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Deliberation and global civil society: agency, arena, affect

JAMES BRASSETT AND WILLIAM SMITH

Abstract. The article provides a critical analysis of the role and function of global civil society within deliberative approaches to global governance. It critiques a common view that global civil society can/should act as an agent for democratising global governance and seeks to explore the importance of global civil society as an arena of deliberation. This more reconstructive aim is supplemented by an empirically focused discussion of the affective dimensions of global civil society, in general, and the increasingly important use of film, in particular. Ultimately, this then yields an image of the deliberative politics of global civil society that is more reflective of the differences, ambiguities and contests that pervade its discourses about global governance. This is presented as a quality that debates about deliberative global governance might *learn from* as well as *speak to*.

Introduction

Deliberative theorists look to global civil society as an agent for reforming and democratising global governance.¹ Some charge it with fostering a democratic public sphere, others seek to ‘open up’ international organisations to wider forms of public reason-giving, while others task global civil society with democratising discourses of globalisation and global governance.² Across these positions an expectation can be discerned that – *at its best* – global civil society can be a champion of deliberative values and egalitarian norms at the global level.

The aim of this article is to contribute to these ongoing efforts to locate global civil society within a deliberative account of global governance. Our contribution begins with an analysis of what we see as a tempting, but ultimately unsatisfying, means of conceptualising the deliberative qualities of global civil society. Global civil society, according to this perspective, is understood primarily as a deliberative *agent*, capable of exercising a decisive and positive influence on the decisions, institutional structures and discursive contexts of global governance. Our concern is that, insofar as global civil society is conceptualised this way, deliberative theorists may – despite their avowed intentions – downplay profound disagreement

¹ Deliberative approaches are normative accounts of global governance that seek to maximise the influence of reason in global or transnational decision-making. See William Smith and James Brasset, ‘Deliberation and Global Governance: Liberal, Cosmopolitan and Critical Perspectives’, *Ethics & International Affairs*, 22:1 (2008), pp. 67–90, for a fuller discussion.

² In particular, see James Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders: From Demos to Demoi*, (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2007) and John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Global Politics: Discourse and Democracy in a Divided World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

within global civil society over the legitimacy of global institutions, the nature of global capitalism, and questions of political strategy.³ In addition, a pronounced focus on agency may – again notwithstanding their professed aims – lead deliberative theorists to overplay the current capacity of global civil society to promote a broadly egalitarian agenda in global or transnational contexts.⁴

This critical analysis forms the basis of our more constructive agenda: to develop an alternative conceptual framework for understanding the deliberative nature and ethical limits of global civil society. Global civil society should, we argue, be defined not only as a deliberative agent, but also as an *affective arena*, a space for critical reflection and affective expression. This move allows us to focus on the critical and ethical content of deliberation that takes place within global civil society, revealing the differences, dilemmas, ambiguities and contests that pervade its discourses about global governance. Our analysis suggests that we should exercise caution in characterising global civil society as an agent of deliberative reform, but, at the same time, offers support for the view that it can be a fertile source of new ideas and challenges relating to global governance. A focus on global civil society as an arena also allows us to explore the co-existence of reason-giving and affect in its communicative processes. The emotional impact of verbal and non-verbal campaigning – pictorial, musical, narrative, and the like – is becoming central to the substantive politics of global civil society, reflected in the extensive use of music, comedy and film in the recent Make Poverty History campaign.⁵ This affective dimension highlights the impact that deliberation has not only on institutional decision-making but also on the self-understanding of global civil society and its audiences.

The argument is developed over three sections. The first section explores the interpretation of global civil society to be found in the work of John Dryzek and James Bohman. Although their endeavours yield contrasting theoretical frameworks, both conceptualise global civil society as an important agent in deliberative global governance. The second section develops a constructive critique of this view, focusing specifically on the danger that it understates the diversity of global civil society and overstates its egalitarian potential. Global civil society is, we argue, home to both reformist arguments for accountability and transparency and to

³ We stress the word ‘downplay’, so as not to imply ‘ignore’ or ‘deny’. It would misrepresent the arguments of the deliberative theorists that we examine in this article to suggest that they do not attach strong value to the plurality and multi-perspectival nature of global civil society. Bohman and Dryzek both draw attention to the capacity for critical reflexivity implied by such pluralism. In what follows, we consider whether their theories employ the best conceptual tools for addressing or engaging with the ambiguities of civil society.

⁴ We stress the word ‘overplay’, so as not to imply ‘assert’ or ‘affirm’. Again, it would be ungenerous and inaccurate to contend that deliberative theorists develop naïve or uncritical accounts of global civil society. According to Bohman, ‘practices of empowerment by NGOs may have paradoxes built into them, such as when less well off civil society organizations become accountable to better-off organizations in exchange for resources and assistance’ (Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders*, p. 70). And Dryzek suggests ‘one should treat with great caution any connotations of virtuous civil society activists confronting and eventually transforming established relations of power in the international system’ (Dryzek, *Deliberative Global Politics*, p. 123). Bohman and Dryzek are acutely aware of the ethical and political deficiencies of global civil society, relating to inequalities of resources between groups, power hierarchies within and between organisations and the potential for co-optation by particular interests.

⁵ James Brassett, ‘Cosmopolitanism vs. Terrorism? Discourses of Ethical Possibility Before, and After 7/7’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 36:2 (2008), pp. 121–47.

ostensibly more radical arguments for de-globalisation and/or anarchy. It is unclear that these arguments can be reconciled, in even a modest way, by encouraging greater deliberation with or within the institutions of global governance. In light of such considerations, the idea of an affective arena is offered as a more promising way of situating global civil society within a broader account of deliberative global governance. The third section demonstrates the potential fruits of this move by discussing the current use of film in global civil society, particularly its role in stimulating debate and discussion about the ethics of global trade. The aim of this case-study is to illustrate our general observations about the nature and limits of deliberation within global civil society and the diverse aims and effects it can have.

1. Globalising deliberation? The centrality of civil society

Deliberative approaches to global governance, particularly those that emphasise the role of global civil society, are influenced heavily by Jürgen Habermas's democratic theory.⁶ Habermas calls for healthy flows of communication between formal decision-making bodies and the associations and networks of civil society.⁷ Civil society is tasked with discovering new social problems and placing them on the agenda for democratic deliberation. It must influence, or 'steer', formal decision-making and protect the communicative infrastructure of deliberative democracy.⁸ Advocates of global deliberative democracy, notably James Bohman and John Dryzek, hope that civil society organisations can perform essentially the same role beyond the borders of the nation-state.

Bohman proceeds from a critique of what he sees as Habermas's state-centric conception of democracy. According to Bohman, Habermas makes the conceptual mistake of describing democracy as a process of self-determination by a singular '*dêmos*'. This is why Habermas remains committed to the idea that deliberative democracy must be embedded within a shared cultural horizon.⁹ The conceptual connection between democracy and *dêmos*, argues Bohman, prematurely limits aspirations to democratise global governance given the absence of anything like a global democratic subject.¹⁰ Against this view, he claims that the singular democratic subject must be radically de-centred: 'democracy needs to be re-thought in the plural, as the rule of *demoi*'.¹¹ He rejects self-determination by a singular *dêmos* as the normative core of democracy and replaces it with the idea of governance in and across multiple units, such as cities, states, and global institutions.¹² This conceptual move allows Bohman to sidestep the restrictions imposed by the assumption that democracy requires a common identity or

⁶ Molly Cochran, 'A Democratic Critique of Cosmopolitan Democracy: Pragmatism from the Bottom-Up', *European Journal of International Relations*, 8:4 (2002), p. 530.

⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), chs. 7–8.

⁸ William Smith, 'Civil Disobedience and Social Power: Reflections on Habermas', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 7:1 (2008), pp. 73–6.

⁹ Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p. 487.

¹⁰ Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders*, pp. 39–40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

receptive cultural environment.¹³ Instead, democracy requires guaranteeing for all persons meaningful opportunities to form and revise the terms of their common life and the institutional framework(s) that govern them.¹⁴

The central task of democratic reform, according to Bohman, is to gain a 'practical foothold' in order to subject previously technocratic and elitist governance mechanisms to principles of political equality and non-domination.¹⁵ This does not entail the impossible and, perhaps, undesirable stipulation that everyone should have a say in every decision, but it does require that, at a minimum, people should have a reasonable expectation that the kinds of reasons they would assent to are represented in political decisions that affect them.¹⁶ According to Bohman, 'the reasonable expectation that I may influence a decision-making process that is responsive to reasons and the discipline of reasons is sufficient for a minimal criterion of freedom as "non-domination."' ¹⁷ The problem with the contemporary regime of global governance, he argues, is that it all too frequently violates this criterion.

In order to enhance the deliberative credentials of global governance, Bohman contends that it is necessary to open, through contest and engagement, an intersection between global civil society and international regimes by creating more or less democratic public spheres:

The greatest impetus for more democracy in the international arena lies in a vigorous civil society containing oppositional public spheres in which actors organize against the state or appeal to it when making violations of agreements public. As various international institutions emerge, they, too, can become the focus of a critical public sphere as actors in transnational civil society expand and maintain their public interaction across various political cultural and functional boundaries.¹⁸

The public sphere refers to the public forum within which actors deliberate and discuss pressing social and political issues.¹⁹ Bohman aims to open up global economic governance by building public spheres out of the interactions between civil society and institutions. If institutions or regimes exist and have a distributive impact which stretches across borders, then their actions should be shaped by the opinions of their constituents. Bypassing the thorny issue of world government, Bohman stresses the contingent, located and experimental nature of evolving public spheres and highlights the potential of a vibrant civil society to ensure that appropriate 'reasons' can be publicised to larger and larger audiences.²⁰

A similar idea animates the work of Dryzek who, like Bohman, complains that Habermas establishes too close a connection between the public sphere and the nation-state.²¹ He also rejects the view that the normative core of democracy is self-determination by a singular demos. The value of democracy for Dryzek resides

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 45–55.

¹⁵ James Bohman, 'International Regimes and Democratic Governance: Political Equality and Influence in Global Institutions', *International Affairs*, 75:3 (1999), p. 500.

¹⁶ Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁷ Bohman, 'International Regimes and Democratic Governance', p. 504.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 506–7.

¹⁹ Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p. 360.

²⁰ Bohman, 'International Regimes and Democratic Governance', p. 506.

²¹ Dryzek, *Deliberative Global Politics*, p. 24.

less in the idea that free and fair elections reveal some kind of general democratic 'will' and more in the character of political interaction between citizens that democracy facilitates. 'Democracy is about communication as well as voting, about social learning as well as decision-making', he says, 'and it is the communicative aspect that for the moment can most straightforwardly be pursued in the international system'.²² Democratic deliberation must provide opportunities for participation by those affected.²³ It must also instantiate a 'reflexive' process that, according to Dryzek, 'consists in part of the capacity to call into question traditions and discourses'.²⁴ He agrees with Bohman that citizens should be able to revise the principles that regulate their social relations through engaging in public deliberation.

The approach defended by Dryzek differs from Bohman's less in its normative basis and more in its account of how deliberative democratic politics should operate at the global level. Bohman focuses on the emergence of international public spheres that mediate between institutions of global governance and the human populations that they govern. This thematic is also alluded to by Dryzek, when he celebrates 'the potential for diffuse communication in the public sphere that generates public opinion that can in turn exercise political influence'.²⁵ At the same time, his account develops a distinctive account of the role that 'discourses' – like 'market liberalism' or the 'War on Terror' – play in democratic politics.²⁶

The aim of transnational democracy, for Dryzek, is to achieve a 'communicatively competent decentralised control over the content and relative weight of globally consequential discourses'.²⁷ The institutional matrix of global deliberative democracy is viewed by Dryzek as less important than the discursive environment within which institutions operate.²⁸ In part this is because – in contrast to Bohman's apparently more optimistic view – Dryzek appears to view political institutions of *any* kind as potentially anti-democratic, due to their hierarchical organisation and the structural limitations on their actions imposed by capital.²⁹ At the same time, he sees far greater potential for authentic democracy – participation and reflexive deliberation – in the oppositional activism of global civil society than in formal institutional settings:

This uneven distribution of the capacity to act reflexively, biased it seems in favour of civil society actors who are disadvantaged when it comes to more conventional sources of political power, has important implications for the wellsprings of transnational democracy. If transnational democracy requires decentralized power in the hands of reflexive actors then civil society actors should be central.³⁰

²² Ibid., p. 25.

²³ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 144.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁶ A discourse is defined by Dryzek as 'a shared set of concepts, categories, and ideas that provide its adherents with a framework for making sense of situations, embodying judgements, assumptions, capabilities, dispositions, and intentions' (ibid., p. 1).

²⁷ Ibid., p. 154.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 160–1.

²⁹ John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 93. Cf. Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders*, pp. 42–4.

³⁰ Dryzek, *Deliberative Global Politics*, p. 123.

Civil society actors who contest the terms of global governance should not actively seek entry to sites of collective decision making. This is because within such sites, deliberative practices are often overwhelmed by the competition to win control over decision making; genuine deliberation is more likely to take place over longer periods of time in informal sites, where the costs of moderation and changing positions are less high.³¹ Civil society actors should focus on educating publics about the nature and terms of dominant discourses, revealing their contingent and changeable nature, and encouraging a process of critical reflection on their adequacy and acceptability.

A motif that runs throughout these theories is that both endorse something like Habermas's account of the function of civil society in deliberative democracy. As we will discuss in more detail below, the vocation of civil society is to influence formal decision-making bodies, either through direct institutional input or through shaping the terms of public debate. This is true even of Dryzek's approach, notwithstanding his scepticism about formal institutions as a site of deliberative reflexivity.³² In addition, Dryzek and Bohman both suggest that global civil society should orientate its activity around the broadly egalitarian aims of combating illegitimate power and giving voice to those governed by global power. This is made explicit by Bohman, when he praises civil society insofar as it advances the aim of non-domination and criticizes it to the extent that it does not.³³ It is also discernable in Dryzek's theory, in his requirement that global civil society must promote a specific type of communication, which, as he puts it, is 'first, capable of inducing reflection, second, non-coercive, and, third, capable of linking the particular experience of an individual or group with some more general point or principle'.³⁴

2. From deliberative agent to affective arena

The dominant theme which emerges is the importance of the role of global civil society as an 'agent' in global deliberation. By 'agent', we mean an actor, or set of actors, ascribed important functions within a broadly normative account of deliberative global governance. Bohman, for instance, values global civil society when it makes institutions more responsive to public reasons or fosters public spheres. Dryzek values global civil society when it promotes a globally consequential discourse or impacts on the conflict of discourses in a broadly reflexive fashion. Such an avowedly instrumental approach to global civil society, we suggest, risks reducing its ambiguity and complexity in the name of theoretical or political imperatives. And, as we argue below, this in turn can compromise some of the more ambitious claims that are made on behalf of the capacity of civil society to promote egalitarian norms.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54–8.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 61–4.

³³ Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders*, pp. 65–6.

³⁴ Dryzek, *Deliberative Global Politics*, p. 52. For further discussion of this feature of Dryzek's view, see Smith & Brassett, 'Deliberation and Global Governance', pp. 87–8.

The ambiguity of global civil society

The tendency to downplay the ambiguity of global civil society emerges in the aspirations that deliberative theorists hold for it as an agent that can influence the debates and decisions of global governance institutions. Global civil society is described as a solution, or part of a solution, to the problem of how these institutions can be made more receptive to the citizens whose lives they affect. This characterisation of global civil society as an agent that can have a meaningful impact on the world is unobjectionable in itself and, indeed, important. There is a risk, however, that deliberative approaches end up doing what they set out to avoid, namely: to make a fetish of decision-making in global governance, rather than engage with, understand and learn from *actual* deliberations within global civil society.

This danger, surprisingly given his anti-institutionalism, is apparent in Dryzek's approach. In his writings, he offers many examples, drawn from recent political practice and involving civil society actors, which illustrate his hopes for deliberative global politics. These examples, however, often arrive after the fact – after the politics of global civil society has been conducted – to provide a rationalisation of how civil society has apparently done what he hopes it can, namely contest or advance a discourse. For instance, he looks at how NGOs have created a 'counter discourse' to market liberalism which '*eventually made its presence felt in the deliberations of international economic institutions*':

Protests against the world economic order, beginning in Seattle in 1999, initially baffled observers attuned not just to the benefits of this order, but also to conventional ways of thinking about political movements. [...] These protests were struggles over meaning: to challenge the assumption that global economic growth can be equated with progress, to attach negative connotation to brands such as Nike and McDonalds, and so open space for recognition of varieties of local struggles against international economic regimes.³⁵

He notes with enthusiasm that 'eventually the protestors were joined by Stiglitz', who stated that 'the protests have made government officials and economists around the world think about alternatives to the Washington Consensus policies as the one true way for growth and development'.³⁶

This account argues, with some justification, that Seattle was a turning point in the discourse of global market liberalism, but the multiple perspectives that were actually generated by the protest movement, although alluded to by Dryzek, are ultimately downplayed in this narrative. Certainly it is important that Seattle (and many other moments in the history of alter-globalisation) 'open[ed] space for recognition of varieties of local struggles against international economic regimes'. But this recognition invites, and perhaps requires, a deeper theoretical and empirical analysis of these local struggles. This analysis is surely compatible with Dryzek's broader theoretical framework, but his own interpretation of Seattle does not engage with the politics, disagreements, practical difficulties, ambiguities or fissures of the process he celebrates.³⁷ For example, the inclusion of speakers like

³⁵ Ibid., p. 10 (emphasis added).

³⁶ Ibid., 124.

³⁷ His analysis of the alter-globalisation movement arguably does not match the complexity of his earlier assessments of environmental movements and their competing discourses (see John S. Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Joseph Stiglitz in the World Social Forum was regarded as highly controversial by many activists, and the ‘post-Washington Consensus’ that emerged was widely seen as a rhetorical legitimisation of ‘business as usual’ for neoliberal global governance.³⁸ The irony is that Dryzek establishes a powerful and avowedly multi-perspectival conception of global civil society – a decentralised network with no common agenda – only to value it for having a singular ‘impact’ on the singular global discourse of market liberalism.

Why might this be a problem for theories of deliberative global governance? Why can’t they simply do both: first celebrate plurality and second celebrate impact? To an extent, we believe that they can; indeed, deliberative theorists are establishing a rich and robust set of arguments on the back of such a ‘dual track’ approach. But we believe it is also necessary to go a step further and ask what is at stake in the pluralism of global civil society beyond its capacity to influence the decisions or contexts of global governance? Is the substantive content of the ongoing discussions in global civil society ethically or politically significant on its own terms?

In addressing these questions, suggestive connections can be established between theories of deliberative global governance and the vast and growing literature on the ethical politics of global civil society.³⁹ A question raised by some contributors to this literature is whether the ambiguity of global civil society has value, *per se*, irrespective of whether it has a specific impact on global governance?⁴⁰ As Louise Amoore and Paul Langley suggest, ‘[...] within a named and assumed civil society grouping there are tensions surrounding “who” is being empowered, or “what” is being resisted [...] to deny these tensions in a search for a single galvanising manifesto or agenda is to miss the very heart of the politics of transformation.’⁴¹ Similarly, Marieke De Goede argues that:

[...] in their drive to detect a common programme behind the many possible acts and movements of resistance, theorists of civil society may erase the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the contemporary politics of dissent [...] it is easily assumed for example that the manifold movements protesting in Seattle have a commonality.⁴²

She cites Amoore and Langley in asking how we should think about the individual who is simultaneously a member of Amnesty International and a portfolio investor

³⁸ See Richard Higgott, ‘Contested Globalization: the Changing Context and Normative Challenges’, *Review of International Studies*, 26:5 (2000), pp. 131–54.

³⁹ Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood: The Report of the Commission on Global Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); R. Cox, ‘Civil society at the turn of the Millennium: prospects for an alternative world order’, in *Review of International Studies*, 25:1 (1999), pp. 3–28; J. A. Scholte, ‘Civil Society and Democratically Accountable Global Governance’, *Government and Opposition*, 39:2 (Spring 2004), pp. 211–33; G. Baker, ‘Problems in the Theorisation of Global Civil Society’, in *Political Studies*, 50:5 (2002), pp. 928–43.

⁴⁰ L. Amoore, and P. Langley, ‘Ambiguities of Global Civil Society’, *Review of International Studies*, 30:1 (2004), pp. 105–6; J. Bartelson, ‘Making Sense of Global Civil Society’, in *European Journal of International Relations*, 12:3 (2006), pp. 371–95; M. De Goede, ‘Carnival of Money: Politics of dissent in an era of globalizing finance’, in L. Amoore (ed.), *The Global Resistance Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 379–91.

⁴¹ Amoore and Langley, ‘Ambiguities of Global Civil Society’, pp. 105–6.

⁴² Marieke De Goede, ‘Carnival of Money: Politics of dissent in an era of globalizing finance’, in Louise Amoore (ed.), *The Global Resistance Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 380.

in Multi National Corporations, or the protestor in Seattle who was filmed kicking a Nike sign while wearing Nike shoes.

The point of these observations is not to take easy pot-shots at activists, but to caution against a temptation to reduce the diversity and ambivalence to be found in global civil society. De Goede argues that there is a political point behind this injunction:

Dissolving the contradictions and ambiguities of global protest is not just a conceptual weakness of global civil society theory, but it is politically problematic. Mostly, finding commonalities in diverse movements and practices of opposition is held out as the road to political strength. However, eliminating ambiguity in favour of unity can also be interpreted as political weakness [. . .] reducing the multiplicity of possible refusals and resistances to a single force or movement can be seen as an exclusionary political project in itself [. . .]⁴³

Characterising global civil society as an agent which can be valued in terms of a singular impact on global governance may run the risk of claiming to represent people who are not sufficiently included in the discussion. For each activist who thinks that the WTO should be democratised and reformed to take account of environmental concerns, for instance one can find (many) others who think that the WTO should be collapsed, that global trade should be understood as a social structure that by definition harms the environment, and that we need to fundamentally re-think the entire logic of global capitalism.⁴⁴ The tendency to analyse global civil society solely in terms of its impact on global governance institutions may therefore obscure the range of discussion and opinion that can be found within this realm.

The ethics of global civil society

This diversity and disagreement within global civil society poses further challenges for deliberative theory. The long-term goal of global civil society must be to forge transnational or global publics, communities of interest that can make their voices heard in global governance. Given the range of disagreement about political aims and strategies within global civil society, it is not clear that deliberative theorists provide us with a convincing account of how it can perform this function. In particular, in order to make good their claims about the role of civil society in global governance, deliberative theorists need to provide a richer account of the processes and dynamics through which civil society organisations promote egalitarian norms in the absence of pre-existing solidarity ties.

The difficulties that emerge in the absence of such an account can be seen in relation to the anticipated formation of transnational public spheres. Bohman identifies three necessary features of public spheres. First, the public sphere is a forum within which participants identify themselves as a public and engage in the give and take of reasons. Second, participants in the public sphere must manifest

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ These kinds of divergences in the arguments for the reform of globalisation are neatly captured by Walden Bello's opposition between the 'Back to Bretton woods gang' and the proponents of 'de-globalization'. Within global civil society it might be useful for illustrative purposes to consider the alternative objectives of reformist NGOs like War on Want and decentralised, 'anarchist' organisations like 'CIRCA-the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army', {<http://www.clownarmy.org/>}.

a commitment to freedom and equality. Third, deliberation in the public sphere must address an indefinite audience.⁴⁵ These three features indicate that the public sphere is not merely a space for debate and discussion between strangers. It is, rather, a normatively rich concept, which designates a forum where a particular type of communication takes place between persons who understand their activities in a special way. The type of deliberation that takes place is not merely orientated towards public affairs, but is conducted in accordance with egalitarian norms of freedom and equality. In Bohman's conceptual framework, this is interpreted as a commitment on the part of all participants to the non-domination of all. The idea of a 'public' also implies that participants view themselves as having something politically significant in common, even if this 'thing-in-common' is merely their shared attachment to non-domination or their shared interest in a particular issue or crisis.

This interpretation of the public sphere reminds us of the magnitude of the task that Bohman ascribes to global civil society. It is not sufficient for civic associations to aim at stimulating public discussion and debate about global governance within and across national borders. Neither is it sufficient, as Bohman sometimes appears to suggest, for civil society groups to establish accessible forums, on-line or otherwise, where such discussion and debate could take place.⁴⁶ Their aim must also be to promote a particular type of communication, in which participants manifest a commitment to norms of non-domination.⁴⁷ Global civil society must encourage participants in transnational public spheres to view themselves *as* a public. This task is made all the more challenging given that most citizens continue to identify themselves first and foremost as members of *national* publics. The architects of public spheres that cut across national boundaries must, therefore, contribute to a transformation in the self-understanding of participants and audiences. The problem is that, in the absence of a sustained analysis of the internal dynamics of debate in global civil society, advocates of deliberative global governance cannot provide us with a compelling account of how this transformation in the values and attachments of citizens can be brought about.

The closest that Bohman comes to providing such an account is his discussion of 'minipublics', randomly selected citizens brought together to discuss particular

⁴⁵ Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders*, p. 60.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 80–1.

⁴⁷ It might be objected that this commitment to non-domination is too demanding. This may be true, but it should be remembered that many – if not all – theories that develop a normative framework for global deliberation or international cooperation require participants to develop ties of mutual concern and attachment. Habermas, for instance, requires global citizens to recognise the universal human rights of all. An ethic of 'cosmopolitan solidarity' must underpin a general willingness to promote the interests of a 'cosmopolitan community', even if this entails going against a narrow interpretation of the interests of their nation (Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, trans. Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), pp. 111–2). John Rawls requires that the populations of well ordered peoples develop 'mutual concern for each other's way of life and culture and [...] become willing to make sacrifices for each other'. He thinks that strengthening weak or non-existent ties of 'affinity' between peoples is an urgent challenge if the requisite support for his 'duty of assistance' is to be forthcoming (John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 112–3). Though 'non-domination', 'cosmopolitan solidarity' and 'affinity among peoples' are radically different notions, all these theorists confront an essentially similar challenge: how to promote a potentially demanding ethos of enlightened mutual concern across diverse populations. This challenge simply manifests itself in a particularly acute form in Bohman's deliberative approach. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this objection.

issues.⁴⁸ He describes the convening of such micro publics as part of an iterative and ongoing process through which transnational publics are forged. 'Minipublics', he says, 'rely on experimental efforts to convene citizens and *create* self-consciously organized publics'.⁴⁹ In this instance, Bohman quite rightly reminds us that the opinions and preferences of citizens are not set in stone but are subject to transformation in and through their participation in public deliberation.⁵⁰ At the same time, as valuable as they may be, the 'institutional experiments' discussed by Bohman are unlikely by themselves to forge the large-scale, inclusive and anonymous public spheres that he identifies as necessary conditions of global deliberative democracy. First, minipublics are, by their very nature, short-lived and only incorporate very small numbers of citizens. As Bohman acknowledges, global civil society, with its diverse range of associations that campaign over a wide range of issues, remains a key variable in the promotion of a more globally-conscious public. Second, and more importantly, Bohman's emphasis on minipublics reflects a general tendency on the part of deliberative theorists to emphasise political *processes* at the expense of political *substance*.⁵¹ The claim that transformations in value horizons can be brought about in and through participation in political processes is certainly plausible, but it must be backed up through at least some exploration of the internal dynamics of these procedures. The capacity of processes to promote the egalitarian norms constitutive of Bohman's democratic publics, for instance, will surely depend on the extent to which at least some participants are *already* committed to these norms and able to promote them in and through political engagement.

Global civil society as an affective arena

In order to shore up the plausibility of their radical ambitions, deliberative theorists must pay more attention to the *content* of civil society campaigns and initiatives. It is necessary to explore whether and how actors in global civil society contribute to the creation of new publics. In other words, how do civil society actors go about appealing to and influencing citizens through their campaigns and activities? In addition, how does debate about internal disagreements reflect back upon the value horizons and political priorities of global civil society itself?

The aim of raising these questions is not to undermine the promising work being carried out by deliberative theorists, but to enhance their project by addressing questions and challenges that are posed by their accounts of global civil society. Our central argument, then, is that *by their own lights* deliberative theorists need to undertake a sustained investigation into the activities of and deliberations within global civil society. The research that is called for here must focus upon the

⁴⁸ Archon Fung, 'Recipes for Public Spheres: Eight Institutional Design Choices and Their Consequences', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 11:3 (2003), pp. 338–67.

⁴⁹ Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders*, p. 88 (our emphasis).

⁵⁰ See also Daniel Weinstock, 'Prospects for Transnational Citizenship and Democracy', *Ethics & International Affairs*, 15:2 (2001), pp. 53–66.

⁵¹ Similar points about the beneficial consequences of participation on the value horizons of citizens are advanced in Dryzek, *Deliberative Global Politics*, pp. 57–8 and Cochran, 'A Democratic Critique of Cosmopolitan Democracy', p. 538.

nature and limits of the various strategies employed by global civil society in deliberation about global governance. The reflections that we offer in the rest of this article do not constitute a methodological blueprint for this research, but rather an attempt to illustrate how it might proceed. To fix ideas, we suggest that, instead of constructing global civil society only as a deliberative agent, it should *also* be construed as an 'affective arena'. The notion of an affective arena has two related meanings.

First, it captures the sense in which civil society is a space of debate and activity. Activists in global civil society discuss issues of globalisation and global governance, organisational structures, appropriate strategies, and much else about the politics of resistance, including political orientation, power, and the dangers of co-optation highlighted by deliberative theorists. Global civil society organisations and the public spaces that they forge, like the World Social Forum, involve vast processes of deliberation geared towards deciding who and what issues are included, how funds are spent and what action might be taken. In describing global civil society as an 'arena', we are suggesting that it is *already* a type of 'public'. It may not qualify as such on the stringent definition preferred by Bohman, given the difficulty of discerning widespread attachment to egalitarian norms among its participants. It does constitute a public, though, in the important sense that the actors within it understand themselves as participating within an ongoing communicative practice. The deliberation instigated by global civil society must, to be sure, aim to have an impact on the wider world. At the same time, this deliberation will also aim at negotiating the values and agendas of global civil society itself, particularly given the pluralism and variety of the actors within it.

The second meaning, which is arguably more important, is that discussions and activities within global civil society are not limited to reason and contestation, but also draw on affective modes of expression. One only need consider recent campaigns, like the aforementioned Make Poverty History, to see how music, film and celebrity are starting to move beyond mere window dressing to contribute to the actual stuff of civil society.⁵² De Goede points to the importance of the affective qualities of global civil society campaigns and discussions when she argues that 'ambiguity, laughter, and making strange can be important political projects in their own right which may not add up to a revolutionary project of global change, but which may constitute important transformations of peoples' experiences'.⁵³ We might also look to the use of music, comedy, art and – as we argue in the next section – film as important elements in the affective arena of global civil society. Such forms and qualities are under-theorised by deliberative theorists, yet they are clearly playing an important role in the campaigns that are carried out within global civil society.⁵⁴

Of particular importance is De Goede's reference to the capacity of these techniques to instigate 'transformations of peoples' experiences'. In focusing on the use of affective modes of expression, we gain deeper insight into the capacity of global civil society not merely to challenge existing value preferences of global

⁵² Brassett, 'Cosmopolitanism vs. Terrorism?', pp. 121–47.

⁵³ De Goede, 'Carnival of Money', p. 381.

⁵⁴ The role of affective modes of communication in deliberative democracy, at least in domestic contexts, has been extensively explored by Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 2.

audiences, but to promote and forge new attachments and identities. Affective modes of expression aim at an emotional as well as a rational response; to use popular parlance, they appeal to the heart as well as the mind. In this respect, affective communication is perhaps better compared to certain types of political protest or even artistic expression. A protest or a work of art can, and often does, aim to communicate a clear message, in a similar fashion to a social movement or politician who advances an argument in the public sphere. At the same time, there is clearly another, arguably richer, communicative dynamic at work in protest or art, insofar as it aims to stimulate an emotional or affective response in its audience. An analysis of the complexity of the communicative utterances projected into the world by actors in global civil society, which focuses on their educative *and* sentimental content, may help us to better understand how civil society can perform the functions ascribed to it by deliberative theorists. In particular, it may help us to appreciate how global civil society might, after all, play an important role in the creation of new publics. It may also cast light on the means through which actors in the affective arena reflect upon disagreements within global civil society itself.

3. Film and global civil society

One of the most noticeable shifts in the nature of global civil society campaigning in recent years has been the adoption of film. The rise of NGO campaign films is a notable feature of campaign websites and has started to form a greater part of intra-civil society communication. Films are produced by civil society actors for mass audiences, but are also increasingly used as part of education and debate within social forums.⁵⁵ Clearly, the nature of film means that it is far more geared towards generating opinion and reflection than political decisions. But we see this as a potential resource for enriching the substance of deliberative approaches to global governance. Indeed, one of the central aims of our analysis is to shift attention away from the ‘decision’ and back to nature of deliberation itself. By doing this we hope to suggest that the contested nature of civil society debates is itself an important part of the politics of deliberative global governance.

Within what we term the ‘affective arena’ of global civil society, film can be at once both a motive force – ‘to move people to arms’ – and a reflective/reflexive medium, capable of forcing people to question their most foundational assumptions. These points can be illustrated via a discussion of the use of film in general and the representation of trade politics through film in particular. The use of film is presented here as a ‘case study’ of the ways in which groups in global civil society appeal to, or even create, transnational communities of interest through deliberative and affective modes of expression. Building on the discussion above, we suggest that the evidence thus far does not point to the emergence of the kind of thick socio-egalitarian public spheres hoped for by deliberative theorists. Rather, our investigation expresses the limits – both ontological and ethical – which deliberative global governance must address.

⁵⁵ For instance, as well as playing a number of his films, the 2004 London Social Forum gave a platform to Ken Loach for discussion for his work and political views.

Campaign adverts

Perhaps the most obvious sense in which global civil society has experienced a turn to film is in the use of ‘campaign adverts’. These are generally short, relatively low budget film clips that identify a major issue area or problem and posit a particular campaign as the ready solution to these problems. In line with much of what Bohman and Dryzek argue, such films are capable of subjecting international institutions to a publicity of reasons that could perhaps democratise the discourses of global governance. For instance, the British NGO War on Want regularly condenses its campaign messages into short 5–10 minute films which can be viewed for free at its website and which campaigners often carry to forums and meetings.⁵⁶ In particular, in a campaign video on the WTO, War on Want suggests that despite liberal rhetoric free trade policies have actually led to the loss of jobs, widespread internal migration from agricultural to urban areas, and the creation of poverty.⁵⁷

In this way, campaign adverts probably fit neatly within the schematic sketched in previous sections about how global civil society can partake in deliberative global governance. Perhaps oversimplifying, Bohman’s standard for the creation of democratic public spheres is probably met by the interactions between say, Make Poverty History and the G8, where media message and films played no small part.⁵⁸ In a similar fashion, Dryzek’s notion of ‘democratising a discourse’ can be adequately stretched to meet the kinds of roles and services that campaign adverts provide. Due to the reduced cost of making films and distributing them via the internet or social forums, it is quite possible for such campaign adverts to serve the deliberative function of educating, and provoking democratic deliberation over particular issues. Campaign adverts can identify an issue area which might be a suitable basis for forming a public around, such as climate change, poverty, animal cruelty, or sweatshops. In addition, campaign adverts can provide an interesting, if somewhat short, gamut of reasons for engaging with, deliberating about and perhaps reforming an aspect of global governance.

It is perhaps unlikely that deliberative theorists would want to attach too much significance to these forms. In the case of charities, campaign adverts are most famously (perhaps infamously?) associated with a mass market television approach which commonly depict helpless, starving, Africans, (usually women and/or women with children).⁵⁹ Such campaign adverts have helped charities and other NGOs to deal with the twin objectives of gaining funds and ‘spreading the word’, but for some within civil society they have come at the expense of actually including those whom the charities claim to speak for. For instance, in opposition to the perceived elitism of the Make Poverty History Campaign, a coalition of Southern grass-roots organisations formed a counter campaign called ‘Not About Us Without Us’.⁶⁰ In this instance, the thicker egalitarian values sought by theorists like Bohman arguably emerged out of a contest within and amongst global civil society activists.

⁵⁶ {<http://www.waronwant.org/Videos+12493.twl>}.

⁵⁷ {<http://www.waronwant.org/War+on+Want%27s+WTO+Film+12336.twl>}.

⁵⁸ Brassett, ‘Cosmopolitanism vs. Terrorism?’, pp. 121–47.

⁵⁹ For a powerful discussion of these kinds of narrative see J. Edkins, *Whose Hunger? Concepts of Famine, Practices of Aid* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

⁶⁰ John Gaventa with Marj Mayo, ‘Not about us without us’: Linking Local and Global citizen Advocacy’, A research proposal. Working Group on citizenship and Engagement in a Globalised World January 2006).

Activists associated with Make Poverty History clearly focused, at least in part, on influencing decision-making (the G8), whereas their 'opponents' interrogated the discursive methods through which these political aims were pursued.

User-generated film

The rise of user generated film is perhaps more likely to speak to the deliberative values of inclusion and recognition. User generated film works on the straightforward principle that individuals are best placed to document their experiences and life chances/constraints. Indeed, certain civil society operations describe this type of film making as 'participatory video'.

A key possibility presented by user generated film is a potential link to grassroots. In a now famous example, *Indymedia* provides a framework where anyone, anywhere in the world, can upload their own film commentaries on political events under the slogan, 'don't hate the media, become the media'.⁶¹ The aim of indymedia is to provide a web forum where activists could circumvent what they regarded as the one-sided reporting of anti-globalisation protests. Instead of the common narrative of protests – protestors throwing missiles and the police responding with 'reasonable force' – films document peaceful demonstrations which were then broken up by aggressive police actions.

Sometimes, the organisation of participatory video involves a 'top-down' promotion of 'bottom-up' practices. In line with deliberative themes of inclusion and recognition, participatory video often involves the practice of giving video cameras to marginalised groups like the urban poor, or people suffering with HIV, for instance, so that they can tell their own stories about their lived experiences.⁶² Participatory video is seen as crucial aspect of including the dispossessed and the voiceless in the practice and deliberative process of deciding upon developmental goals and objectives. As Pat Norrish suggests:

As development thinking has shifted towards sustainability and participation, there have been remarkable and rapid developments in computing and communication technologies which offer exciting possibilities for rural communities to move into the information age. For this to happen there needs to be a concerted, multisectoral approach to information technology with a focus on rural populations as communicators and contributors to information and knowledge, rather than passive consumers [...].⁶³

In a similar vein, the World Bank has championed the benefits of participatory film making as a means of learning something about the people who many in global civil society claim to speak for, arguing that:

⁶¹ As Andre Spicer recounts: 'Indy media is a global online activist media network. It is made up of over 150 autonomous Indymedia collectives around the world. Each collective typically operates a website which allows anyone to upload new stories and comment items for public viewing. The news which tends to appear on an Indymedia site has a definite orientation towards issues that concern progressive activists.' (Unpublished Working paper).

⁶² R. Bleiker and A. Kay, 'Representing HIV/AIDS in Africa: Pluralist Photography and Local Empowerment', in *International Studies Quarterly*, 51:1 (2007), pp. 139–63.

⁶³ Pat Norrish, *The First Mile of Connectivity: Advancing telecommunications for rural development through participatory communication*, {<http://www.fao.org/docrep/x0295e/x0295e00.htm>}.

Indigenous knowledge and local initiatives are usually documented and disseminated by outsiders, who make their own interpretations in the process. Participatory Video (PV) provides an opportunity for rural people to document their own knowledge and experiences and to express their wants and hopes from their own perspectives.⁶⁴

Of course, it would be easy to over sell this emergent form. Participatory video relies on the extension of information technology to poor communities often with a highly focused set of objectives, that is, to create economic growth. As Garrett Brown discusses in his contribution to this volume, the principle of multi-sectoralism is often tarnished by the way in which the initial debate is set up and how certain and particular sectors are able to dominate proceedings.⁶⁵ An important issue is whether user generated film could explore the possibility of some form of hybrid between placing a radical emphasis on autonomy, such that film subjects are chosen by film makers, and the kind of funded, and highly focused, emphasis on development issues favoured by the World Bank, which perhaps privileges the economic dimensions of people's lives. However, the successful inclusion of the subjects of development in at least the deliberations over how development should proceed is surely an important spur for a deliberative approach to global governance.

Ethical documentaries

Finally, there has been a recent growth in the production of 'ethical' films and documentaries. Sometimes these are films funded by ethical entrepreneurs, such as *Black Gold*; others are films made with an ethical objective in mind. Films like *Life and Debt* and *Darwin's Nightmare*, for instance, each tap into an important critical issue within the discussion of globalisation that is both interesting for, and arguably constitutive of, global civil society. For instance, *An Inconvenient Truth* was instrumental in the generation of public energy towards the 'Live Earth' campaign.

A key example of this type of film is *Black Gold*, a documentary about the coffee industry with the subtitle 'wake up and smell the coffee'. *Black Gold* occupies a space on a spectrum between film and global civil society. The narrative of *Black Gold* strongly endorses fair trade as a route beyond the pathologies of the Coffee Market. The film presents a stark image of a world coffee price predominantly governed by the New York Coffee Exchange which agrees a price to trade beans from developing country suppliers to developed world coffee processors. Of course the steps in the supply chain are far more complex. On the one hand, developing country suppliers buy from a large number of small farmers at a lower price even than the New York Coffee Exchange. On the other hand, the developed country suppliers can sell on to supermarkets and coffee shops at a much higher price. The resultant differential means that the price paid for one cup of coffee in Starbucks is roughly the price paid to farmers for two sacks of coffee.

In this context, the film tells a sympathetic narrative of how one developing country supplier has engaged in fair trade deals to guarantee a better price to

⁶⁴ IKNotes, World Bank, No 71, {www.worldbank.org/afr/ik/default.htm}.

⁶⁵ Garrett Brown, 'Safeguarding deliberative global governance: the case of The Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria'.

farmers. *Black Gold* is therefore both a serious cinematic engagement with the issue of trade and a political endorsement of the Fair Trade campaign/movement/business. While such films are obviously important for spreading awareness about unfair trade practices and educating a broader public about the possibilities of fair trade practices, there is perhaps a sense in which *Black Gold* misses the possibility of deeper critique of trade. As a counterpoint, *Darwin's Nightmare* presents a root and branch deconstruction of the trade relation as it was felt in Tanzania. This film tells a far darker story of how a society can become structured around a single export product – the Nile Perch – fished and processed for trade to European markets. Because of the cash value of the Nile Perch, nearly all areas of society around Lake Victoria are either involved in the industry or parasitic upon it; including begging, prostitution, and the bastard industry of fish heads and fish bones for local people (that is, Tanzanians sell the meat and buy the bones).

The importance of *Darwin's Nightmare* is that it shows how the structure of the trade relation, emphatically endorsed by the European Commission as a route to development, is actually capable of disarticulating a community. The concentration of capital and profit draws male farmers from the rural areas to fish, while women often end up with little choice but prostitution. Moreover, the film makers structure their narrative around the transport planes which enter and leave everyday. They come in empty and leave full of fish. The Russian pilots are frequent and sometimes violent customers for the prostitutes and eventually disclose some of their other trade jobs, the principal among which is the import of arms. One pilot tells of how he once realised that at Christmas he was taking fish to the tables of children in Europe and guns to the child soldiers of Africa.

As an element within global civil society the film performs many, often ambiguous functions. On the one hand there is clearly an educative dimension to *Darwin's Nightmare*. In this way, film might provide an important site of 'ontological deliberation' over global governance. Against the 'big questions' of deliberative global governance, which focus on how global civil society can affect the WTO, for instance, this type of narrative might actually undermine the ethical basis of such a view, by levelling a foundational critique of global trade, *per se*. Indeed, there is something quite unnerving about the deliberative view that the inclusion of more voices in decision making can actually solve the large problem of what counts as non-domination on a global scale. How can democratising the WTO address the issue of the structural inequalities of the global trade relation? How can it address the issue of the relationship between global trade and environmental degradation? Perhaps it can, but we would require a far more explicit engagement with such fundamental dilemmas. On the other hand, the film had a paradoxical impact: French supermarkets refused to continue stocking the Nile Perch and the Tanzanian government began a crackdown on anyone who was involved with the film.⁶⁶ Thus, a radical intervention had a negative, though unintended consequence.

In this way, the move to film has yielded not only a technical complement to the subject of deliberation within the arena of global civil society but also a set of substantive issues relating to the ethical and political priorities of deliberative global governance. This might equally occur via a greater engagement with social

⁶⁶ See {<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/aug/17/film.filmnews>}.

forum discussions and the protracted debates between the ‘horizontal’ and the ‘vertical’ (or the grassroots networks and the NGO’s) over the proper organisation of the World Social Forum. But the point would remain the same: fundamental ontological and ethical disagreement about the shape and practice of global governance will not be overcome via pluralism alone. The aim of our argument, as we have emphasised, is not to reject deliberative accounts of global civil society. Our concern, rather, is to draw out, in a constructive fashion, what we see as serious empirical and political difficulties in these accounts. An example of these difficulties, neatly illustrated by our discussion of *Darwin’s Nightmare*, is that incorporating a plurality of perspectives in global governance may not, in and of itself, promote the normative values that animate deliberative theories of global governance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our argument has traced certain motifs in deliberative accounts of global civil society. The temptation to conceptualise global civil society as a deliberative agent has been criticised and an alternative analysis of it as an affective arena has been introduced. On the one hand, our aim has been to nudge the study of deliberative global governance down the path of generating richer and more variegated empirical analyses of the actual content of deliberation within global civil society. On the other hand, our study of film has raised tough questions about the deliberative politics of global civil society. How do we deliberate with those who may, quite reasonably, reject the terms, content and site of deliberation at the global level? In line with others, we fear that a celebration of pluralism within deliberative theories of global governance can at times lead to an effacement of the difficult political questions about power and domination articulated by radical voices within global civil society. Deliberative theory may need to take more notice of the actual deliberations *within* civil society, in the coming years, if it is to offer a more reflexive account of the ethical reform of global governance to come.