

movement, Pleyers stresses that it should be seen as a global historic actor rather than as a concrete civil-society organization or cluster thereof. For particular organizations may decline (as did one important organization, Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens), but the movement has persisted and changed as new groups emerge. By “[p]lacing the market at the centre of the organization of social life and international relations, the neoliberal ideology makes actors disappear in favor of a global system ruled by markets . . . a world without actors and alternatives” (p. 17). Thus, the movement’s work of creating diverse ways for individuals to engage in a struggle to transform the very structures of our global political and economic order is essential to both sustaining the movement and enhancing its possibilities for success.

As the Occupy Wall Street movement expands and develops, *Alter-Globalization* can be a useful resource in helping readers understand the complex, inevitable tensions and the diverse ways participants answer questions about strategy and tactics. The engaging writing will make the book useful for both practitioners and students, and it could be a useful text in undergraduate courses on social movements and on globalization. Pleyers’s book also represents an important contribution to the growing literature on contemporary global justice activism.

Benjamin Shepard and Greg Smithsimon. *The Beach Beneath the Streets: Contesting New York City’s Public Spaces*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011. \$24.95 (paper).

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What is the significance of a group of five thousand or so bicyclists taking over New York City’s streets for several hours? How should we view this action in the context of broader changes in the nature of public space in cities over the last few decades? In *The Beach Beneath the Streets: Contesting New York City’s Public Spaces*, Shepard and Smithsimon confront this question. They write centrally about the contestation of and struggle over New York City’s increasingly privatized urban public space under conditions of neoliberal development policies, including local activists’ and residents’ creative, playful, and innovative resistance to those trends. Shepard and Smithsimon critique the rise of urban policies in

the last 40 years in New York City that have privileged private developer and elite investors’ interests over residents, or exchange value over use value, in the city’s public spaces. They point to a dialectical relationship between exclusion and control of urban space, or *repression*, on the one hand, and *resistance* enacted in and through urban public space, on the other.

This is a complex, dense, ambitious, and valuable book for those interested in the intersection of urban spatial analysis and the ways that social movements and community action groups use spontaneity and play to resist domination within the seams of urban regimes. It employs rich and lively data collected through an impressive variety of methodological approaches that range from quantitative, historical, auto-ethnographic, participant observation, and interviews to content analysis of community group and social movement materials. Of special note is the authors’ seamless integration of data from first-hand observations of and participation in the community groups and direct action groups that they encountered over the years as researchers, residents, and members of the New York City community.

This book is divided into two parts, each with a distinct focus. The first part details the conditions of control and exclusion within post-1970s New York’s public sphere. The authors argue that democratic access to today’s public urban spaces is suffering under elite and corporate domination, homogenization, and the privatization of space as well as increased social control through heavier policing practices. For example, they carefully research and expose the strategies that elites use to exclude people from privately owned public spaces, such as “bonus plazas” that are the awkward by-products of bargains made between corporate developers and urban regimes for the privileges of property expansion. As “public spaces” that are ostensibly constructed for residents and citizens to utilize, they are also deliberately ineffective at generating or even permitting social interaction. The authors also point to the rise of privatized, “filtered” and “suburban” spaces in New York City—spaces that effectively (through not overtly) serve to keep out people who are perceived as undesirables (read: not middle-class consumers).

Perhaps of greater interest to *Mobilization* readers, however, will be the second half of the book, which turns its attention to the *resistance* of these dominant processes in New York City—essentially, social movement and community activities designed to challenge social control in public space and reinvigorate urban public life. The authors cover a wide variety of groups that

are both framing their demands in terms of the right to space and also using strategies of play, creativity, and improvisation to turn the urban public sphere into a place for subversive political possibilities. The authors highlight groups ranging from FIERCE! (working on behalf of homeless queer youth to protest the regulation of squatted living space at the Hudson River Piers) to Reclaim the Streets (a direct-action group challenging the assault on public space by privatization and by city government). Shepard and Smithson also feature the actions of the Bike Lane Liberation Clowns, a group dressed as clowns that comically and spectacularly enforce bike lane laws, and community garden advocacy groups, such as Time's Up! and the More Gardens! coalition. These groups are actively protesting the disappearance of public community gardens as a result of private urban development.

These groups not only have in common the contestation of urban public space, but also their dramatic use of carnival-like performance, party themes, pranks, and rambunctious street theater in their political actions. The authors argue that these actions are irreverent, absurd, joyful, serious, and liberatory, all at the same time. Moreover, it is this exact ludic quality of direct action and community organizing that has the potential to counteract the hegemonic processes of homogenization, commercialization, and privatization coming to define the urban sphere in New York City.

With an ambitious and impressive scope, the book covers a dizzying number of different sub-topics. It explores multiple central questions at once and presents in-depth research on these various elements. This was both exciting, yet, at a few points, slightly distracting (for example, the lengthy discussion of the typology of spaces was perhaps not crucial to the central claims of the book). One additional minor quibble is that, in an effort to view play, spontaneity, and street theatrics as countervailing forces to the contemporary processes of privatization and restrictiveness of public space, this theorization becomes somewhat ahistorical. Play and the carnivalesque are not just reactions to our modern life, but have been present in (urban) protests throughout history. I do not doubt that the authors are aware of this fact. Yet, perhaps a brief application of their theory of the relationship between urban space, urban development, and community resistance to other cases in history (including other cities, at other moments in time) would have helped to drive home for readers how this research can transcend the specific setting (New York City) and be useful for analyzing multiple cities and spaces. However, one book cannot do every-

thing, and the authors' analysis opens up very fertile ground for future application to other urban and social movement cases. Overall, this is an important and laudable book for its far-reaching theoretical contribution to scholarship on the intersections of urban public space, social movements, and the dimensions of play and the carnivalesque in community activism.

John G. Dale. *Free Burma: Transnational Legal Action and Corporate Accountability*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. \$75.00 (hardcover), \$25.00 (paper).

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Many people studying or working at North American universities during the 1990s may remember, or even have participated in, campaigns against international companies doing business with Myanmar's repressive military government. Few, however, can point to the successes of those campaigns. Over twenty years have since passed and the military still controls the country and democracy and human rights remain absent. Did the movement fail and fizzle out?

The answer is no. It didn't fail and the movement is teeming with activists working for democracy and human rights in Burma. John Dale argues that because social movement scholars emphasize state-centered approaches they are ill-equipped to engage with the transnational relations of contemporary activism and often conclude that the movement failed. Further, he argues that ignoring transnational relations misses many of the movement's successes and the new tactics and targets for action available in an increasingly global world.

Using ethnography of relations, Dale examines the creation of "transnational legal space." He argues this space is a result of neoliberal globalization, but contributes to discourses and narratives that challenge it. Attention to the relationships that shape that space allows one to identify different targets of contention, like international business corporations or relations between states, and illuminates innovative tactics, such as creating opportunities in the political-economic-legal system to pursue legislative, administrative, and judicial discursive contention. A focus on transnational legal space also shows that moral and cultural change is important because these changes influence political institutions and structures.