have been among hoped-for outcomes of these protests. In all likelihood, explaining outcomes at the level of actual G20 decisions would require analysis at multiple levels: international political economy, the geography of the summit, the domestic politics of host countries, analysis of policing, as well as mechanisms of contention. Clearly, such a comprehensive analysis is beyond the ambition of this paper. A common alternative is to point to less concrete outcomes, such as building a sense of community and common purpose; in short, developing collective identity. There is certainly room for this type of
research, particularly in light of Barr and Drury’s finding that the sense of empowerment derived from participation in summit protests is less evenly distributed amongst protest participants than organizers might hope.¹⁵

My interest, however, is in the relationship between protest tactics and power. Therefore, the axis of efficacy I am interested in is one that Melucci has argued is a central effect of new social movement mobilization: making power visible.¹⁶ Underpinning my argument, however, is an awareness of the fact that, particularly when it comes to questions of power, visibility is not an all-or-nothing question. Rather, visibility must always be thought of as a dynamic process wherein bringing certain features to light necessarily occludes others. Certainly the police response to even the possibility that Black Bloc tactics might make an appearance rendered visible the state’s capacity for brute coercive power. If the BlackBloc had not participated, would that power have remained invisible? Certainly one implication of the People First efforts to negotiate with the police (discussed below) might have been to maintain that power’s invisibility. That is, the state’s reliance on coercive power “in the last instance” to ensure its operation of economic power, which the BlackBloc exposed, demanded tactics designed to render visible that aspect of state power by provoking coercion. Nonetheless, Black Bloc’s detractors argue that its tactics produce distortions in media coverage and public discussion about the G20 meetings and, in a sense, therefore were also complicit in removing the G20’s economic power from sight. Indeed, as I argue below, the state’s police power and the G20’s economic power are separate components of a broader scheme of power—Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power—that is nearly impossible to render unproblematically visible. Yet, rendering visible the relationship between the arbitrary and disproportionate symbolic power of the G20 states and the effects of the use of that power on people’s lives must surely be a necessary condition for confronting neoliberal hegemony.

**The Context: Neoliberalism and Liberal Protest Ethics** In his later years, Bourdieu increasingly focused his research and polemics on neoliberalism’s deepening naturalization.¹⁷ After several decades of growing neoliberal hegemony, its features are well known but a few are worth rehearsing briefly.¹⁸
Neoliberal partisans equate economic liberalism and efficiency with democratic freedom and therefore diacritically articulate all collectivism, state intervention, and market restraint as archaic forms of totalitarianism. This allows them to construct their opponents as either naively or perniciously fighting hopeless and ideological battles against inequality’s inevitability and desirability. Neoliberals conceive the state’s role to be primarily for providing neutral, technical economic management, and promote a prescriptive focus on austerity financing, state downsizing, and privatization in a concerted effort to roll back the progressive gains of the last century. As Duggan argues, a primary effect of neoliberal restructuring has been to redraw the divide between public and private and consequently the division between the political and the nonpolitical. The redrawn division between the boundaries of the political and the nonpolitical, particularly as it relates to the authority to oversee the technical management of global capitalism, is central to my argument about expressive protest, below.

Bourdieu and Wacquant argue that imposing these conceptions of the relationship between the state and the economy has depended on a form of symbolic violence, which, as discussed earlier, depends upon dominated groups adopting the point of view of dominant actors. Neoliberal restructuring entails constraining the state and anything associated with it as much as possible and organizing as many fields as possible according to principles associated with the market, namely, according to particular conceptions of freedom, flexibility, individuality, and democracy. As fields have been objectively structured according to this scheme of classification, these schemes have been slowly incorporated into the habitus of people living within highly neoliberalized societies. Keil, using a Foucauldian analysis, points to the “everydayness” of neoliberalism in urban settings, which is to say, the ways in which people’s daily activities and particularly their encounters with cityscapes reinforce the divisions on which neoliberalism is based.

It is worth noting that neoliberalism is not the sole determiner of the symbolic space of protest in G8 countries. As Della Porta and Filleule note, disruption has been delegitimized as communication societies endeavour to eliminate all traces of social conflict. The moral framework behind such
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desire to eliminate disruption by transforming conflict into communication has roots in both liberal political ethics and deliberative democracy. In both cases, mutual recognition and civil negotiation of differences are premised on eschewing actions or modes of communication that either radically question fundamental principles of social organization (for example, because they underpin and legitimize exploitation and marginalization) or are expressed in ways that are emotional, “impassioned, extreme, and the product of particular interests.”

While further empirical work on the relation between neoliberal hegemony and public perception of protest needs to be done, the dynamics between the everydayness of neoliberalism and its consequent incorporation into the disposition of the general public gives ample reason to predict that as Torontonians and Canadians watched the encounters between police and protesters, they would be disposed to perceive and interpret these encounters according to naturalized and misrecognized neoliberal doxa. Not surprisingly, according to at least one poll the public did not appear to sympathize with either People First or the Black Bloc activists, and the majority of respondents expressed disgust, shame, anger, and sadness at the event.

To summarize, the symbolic space within which G20 protests struggled was characterized as a neoliberal regime of distinctions between public and private, freedom and liberty, and so on. Complementing this schema was a further liberal orthodoxy regarding legitimate and illegitimate forms of communication, an orthodoxy that increasingly delegitimizes disruption in favour of a moderate communicative ethic. Given that there was a neoliberal public watching events unfold, accruing symbolic profit in the G20 field depended, in large part, on the consonance between protest actions and liberal and neoliberal distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate protests, efficiency and disruption, neutrality and bias. There is nothing novel in arguing that the success of protests depends in part on the relationship between participant frames and mainstream beliefs and values. What I argue, however, is that symbolic domination cannot be captured through cultural models alone insofar as such approaches tend to emphasize the causal effects of ideas and consciousness. The Bourdieuan framework that I am developing here traces the success or failure of protest to specific
distributions of various forms of “capital,” naturalized through specific schemes of classification.

**Two Protests** This section sets the groundwork for the analytical sections that follow by identifying the central actors in the G20 field and articulating their differences not as reflections of differing natural properties, but as distinctions based on specific schemes of classification and perception manifested through the actions or position-taking they perform within social space.\(^{28}\) These position-takings constitute concrete attempts on the part of actors to establish their own self-definitions as well as a definition of the field itself, that is, to establish constructions that in turn have real effects on subsequent developments of the field.

The week prior to the G20 summit included protests and events focusing on issues ranging from Indigenous rights to queer liberation and climate change. This paper, however, focuses on two major events: the People First march and the Black Bloc “Get Off the Fence” action. The People First march was organized by labour unions (primarily the Canadian Labour Congress and the Ontario Federation of Labour) as well as a number of allied groups (such as the Council of Canadians, Greenpeace, Oxfam Canada, and the Canadian Federation of Students) and attracted between 4,000 and 30,000 participants.\(^{29}\) Event organizers negotiated with police and attempted to gain symbolic leverage through their visibility, their numbers, and the moral content of their message.\(^{30}\)

By contrast, the Get Off the Fence action intended to join with the People First march until it turned away from the fence towards the police-sanctioned free-speech zone, at which point activists would break off to engage in “a militant, confrontational demonstration where [they would] challenge the global apartheid and injustices the fence represents.”\(^{31}\) As promised, where the People First march was stopped by three rows of police, Black Bloc activists broke off and undertook a highly choreographed burst of property destruction. Activists engaging in Black Bloc tactics insisted on maintaining anonymity, framed the police as singularly hostile and violent representatives of state power, and sought to gain symbolic leverage through the destruction of the symbols of capitalism, primarily storefronts of big businesses such as Starbucks and various banks.
Antinomies: Politics of Disruption  An obvious place to begin seeking political antinomies is to examine the use of so-called violent actions by Black Bloc protesters. Conway identifies a number of features of political property destruction that are worth recounting briefly here. Supporters of the tactic argue that property destruction is a continuum of actions from stickering to window-smashing and that some actions on the continuum (graffiti, billboard “corrections,” and stickering in particular) are well accepted as legitimate forms of protest. Further, advocates argue that any protesters who act outside legitimate, routinized, and bureaucratized forms of dissent are indiscriminately deemed violent and that the term ought to be applied only to situations where people actually get hurt. Finally, advocates argue that people engaged in this type of property destruction distinguish between private (capitalist) property and personal (use-value) property and target only the former. The intention in doing so is to unsettle reified middle-class attitudes about property and thereby open up debates about alternative ways of organizing ownership and material goods.32 These justifications appear to have been at play in the G20 field as well. Media reports contain claims such as “This isn’t violence. This is vandalism against violent corporations. We did not hurt anybody. They (the corporations) are the ones hurting people.”33 Mathieu Francoeur, of the Montreal-based Anti-Capitalist Convergence, called the vandalism “a means of expression [that] doesn’t compare to the economic and state violence we’re subjected to.”34

Understanding the place of these tactics in neoliberal opposition requires breaking from substantialist thinking about violence. Violence is not an object with moral properties but a site of struggle over how to understand relationships between individual or group actions, structural conditions, and those people and objects that are somehow damaged by those relationships. Analysts ought to avoid joining Black Bloc activists in arguing for a different definition of violence—that would be to treat violence itself as an object of study—but rather take the conditions under which definitions are produced as the object of study. The task, in Bourdieuan terms, is to objectify the structures by which violence itself is objectified (i.e., constructed as an object of study). In this way, we can interrogate the viability of activist attempts to impose a new definition of violence or even to open up the question of violence in the minds of the watching public.35
In Bourdieu's view, the “specific efficacy of subversive action consists in the power to bring to consciousness, and so modify, the categories of thought which help to orient individual and collective practices and in particular the categories through which distributions are perceived and appreciated.”

The question then is, what are the conditions under which vandalism has the power to modify conscious beliefs about property and its relation to capitalist exploitation? But elsewhere Bourdieu cautions that modifying consciousness is not a simple task of changing ideas that people have about the world; it entails changing the embodied dispositions—the *habitus*—through which they perceive the world. There is reason for concern, then, that Black Bloc tactics may be too discursive, that they might exist too firmly in the realm of the symbolic to act directly on dispositions.

Lovell makes a compelling argument against overly discursive strategies in her rejoinder against Butler’s critique of Bourdieu. Butler argues that Bourdieu’s conception of the *habitus* is too deterministic, particularly because it gives insufficient attention to the performative possibilities of resignification. She poses the question of “whether the improper use of the performative can succeed in producing the effect of authority where there is no recourse to a prior authorization; indeed, whether the misappropriation of the performative might not be the very occasion for the exposure of prevailing forms of authority and the exclusions by which they proceed.”

Lovell takes up Butler’s use of Rosa Parks as a paradigm example of unauthorized resignification and shows that, in fact, apparently unauthorized performatives do require insertion into amenable—which is to say authorizing—social fields. Similarly, then, Black Bloc tactics need to be understood in terms of the field in which they enter.

The antinomy protesters faced centres on the question of violence. Black Bloc activists sought to subvert the category of violence without having sufficient symbolic and material capital to do so. Importantly, symbolic domination is not simply the result of framing or messaging; it comes from the complicity between neoliberal schemes of classification, the physical space occupied within the G20 field—the fence, the police lines, the kettles, the protest crowd—as well as from the symbolic and material capital all participants bring to the field and the disposition of the public towards appreciating or depreciating activist attempts at resignification.
While Black Bloc activists sought to unsettle and transform reified valuations of the tactical and ethical value of “violent” property destruction, their use of tactics already devalued by reified conceptions cannot resonate with a neoliberal public. As a consequence, the action itself diminishes their capacity to accrue sufficient symbolic capital to impose a new definition. Fundamentally, the relationship between the tactics and the symbolic structures into which the tactics were inserted foreclosed any possibility that the tactic would find success.

This analysis is in no way an attempt to weigh in on longstanding debates about the value of property destruction as a political tactic generally. Instead, I recommend distinguishing between the moral leverage upon which movement actions implicitly rely and the question of tactical efficacy. Deobjectifying violence and other movement tactics entails reconceiving moral leverage as symbolic capital. This kind of political contention is a two-stage struggle. First, property destruction needs to be endowed with adequate moral content to be recognized as a legitimate action within the political field. Only then can violence be deployed against specific objects. The close relationship between \textit{habitus} and field, on which social intelligibility depends, means that actors cannot simply force their way into a field and make socially intelligible actions that disregard the entire scheme of distinctions according to which that field operates.

To summarize, an impossibility emerges from the relationship between the objective possibilities inscribed in the G20 protest field as part of a broader political field constructed on neoliberal doxa and the combination of dispositions and “capital” upon which the protesters construct their actions. Despite themselves, Black Bloc activists seek symbolic leverage where there is none to be had, a position-taking occasioned by the resolution of their ambivalence about the political field through their forced incorporation into the very scheme of legitimacy-accumulation their tactics seek to undermine.

\textit{Antimonies: Politics as Pluralism, or, Protests Are Not Democratic}

Appreciating the impossibilities facing the People First march requires breaking from the democratic sensibilities of expressive protests and relocating protests within the nondemocratic space of symbolic markets. The diffi-
culty lies precisely in accomplishing what mainstream approaches to social movement research fail to do, which is to understand protests neither in terms of their own self-conception nor in terms of their function within democratic structures, but in terms of the relationship between self-understandings within the G20 protest field and the structures of the field itself.

Several researchers have already begun to point to the diminishing effectiveness of demonstrations. Della Porta and Filleiule, for example, argue that “to the extent that demonstrations have become widespread, acceptable, and more predictable, they seem to have lost political effectiveness.” Following Piven and Cloward, they describe the growing acceptability of protests as a process of normalization rather than institutionalization. As this process deepens, movements shift their strategies away from efforts to “make trouble” and towards efforts to “make up the numbers.” Further, they accept a delegitimization of disruption generally as communication takes priority over exposing social conflict. They conclude that this trend produces a distinction between groups that have the resources to mobilize sizable demonstrations and those groups whose resource poverty encourages more disruptive strategies. As they put it, “the distribution of resources that allows one to adapt to the new rules of the game of ‘opinion-geared democracy’ is neither equally nor randomly distributed among social groups.”

Organizers of the People First rally pursued a strategy that, at least in part, attempted to increase their symbolic capital by distinguishing themselves from the activities of the relatively resource-poor anarchists using Black Bloc tactics. Sid Ryan polemically equated the threat to democratic space posed by Black Bloc “hooligans” to the threat posed by the state’s massive police presence and boasted of working to create a democratic space by working with police. In fact, prior to the summit, organizers argued somewhat ironically that they were providing a safe place to express dissent that was “free from the overblown security presence that’s become so commonplace during meetings of the world’s most powerful heads of state” precisely by working closely with representatives of the overblown security presence on details of where the demonstrations would take place.

Close cooperation with security forces can be understood as precisely the kind of paradoxical manoeuvring Lawler identifies. Instead of looking
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at cooperation with police as a mechanism for producing democratic facilitation, it can be better understood as a mechanism—intended as such or not—for accumulating symbolic capital by producing a distinction between People First and Get Off the Fence. By demonstrating that People First was not Black Bloc, People First organizers accumulated symbolic capital at Black Bloc’s expense. The organizers’ ability to produce this distinction depended materially on their organizational resources, but the organizers also brought to bear important symbolic resources. They used their institutional stability to maintain relations with police and thereby portray those relations as supporting legitimate protest. Their commitment to non-disruptive politics conformed to not only the ideals of liberal pluralism, but also neoliberal norms equating progress with efficiency and order, and conceiving conflict as located in, and resolvable through, democratic and communicative spaces. The question is whether People First could mobilize sufficient material and symbolic capital to render visible the G20’s economic and political power, or whether it merely indicates accession to a field structured precisely against the possibility of such change.

The People First organizers sought to achieve symbolic leverage by repeatedly emphasizing the size of the protest and the moral virtue of both their claims and their means for expressing them. Both strategies rely on a state and public disposed to appreciating the value of a particular size of demonstration and the claims being made—that is, on a shared understanding of the structure of the social field and positions taken within it. Implicitly, the strategies rely optimistically on the potential for a combination of size and virtue to provoke reflection in the watching public and to thereby make them available for other opportunities to oppose neoliberal projects.

There are good reasons for thinking these strategies were doomed to failure in the G20 field. First, they miss out on the fact that neoliberalism has, wherever possible, shifted decisionmaking out of the democratic arena and into technical ones. Attempting to confront neoliberalism from within democratic space fundamentally misrecognizes the semi-autonomous operation of different subfields within the Canadian field of power. As discussed above, consolidating the apparent obviousness of the need to technocratically protect an expansive capitalist economy at the expense of all other
considerations has been a primary achievement of neoliberalism. As a result, questioning the underlying premise of the G20—technical global economic management—has been removed from the democratic field. The doxic, unspoken, and misrecognized character of this removal makes the expressive demands of the protesters politically (though obviously not literally) unsayable. To be more accurate, such demands are unintelligible in a democratic field where socially motivated intrusions into the market have become practically (in both senses of the word) unthinkable. Thus, the commitment to liberal pluralism that underpins the expressive politics of demonstrations—a commitment that imagines groups making rational and moral claims for justice in a democratic arena and that entails expressive protesters submitting to the rules of democratic engagement that restrict allowable appeals to those based on reason and shared moral values and those presented in nondisruptive, reasonable ways—misses a critical feature of contemporary political struggle: conflicts within the democratic field are at best minor skirmishes in the broader field of power and have been highly marginalized by the neoliberal reorganization of the relationship between economic management and democracy. This constitutes a political impossibility. The field in which protesters are competent to protest, the field in which they have the requisite knowingness, organizational capacity, and symbolic legitimacy, is a field in which neoliberalism is sufficiently dominant symbolically to have already excluded anything protesters might say from the realm of the politically thinkable.

Conclusions and Further Research  I have argued that applying a Bourdieuan framework to the analysis of contentious politics allows us to perceive and appreciate the existence of political antinomies: the necessary failure of mutually exclusive modes of protest points to a contradiction between the conditions under which certain protests are mounted and the possibility of adopting successful protest strategies. In the case of the G20 protests in Toronto, I have argued that neither strategies based on expressive demonstrations nor disruptive vandalism were supported by sufficient symbolic capital to effectively render visible neoliberal economic and political power, and indeed that the structure of the G20 field prohibited any chance of successful protest. This analysis marks an extension of Bourdieu's
own sociological work into the realm of political theory by combining empirical analysis and normative critique to problematize liberal pluralist and neoliberal conceptions of democratic practice, particularly as they relate to protest politics. Doing so draws attention to the growing distance between the democratic pretensions of liberal pluralism on the one hand and the conditions of the field of power, neoliberalized *habitus*, and the distribution of material and symbolic capital among protesters on the other.

Two broad areas of research are opened up by these conclusions. Empirical work needs to be undertaken on the effects of protest that fall outside of the specific definition of success I used for this analysis. Some such work has examined the relationship of protest to *habitus*, notably Crossley’s work on the production of what he calls “radical habitus” during protest participation, as well as Ibrahim’s work on the relationship between *habitus* and ideology in anarchist and socialist mobilization. It is, however, worth keeping in mind that investment and accumulation remain central to Bourdieu’s understanding of capital. In this sense, protest events represent a sort of investment opportunity, pointing to the need for empirical research on the relationship between the “capital” investments of anarchist and representation-based protest strategies and subsequent mobilization. Such research should focus less on the effects of protest on fields characterized by political antinomies and more on the effects of the overall quantity and structure of the “capital” that activists and organizations derive from investments in particular protests. In light of the problems raised in this paper, social scientists ought to investigate what kinds of social actors, endowed with what kinds of collective resources and dispositions, do specific “investment” strategies make available for subsequent struggles to make the world less unjust and social distinctions less arbitrary? Put another way, in terms of capacity building and the general direction of social movements, what are the long-term risks and opportunities associated with conforming to neoliberal protest doxa, on the one hand, or refusing intelligibility within the available symbolic market, on the other? There are clear connections to be made with existing social movement research, but a Bourdieuan relational logic—such as the one I have articulated here—based on *habitus*, field, and capital should provide novel theoretical and empirical interventions.
The second broad area of research that my argument suggests is more explicitly normative because a number of ethical questions are raised by the likelihood of guaranteed failure. If success is impossible in a particular context, what duties do activists pursuing specific strategies owe to activists pursuing alternative strategies? If antinomies do exist, then neither Black Bloc nor People First can make an absolute claim to moral high ground and, arguably, each must demonstrate greater sensitivity to the other. This observation does not simply return us to debates about diversity of tactics. For example, antinomies might imply a moral duty for Black Bloc to sometimes agree not to engage in property destruction at the request of another collective actor. This would entail giving up something of value—the right to autonomously organize—and buy into the logic of representation. Specifically, this would mean agreeing to refrain from property destruction not because of autonomously taken decisions, but because an external group or representative determines that such restraint is essential for a specific protest. At the same time, those invested in representative political logics, such as the organizers of People First, must find ways of being less strident in their condemnation of alternative forms of protest. That is, they must refuse to capitalize on the symbolic capital available through denunciations of activists fighting for similar goals through different tactics. Again, this entails relinquishing something of value: namely, the symbolic leverage gained through complete accession to the demands of “legitimate” democratic protest. In short, serious ethical questions regarding autonomy, democratic practice, and responsibility are produced by the impossibility of adopting a “right” form of protest in a “wrong” political field.

Notes

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Studies in Political Economy

10. Marxists may find Bourdieu’s use of the term “capital” to be idiosyncratic at best and conceptually muddy at worst. Bourdieu’s use moves away from the political economy treatment of capital as a specific social relation towards the context-specific resource a social actor can mobilize within a particular field. In its symbolic form, which is the focus of this paper, “capital” refers to the recognition conferred on “legitimate” actions within a field. What is meant by capital within Bourdieu’s framework warrants refining, but such a project is beyond the scope of this paper. For an overview of his conception of capital, see: Pierre Bourdieu, “Forms of Capital,” in *Education, Globalization and Social Change*, Hugh Lauder et al., (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 106 and 115 at note 3.
14. R. Day has been prominent among observers who question the usefulness of summit protests. Where Day questions state-centred politics of demand generally, my interest is in the antinomies produced by symbolic domination as a specific mode of power, which may or may not include the state as an actor or target of action. Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead* (London; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 80.


27. V. Taylor and N. Van Dyke, “‘Get up, Stand up’: Tactical Repertoires of Social Movements,” in The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements, pp. 282–283.


35. It is not my intention to give a full account of how violence had been constructed prior to the protests, nor even a full account of its construction during the meetings. Although such an analysis would be useful, my focus is on the efforts of one set of actors—Black Bloc activists—and the problematic strategy of using symbolically devalued tactics in struggles to construct meaning.


43. Ibid.