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Two Steps Back
The Return Of Nonviolence In Ecological Resistance
May 1st, 2014

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The Return Of Nonviolence In Ecological Resistance

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darity resulting in a smattering of actions across the continent. At the risk of reducing complexities, this has happened by advocating relatively open tactical approaches and articulating a need for attack. At best, Earth First! has remained distant from these strands and at worst has been hostile.[48]

Earth First!—and "the radical environmental movement"—could learn from the not-so-distant past and try new approaches being taken elsewhere. The most obvious approach is to cast aside the language of nonviolence, civil disobedience, and morality. Tactics should be measured by their effectiveness, not their adherence to principles loaded with value judgments. Is this lockdown going to work? Are the benefits worth the cost? Will this act of sabotage work? Which approach will work better? These are the types of questions that should be asked. Moreover, a culture should be created which embraces a diversity of tactics wherein groups agree not to condemn the actions of others, refuse to cooperate with the police, and refuse to isolate those pursuing more militant approaches. Regardless of individual and group tactical preferences, all choices gain strength when they are part of a broad space that cannot be easily co-opted and divided.

Of course, such a culture of militancy isn't going to come about out of a simple declaration of support for a diversity of tactics. But, it is at least a start. If options are kept open, not only is there more to draw from, but more places to go.

[48] Panagioti, "The Ecology of a Police State," earthfirstjournal.org- state/

one that challenged capitalism (at the very least)—via a diverse and combative approach.

Another example that is worth considering is the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign. Using an entirely decentralized and open approach, the SHAC campaign—which targeted Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS) and the companies that did business with them—allowed space for individuals and groups to engage in a wide range of actions under the idea that everything helped. A timeline of actions focusing on just one company, Marsh Inc., shows a staggering array of approaches ranging from home demonstrations, locks being glued in offices, blockades at offices, vandalism of homes, property destruction, demonstrations, etc.[46] In just a few months, Marsh ceased involvement with HLS. The symbiotic relationship between the aboveground and the underground, as well as support for a diversity of tactics helped catalyze a range of actions. While there are additional lessons to be learned from the SHAC campaign,[47] it is interesting to consider how such an approach might be applied to the current struggles over pipelines. How well would construction fare if local companies building pipelines were attacked with the same intensity as those doing business with HLS?

Similarly, ecological resistance could learn from the approaches developed by insurrectionary anarchists across North America. Anarchists have created a culture of attack that in the best cases works not only to expand their base, but also to materially damage their enemies. For example, struggles against the police in the Pacific Northwest that both offered relatively open forms for people to get involved in militant street confrontations as well as nighttime attacks on police stations. Moreover, these currents have been successful at catalyzing activity elsewhere, with calls for days of soli-

[46] SHAC ATTACK! Targeting Companies Animal Rights Style (n.d., n.p.)

[47] See "The SHAC Model: A Critical Assessment" in Rolling Thunder, #8, 2008 and "SHAC: A Campaign That Made History"

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infrastructure. So not only do the tactics become confined, but the politics as well.

Alternatives?

At best, the radical environmental movement is stuck in a rut, trapped within a space of increasing contradictions as leftist groups and large NGOs try to manage dissent. Groups like Earth First! and others that share similar approaches are playing a role in this by embracing non-violence, civil disobedience, moral appeals, and a culture of ritualized and scripted actions. Rather than growing from the experiences of the past, they have shifted onto a course that constrains struggle rather than expands it.

Of course, it doesn't have to be like this. There are other approaches to take. Earlier in this piece, there was a discussion of the radical environmental milieu in the years following the Seattle WTO and how a multi-tendency space that broke with traditional forms of protest that created opportunities for new forms of resistance. While success is difficult to define, those years had a level of excitement and even victories that inspired many to take significant risks—perhaps even inspiring some of the current crop of Earth First! elders. Had the current level of stifling adherence to non-violence that we now see been applied to that period, many people like myself wouldn't be around—we would have missed out on the excitement and formative experiences of confronting lines of riot police, the joy of moments of collective acts of rebellion, and the inspiration that came from pushing dumpsters into lines of police. This isn't to reduce things down to simple tactical preferences, but rather to point out that just as Keystone XL won't be stopped by non-violent civil disobedience in front of the White House, the Seattle round of trade talks wouldn't have collapsed unless the states involved saw the opposition as a genuine threat—in that case, one which was unpredictable and uncontrollable, and

should be challenging these narratives, not embracing them. This could be done through constructive criticism and propaganda, or by creating exciting and empowering alternatives.

Instead, Earth First! seems to be caught in a rut, pursuing a limited strategy of moving from one campaign to another and pursuing the same limited set of tactics. What is going to happen at any given action is predictable. There will be a call for solidarity actions (nowadays often called by some big group like 350.org as EF! is often reacting to their work rather than setting their own unique course), a lockdown will take place or a tripod will go up, a post will go on the newswire, and fundraising calls will go out. Or there will be an "action camp" featuring the usual set of workshops, followed on the last day by some kind of "action" following the above template. The actions themselves will be highly scripted and ritualized, with a series of unique roles—media liaisons, police liaisons, arrestables, etc. There is little if any improvisation, the actions are perfected down to a science—hence the reason why Earth First! can conduct so many "trainings" on how to do them. Moreover, by adopting as their primary form relatively specialized types of blockades that require some technical knowledge—it creates a culture of specialists in struggle. The result is an increasingly narrow range of actions with increasingly high stakes. If every lockdown is going to result in felony charges, at what point does the tactic become obsolete?

If the tactics aren't working, neither is using these approaches to advance Earth First!'s understanding and critique of civilization. Whether to build the alliances described above or out of a strategic calculation of some sort, they almost always position themselves around a "single issue" rather than addressing the totality. Consequently, when Earth First! engages in these new movements, its views— particularly the criticism of civilization—are not being taken up. These movements are still defined narrowly in terms of protesting a particular type of energy. There has yet to be anything with a perspective critical of civilization or all forms of industrial

At the turn of the century, Green Anarchy's critique of civilization and uncompromising support of militant tactics was a challenge to anarchists and brought a number of new debates to the surface. Green Anarchy also existed within a space that adopted a combative approach towards ecological struggles with a series of high profile attacks, actions, blockades, and the like taking place across the United States. It was the years of black blocs at summit protests, the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), and other confrontations that tossed the question of nonviolence to the side in favor of a multifaceted approach embracing a "diversity of tactics."

In the years since, a lot of that activity has receded within anarchist circles. The critique of civilization has arguably become less present, even though the bankruptcy of civilization becomes more obvious each day. If anything, the dystopian future outlined by Green Anarchy is arriving sooner than expected. Despite a shift in anarchist circles away from ecological struggles, these struggles have continued and in some ways are increasing in the United States. Whether due to awareness of global warming, the involvement of more mainstream non-profit groups, or an increase in Earth First!-style groups and approaches, the numbers of actions, action camps, and gatherings is growing. Somewhat like previous eras of resistance, anarchists and Earth First!-style radicals inhabit this new ecology of resistance, albeit with more distance between the two camps (to the extent that they can be separate) than existed in previous years.

Many of these actions fall under the rubric of what could be called "radical environmentalism" in that they are often initiated or supported by groups that have a deeper analysis or more militant approach than the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, or the other large environmental groups that operate primarily on the political terrain (lobbying and soliciting funds to engage in such activities).[1]

[1] Throughout this piece, terminology is occasionally used that is imperfect at best: "ecological resistance," "movement," "radical environmentalism," etc vari-

Among these groups, Earth First! is the most prominent. From hosting annual meet-ups and conferences, providing trainings, and publishing accounts in the Earth First! Journal and on their website, Earth First! has been involved, either explicitly or indirectly.[2] Much of this new ecological activity has been what could be described as "non-violent" direct action: lockdowns, treesits, and the like. In many ways, it's the standard toolbox from which Earth First! has drawn from for the better part of thirty-five years. However, what is different about these efforts is how Earth First! and this wider crowd has self-consciously started to adopt the restrictive rhetoric of non-violence and civil disobedience, as well as the worn approaches.[3]

There are multiple ways to orient oneself to this approach. On the one hand, outright dismissal seemslike the most easy course. Anarchists would see little to gain and would have an easy time debunking the tactical and strategic choices being made in the radical environmental movement. It isn't hard to see this new route as a retreat into the failed approaches of the past. However, in the relative absence of a green anarchist presence in the United States over the past few years, Earth First! was the primary radical and militant voice. They are one of the only groups that will raise the problem of "industrial civilization"[4] and their publications are peppered with a vague form of anti-civilization anarchism, even if it

ously make me cringe or roll my eyes. Nevertheless, it's hard to describe without using such terms. You know, symbolic culture and all that jazz…

[2] "A Decade of Earth First! Action in the 'Climate Movement,'" earthfirstjournal.org- decade-of-earth-first-action-in-the-climate-movement/

[3] As a matter of course, I consider "non-violence" to be a concept that must be destroyed. For those unfamiliar with such a critique, I'd recommend consulting Peter Gelderloos' How Non-Violence Protects the State (South End Press, 2007) and Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America, (AK Press, 2007). As a bonus reading, Ashen Ruin's Beyond the Corpse Machine is a fun (if somewhat dated) look at how these debates play out in anarchist circles.

[4] "About Earth First!," earthfirstjournal.org

scorn.[43] The attitude seems to be that debate is divisive, a position that may get short-term allies, but is likely to gloss over differences and cause problems down the road. Moreover, it raises all sorts of questions: what are the ramifications of being dishonest about one's beliefs for short term gain? Are they hidden out of fear? Paternalism? Etc? While not relating specifically to nonviolence, one example of pursuing an alliance despite significant differences was Earth First!'s multi-year embrace of Deep Green Resistance, a neo-Maoist group dominated by Derrick Jensen and the transphobia of Lierre Keith.[44]

Limiting Options and Narrowing Forms of Resistance: Ritualized Actions

It's easy to criticize the efforts of groups like 350.org and the more mainstream of the environmental groups. In many ways, in the climate that exists in the United States, it isn't surprising that such groups would adopt a strict adherence to non-violence—it is one of the primary myths that we're taught about how "change" happens. In many cases, there are caricatures of past movements—the glossed over accounts of the civil rights movement or Gandhi and the Indian independence movement—that cast them as solely non-violent struggles or pick out the most passive forms of resistance and hold those up as successful.[45] A group like Earth First! or the anarchists/radicals who chose to work with these new groups

[43] These run throughout lots of Earth First! Journal pieces, but there's an article where they encourage people to suck it up an engage with local city commissions while slamming anarchists that is pretty revealing: earthfirstjournal.org

[44] For a good discussion of the problems with Deep Green Resistance see, Ruhe, "Deep Green Resistance: A Book Review," www.sproutdistro.com and Earth First!'s statement disassociating themselves with the group, "Deep Green Transphobia," earthfirstjournal.org

[45] See Zig-Zag, Smash Pacifism:A Critical Analysis of Gandhi and King (Warrior Publications, 2012).

to take hold.[38] An organizing manual funded by 350.org called the "Creative Action Cookbook" was funded by 350.org advocated nonviolence, even offering a helpful scenario in which they described how scary a protest with a crowd of people ("mostly young white men in their twenties") dressed in black is compared to a nonviolent protest where "even the police officers are smiling and they are gently putting protestors in mass arrest trucks."[39] In the case of #SummerHeat, action participants at a scripted sit-in at a Chevron facility in Richmond, California were required to sign-up online and confirm that they "promise to be nonviolent and peaceful in all of my activities during the action."[40] Guidelines further stated that "Non-violence includes no verbal abuse or threatening motions"[41] and that they should "appear dignified in dress and demeanor – these are serious issues, and we want to be taken seriously"[42].

For their part, Earth First!—as much one can make statements about it—seems intent on pursuing a policy of engagement with these efforts. This is most often done uncritically. In the case of the aforementioned #SummerHeat action, the coverage was absolutely glowing. The author praised the campaign, writing "350.org joining with the Industrial Workers of the World on an environmental justice campaign. If that doesn't give you goosebumps, I don't know what will." They also included a quote praising the police for being "very gentle, apologetic, and polite." In the absence of criticism, it is far more likely to see condescending tones directed towards those who disagree with this uncritical embrace of new movements—with anarchists receiving a particular amount of

[38] Kristin Moe, "#FearlessSummer: How the Battle to Stop Climate Change Got Ferocious," www.yesmagazine.org

[39] Creative Action Cookbook, issuu.com

[40] "Summer Heat Richmond," joinsummerheat.org

[41] "Summer Heat Richmond – Participant Info," www.350bayarea.org

[42] "FAQs," joinsummerheat.org

rarely coheres into much of anything and is often missing from its actions.

A Flash Back…

Radical ecological action has a history in the United States that dates back at least to the 1980s when Earth First! appeared on the scene. Earth First! broke from the prevailing model of environmental activism both in terms of advocating for direct action to protect wild spaces (for example, blockading roads and treesits to prevent logging) and sabotage. From the early 1980s on, Earth First! has supported sabotage (often called "monkey wrenching"), by openly encouraging its use, publishing manuals popularizing the tactics, refusing to condemn its use, and supporting prisoners doing time for acts of ecological resistance. Earth First! is of course not a unified network, it's a collection of relatively autonomous chapters, characterizing itself as "…not an organization, but a movement."[5] Consequently, making blanket statements about Earth First! can be difficult, but it is fair to say that the mix of direct action and sabotage has been a prominent strategy. Nevertheless, Earth First! advocated for a range of different approaches over the years, talking about sabotage one minute and a few minutes later holding up the virtues of civil disobedience. In its Primer, Earth First! speaks favorably of monkey wrenching, while hedging its bets and saying that "the Earth First! movement neither advocates nor condemns monkeywrenching officially."[6]

Earth First! has existed within a space that could be broadly called "radical environmentalism" that incorporates a range of other tactics. Anarchists have been involved in Earth First! over the years, coming to prominence in the late 1980s. An important point of reference was the publication of Live Wild or Die. It advo-

[5] Earth First! Primer, p. 1, earthfirstnews.files.wordpress.com

[6] Earth First! Primer, p. 3.

cated for more destructive actions and a deeper analysis, moving closer to the anti- civilization anarchist perspective developing at the time. Influenced by publications such as Green Anarchist and Do Or Die out of England, more people in the United States began to advocate for a more conflictual approach. Perhaps as a reaction to some of the more contradictory elements of Earth First!, these critiques grew in prominence in the Pacific Northwest where some of the most high profile environmental struggles were taking place. Zines such as Black-Clad Messenger published with the tag line "actualizing industrial collapse" and Disorderly Conduct published by "The Bring on the Ruckus Society" (a seeming tongue-and-cheek critique of the "mass movement" that emerged after the protests against the WTO in Seattle in 1999) advanced a critique of civilization and advocated uncompromising militant action,[7] an approach also characterized the journal Green Anarchy.[8]

In the 1990s and into the early 2000s, these different groupings formed a constellation of activity characterized by a variety of new approaches. Lines between different grouping were relatively loose and their was considerable cross-over between groups. From occupations and treesits like Warner Creek to the Minnehaha Free State, different tactics and strategies existed in parallel with and drew strength from each other. While we now know based on various legal cases over the past several years the lines between Earth First!, the Earth Liberation Front, and anarchists weren't always clear, the strategies were often different. For example, while Earth First! was involved with the Minnehaha Free State, the Earth Liberation Front tried tree spiking. Among the participants in the black

[7] Black-Clad Messenger #8, (n.p., 2000) and Disorderly Conduct #4, (n.p., Fall 2001).

[8] An archive of issues of Green Anarchy is available online at greenanarchy.anarchyplanet.org/ A published book length anthology of the theoretical pieces called Uncivilized: The Best of Green Anarchy, (Green Anarchy, 2012) is a good starting point for an anti-civilization perspective.

their actions to place minimal strain on the police. This was the case at an action in Massachusetts where 350.org worked with police to coordinate the protest and wore shirts identifying those risking arrest.[33] It can also happen in smaller ways, such as when protestors announce their intentions in advance, as was seen at a MI-CATS action where an individual climbed into a pipeline until just 5pm.[34] This limits the tactic and removes the threat of uncontrollable disruption. In other cases the individual focus results in a celebrity culture where actual celebrities (think Taylor Swift's ex-boyfriend, Robert Kennedy, and the like[35]) are praised for their sacrifice (and at elevated above others as being more important), or where "movement" celebrities are created.[36]

Over the summer of 2013, many ecological actions followed these models. The #FearlessSummer campaign (a series of actions primarily promoted through "social media") and the #SummerHeat (named with a "Twitter hashtag"—is this really how disconnected from the Earth we have become?) campaign were two examples. Aside from the problematic politics of advocating a "clean energy economy"—which should be enough to keep so-called radicals away, these groups also embrace the same narrow range of tactics.[37] While theoretically decentralized, the influence of organizations pushing for nonviolence was apparent in much of the language. At best the topic is avoided (as is the case in the language for #FearlessSummer), but absent a stated supported of a diversity of tactics, it is all too easy for the recuperative aspects

[33] "Forty-four Protesters Arrested at Mass. Coal-Fired Plant," earthfirstjournal.org "Michigan Tar Sands Pipeline Protester Could Get Two Years in Jail,"

[34] bcblackout.wordpress.com

[35] "OMG, Taylor Swift's Ex-Boyfriend Totally Arrested for Protesting Keystone XL Pipeline," earthfirstjournal.org

[36] "Earth First! Journalist popped at Tar Sands Blockade," earthfirstjournal.org

[37] "Fearless Summer: Powerful Start 6 Days 18 States 28 Actions," www.popularresistance.org

like they are doing much to catalyze support for direct action as Earth First! may have defined it in the past. Instead, these groups are having a constraining effect on the radical environmental movement. Eager to fit into the new ecological "movement," it seems that many so-called radicals are beginning to narrowly position themselves in a way so as not to separate from these potential allies. Rather than pushing the envelope, Earth First! is in many ways closing the envelope in ways that limit struggles.

Groups within the "radical environmental" movement have started to self-identify their actions as civil disobedience. For example, the Michigan Coalition Against the Tar Sands (MI-CATS) described an action in which some members locked themselves to a bulldozer as "non-violent civil disobedience."[29] Many of these actions have adopted the worst aspects of civil disobedience, playing up the "civil" aspect and adopting an attitude of personal sacrifice and martyrdom.[30] They become acts of personal heroics, as is the case when activists position themselves as being compelled to act in the face of great injustice as a "personal statement of civil disobedience."[31] Actions become about the individuals as much as stopping the act of destruction. The story of why one acted is almost as important as the action itself. A familiar trope is a rhetoric of regret, where participants might express sadness that they are keeping people from "their jobs" or the police from "protecting society"—even though in this case those jobs are allowing for the destruction and the police are a part of the system that allows for it.[32] In the most ridiculous extreme of these actions, activists work with the police, choreographing

[29] "BREAKING: Activists Block Tar Sands Pipeline," www.michigancats.org

[30] "Michigan Coalition Against Tar Sands Defendants Move Cases Forward in Court," www.michigancats.org

[31] "Solidarity With Fearless Summer: Blockader Skateboards Into Enbridge Pipe," www.michigancats.org

[32] "Michigan Coalition Against Tar Sands Defendants Move Cases Forward in Court"

bloc in Seattle that attacked chain stores and various other corporations during the World Trade Organization (WTO) summit were those who acted within this space.

While not always directly connected to ecological resistance, the years immediately following Seattle were ones characterized by militant confrontations with the state and attacks on corporate property. Outside of trade summits, black blocs were a favorite tactic, attacking the police and property. In Seattle, both the sanctity of corporate property and non-violent protest tactics were challenged. In the wake of Seattle, one heard relatively little about civil disobedience and non-violence, with the discussion dramatically shifting. While not everything was perfect, the subsequent confrontations were described as "direct action" rather than "civil disobedience," a change in wording that signaled a desire to move beyond symbolic and ritualized displays of dissent. While there was no unified view, property destruction was largely seen as a given, with proponents either accepting it outright or trying to argue that it was in fact "non-violent." Pacifism, peace police, and non-violence—all of which were characteristics of the post-1960s movements—were heavily critiqued (see for example, Peter Gelderloos How Nonviolence Protects the State). Rather than the restrictive non-violence codes of the past, "diversity of tactics" was the name of the game and for the most part those advocating for a strict adherence to nonviolence were on the defensive. In the realm of ecological resistance, attacks by the Earth Liberation Front were quite common. These weren't just the high profile attacks at Veil or Michigan State, but reflected a conflictual practice that spread within the context of radical environmentalism to places such as Louisville, KY and Long Island.[9] Throughout the same period, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and the more radical portion of the animal liberation movement advocated and engaged in economic attacks. The SHAC

[9] Leslie James Pickering, The Earth Liberation Front 1997-2002, (Arissa Media Group, 2007).

campaign—which combined a diverse array of strategies from harassment of individuals to property destruction—almost brought Huntingdon Life Sciences to its knees. Even after September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks caused most leftists to abandon the "anti-globalization movement," anarchists and others continued to pursue summit-based confrontations and nighttime attacks amongst the standard range of collectives, publications, infoshops, and other projects that make up the anarchist space.

If one is to compartmentalize history into eras, this era of activity ended largely due to the collapse of the anti-globalization movement, the Iraq War, and the rise of leftist protest coalitions (although paradoxically, the left was unable to mount an effective challenge to the war, but it was able to largely return the model of scripted mass marches), and the repression of what has been called "the Green Scare."[10] With Operation: Backfire, several former participants in Earth Liberation Front actions were arrested after one became an informant. Other related cases including Marie Mason—who participated in several Earth Liberation Front actions in the Midwest—and the case of Eric McDavid (a victim of a government scheme to blow-up a dam), were followed by a decline in ELF activity.

Even with these setbacks, two mobilizations that happened towards the end of the 2000s reflected the lessons learned over the course of these summit demonstrations. Groups organizing against the Republican National Convention (RNC) in St. Paul in 2008 adopted a set of principles dubbed the "St. Paul Principles" that enshrined many of the operating practices of the previous years. It called for the support for a "diversity of tactics," while also reaching agreements not to cooperate with law enforcement against other activists and to refrain from denouncing others in

[10] "Green Scared? Preliminary Lessons of the Green Scare," www.crimethinc.com

these could be cast as "radical," they are worth considering for the attention that they have received within the radical environmental movement. For the most part, these have been embraced or promoted uncritically. Over the summer, an editor for the Earth First! Journal wrote a piece titled "NGOs Kickoff Civil Disobedience Campaign at Chicago Anti-KXL Rally" which is representative of the attitude towards these new efforts. The campaign was organized by Credo Mobile (yes, a cell phone company that "supports activism and funds progressive nonprofits") and aimed at preventing President Barack Obama from approving the Keystone XL. On their "Pledge of Resistance" they ask people to "engage in serious, dignified, peaceful civil disobedience,"[26] invoking the images of "the peaceful and dignified arrests" of over 1,253 people in August 2011, which they claim delayed approval of the plan. This is scripted civil disobedience at its finest, a scenario that could be straight out of Ward Churchill's Pacifism as Pathology.[27] The writer from Earth First! didn't seem to find anything wrong with this, instead imploring radicals to "…not to blow it by being self-righteous pricks." The writer argues that actions "make space for growing broader support of direct action in general, if we engage them as such." When the Sierra Club announced they were going to engage in civil disobedience, the Earth First! Newswire expressed some skepticism but saw it as the potential seeds for an ecological "mass movement" and said that the proper role for Earth First! was "to keep pushing the envelope—until said envelope has been reduced to ashes."[28]

Unfortunately, this has not happened. Groups like Earth First!—whether caught up in fantasies about "the movement" or for other reasons—have uncritically supported these efforts. It doesn't seem

[26] "Sign the Keystone XL Pledge of Resistance," act.credoaction.com?source=NOKXLORG_kxlpledge

[27] See pages 61–66 in Ward Churchill's Pacifism as Pathology for a classic description of this.

[28] "Sierra Club Announces Direct Action to Stop Tar Sands?!?," earthfirstjournal.org

Aside from limiting the range of responses to ecological destruction, nonviolence codes serve a policing role over struggles. There is self-policing when only a limited range of acceptable tactics are considered. In relation to others who resist, they have a policing role by isolating others and having a position that condemns other types of tactics. It's paternalistic in the sense that the movement specialists—those with the training and those who do the trainings—decide for others what the best way to resist is. By stating explicitly that they will remain within certain narrow parameters, it is easier for the state to manage and neutralize them. While debating what is and isn't "direct action" is not the most exciting or most relevant debate, it is interesting to note that the radical environmental movement is increasingly defining it in ways that include tactics that rely solely on representation by specialists, such as the so-called "paper wrenching" of filing lawsuits[25] or highly technical blockades.

Embracing Civil Disobedience?

Along with the embrace of non-violence, there has also been a shift towards even more restrictive forms in which "direct action" has been replaced with "civil disobedience." While it may seem like a semantic debate, it suggests a political orientation. Whereas direct action is largely about disruption and gaining direct results (for example, stopping logging), civil disobedience is about performing an "illegal" act for the purpose of appealing to authority and/or demonstrating the unjust nature of a particular law or policy. It also carries the expectation of politeness, that one will act in a "civil" manner as one demonstrates their opposition.

There has been an increase in civil disobedience actions relating to the environment over the past couple of years. While none of

[25] Panagioti Tsolkas, "Direct Action: What It Is and Why We Use It," earthfirstjournal.org

the media.[11] The primary anarchist organizing body—The RNC Welcoming Committee—and the prominent "liberal" groups all agreed to the same terms. The result was a disruptive mobilization wherein to a certain degree there was support and respect for different approaches. A year later, the Pittsburgh G-20 Resistance Project adopted similar language and organizing principles.[12]

The point of this is not just to present an overly simplified history of the early 2000s, but to make the argument that during the period dogmatic adherence to non-violence was largely abandoned. A wide- range of folks—from anarchists in the black bloc to those engaged in various forms of ecological resistance—were doing so outside of traditional forms of non-violent protest and civil disobedience. Earth First! existed within this context and benefited from the combative approach.

The Perplexing Return of Non-Violence

One of the most talked about recent campaigns in the radical environmental movement has been the Tar Sands Blockade, an effort in south Texas aimed stopping the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline. Tar Sands Blockade was launched with the help of 350.org[13] and Rising Tide to establish a "peaceful direct action camp" with a particular focus on building relationships with those living in the pipeline's path.*14* Members of Earth First! participated as well and the larger Earth First! network issued a call encouraging Earth First!ers to go to Texas.[14] Before the Tar Sands Blockade ceased operating as a result of a civil lawsuit in which TransCanada

[11] "St. Paul Principles," rnc08report.org

[12] "Resisting the G-20 in Pittsburgh," rnc08report.org

[13] Candice Bernd, "The Summer of Solidarity: Direct Action Against Extraction," truth-out.org

[14] "Get Your Ass Out to Texas and Fight the Tar Sands Pipeline!," earthfirstjournal.org

claimed the campaign had cost them $5 million dollars,[15] it featured lockdowns in pipes and on bulldozers, treesits, and actions at corporate offices.

Tar Sands Blockade embraced "non-violent direct action."[16] Far from using the term as a mere descriptor, they adopted the ideology of non-violence with all of its worst aspects. They described it as "a moral high ground from which we can build community in a broken world," thereby creating a value judgment against other approaches. Similarly, they viewed nonviolent direct action as a course to be pursued only once other methods had been exhausted (a logic that implies one must go the tedious route of pursuing endless lawsuits first, in order to give their "resorting" to direct action more legitimacy). They cast nonviolence as the only choice, stating that "With respect for our community, our opposition, and ourselves, we affirm that we will engage in nonviolent, community building tactics." Moreover, they adopted a rhetoric of professionalism, stating that there is a "need" for it and that all of those they work with will be "well-trained" and "abide by our code of conduct." Not surprisingly, they pledge to treat all people—from police to those building the pipeline—as if they were their "own brothers and sisters." After all, "in the end, we are family." To top it off, much of their rhetoric around non-violence was adopted uncritically from "The 99% Spring" training guide, a booklet that was published as part of a series of trainings held by various non-profits with the goal of reigning in Occupy.[17] The booklet provides a basic introduction to nonviolence as practiced by U.S.-based activist groups, complete with sanitized histories based on prevailing myths of how "social change" happens. Ironically the recuperative and neutralizing advocacy of nonviolence was literally adopted from groups who had that explicit purpose. As the campaign carried on they began to describe it as "civil disobedience"—a change that reflected an even narrower approach. Despite this, nothing critical was said about the Tar Sands Blockade. The blockade received a cover image and a dramatic photo spread in an issue of the Earth First! Journal—notable for the complete lack of content beyond spectacular images.[18] Only one critique of the Tar Sands Blockade seems to have been published, otherwise coverage has been overwhelmingly positive.[19]

Nonviolence codes have proliferated rapidly within the radical environmental crowd. An action camp publicized on the Earth First! Newswire for the "Hands of Appalachia" campaign, was peppered with the words "non-violent" to describe their tactics of choice.[20] In the campaign's "Non-Violence Policy," they state that "All individuals are expected to commit to nonviolence" and further state that they "do not condone property destruction."[21] Mountain Justice, another campaign targeting Mountain Top Removal mining in Appalachia, has a similar code. They explain that property destruction and violence have been used by coal companies to silence opposition, framing themselves as a more dignified non- violent approach.[22] They make it clear in multiple areas of their website that they "do NOT engage in sabotage."[23] RAMPS (Radical Action for Mountain People's Survival)—while less explicit— categorizes their anti-mountaintop removal work as a "non-violent direct action" campaign.[24]

[15] "Activists Forced to Settle Lawsuit But Will Continue to Fight Keystone XL Pipeline," www.tarsandsblockade.org

[16] "Nonviolent Direct Action," www.tarsandsblockade.org

[17] "The 99% Spring Training Guide," s3.moveon.org

[18] "Tar Sands Blockade, East Texas," Earth First! Journal, Lughnasdh 2012, 32-33.

[19] "Block the Flows: Defeating Tar Sands in the U.S. and Canada," The Raging Pelican, ragingpelican.com

[20] "Hands Off Appalachia November Action Camp," earthfirstjournal.org

[21] "Policy of Nonviolence and Anti-Harrassment," handsoffappalachia.com

[22] "Mountain Justice policy of non-violence/non-property destruction and Anti-harassment," mountainjustice.org

[23] "Mountain Justice Tactics," mountainjustice.org

[24] "About Us – RAMPS," rampscampaign.org