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Learning in action: How 'radical habitus' mediates social movement activity and learning

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Learning in action: How 'radical habitus' mediates social movement activity and learning

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Abstract: Social movement theory has seen influences from a variety of disciplines, beginning with traditions of psychology and social psychology, followed by an emphasis on resource mobilization and political process. Some promising literature in socio-cognition, and specifically Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), provide new approaches to understand learning in social movements. At the same time, there have been efforts to incorporate Bourdieu's theory of practice in analyses of social movements. In this paper, I argue for a need to utilize Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *field* within CHAT *activity systems* as a means to improve analyses of individual/collective learning and transformation in social movements. By looking at a case study on anti-poverty organizing in Ontario, I illustrate a promising conceptual approach to understand the dynamics of social movements.

Keywords: theory of practice, cultural historical activity theory, anti-poverty activism, social movement learning, radical habitus

LEARNING IN ACTION: HOW 'RADICAL HABITUS' MEDIATES SOCIAL MOVEMENT ACTIVITY AND LEARNING

The study of social movements has a long tradition, and is often traced back to movement-related literature from the 19th century. However, explicit discussion of social movement theory (SMT) has far more recent history within academic research, and has been interdisciplinary in nature. As the academic field grows, there has been an array of influences from various scholars. In this paper, I focus on the work of Pierre Bourdieu in relation to SMT, and how his theory of practice has certain explanatory power in understanding the dynamics of social movements, their participants and other social agents involved. Specifically, I explore potential alternatives to existing methods of examining social movements, with an interest in socio-cognition and a cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) approach. However, I demonstrate that utilizing only one conceptual framework may become problematic, and I propose an integrated approach that utilizes *habitus* as a *mediating artefact* within activity systems. Such an analysis can prove fruitful in utilizing a transformative approach to learning in conjunction with methods of understanding dynamics of reproduction that are illustrated by Bourdieu.

Beginning with an overview of existing social movement theory, I demonstrate some aspects that can help guide us in analysing movements as well as areas that have proved to be problematic. Following this analysis, I provide an in depth look at Bourdieu's theory of practice, specifically addressing *habitus*, *field* and *social space* in relation to social movements and collective action. After developing these tools to

understand contention, I explore how “radical habitus” (Crossley, 2003) can mediate activity as an artefact. In this section, I provide a brief overview of another methodological approach, cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), in relation to Bourdieu’s work. Finally, I examine a narrative from an APCOL case study to examine how we may operationalize the concept of radical habitus by using a basic activity system.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY AND ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

The origins of SMT begin with social psychology and early sociological accounts of pathological mobs that are driven by irrational thought (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003). By the 1960s and 1970s, a significant shift took place and structural concerns began to take the foreground rather than individual and psychological issues (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003). The development of SMT is not as linear as it may appear within the social movement tradition and some argue that the *Communist Manifesto* is an earlier (and more relevant) example of movement-related literature (Bevington and Dixon, 2005). In this section, I outline existing theories of social movements, followed by an analysis of the work of Nick Crossley (2002; 2002a; 2003) and his inclusion of Bourdieu’s conceptual tools to understand social movements.

Before looking at theories of social movements, it is important to highlight the contention among scholars in their efforts to even define the social movement. Goodwin and Jasper (2003) see them as “conscious, concerted, and sustained efforts by ordinary people to change some aspect of their society by using extra-institutional means” (p. 3). In contrast, Charles Tilly is explicit in citing the “historically specific complex” which demonstrates three elements;

> 1) campaigns of collective claims on target authorities; 2) an array of claim-making performances including special-purpose associations, public meetings, media statements, and demonstrations; 3) public

> representations of the cause's worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment. (Tilly, 2004, p. 7)

Activists, scholars and others have used the term for varying reasons, often without considering its definition. When approaching social movements as an institution, definitions are necessary to frame the analysis, but when looking at a movement through the lens of *relations*, such finite definitions may become limiting.

Beginning with sociological and historical analyses of social movements, we must look at some key definitions that emerged from the tradition of *resource mobilization theory*. The distinct shift from antipathy to sympathy towards social movements also marks a change in the unit of analysis from individuals' activities to the activities of social movement organizations (SMO). Resource mobilization emerged as an approach which "examines the variety of resources that must be mobilized, the linkages of social movements to other groups, the dependence of movements upon external support for success, and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements" (McCarthy and Zald, 2003, p. 169). Such an approach was motivated by an interest to "move from a strong assumption about the centrality of deprivation and grievances to a weak one" (Ibid., p. 170). Rather than emphasising the individual and collective conditions, which had been the primary focus before, McCarthy and Zald proposed analyses that were concerned with the resources that would support or hinder social movements. By defining the institutional players involved, a new approach emerged, involving social movement organizations (SMO), industries (SMI) and the social movement sector (SMS) as encompassing various SMIs and their respective SMOs. Rather than spontaneous and irrational mobilization, McCarthy and Zald began to explore how certain resources mediated mobilization, and they agreed with a key assumption;

> [T]here is always enough discontent in any society to supply the grass-roots support for a movement if the movement is effectively organized and

> has at its disposal the power and resources of some established elite group. (Turner & Killian in McCarthy & Zald, 2003, p. 171)

Furthermore, social movement entrepreneurs and organizations are often at the centre of framing and developing "discontent" in favour of their movements. The validity of this theory has been heavily debated, and in this particular text from the mid-70s, McCarthy and Zald outlined ten hypotheses that highlight the relations between the SMS, SMIs, SMOs and the rest of society in a fashion similar to an analysis of any particular industry and its dynamics with consumers, producers, distributers and the political forces.

Partly in response to resource mobilization, political process theory (PPT) addresses movements in relation to the state. Scholars from this approach view the emergence of a movement as contingent upon "economic and political shifts, usually independently of the protestors' own efforts" (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003, p. 12). The emphasis of such analyses is on political inclusion as central to the demands of movement participants;

> Most process theorists have focused on movements of groups who have been systematically excluded from political power and legal rights, in other words groups who are demanding the full rights of citizenship. (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003, p. 13)

Utilizing a PPT approach provides an understanding of the political aims and conditions that drive contention, and illustrates struggles for inclusion in the political sphere.

The theories aforementioned emphasise institutions and organizations as the primary unit of analysis, effectively leaving out individual and collective agents of social change. The dynamics within movements are challenging to understand when looking at movements through these lenses. While providing strong understanding of how structures impact movements and movements impact structures, to what extent does such theory help in explaining chosen repertoires and the transformation that takes place among individuals and groups?

Amidst critiques of resource mobilization and political process theories emerged alternative approaches that would emphasise the importance of identity, culture and learning in the development of social movements. Rather than understanding movements as mediated exclusively by resources and political inclusion, new social movement (NSM) theory broadened the scope with an emphasis on the motivation of individuals and collective identity. This break from classical movement theory centred discussions on ideology, discursive repertoires, collective identity and habitus as a means to develop improved analyses of social movements (e.g. Steinberg, 1998; Johnson, 2009; Crossley, 2003).

Questions of transformation often arise in this discussion, and there has been a tendency to focus on either individual or collective transformation, rather than providing an integrated approach. Many of the contradictions and conflicts that provide the richest learning in our activities become lost when we focus on one or the other. How can we bring back a focus to individual actors in social movements without losing an understanding of the systems that are structuring and being structured by activity?

SOCIAL SPACE, HABITUS AND FIELD: TOOLS TO UNDERSTAND CONTENTION

> Bourdieu seldom deals directly with the issue of movement, his theory of practice provides the most fruitful conceptual framework for anchoring the sociology of social movements and allows us to overcome many of the key problems that are evident in the more usual approaches. (Crossley, 2002a, p. 15)

Understanding Bourdieu's theory of practice provides an opportunity to develop a conceptual framework that explores social movements and contention from a multi-dimensional approach, bridging the agency/structure dichotomy and incorporating theories of reproduction and transformation in a wholistic methodology. Beginning with a discussion of Bourdieu's explanation of *social space*, *habitus* and *field*, I outline their

specific roles in understanding social movements in dialogue with the above theories of social movements. Following these explanations and definitions, I expand on Crossley's development of "radical habitus" and "fields of contention" as potential tools for further analysis.

HABITUS, FIELD AND CAPITAL

Bourdieu's early work in developing his theory of practice was to overcome dichotomies that limited the opportunity to understand social relations in their full complexity. To begin an understanding of his approach, "it is necessary to abandon all theories which explicitly treat practice as a mechanical reaction, directly determined by the antecedent conditions and entirely reducible to the mechanical functioning of pre-established assemblies" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 73). Moreover, such abandonment is easier said than done, and thus he set out to demonstrate this proclamation through extensive empirical research. Beginning with *habitus*, we can understand it as "a property of social agents (whether individuals, groups or institutions) that comprises a 'structured and structuring structure'" (Maton, 2008, p. 51). As it is both structured and structuring, habitus is constantly being affected by past, current and future environments (or fields), and is also impacting those temporal structures. Furthermore, habitus is defined as "a system of dispositions" where the term "disposition" is explained:

> It expresses first the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being*, *a habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition*, *tendency*, *propensity*, or *inclination*. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 214)

The key terms here are emphasised by Bourdieu, providing a level of ambiguity and contradiction in his language, while maintaining the concept as a unique form. Isolating habitus creates a false sense that it operates on its own volition[i]. Instead, it is directly connected to *field* and *capital*, as "practices are thus not simply the result of one's habitus but rather of *relations between* one's habitus and one's current circumstances"

(Maton, 2008, p. 52). In turn, these *relations* and the *practices* that result are in constant movement, with a tendency towards reproduction, but still with opportunities for agency and social change.

If habitus is a "system of dispositions," then we can consider a field to be a "structured social space" made up of various social agents and subfields;

> It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies. (Bourdieu in Thomson, 2008, p. 74)

Once again, power and hierarchy is central to this discussion, and we are faced with an important question of agency and social change. According to Thomson (2008), this is resolved through Bourdieu's acknowledgement of a "possibility of 'free play' in fields and, that events in adjacent fields and external to fields…could also produce change within them" (p. 74). In other words, conflict between fields and subfields and various social agents provides opportunities for change, which is mediated by using the various forms of power that these different actors possess. In this language, we are getting closer to understanding Bourdieu's relationship to social movements.

How can we understand these varying forms of power? Bourdieu's discussion of *capital* (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) can be seen as the currency used to negotiate power in various fields, as it holds different value in different fields. The "social field" is then mediated by levels of economic capital and cultural capital, and it can be expressed as "a square consisting of two intersecting axes" with economic capital as the vertical axis and cultural capital as the horizontal one (Thomson, 2008, p. 71). This illustrates how Bourdieu maintained economic capital as dominant, but still relating to

cultural capital. When considering how habitus, field and capital interact to produce various social relations, it is important to return to Bourdieu's original intention of overcoming dichotomies and "establishing an experimental science of the *dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*, or…of incorporation and objectification" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). Understanding this intention, let us return to an understanding of how *habitus* embodies this notion and provides opportunities for transformation.

> In practice, it is the habitus, history turned into nature, i.e. denied as such, which accomplishes practically the relating of these two systems of relations, in and through the production of practice. The "unconscious" is never anything other than *the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of habitus*" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78-79, emphasis added)

Such an understanding of habitus as layers of historical activities, some conscious and most unconscious, that culminated into a "system of dispositions" within social agents in a manner that "produces in the second natures of habitus." It is clear that social agents are not ahistorical beings, and *habitus* emphasises this historicity in order to incorporate the countless variables that have contributed to individual and collective dispositions. Through careful exploration of relations between habitus, field and capital, we can begin to understand moments of contradiction, that when exposed, can result in learning and collective action.

SOCIAL SPACE

From the basic tools presented by Bourdieu, we have an understanding of the parts and the relationship to each other, but have yet to address the whole and its relation to the parts. Social space may be considered as such, and is described through the power relations it invokes;

> In so far as the properties chosen to construct this space are active properties, the space can also be described as a field of forces: in other words, a set of objective power relations imposed on all those who enter this field, relations which are not reducible to the intentions of the individual agents or even to direct *interactions* between agents. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 230)

With an emphasis on power and hierarchy, social space can be considered a "field of forces" that is producing the "objective power relations" onto the social agents within a field. Essentially, this is the means to understand the power relations in fields that are in relation to society. Moreover, *social class* becomes a means to understand one's position within a given social space in relation to economic and cultural capitals (Crossley, 2008). In Bourdieu's analysis, he is keen on critiquing Marxist approaches to the classes, and creates a distinction between "class on paper" and "class as action,"

> This working class as "will and representation"…has nothing in common with the class as action, a real and really mobilized group, imagined by the Marxist tradition; but it is no less real, with that magical reality which…defines institutions as social fictions. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 251)

The distinction demonstrates how class dispositions and categories may create a probable affinity to one another, but is only "real" when it transforms into action. In his analysis of social space and class, there is evidence of discussion around questions of how the "circle of reproduction" can be broken, but he maintains a cynical approach to any such transformations. The power of reproduction seems to maintain his disdain towards the Marxist tradition, as well as the need to include cultural capital as a significant moniker in social spaces.

At the same time, Bourdieu does make several key assertions in relation to opportunities for social change, specifically how political struggle is contingent upon "knowledge of the social world…the categories which make it possible" (Bourdieu, 1991,

p. 236). The emphasis on categories in his analysis demonstrates how labels and naming can either contribute to reproducing existing hierarchies or transform them. Furthermore, he argues that reproduction of the "objective relations of power" occurs through "symbolic relations of power, in visions of the social world which contribute to ensuring the permanence of those relations of power" (Ibid., p. 238). In order to disrupt this system and to break "out of the circle of symbolic reproduction," Bourdieu argues that "*alliances* can be set up which are more or less durable and which are always based on a more or less conscious misunderstanding" (Ibid., p. 245). He describes these alliances based on a "homology of position" where;

> …an ambiguous alliance, in which cultural producers, the dominated among the dominant, supply to the dominated, by a sort of embezzlement of accumulated cultural capital, the means of constituting objectively their vision of the world and the representation of their interests in an explicit theory and in institutionalized instruments of representation – trade-union organizations, political parties, social technologies of mobilization and demonstration, etc. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 245).

In other words, the "dominated" are left to find power in allying themselves through "institutionalized instruments of representation," which can be applied to theories of resource mobilization, wherein social movements are reliant on resources to function. The clear difference is that Bourdieu emphasises the value of "accumulated cultural capital" as a means to establish these alliances and break reproduction. Also, he highlights the danger of "political alienation" as it manifests in the "political field" as,

> …isolated agents… [who] cannot constitute themselves as a group, as a force capable of making itself heard in the political field, unless they dispossess themselves and hand over their power to a political apparatus: they must always risk political dispossession in order to escape from political dispossession. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 249)

This disconnect between the "isolated agents" and the rest of the political field is a common scenario in social movements, where the movement organization (which begin as a means to represent activists) becomes institutionalized and focused on navigating the political field ahead of engaging its members[ii].

"RADICAL HABITUS" AND "FIELDS OF CONTENTION"

Thus far, I have summarised Bourdieu's theory of practice with limited discussion of its application to social movements. Through Bourdieu's work, there is an emphasis in understanding *reproduction* rather than *transformation*, but that does not mean he ignored it completely, nor that he believed it impossible. Rather, I would posit that he saw a dire need to critique and analyse systems of power and domination, particularly in their *symbolic* and ordinary forms in order for social agents to develop improved repertoires to combat such hierarchies. There is no doubt that his conceptual tools provide an effective methodology for understanding social relations, and in this section, I hope to illustrate possibilities for understanding social movements.

One evident analysis of collective action is in Bourdieu's analysis of habitus. While habitus is considered to be durable, he discusses opportunities for change in terms of collective action as a dialectic process between "habitus" and an "objective event":

> It is just as true and just as untrue to say that collective actions produce the event or that they are its product. The conjuncture capable of transforming practices objectively co-ordinated because subordinated to partially or wholly identical objective necessities, into *collective action* (e.g. revolutionary action) is constituted in the dialectical relationship between, on the one hand, a *habitus*… and on the other hand, an *objective event* which exerts its action of conditional stimulation calling for or demanding a determinate response, only on those who are disposed to constitute it as such because they are endowed with a determinate type of dispositions. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 82-83, emphasis in original)

As habitus and objective events are in particular relations that provide certain opportunities for resistance and collective action in the form of a "determinate response" to an "objective event" which constitute each other in different ways. When considering this dynamic process, he argues that there is a "hysteresis of habitus," which is a "structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions to grasp them" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 83). This disconnect is both the opportunity for collective action as well as the reproduction of existing structures, as one's revolutionary dispositions may have the "right" history, but the lag means a missed opportunity. In other words, the dialectic relationship between subject/object and past/present is a means to maintain a cycle of reproduction as long as social agents remain unaware of the process. He argues that the only means to stop such reproduction is to be conscious of the reality that the "objective structures are themselves products of historical practices and are constantly reproduced and transformed by historical practices whose productive principle is itself the product of the structures which it consequently tends to reproduce" (Ibid.). In order to begin direct application to social movements, let us consider Crossley's (2002; 2003) use of the concepts *radical habitus* and *fields of contention* as theoretical frameworks to understand contention, and to overcome some of the deficiencies he sees in Bourdieu's analysis of social movements.

When Bourdieu discusses radical movements, he discusses "a theory of 'crisis'… periods in which habitus fall out of alignment with the fields in which they operate, creating a situation in which 'belief in the game' (*illusio*) is temporarily suspended and doxic assumptions are raised to the level of discourse, where they can be contested" (Crossley, 2003, p. 44). This is a key point of contention for Crossley, as he argues that this theory leaves out analyses of "more durable forms of social movement activity" (Ibid.). He argues that the "activists' habitus is structured through their involvement in protest and activism; it is a structured structure," while it is also "this same habitus which leads the activist to continue in activism and thus to contribute to the perpetuation of activism as a social practice; the activist habitus is thus a structuring structure" (Crossley, 2003, p. 51). The spaces where activists are engaged can be considered

"fields of contention" as the locations that mediate the development of an activist's habitus. In line with Bourdieu's equation, "[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice" (1984, p. 101), Crossley presents the notion that "[(habitus) (capital)] + field = movement";

> Insofar as involvement in protest gives rise to a habitus, which in turn gives rise to protest and movement activity, I suggest that we have identified the basis of a dynamic of reproduction within the domain of social movements and protests. (2003, p. 56)

Such a "dynamic of reproduction" in social movements is encouraged through the interactions between agents and "fields of contention," which results in various forms of learning. At the centre of this learning process is contradiction and, more importantly, one's awareness of this contradiction. Operationalizing this conceptual approach to social movements would involve "an empirical mapping of particular fields of contention, such that the structure, dynamics and effects of such fields can be more closely examined" (Crossley, 2003, p. 63). He concludes his analysis with a set of questions that can guide an analysis of a social movement using some of Bourdieu's conceptual tools. Also, he re-emphasizes the dangers of focusing on the "crisis" between habitus and field as the sole mediating circumstance for social change. At the same time, he recognizes its role in affecting mobilization;

> Crises, protests and movements are shaped by a variety of interacting factors, none of which is sufficient to bring them about independently, but each of which could be the 'final straw' that gives rise to mobilization. We need a multi-dimensional model of mobilization. (Crossley, 2003, p. 63)

Such a "multi-dimensional model" can provide us with an understanding of how agents and organizations relate within social movements, and more importantly how they challenge/reproduce hegemonic structures. Crossley's notion of "radical habitus" brings an important dimension when we attempt to understand how learning takes place within social movements, and the learning required for social movements to develop. The

“belief in the game” (*illusio*) and one’s “taste for contention” may also provide us with a deeper understanding of how habitus impacts learning (Crossley, 2003, p. 64). The disillusionment that activists experience (and the ability to counteract it) is significantly impacted by one’s habitus and the fields encountered. The intricacies of movements in relation to themselves, each other, politics, media and economy become the focus of understanding social movements. While this promises to offer a more thorough analysis, to what extent are individual/collective learning processes and motivations understood through such an approach? And how might they become assumed through “dynamics of reproduction”?

The work of Crossley demonstrates how some of Bourdieu’s conceptual tools can provide a part of a multi-dimensional approach to social movements. If we understand that agents of social movements interact within a field that is both structured by individuals and structuring individuals, then we can begin to understand how other fields interact with the social movement field. The complexity of social movements begins to unravel when we take such an approach, and using Bourdieu’s analogy of the “game,” we can see how such social movement fields produce their “exigencies, dynamics and rules, becoming a relatively autonomous ‘game’, but which is always only ever relatively autonomous, both because its participants seek to achieve change in other fields (e.g. the political field) and because other fields, such as the economic and media fields, intrude upon it in a variety of ways” (Crossley, 2003, p. 62). In other words, power dynamics and hierarchies within and without social movement fields are in constant play, reproducing and producing the various habitus and capitals of individuals, and impacted by the hegemonic fields of society.

RADICAL HABITUS AS AN ARTEFACT

The role of Bourdieu’s theory of practice in social movement theory is evident as outlined above, but there are several methodological challenges that we face in using his concepts for conducting research, especially of a participatory nature. One could present his concepts in relation to other theorists of social movements, as Crossley

(2002a) presented through Smelser's "value-added thesis" (See Ch. 9). For questions of how individuals learn and transform in social movements, I find Crossley's approach to be somewhat limiting. However, the concept of "radical habitus" can enrich these questions greatly. In this section, I provide a brief outline of a Marxist approach to cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) and illustrate how CHAT provides some similar features that Crossley develops, but is a framework that has an agenda for transformation and "creative externalization," which has advantages and disadvantages. Finally, I provide an analysis of a case study on anti-poverty organizing in Ontario as an application of understanding activity as mediated through radical habitus.

Attempts to understand cognition are varied and often face limitations of adaptation and "individuated internalization" (Sawchuk, 2010), which potentially ignore the collective and externalization process essential for learning. For this, I turn to the work in socio-cognition, and more specifically the approaches offered by scholars in the Marxist tradition of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT).

> [H]uman nature is a process of overcoming and transcending its own limitations through collaborative, continuous practices aimed at purposefully changing the world. In other words, it is a process of historical becoming by humans not as merely creatures of nature but as agents of their own lives, agents whose nature is to purposefully transform their world. (Stetsenko, 2008, p. 483, emphasis in original).

Among various sociocultural approaches to learning, CHAT provides a distinctly dialectical approach rooted in a "transformative relation to the world" where "it posits that human development is both continuous with *and* radically different from the processes in the rest of the animate world" (Stetsenko, 2008, p. 483). The long tradition of CHAT comes from Soviet Russian psychology in the works of Vygotsky, Leontiev and Luria who were deeply influenced by the work of Marx and Engels (Engeström, 1999). Beginning with *activity* as the unit of analysis, with the intent to present a "multivoiced theory" that "should not regard internal contradictions and debates as signs of

weakness; rather, they are an essential feature of the theory" (Engeström, 1999, p. 20). These "contradictions" that emerge are central to breaking "down the Cartesian walls that isolate the individual mind from the culture and the society," which provide opportunities for learning through *mediation* that involves "using and creating artifacts" (Ibid., p. 29). In social movement studies, the appeal towards CHAT stems from its central goals of transformation and social change, and more specifically with the tools provided to understand cognition from the individual and collective, simultaneously.

> It locates cognitive activity within a broader system structured by subjects motivated by goals or objects; mediating artifacts or tools; institutional rules and genres of discourse; relevant communities; and divisions of labor within those communities. Cognition is distributed within these larger systems. The systems, rather than the individuals, become the unit of analysis. (Krinsky, 2008, p. 3)

These "activity systems" become a useful way to begin to understand how individuals and groups are impacted by and impact each other through the use of *artifacts*. Mediation is the key component that must be emphasised in this discussion, especially in relation to social change. When considering the activities that individuals engage in, it does not suffice to look at pre-conditioned realities (i.e. personal biography versus conditions of poverty) to explain actions, but rather we must consider how various artifacts mediate activity.

Immediately, we can see several key parallels to Bourdieu's theory of practice. Both methods are keen on overcoming or transcending dichotomies through a dialectical approach. There is a focus on *relations* between social agents within fields or actors within activity systems. The unit of analysis is flexible, yet focused on boundaries based on relations and hierarchies. The key difference that I see between the two is the overt transformative stance of CHAT that Bourdieu and Crossley do not seem to emphasise in their work. If we consider the notion of *artifact* in a similar way to *capital* and its mediating effects between habitus and field, then we may consider bringing in habitus

("history turned into nature") as a mediating artifact (among countless artifacts) to understand how a system of dispositions ("a way of being…*predisposition*, *tendency*, *propensity*, or *inclination…*") mediates the interactions between individuals and their *object/motive*[iii] and the *outcomes* of such relations.

ANTI-POVERTY ORGANIZING IN SCARBOROUGH, ONTARIO

I now turn to a case study on anti-poverty organizing in the Kingston-Galloway/Orton Park (KGO) neighbourhood in Scarborough, where the various narratives demonstrate how local activism is often rooted in the complexities discussed above. The case study is a part of a five-year SSHRC/CURA funded project, the Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL) project, whose mission is to "examine grassroots popular education and learning strategies within anti-poverty community organizing campaigns in a sample of the highest poverty neighborhoods in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)."[iv] In understanding how personal biographies, local histories and collective memory deeply impact how activism manifests; we are conducting in depth interviews with local activists and participants of anti-poverty activities. In addition to these interviews, we have also engaged in focus group discussions where activists have the opportunity to reflect on the work they are engaged in, as well as the broader questions of anti-poverty organizing.

The following is an excerpt from a dialogue between the interviewer and Timothy, where they discuss how he got involved with anti-poverty activities, and why he stayed involved over the years.

> Interviewer: How did you get involved?
>
> Timothy*: You know, it's funny but I got involved accidentally because I wanted to get my hours for high school, and I started tutoring when the [Local Organization] was a tiny, tiny little place… I started tutoring twice a week…

Interviewer: So, what made it different for you? A lot of sixteen year olds need to go and get their hours, right?

Timothy: I was done with my hours. (laughs)

Interviewer: So you did how many? 160 hours?

Timothy: 160 Hours by then.

Interviewer: So, why did you stay? Why did you do more than 40?

Timothy: You know, I've done a lot of things in terms of…even in my school I've always been involved in community. Like I raised $1000 in my school by organizing a group of students and we did fundraisers like dinners and stuff because I have that spirit of you know, helping people and it was transmitted through my family. Back home when we were in Africa we used to help seniors with food supplies because they wouldn't have food because in my home… my country… there was an aftershock after a genocide. A lot of family members lost support, you know the bread earners as well died. So you have these seniors, these young kids that don't have any support in between. So we were fortunate, and we wanted to help them, and you know my mom, and my grandparents we always talked about these things of always giving back, and when you have these Christian values it comes naturally even though I have other interests it comes naturally to do that, besides what I do normally.

Interviewer: Is it something that has to do with stories that you were told or experiences, things that you saw, the way that people helped each other…

> Timothy: Experiences. And I think…The images that I have of my youth are of me running in between big bags of food and my mom giving it out to seniors and we have images of that. You come away with that… It's a balance between choice and your experiences because there's gotta be something for you, which is the happiness you feel doing it.
>
> (APCOL KGO Case Study)

** Alias*

Throughout this dialogue, Timothy demonstrates an increased awareness of his own habitus. In the beginning, he is reluctant to share more than his basic school requirement (school rules artefact) as the reason he got involved with local community organizations. As the interviewer pushes, Timothy reveals a piece of his personal history, where his experiences in Africa with a giving family and a Christian background have led him to feel his activity "comes naturally" and what he does "normally."

The various artefacts that have mediated his activity begin to emerge in this short excerpt, but I would argue that his *habitus* is in fact the dominant artefact that mediates his anti-poverty activities. Furthermore, the "naturalizing" effect of habitus is demonstrated as he does not see his work as extraordinary within his social space, it becomes a *doxic* notion of engaging in community work and anti-poverty activities. However, through the interview, the discussion evokes an awareness of his own habitus that allows him to produce it as an artefact, rather than it being a strictly "un-self-conscious" process. Based on Crossley's concept of "radical habitus," we may consider Timothy to belong to the collective radical habitus, but that does not mean he has an identical background or belief system to other activists. Rather, we can understand radical habitus as a set of predispositions that are loosely shared amongst individuals whose experiences have led them to share common habits, which are constantly being structured and structuring their various fields.

Utilizing an activity system, we can begin to map out such interviews empirically for large samples to begin tracking tendencies for contention and dynamics between social agents. On page 22, I demonstrate a sample activity system, using examples from the above interview excerpt to illustrate the explanatory potential of such a method. By plotting out data in such systems, we can create visual representations of such contradictions in social movements, and demonstrate opportunities for transformation and learning.

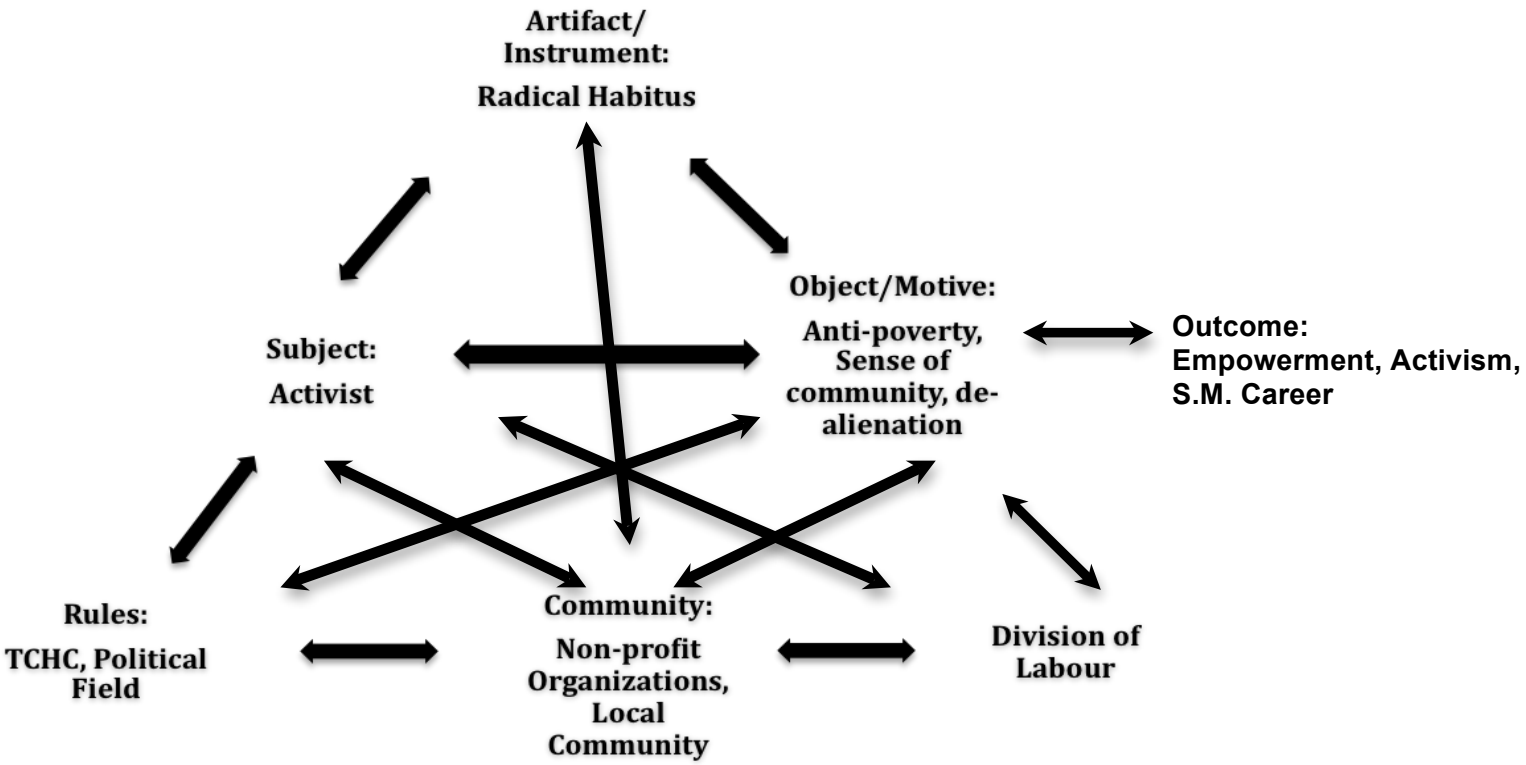
CONCLUSION

The numerous approaches to understanding social movements has created new opportunities as well as challenges for researchers attempting to engage in social movement studies. I have demonstrated how Bourdieu's conceptual tools can be implemented to provide a unique understanding of social movements, particularly when attempting to take a multi-dimensional approach, addressing the internal and external dynamics of movements. Also, I introduced another approach that is from the sociocultural tradition, CHAT. Similar to Bourdieu's approach to *habitus*, there is a distinct effort to transcend dichotomies and emphasise the mutually producing effects of subject/object, individual/collective, internal/external, etc. Using a dialectic approach in both methodologies, it is evident that the study of social movements is need of such analyses that study *relations* or *activity* as the primary unit of analysis. This allows for learning to be included in discussions, and to consider how transformative learning experiences take place through activism.

I am reminded of Freire's emancipatory learning philosophy as a framework for "problem-posing education" where he argues that particular situations form one's existence and provides opportunities to take action. Freire (2000) explains this phenomenon as an "investigation of the people's thinking—thinking which occurs only in and among people together seeking out reality" (p. 108). He advocates "problem-posing education" as a method for educators to provide critical reflection and "affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in

and with a likewise unfinished reality" (Freire, 2000, p. 84). In many ways this parallels Bourdieu's explanation of the relations between *habitus*, *field*, and *capital*, and they demonstrate individual and collective efforts to *understand* ourselves and our world. This understanding, through sociology, is what can develop theories of social movements that not only analyse them, but also provide a meaningful understanding of the individuals and groups in their efforts to change the world. This understanding of social relations must be grounded in the multi-layered, multi-dimensional perspectives of relations, with a foundation in learning. As educators, researchers and participants of social movements, it would be a great benefit to engage in a theory of learning that demonstrates the active and dynamic process of learning that can provide analyses that go beyond critiques of reproduction and idealistic notions of mass movements.

Figure 1: Sample activity system based on interview with Timothy. This illustrates potential mediating artifacts; Radical habitus, housing, political field, non-profits, and division of labour. Potential outcome through mediation could be a sense of empowerment, further activism and social movement career.



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[i] Bourdieu warns of the danger of *fetishizing* these concepts through such isolation. (See Bourdieu, 1991)

[ii] An account of the welfare rights movement in the U.S. is an excellent example of this sort of alienation that occurs between participants and organizations/institutions that were originally produced by the participants (See Piven and Cloward, 1979, Ch. 4).

[iii] *Object/motive* is defined as that which is "held by the subject and motivates activity, giving it a specific direction; behind objects there 'always stands a need or a desire, to which the activity always answers'" (Sawchuk, 2003, p. 41). Also it is important to note that "[i]t is understood that the motive may be either material or ideal, either present in perception or existing only in the imagination or in thought" (Leontiev in Sawchuk, 2010, p. 12).

[iv] Mission statement from APCOL proposal, whose principal investigators are: David Livingstone, Peter Sawchuk and Sharon Simpson.