Breaking the spiral of silence: unpacking the "media debate" within global justice movements.
A case study of Dissent! and the 2005 Gleneagles G8 summit

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Abstract

The so called 'media debate' within radical social movements is often perceived as a polarising subject that is best left to one side to avoid flaring an unsolvable debate. The 'media debate' within such movements is often a euphemism for a dichotomised view of media which embraces 'radical media' (Downing et al. 2001) such as Indymedia while dismissing 'mainstream media'. Drawing on over a year of participant observation and 30 activist interviews, this article takes as its focus 'the media debate' through a case study of the Dissent! network, and members within it, in the preparation for an enactment of contention at the 2005 Gleneagles G8 Summit. The article argues that while a binary view of 'the media debate' existed within Dissent! at a network level, such a perspective fails to capture some network activists' efforts to move beyond dualistic thinking towards a more nuanced, flexible and 'pragmatic' perspective which values both media. The article also considers the impact of the 'media debate' within Dissent! which, it is argued, created a 'spiral of silence' (Noelle-Neuman 1974) in the network. The conclusion reasserts the need for activist dialogue on the advantages and limitations of all forms in order to move beyond dualistic views of media.

Introduction

The 'media debate' within the Global Justice Movement is well known by activists and, at least within many autonomous movements, often viewed as a contentious and divisive topic but seemingly rarely discussed. At its core, the media debate is about differences (real and perceived) in the utility of interacting with the 'mainstream' or corporate media. While this topic is contentious, the use of 'radical' or social movement media in any form, though perhaps most notably as Indymedia, is often openly embraced. This has led to the evolution of a rather rudimentary dichotomy within some activist circles which valorises activist media as 'good' while demonising mainstream media as 'bad'. Consequently, the idea of 'the media debate' has also become a

euphemism for either the blanket interaction with, or rejection of, mainstream media. Often the rejection of mainstream is justified by the need to focus on a social movement's own media, thus creating a false choice of mainstream *or* movement media. However, the relationship that social movements have with media – radical and mainstream – is much more complex and nuanced than such rudimentary debates imply. Rucht (2004), for example, identifies a collection of four overlapping strategies social movements may deploy in the media arena. Yet dualistic thinking about media persists within the Global Justice Movement and is visibly manifest in the 'media debate'. To this end, the following article aims to open both an academic and activist dialogue on the media debate, and, in so doing, has two interrelated objectives.

First, this article seeks to extend academic understanding of the 'media debate' which has traditionally taken two forms. It was either simply recognised as a contentious issue but not analysed, or viewed in simplistic, dichotomous terms. Anderson (2003) has suggested that within grassroots 'leaderless' networks, issues of representation and how to interact with mainstream media have often caused 'serious rifts' between movement members. Starr (2000), in an interesting discussion on the construction of movement 'violence', does little more than acknowledge that a debate over media representation exists. Meanwhile, Snow (2003 p. 111) polemically and without irony argues that within the GJM it was 'cool' to hate the mainstream. Together, these articles highlight a gap in the literature which has failed to critically analyse the media debate. This omission is significant as the forms the debate has taken provide insight into how social movement actors understand mainstream media - their function, their position in society and their role in political contention – and how this understanding informs and shapes the 'mainstream' and 'radical' media practices of social movement actors.

The second objective of this paper is to articulate the rarely discussed foundations of the 'media debate' and suggest three ways in which it is understood from the perspective of activists. This is supplemented with an analysis of how the presence – and perceived severity – of the media debate influenced the media policy of the Dissent! network and the actions of some members within it. The hope is that the analysis here can contribute to a necessary dialogue within activist circles that takes an informed and critical perspective to *all* media practices.

This is achieved through a case study of the 'media debate' within the Dissent! network in the context of their mobilisation around the 2005 Gleneagles G8 Summit. The article begins by outlining the methodology underwriting this article. Next, the case study is contextualised with contention around the Gleneagles G8 Summit and specific background on Dissent!. Most of the article is dedicated to exploring the way in which 'the media debate' was articulated by Dissent! activists. Drawing on interview material, the media debate is initially presented in an anti-media/pro-media binary. It is then argued that while there is evidence that some within Dissent! take an 'anti-media' stance, evidence to

support the existence of a 'pro-media' position (as anti-media's antithesis) does not exist.

Breaking this binary, the article charts the emergence of a 'third-way' for dealing with media: a pragmatic media perspective. It is argued that a pragmatic orientation toward media is based on three main beliefs. First, media are viewed as sites of social struggle. Second, the 2005 G8 Summit as a media event provided a political opportunity. And, third, alternative media have a complimentary role to mainstream media in articulating protest. The last analytical section explores how 'the media debate' unfolded within the network. This section argues that the perceived fractious nature of the media debate within Dissent! brought about a 'spiral of silence' (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) on the topic of media interaction at a network-level, whereby the topic was assumed to be divisive and therefore not broached within Dissent!. Although the 'anti-media' stance within Dissent! is shown to be a very powerful regulator, it is argued that perspectives on the topic are not as divisive as some activists had believed. The implications of this are then considered in a brief conclusion.

Methods

This article is derived from a larger research project which followed Burawoy's (1998) "extended method" as its methodological approach. The 2005 Gleneagles G8 Summit was selected as it was viewed as a part of an ongoing series of international mobilisations which have been on the mainstream media radar since 1999. The choices of research approach, technique and analysis have a significant impact on what is studied and found. This research is rooted in a qualitative approach, as such an orientation allows for the examination of the knowledge and practices of social actors, and is suitable when seeking to develop a detailed description of an event or process (Flick, 1998; Weiss, 1994).

This article is based on two types of empirical data gathered during fieldwork. First is the qualitative analysis of 30 semi-structured interviews conducted with 24 participants, all of whom were members of the Dissent! network (6 participants were interviewed twice – before and after the G8 Summit – accounting for 12 of the 30 interviews). Following Roseneil (1995), interviewee recruitment involved 'snowball sampling' based on a list of 'important variables' (age; gender; activist experience; degree of network involvement) which directed the strategic selection of informants. Interviews were conducted between March 2005 and August 2005. Wherever possible, interviews were conducted face-to-face though four interviews were conducted by telephone and one by email. On average, interviews lasted 45 minutes. Full transcripts were produced for all 30 interviews, totalling 444 single-spaced pages of text. Transcripts were analysed via 'thematic coding' (Flick, 1998) with the assistance of Atlas.ti to generate a theoretical framework based on theoretical areas of interest.

This study is also based on over a year of overt 'theory-driven participant observation' (Litcherman, 2002) with Dissent! prior to and at the 2005 G8 Summit. Fieldwork began in December 2003, consisting largely of electronic participant observation on relevant network listservs until October 2004. From October 2004 until August 2005, I regularly attended local and national Dissent! meetings and continued to participate actively on multiple Dissent! network listservs. The most intense period of fieldwork was the on-the-ground G8 mobilisation from June 29th, 2005 to July 9th, 2005 in Scotland. Throughout, fieldwork notes were taken, movement documents (paper and electronic) archived, and mainstream media articles logged. This data was largely used to compare with and consider themes emerging from interviews. One exception was Dissent!'s media strategy listserv, whereby the 533 emails posted to the list were thematically analysed to explore repertoire of media practices deployed by the network.

A closing comment on the generalisability of claims made in this article is necessary. While Dissent! may be similar to autonomous networks within the Global Justice Movement, social movements are contingent upon their social, political, economic and historical context (Tarrow, 1998, p. 3). Therefore, the below analysis of Dissent! is presented in an effort to understand the media debate within global justice movements.

Mobilising networks – Dissent! at the 2005 Gleneagles G8 summit

Unpacking the 'media debate' within Dissent!, and considering its implications, first require sufficient background information on the mobilisation around the Gleneagles G8 Summit and the Dissent! network itself. In total, three significant networks emerged to contest the Gleneagles Summit. First was the sympathetic Make Poverty History (MPH) campaign – the largest of the three networks. At its peak MPH consisted of a network of over 500 British and Irish NGOs, religious groups, and high-profile celebrities. The main event MPH organised – a rally in Edinburgh on July 2nd, 2005 – was attended by 225,000 people (BBC News, 2005). Second, *G8 Alternatives* (G8A), a network of approximately 30 mostly Scottish organisations, including trade unions, political parties, NGOs, and a handful of academics such as Noam Chomsky. G8A organised, among other actions and after much police interference, a marshalled march past the fence of the Gleneagles Hotel on July 6th, 2005, the first day of the G8 Summit, an event which was attended by an estimated 10,000 people (Vidal and Scott, 2005).

The third network was 'Dissent! – Network of Resistance Against the G8' (Dissent!), the focus of this article. The smallest of the three networks, Dissent! was an 'anti-capitalist' network with roots in the British environmental direct action movement. To understand Dissent!, it is worth briefly contextualising the network within a history of political contention within the United Kingdom, specifically the Environmental Direct Action movement (EDA). Plows (2002, p.

19) argues that the EDA can be situated on a "continuum" of social movement activity since the student movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, the anti-nuclear movement, and within the wider environmental movement of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The EDA may be differentiated from the wider environmental movement by its commitment to direct action (Plows, 2002). Within the UK, Doherty, Paterson and Seel (2000) argue that the birth of the EDA was characterised by a shift towards direct action:

> In the 1990s there was a dramatic rise in the amount of direct action...what distinguishes [this] new wave of direct action is an ethos characterised by an intention to affect social and ecological conditions directly, even while it also (sometimes) seeks indirect influence through the mass media, changed practises of politicians and political and economic institutions (Doherty et al., 2000, p. 1).

One of the most prominent organisations of the direct action movement of the 1990s was EarthFirst! (EF!). Wall (1999) offers a detailed and critical historical account of EF!'s rise and actions. The politics of the environmental movement and EF!, specifically with its legacy of anti-roads protests, played a crucial role shaping British environmental politics and specifically direct action politics.

While direct action activists were open to interacting with mainstream media, its their ethos was premised on the assertion that media coverage was not necessary for a protest to be worthwhile (Doherty, Plows and Wall 2003, p. 674). Moreover, a noticeable distrust of mainstream media developed within [the Direct Action movement due to negative experiences with journalists (Anderson, 1997; Doherty, Plows and Wall 2003). As Patterson (2003, p. 162) notes, the movement's critique of mainstream media was also [an ideological] premised on the belief that media interaction should not distract activists from the task at hand: direct action and its *direct* effect on the individual and the political system. This aversion to media coverage did not necessarily deter or deflect the media's interest in anti-roads or other EDA activists, but it did inculcate within the movement a critical orientation towards mainstream media; a legacy carried forward to Dissent!, as many individuals who were previously involved in EF!, or the EDA more generally, were also active in Dissent!.

Dissent! was envisioned as a non-hierarchical network comprised of organisations, autonomous collectives and individuals. Dissent!'s structure carried forward the organisational model of loose, purpose-oriented networks which have mobilised around international meetings since the late 1990s (Cammaerts, 2005, 2007; Fenton, 2008; Harvie, Milburn, Trott, & Watts, 2005; Juris, 2005a, 2005b, 2008; Klein, 2000). Dissent! described itself as follows:

> ...the Network has no central office, no spokespeople, no membership list and no paid staff. It's a mechanism for communication and co-ordination between local groups and working groups involved in building resistance to the G8, and capitalism in general (Dissent!, 2004).

Dissent! was characterised by two types of groups: local and working groups. Briefly, local groups were autonomous, geographically-based nodes of Dissent!. They offered a reference point for individuals, affinity groups and various collectives to gather and plan protest on a local level while still connecting with the wider mobilisation. Working groups were 'groups of individuals working together on a specialised aspect of the organisational process' (Dissent!, 2006). They were established around various tasks such as catering, or actions such as blockades. In total, the network consisted of a collection of 16 local groups dispersed across the United Kingdom and approximately 20 network working groups.

Dissent!, Gleneagles and the Hori-Zone ecovillage

G8 Summits have evolved from the sequestered gatherings of the economic elite to full-scale political media events (McCurdy, 2008). Thus the G8 Summit in Scotland attracted much local, national and international media attention. While delegates where at the five-star Gleneagles Hotel for the G8, Dissent!ers established the Hori-Zone eco-village and 'convergence space' 30 kilometres away in Perthshire, Scotland. Hori-Zone provided space for 5,000 campers and served as a space to both plan and conduct resistance. with around 1,000 activists departing from the camp to take part in blockade-type actions on Dissent!'s July 6th 'Day of Action'. The camp was open to activists. but enacted a policy prohibiting mainstream media from entering. though it was unable to prevent undercover, predominantly tabloid, journalists from sneaking in.

Many journalists congregated out in front of the camp's guarded and fortified entrance. In anticipation of the media interest, an activist group within Dissent!, who came to be known as the CounterSpin Collective (CSC), formed to facilitate media interaction between activists and mainstream media. Their specific practices are discussed elsewhere (CounterSpin Collective, 2005; McCurdy, 2009). Important for the present argument is that an activist collective which emerged from within Dissent! took responsibility for interacting with media and did so at their 'media gazebo' which was positioned *outside* of the camp's entrance. The gazebo's positioning outside of the camp, as opposed to immediately in front of the gate or even inside the camp, demonstrates the oppositional network-level view taken toward media as an adversary to be defended against. From this perspective, the media gazebo was a space where journalists could gravitate (as opposed to the camp's entrance), and where members of the CSC could manage media.

While mainstream media were prohibited from entering Hori-Zone, an Independent Media Centre (IMC) was established *within* the camp's boundaries. The ethos of the IMC endorses a flattening of the traditional hierarchy of representation found in news production processes (Bell, 1991; Gans, 1979; Tumber, 1999) through opening the possibility of creating and publishing news to anyone with the skills and interest (Atton, 2002; Downing, 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Downing et al., 2001; Pickerill, 2003). Thus the IMC at

Hori-Zone provided computers and internet access, allowing anyone at the camp to use Indymedia as a platform to publish their news. The CounterSpin Collective, on the other hand, was premised on associating with mainstream media and, as a consequence, it was made very clear to CSC members by other activists within Dissent!, and some individuals affiliated with the IMC, *that IMC resources provided at Hori-Zone were in no way to be used to facilitate any kind of interaction with mainstream media*. As a result of this advice CSC members used the IMC's Internet access — *the only source of Internet access at Hori-Zone* — both sparingly and covertly.

The above anecdote of members of an activist collective who took it upon themselves to manage mainstream media resorting to the clandestine use of internet access offered by Indymedia — arguably *the* organisation that symbolises the Global Justice Movement — aptly illustrates the network-level culture within Dissent! that the mainstream media should be unquestionably rejected and radical media embraced. What is more, clear boundaries were drawn between mainstream media and radical media with mainstream media front stage, radical allowed backstage. There are understandable and defendable reasons for not permitting mainstream media in Hori-Zone. However, the failure to share resources between activists supposedly in solidarity within the same network leading to the clandestine use of said resources not only captures the dichotomised perspectives on media, but illustrates a need for dialogue on the role of *all* media within activism.

While this dichotomised thinking — radical media good, mainstream media bad — was evident in network-level practices, it was less visible in activist-level talk. Those interviewed for this research viewed Indymedia as a vital activist resource but, in the context of a media event protest such as the G8, also saw the benefit of interacting with mainstream media. This nuanced view, however, is not captured in the traditional binary view of the media debate.

'The media debate'? Understandings and perspectives

The existence of 'the media debate' in Dissent! was widely acknowledged amongst those network activists interviewed. Moreover, participants and interviewees had little difficulty articulating their perceived foundations of the media debate, particularly the anti-media side. When asked, all interviewees had heard of the 'media debate', with the exception of one interviewee whose lack of awareness can be attributed to a paucity of prior involvement in 'radical' politics and only a peripheral association with Dissent!. Despite the majority of interviewees being aware of the media debate, some felt the issue was not well understood by Dissent! or the Global Justice Movement more generally. Hamish, for example, described the media debate as '...heated, passionate, but not very coherent' (Interview with Hamish[1] 09/07/2005). The synthesis of the media debate offered by Hamish captures both the perceived controversial nature of the debate and the disjuncture in discussions.

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[1] All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

Interviewees predominantly employed two related binaries to describe the media debate. The first dichotomy portrayed the debate as being between using movement media, specifically Indymedia, versus mainstream media. The argument being that in a movement with already limited resources, focussing energy on mainstream media diverts attention away from independent media. The second, more general understanding of the media debate is summed up neatly by Scott who described it as being about 'do we talk to the media or not?' (Interview with Scott, 31/03/2005). Positioning the debate in a 'do we or don't we?' manner alludes to the most common binary drawn upon to explain the media debate: 'anti media' versus 'pro-media'. However, as will be argued below, while the media debate is often viewed in dichotomous terms, the 'pro-media' stance is, in fact, an artificially constructed position that did not appear to be held by anyone within Dissent!.

In order to understand the foundations of the media debate, the ideologies and motivations which are perceived to be underwriting each perspective must be understood. Accordingly, interviewees' understanding of the anti-media position is first considered. It will then be argued that the pro-media stance is a position which does not exist and instead has been constructed by the anti-media position. This will be followed by the discussion of a 'third' position within the debate referred to as the 'pragmatic-media approach'.

Anti-Media (Binary)

The anti-media perspective was both practical and ideological. It was based on various readings and understandings of the political economics of media, as well as on a commitment to radical, Situationist and/or autonomist politics. Below is an overview of prominent themes and perspectives within the anti-media position within Dissent!.

One conviction that drove the anti-media perspective evident within Dissent! was the assertion that an anti-capitalist network such as Dissent! will never be represented fairly by 'capitalist media'; doing so goes against the media's business interests. This position was described by Sarah: '[the] media [are] owned by big corporations that represent the interests of big business, they are never going to report fairly on us so why even bother?' (Interview with Sarah, 27/04/2005). This political-economic analysis of media, parallels academic research in the field such as the work of McChesney (2000) or Herman and Chomsky (1998). Taking the political-economic view to its extreme, the anti-media perspective, at its most acute, aggregates mainstream media into a unitary entity. Bluntly, 'It's all shit. You know, from the Sun to the Guardian, they all suck' (Interview with Darren, 07/08/2005)[2].

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[2] It is important to expand upon the context of this quote. The comment was made as Darren was describing how he perceived the 'anti-media' debate position. Darren later went on to position himself as holding a pragmatic-media viewpoint. Regardless, the feeling that the quote captures 'all media suck' still accurately reflects the blanket anti-media critique.

A second major perceived theoretical underpinning of the anti-media position was situationism (Debord, 2006). Drawing predominantly on Debord's concept of 'spectacle', media were seen to simply reproduce the spectacle of capitalist society. This Situationist-inspired perspective of media is evident in the Wombles analysis of the G8. In a posting on their webpage under the subsection 'Anti-Media(tion) " ', the collective argued that:

> Revolt is something you experience not something you film ... 'collaborating' with mainstream media reinforces the false and 'unlived' experiences generated by the spectacle of the media and capitalist society. Instead, it is argued, efforts should be placed on *direct* experiences, struggles and relationships. From this perspective, the media is viewed as a 'consumer product', a commodity and therefore not a site of struggle, but a site of oppression and distraction. A struggle against the media and the 'spectacular relationships' it maintains requires an outright rejection of media'(Wombles, 2005).

In tandem with a rejection of mainstream media is a valorisation of movement-generated media and particularly Indymedia. From the anti-media perspective, self-produced radical media has the ability to open up discursive spaces that are otherwise constrained and controlled by mainstream media. Moreover, producing one's own media is empowering. It reduces a dependence on corporate and government bodies for representation and reinforces the do-it-yourself ethos of autonomous mobilisations.

Creating media also offers a level of control over representation not possible with mainstream media. Individuals, collectives and networks may present themselves on their own terms, using their own images and words. Michael described Indymedia as 'stories we write ourselves' (Interview with Michael, 17/05/2005). On the other hand, with mainstream media there is a lack of control. In fact, many interviewees, regardless of their position on the media debate, recognised that, unless an interview was live, the final edit and therefore control over representation rested with the media. Handing over representational control requires a level of trust in mainstream media. However the anti-media position was rooted in a *fundamental distrust* of mainstream media. Many individual Dissent! members, and the network itself, had directly experienced breaches of trust via media exposure, undercover journalists and quotes being taken out of context or even simply 'made up'. Ultimately, these cases of selective, hyper-dramatic and inflammatory reporting were used as evidence that the mainstream media should not be trusted.

Insight into the anti-media position may also be taken from Silverstone's discussion of complicity. Silverstone (2007) suggests that any interaction with media involves a level of 'complicity' between all parties. This is driven by the mutual understanding that any effort by media to 'claim a reality' is 'inadequate and compromised by its own contradictions'(p. 129). Therefore, those who willingly accept the limitations of media without questioning or challenging them are complicit. However, the anti-media position - the rejection of any involvement with mainstream media — is grounded in a view that media never

can or will represent the world accurately. In this sense, the media-debate is rooted in a rejection of complicity; an unwillingness to accept the inadequacies of mainstream media representation[3].

The anti-media position also has a historical legacy which includes, as outlined above, not only the experiences of activists involved in the Environmental Direct Action Movement, but also the ideological critique of media representation, particularly when it distracts or hinders engaging in direct activism (Anderson, 1997; Doherty, Plows and Wall 2003; Patterson 2003). The anti-media perspective has ideological roots in the autonomous politics of Dissent!. Katsiaficas, (2006, p. 21-24) argues that autonomists are critical towards media, which they see as a potential tool for police to identify and arrest activists. Katsiaficas (2006, p. 21-24) also highlights the potential of media representation to manufacture a network hierarchy and thereby potentially creating 'leaders'.[4] This is problematic on two fronts. First, it could potentially destabilise the dynamics within a movement whereby the power of media-selected 'leaders' becomes disproportionate, abused or both. This conundrum is avoided by not interacting with media (Katsiaficas, 2006, p. 22). Second, autonomous politics is premised on a rejection of leaders and a belief that individuals and collectives should be free to engage in politics and use tactics as they deem fit (Flesher Fominaya, 2007). This reading of autonomous politics is reflected in the view of Dissent! as a 'mechanism for communication and coordination' and the assertion that it has 'no spokespeople'(Dissent!, 2004). An anti-media position compliments this perspective with the view that it is not possible, nor desirable, for the media to collectively represent the network. This does not rule out, as will be argued later, autonomous collectives interacting with media if they chose to do so, but argues against such action on a network level.

Pro-Media (Binary)

A debate usually requires two contrasting viewpoints. The existence of a 'pro-media' stance within the media debate may therefore be assumed to occupy a contrapuntal position to its 'anti-media' counterpart. Therefore while anti-media proponents reject any level of 'complicity' with media, a pro-media perspective would be envisioned as openly, and without question, embracing mainstream media interaction. However, from observations of the Dissent! network, it would seem this all-accepting 'pro-media' position does not exist. None of the participants interviewed for this research expressed a belief in line with the 'pro-media' stance as articulated above. Moreover, such a conviction was not seen during fieldwork. This is particularly noteworthy considering that

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[3] Nonetheless, the argument for complicity could easily be extended to include alternative media. However, the self-determination allowed by alternative media, the ability to control the reality presented, is what drives the anti-media position.

[4] For an interesting account of how the media can create leaders in social movements and the consequences thereof, see Gitlin (1980).

the balance of interviewees for this research favoured individuals who were willing to work with media. This suggests that there is a disjuncture between the imagined and the actual positions of the media debate. It also lends further credence to the earlier suggestion by Hamish that the media debate is passionate but not coherent.

The 'pro-media' position then — as part of a media debate binary — should be seen as a straw man constructed by 'anti-media' discourse. Put differently, a natural or real antithesis to the anti-media stance *within* Dissent! did not exist, except perhaps in the minds of certain individuals with anti-media sentiments. Evidence of this may be found in Jeff's description of the 'pro' side as consisting of 'media tarts' and 'media suckers' that have an idealised view of media. Similarly, Michael described those in the 'pro' binary as running the gamut from 'optimistic to naïve' (Interview with Michael, 17/05/2005). While the 'pro' stance was not evident in Dissent!, outside of the network, this type of stance was evident in the phantasmagorical actions of *Make Poverty History* and *Live 8*. Moreover, language describing these networks as 'media tarts' was, in fact, not uncommon. Consequently, the 'pro' stance should not necessarily be seen as a something *within* the network, but something *around* the network; a strategy deployed by competing networks. Thus the constructed 'other' of the 'pro' stance could in fact be read as a reference to — and critique of — tactics deployed by *Live 8* and *Make Poverty History*[5].

This insight still leaves the unanswered question, 'If the 'pro-media' position is not the antithesis of the 'anti-media' position within Dissent!, what form did it take?' Answering this question requires breaking the anti/pro media binary. The next section outlines a third approach, referred to as the 'pragmatic-media perspective', which was the most common position taken by interviewees, and may be understood as a refined and informed alternative to either the anti or pro positions.

Beyond a binary: A 'pragmatic' media perspective

Taken at face value, the media debate implies the presence of ideological opposites. Yet, as shown above, the anti-media stance was vocally expressed by some in Dissent!, while the 'pro-media' position — as the antithesis of the anti-media position — was a movement myth. Nonetheless, there was support from some members within Dissent! for interacting with media. However, this position can not be considered particularly 'pro-media' in the sense described above. Instead, the stance is termed a pragmatic-media perspective. The pragmatic-media perspective is founded on three core arguments, each of which will be explored below. First, it recognises the media as a site of social struggle. Second, the G8 is viewed as a media event which provides an opportunity for

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[5] Many thanks to the Anonymous reviewer for suggesting that the constructed 'Other' may be a group *outside* of Dissent! such as Make Poverty History; I had not made the connection.

visibility in the media, and third, radical media is recognised as playing a crucial role in social struggle.

An Environmental Struggle

The pragmatic-media approach, unlike the anti-media stance, views mainstream media as a 'site of struggle' on par *and in tandem* with more traditional, material spaces of contention, such as city streets. Media are not separate fields of action, but overlapping fields which are intimately and inevitably intertwined with everyday life. In the context of 2005 G8 Summit specifically, and the spectacle of large scale summit mobilisations more generally, media are sites of struggle requiring appropriate activist practice. This perspective is captured in Darren's comment:

> For me, mainstream media is just like any other social field, a field of struggle. The Summit protest actually is one of the crucial fields of struggle. We don't just want to leave it to that, so to speak, because the police talk to the media, you know. Bob Geldof talks to the media, excessively so. If we don't, we lose a lot of the potential that is here in these global media spaces (Quote 1; Interview with Darren, 07/08/2005).

Darren was one of only two interviewees to explicitly refer to the media as a 'site of struggle'. However, the argument Darren employs to qualify his claim - one might as well try and influence the media or someone else will do it for you - was heard from other interviewees and during field work. Gregory, for example, commented, 'I just think it's kind of crazy not to engage with the mainstream media because they're going to say what they like about you and you should just at least try and have some kind of impact on it' (Interview with Gregory, 26/07/2005). Similarly, Sarah stated, 'I think we will be absolutely shafted if we don't talk to the media' (Interview with Sarah, 27/04/2005). The argument made by Darren, Gregory, Sarah and others is premised on the belief that a policy of non-interaction, such as that promoted by the anti-media stance, does not prevent media coverage. Instead, it simply allows others, particularly the police and political opponents, to represent the network and the protests.

Recognising the media as a legitimate field of social action necessitates a revisiting of 'complicity'(Silverstone, 2007). It was argued above that the anti-media position is rooted in a rejection of 'complicity' with mainstream media. But, while the concept of 'complicity' works well for the anti-media ideology, from a pragmatic media approach, it is problematic. To illustrate why this is, it is first helpful to review the concept. Silverstone argues that news production 'involves complicity in which all involved participate; a refusal to recognise that the process...is inadequate and compromised by its own contradictions.... Subjects are complicit... when they fail to recognise the impossibility, and partiality, of representation' (p. 129). The footnote associated with this quote then suggests 'complicity turns to collusion, when... media subjects seek, in their understanding of the process, to manipulate the setting in order to guarantee participation and visibility' (ibid, footnote 8, p. 196). Complicity is described

both as an intrinsic and requisite property of the media process as well as an (im)moral act on the part of those involved in the process. Media demands complicity and people act complicitly.

Silverstone offers little way out of the complicity bind; it is required by media. At the same time individuals, on all sides of the media process, must challenge the realities portrayed by media. Failure to confront the media's shortcomings results in complicity. Paradoxically, identifying media shortcomings – for example, recognising the media's need of a 'news hook' (Gans, 1979; Ryan, 1991) and adjusting one's actions appropriately - from Silverstone's perspective, moves beyond complicity into media 'collusion.'

Collusion implies a degree of criminality; parties inappropriately conspiring together. The pragmatic media position does not view itself as conspiring with media. Moreover, it does not take an unquestioning view of media. Instead, the inherent representational inadequacies of media are recognised. The media, in the words of one interviewee, is 'an enemy and a friend'(Interview with Tom, 08/07/2005). This seemingly paradoxical statement illustrates an ability to differentiate between media, unlike the anti-media position which views media as unitary entity. On a related point, the political economic critique expressed by ardent anti-media proponents is also folded into the pragmatic media view. However, instead of a fatalistic or ideological rejection of media on this premise, a pragmatic media perspective uses this information to endorse a *selective* and *strategic* approach to media. In this spirit, and as outlined elsewhere (CounterSpin Collective, 2005; McCurdy, 2009), various strategies were discussed and deployed by Dissent!'s CounterSpin Collective, such as the preferential treatment of 'friendly' journalists in an effort to influence media coverage.

Media Events as Political Opportunities

With the media recognised as a legitimate field of social struggle, the 2005 G8 Summit was seen as a significant event on the media landscape. In the words of one interviewee, the G8 is 'too big of an opportunity not to [protest]' (Interview with Scott, 31/03/2005). All interviewees, regardless of their orientation towards media, saw the G8 as an opportunity for an activist gathering. The comments of Sarah capture this view well:

> It's where we come together and we meet each other, and we network and we build things together. We try and create space-self managed spaces. We try and feed a thousand people. We try and manage things together, we try and do actions together, we try and create things together and I think that that is invaluable in building a...truly global movement (Quote 2; Interview with Sarah, 27/04/2005)

However, for those of a pragmatic-media orientation, the media event status of the 2005 G8 Summit also provided its own 'political opportunity' (Tarrow, 1998). From Mary's perspective, an interviewee active in the CounterSpin Collective, the 2005 G8 Summit offered a 'window of opportunity to get a

message out to a much wider public'(Interview with Mary, 08/07/2005). Implicit in Mary's comment is recognition that the G8 Summit is a news event with a capped media lifespan. Sarah, also active in CounterSpin, felt that intense media interest in the 2005 G8 Summit made it easier for critiques of neo-liberalism to be discussed in the media:

> I think it moves us and our critique much closer to the surface than it was prior to that and we don't have to fight so much harder for media attention because the media attention is already there so I think there is a lot of benefits to doing a protest at the G8 Summit (Quote 3; Interview with Sarah, 27/04/2005).

Taking the two comments together, the pragmatic-media perspective viewed the G8 Summit as a limited opportunity to register protest on the media horizon, characterised by an easing of the barriers to access the media arena. This supports Gamson and Meyer (1996) who argue that media access is an element of political opportunity. Part of the opportunity, from the pragmatic perspective, was the recognition of *difference between media outlets*. Neil, for example, noted, '...I think it's pretty clear that the BBC is different than the Sun and we should hold the BBC to a higher level of fairness than we would the Sun...'(Interview with Neil 06/04/2005). Meanwhile Scott remarked, 'You are not going to get... an intelligent analysis of the left position in the Daily Telegraph, are you?' (Interview with Scott, 31/03/2005). Thus while anti-media proponents would paint all media with the same brush, a pragmatic perspective seems to appreciate, and subsequently capitalise on sympathetic media and/or journalists covering the G8 Summit.

In discussing the G8 and the media as an 'opportunity', it is important to make one final observation. Tarrow (1998) has described political opportunities as external resources that an aggrieved group may 'take advantage' of, but that do not 'belong' to them (p. 20). Mainstream media easily fit this description. Of note, however, is that many people who exhibited a pragmatic-media perspective often felt activists should not compromise themselves for media. Guy commented that, 'We should not distort what we do in order that it will be more reported' (Interview with Guy, 21/04/2005). Chris qualified media interaction by commenting 'I don't think we should pander to the needs of the mainstream media'(Interview with Chris, 20/07/2005). Of course, what constitutes pandering to the media is subjective and may be problematised further in the context of a media event, such as the 2005 G8 Summit, yet doing so would require a different research focus than the one at present. The objective of this section has been to illustrate how activists viewed the G8 Summit as a political opportunity for media visibility.

Radical (Movement) Media

As outlined above, the anti-media stance views radical or movement produced media as an important resource for creating and opening up discursive space, facilitating resistance, and generating support, as well as contributing to identity

formation. These 'advantages' of alternative media do not go unnoticed by the pragmatic-media perspective. But instead of preferring one media at the expense of another, a pragmatic perspective prefers a 'complimentary' approach drawing on mainstream *and* alternative media. The following remarks by Edward reflect this perspective:

> Indymedia... is a form of direct action media work. Be the media! Be your own media! I think you should be the media but the way you are going to get to be the media is that you be both... the mainstream media and your own media, and you sort of play off and shift power from one to the other, you know? (Quote 4; Interview with Edward, 10/08/2005)

From the pragmatic-media viewpoint both forms of media - mainstream and alternative - are important. Both compliment each other and deserve movement attention. The following passage by Neil also reflects the complimentary approach:

> The biggest numbers that you reach with the least amount of control over your message is the mainstream media. And then lower numbers of people that you reach with total control is through your own independent media. So, there are two perspectives which personally, I find complementary and not counter to each other necessarily, are to use both the independent media--your own media--and mainstream media. I think how you can do this in a complementary way is to say your own messages as clearly as you can through independent media and continue to try and grow independent media but also at the same time to work more with mainstream media which reaches a large number, and not only try to get your message out but try to direct people towards your media.

(Quote 5; Interview with Neil, 06/04/2005).

The above quote was taken from Neil's discussion of the media debate and subtly presents mainstream and radical media as contrasting perspectives. However, instead of endorsing a preference for one type of media over another, the dual emphasis on radical and mainstream media endorsed by Neil reflects the pragmatic media perspective held and shared by many interviewees.

The passage is also of note as Neil illustrates an awareness of the strengths and limits of both media types. Similarly, many pragmatic-media proponents felt an emphasis on mainstream media is needed to compensate for the shortcomings of alternative media[6]. The critique offered by Andre is of particular relevance:

> Indymedia has become a very useful tool for activists, but it is made by activists about activists, for activists. It doesn't exist outside that. So, and I use the example of Indymedia but ... there are many other things

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[6] Of course, the inverse is also true. Alternative media provides numerous well documented advantages to mainstream media. However, in the context of this discussion what is at issue is the normative rejection of *all* mainstream media. Consequently, the aim of the argument is to highlight the value mainstream media is seen to bring to radical social movements.

we could mention... that have failed to actually struggle with mainstream media for people's attention... for their hearts and minds. (Quote 6; Interview with Andre, 18/08/2005)

Andre suggests an interesting distinction between Indymedia as an activist tool and medium of public information. While Indymedia is presented as valuable resource for activist organising, Andre argues that it has limited utility as an information medium outside of activist circles. Moreover, as Indymedia is unable to match the audience pull of mainstream media, he believes activists' efforts should also include mainstream media. This perspective echoes Gamson who argues that 'only general-audience media provide a potentially shared public discourse'(Gamson, 1995, p. 85)[7]. However, as Neil notes above, the emphasis on mainstream comes with a loss of 'control' over one's message. Conscious of this limitation, many pragmatic-media proponents apply various practices in an attempt to control and influence media coverage. The control lost through interactions with mainstream media can, in some sense, be compensated for through the use of movement media.

In conclusion, the pragmatic media perspective sees both mainstream and radical media as each having their strengths and limitations. Interaction with mainstream media is not unquestionably endorsed but seen as a strategic necessity in the context of a political opportunity afforded by a highly mediated event. It is this 'pragmatic' position to the media debate that was expressed by the majority of interviewees approached for this research and was a perspective taken by the CounterSpin Collective who, as noted earlier in this paper, took it open themselves to interact with mainstream media at the Hori-Zone ecovillage, the final section of this article examines the creation of a 'spiral of silence' (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) around the media debate within Dissent! which prevented the 'pragmatic perspective' from being discussed, despite the prominence of this view towards the media debate.

The biggest movement debate never had: the media debate and the spiral of silence

Despite the prevalence of the pragmatic-media perspective amongst interviewees, this viewpoint was rarely, if at all, discussed at network meetings of Dissent!. One reason for this is that there was a *lack of debate* about mainstream media interaction within Dissent!. This lack of debate, it is argued, created a 'spiral of silence' (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) on the topic. Noelle-Neumann (1974) used the term 'spiral of silence' to define the process where individuals assess and monitor their social environment, adjusting their willingness to speak out based on their assessment of the climate of opinion. The more someone feels that his opinion is in the minority, the less willing he is to openly state it due to a fear of ridicule and/or rejection (p. 45).

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[7] While Gamson views mainstream media as an important forum for public discourse, he is very sceptical of the ability of social movements to get 'positive' media coverage.

As argued above, interviewees were able to articulate the foundations of the media debate and also took a personal position on it. And while some collectives associated with Dissent! published their analysis of why one should work with the media (e.g. the CounterSpin Collective) or should not (e.g. the Wombles), discussion on a network level failed to materialise. The lack of dialogue led the issue of the 'media debate' to be characterised by one interviewee as one of the biggest movement debates that has never been had:

> It's one of those two or three really huge debates that actually never happened. People refer to it as if there actually were a debate about it. And it just doesn't happen... What you see is... people just holding on to their entrenched positions. And there isn't really much of an attempt to explore the disagreements and the difference in any depth....

(Quote 7; Interview with Andre, 18/08/2005).

In the above passage Andre recognises the issue of mainstream media as both legitimate and contentious, but challenges the suggestion that a 'debate' about media has ever taken place. For Andre, what is often described as a 'debate' is not about discussion, but about silence. From this perspective, the media debate is characterised by an absence of dialogue between conflicting ideologies. The lack of discussion was often attributed to a desire to avert conflict as the media debate was viewed as a potential deal breaker. Scott's description of the debate is relevant:

> I think it's a divisive argument.... I think people spend a lot of time who are very well-aligned on lots of other stuff and they disagree quite fiercely at times on media. I think it is one of the things that can drive a wedge between people or groups of people....

(Quote 8; Interview with Scott, 22/09/2005)

By avoiding a debate on the politics and ideological positions underwriting the media debate, Dissent! members were not required to test what many perceived as a fragile consensus within the network. Having said this, it is important to recognise that there may not have been a conscious effort to sidestep a detailed political discussion. This is because the most suitable venue for such a discussion would have been a Dissent! national gathering. However, the gatherings only had a finite amount of time, most of which focused on the logistics of the mobilisation. Consequently, the suggestion to dedicate time to a strategic rather than a tactical discussion of media might have been met with resistance. Moreover, and as suggested above, the media debate is often portrayed as an unbridgeable divide within the network and the movement at large. Therefore, not discussing the issue prevented the appearance of visible fissures or 'wedges' in the network's foundation. Despite a veil of consensus, a debate had not been held and the issue remained unresolved.

Within Dissent!, there is evidence of a spiral of silence developing around the issue of the media debate. The significance of this being the perceived dominant view on the media debate within the network was the 'anti-media' stance which had the effect of silencing other discourses. Support for this may

be found in the dialogue of members of the CounterSpin Collective interviewed for this research. The most telling example comes from Gregory who expressed feelings of trepidation when engaging in media related activities. When asked to describe how he felt about seeking out potential media interviewees for the CSC at the Hori-Zone camp, Gregory remarked:

> Generally quite kind of sheepish and you would always be a bit kind of apologetic. It's because I think we were really kind of paranoid about kind of, we already faced criticism within the network [for] working with mainstream media. So the whole time we were kind of going up to people, being quite apologetic saying, 'Look, I know it's mainstream media but would anyone fancy doing it?' (Quote 9; Interview with Gregory, 26/07/2005).

Above, Gregory links his apprehension to approaching people with previous criticism fielded towards the CSC from within the network. The fact that Gregory described himself as feeling 'sheepish', 'apologetic' and 'paranoid', suggests that he believed the majority of people within Dissent! held an 'anti-media'(in the sense described above) stance. A similar belief was expressed by Sarah, also a member of the CSC, who suggested:

> I mean [in] this country... if you are an anarchist or I don't know what, a horizontal, or whatever you want to call it, you don't talk to the media, you know? We don't do it. It's not done *apparently.* (Quote 10; Interview with Sarah, 27/04/2005).

The prevalence of the 'anti media' position with radical 'horizontal' politics is articulated in the form of a taboo. To work with mainstream media is a violation of the socially accepted norms of Dissent! and the mobilisation in general. Interestingly, this position is at odds with Sarah's own views; she supports a 'pragmatic-media approach'.

Sarah was not the only interviewee to link the anti-media undercurrent in Dissent! network-level politics with a broader mobilisation. Darren, originally from Europe and active in the CSC, suggested that an anti-media orientation was part of the 'U.K. direct action habitus' (Interview with Darren, 07/08/2005). As such, Darren suggested that the rejection of working with mainstream media was a known and accepted movement-wide practice and, because of its familiarity, was not discussed:

> In terms of the real direct action scene, there is this savoir faire of 'You just don't talk to the media. That is just the way it is'... You don't have to discuss it anymore, because everybody already knows it... (Quote 11; Interview with Darren, 07/08/2005)

For Darren, an anti-media orientation is common knowledge and common practice for the radical direct action movement and, within that, Dissent!. This position was shared by at least five other interviewees, all of whom were involved in the CounterSpin Collective. The strongest criticism was given by Neil, a North American activist, who, reflecting on his experience at the 2005 G8 Summit, commented:

> I think that the U.K. radical left movement doesn't have a commitment to speaking to the media at all. In fact, there is much more strong resistance to speaking with mainstream media at all. So I think it is a cultural thing within the left scene in general around the world. There is a massive distrust with the mainstream media but especially it is really strong with the UK (Quote 12; Interview with Neil, 27/08/2005).

Of the participants interviewed for this research, Neil was the most ardent supporter of employing an active media strategy. Similarly, the majority, *though not all*, of the respondents who picked up on the anti-media current in Dissent! were involved with the CSC. Although an association with the CSC could account for some of the interviewees' heightened-awareness on the matter of media, the fieldwork supports the assertion that there was a high level of perceived animosity surrounding the media debate. Important at present is the *perception* that a rift was caused by the media debate and the impact this had on actors within the network. Therefore, even if the anti-media stance was not as prevalent 'in reality' as participants believed, of interest is how the perceived dominance of the anti-media position over the debate impacted the actions of activists.

Returning to the central claim, it is suggested that the anti-media stance of the network – as a product of the UK direct action scene – created a spiral of silence around the media debate. The quote from Gregory provided at the start of this section showed how his perception that the 'anti-media' stance was a widely held belief made him feel 'sheepish' about his own position and actions. The below passage from Hamish also acknowledges the existence of media boundaries within the network. Reflecting on the media strategy of the Hori-Zone camp he commented,

> I would have loved to have had some coverage from the inside of the [Hori-Zone] campsite... But at the same time, I don't think the potential cost of that would have been worth it. (Quote 13; Interview with Hamish 09/07/2005)

The 'potential cost' mentioned by Hamish can be interpreted as a reference to the creation of a wedge between network participants as well as the levelling of criticism towards CSC members. The decision to constrain media-related action is based on a perception of the climate of opinion within the network and the costs and chances of success (Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

A principal argument of Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence is that people who feel their opinions are in the minority on an issue are less likely to speak out. As argued above, an undercurrent of 'anti-media' sentiment was believed to run through Dissent! and the radical action network in the United Kingdom at large. Its existence constrained the actions of some Dissent! members who, by choosing to interact with media, felt as if they were breaking a taboo. The perceived prevalence of the 'anti-media' sentiment also meant that, as a result of a spiral of silence, this position went unchallenged resulting in little, if any, strategic/political debate about the role of media in the mobilisation.

Despite the lack of political debate on the topic, Dissent! established a network-level media policy and a working group, the CounterSpin Collective, formed to field media requests. And although members of the CSC felt constrained by the perceived 'anti-media' thread in the network, they carried on with their action. Returning to the case of Gregory mentioned above, Gregory described himself as feeling anxious in the execution of his role as a CSC member; however, he was surprised by how people reacted to his request:

> No one was like particularly really abusive... Some people would be like, 'Oh no, I've got better things to do, don't bother me' but... generally, I was quite surprised, people's reactions were quite positive. (Quote 14; Interview with Gregory, 26/07/2005)

He continued:

> There was more positivity from within the Dissent network that I encountered and that was a surprise for me because I thought we were going to be kind of hated and reviled for what we were doing. (Quote 15; Interview with Gregory, 26/07/2005)

The disjuncture between how Gregory expected people to act and the reception he received may be rooted, at least in part, to the spiral of silence and a fear of being reprimanded or isolated. The apprehension may be justified, given that there was one documented incident of a CSC member who was talking with a journalist when a fellow Dissent! member threw a half-full plastic bottle of water at them[8]. Despite this, and for the most part, members of the CSC received a warmer reception than anticipated.

Based on interviewee comments and fieldwork, I would argue that the disjuncture between expectations and experience indicates that Dissent! — and perhaps even the UK radical left — is not as divided on the media as assumed. This is not to overlook the vocal presence of 'anti-media' advocates, but it is to side with an assessment offered by interviewee Robyn:

> I think most people [were] quite happy for [people to interact with media]. I think there [was] a core... a smaller amount of people who were really, really, really adamant that there should be no speaking to corporate media (Quote 16, Interview with Robyn, 21/07/2005).

The salient point is that the dominant orientation of the network was not 'anti-media.' However, a lack of dialogue on the issue coupled with a vocal 'anti-media core' stifled any political-level discussion, bringing about a spiral of silence. Although factors such time constraints and an emphasis on the practical aspects of mobilising may have contributed to the lack of theoretical discussion on the media within Dissent! at the network-level, it does not account for the

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[8] I witnessed this incident in person and also spoke to the person this happened to. The incident exemplifies the extreme version 'anti-media' position which is passionate, reactionary but not very thought out. The incident received a online mention in the Scotsman noting, 'bottles were thrown at a journalist and photographer as they departed [the Hori-Zone camp]' (Chamberlain & Black, 2005).

'anti-media' sentiment sensed by many interviewees. But it does suggest that the media debate is a discussion which needs to take place.

Conclusion

This article set out to address and map a subject well known in activist circles but relatively unstudied by academics: the media debate. This was undertaken through using the Dissent! network and the 2005 Gleneagles G8 Summit as a case study to explore how activists understand the 'media debate' and how this perceived understanding influenced network activities. While the 'media debate' was rarely discussed within Dissent! at a network-level, activists interviewed for this research were shown to be able to articulate their understanding of the debate with ease. The media debate was described by activists through the use of two binaries. First, it was presented as debate over either interacting with mainstream media or using movement media and, most often, Indymedia. Second, it was articulated as an 'all or nothing' binary whereby mainstream media was either worked with or not.

While the analysis outlined the various reasons supporting the 'anti-media' perspective, it was argued that the 'pro-media' side of the debate did not exist within the network, though this could also be read as a veiled critique of Make Poverty History. Restated, none of the activists interviewed for this research endorsed an open and all embracing view of mass media interaction. Instead, the article charted the emergence of a 'pragmatic perspective' held by activists and evident in the actions of the CounterSpin Collective, whereby activists attempted to develop strategies - consistent with their reading of autonomous politics – that allowed them to navigate the contentious field of the media debate, yet still engage with mainstream media. The pragmatic perspective rested on three pillars. First, media was viewed as a field of social struggle on par with city streets, thus necessitating media interaction. Second, the media event status of the 2005 G8 Summit was recognised and viewed as a 'political opportunity' (Tarrow, 1998) for visibility. And, third, mainstream media and radical media were both valued. Whereas the polar view of radical versus mainstream media forces a choice between the two media, a pragmatic perspective views both media as necessary and complimentary; each has their own purpose, audiences, strengths and weaknesses.

The prevalence to which the pragmatic perspective was articulated amongst interviewees and observed within the Dissent! network suggests that there is a disjuncture between the imagined positions of the media debate as articulated in its polarised form, and the actual positions of the media debate as captured in the pragmatic perspective. In the final section of this paper, it was argued that one source of this disjuncture may be the 'spiral of silence' (Noelle-Neuman, 1974) created around the media debate. Because the topic of media interaction was perceived to be so divisive by activists, the topic was not broached. This has two implications. First, it illustrates the rhetorical power the 'anti-media' position held within Dissent! At the same time, the 'anti-media' position was

one which did not seem to be taken by many within the network.   To assert that the 'anti-media' position was not as prominent as many perceived it to be within Dissent! is not to negate the arguments the perspective rests upon. There are convincing arguments for abstaining from interacting with media (Katsiaficas, 2006, p. 21-24). And while it may not be possible to resolve ideological differences between the anti-media and the pragmatic approach, it is important to acknowledge the boundaries of each. Moreover, this article has argued that activists should revisit their positions on mainstream media interaction in light of the media eventisation of protest and the mobilization at media event protests such as the G8. Yet, the 'media debate' is often a topic that emerges in the heat of organising, and is thus a context which is often not conducive for drawn out ideological debate. Moreover, the perceived contentious nature of the debate has lead activists to a pragmatic 'pain avoidance', staying silent on a perceived divisive issue. However, it is crucial to any organising that activists not feel intimidated within their own network, and that an atmosphere for constructive dialog can be created. This is not to endorse any one perspective on the debate-- one's perspective must be commensurate with one's politics -- but it is to argue for the need to respect differing positions. A common thread with both positions is the need for dialogue, not just by academics but especially within activist communities, on the advantages and limitations of all forms of media: mainstream and radical. It is hoped the analysis presented in the article can contribute towards such a discussion.

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