Spatial Politics in Practice: The Style and Substance of Environmental Direct Action

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According to many commentators, Environmental Direct Action (EDA) has become a growing political force in recent years. This paper explores the style and substance of EDA by focusing on one indicative example of EDA activity, the anti-quarry campaign at Ashton Court, Bristol, UK. The paper will argue that EDA is a political practice constituted by an imbroglio of premises, practices, identities, and modes of organisation that in a variety of ways asserts its difference to those of the liberal democratic system. The paper will go on to show that EDA is politically and geographically significant as it has been successful in taking and making space in line with its own cultural values. Through being successful in this way, EDA has entered into a dialogic relationship with the political practices of the State that can offer a useful tracing of how power struggles are played out in material and symbolic space.

Introduction
Rooted in anti-nuclear and counter-cultural struggles, Environmental Direct Action (EDA) emerged in the UK as a recognisable phenomenon in the early 1990s at the M3 site of Twyford Down, Hampshire (Bryant 1996). Over the following decade this protest inspired a widespread anti-roads movement in the UK (Wall 1999), and evolved from apparently single-issue foci to include a host of connected issues affecting citizens in the post-modern world. These included issues concerning how we travel (the relative economic, environmental and health costs of road, air and public transport), where and how we live (the merits of housing in green belts, quarrying for building materials, and the (im)possibility of alternative accommodations, eg in the form of eco-villages), what we eat (the controversies over genetically modified crops and food), and how we can be represented politically (in traditional and more radical spaces of political action). During this period EDA spread in geographical scale, spawning similar actions across Europe and creating affiliations with other protest movements in North and South America. Concomitantly EDA developed its critique into one focused not simply on the symptoms of post-modern society, but on what it perceived to be the cause, the capitalist system itself (see McKay 1998 or any SchNEWS publications 1997–1999).
Reflecting its roots in a range of disparate, once unconnected issues, EDA is not monotheistic in character. Its political objectives, tactics, strategies and motivations vary widely, with its diversity matched only by the number of participants involved. In common with the characters of Edward Abbey’s US direct action novel, *The Monkey-Wrench Gang* (1991), activists come from a range of socio-demographic backgrounds, they are motivated by a range of political/environmental beliefs, and get involved in a multiplicity of political actions. The diversity of the movement means that individuals operate under a variety of organisational (or dis-organisational) banners depending on the action concerned, and oscillate between the use of traditional spaces of political protest (for example public inquiries, high court actions or public petitions), more radical spaces of action (for example street demonstrations, illegal land occupation), and the invention of new spaces of protest (for example cyber-activism, shareholder protests, and “subvertising”) depending on the issue and activists involved.

Due to the diversity in every facet of EDA, it is difficult to paint an overall picture of the phenomenon; any attempt at doing so will inevitably recuperate the practice to some degree. However, by using a case study of one EDA community within the wider movement, namely the campaign against Durnford Quarry extension at Ashton Court, Bristol, a number of key themes that are characteristic of this political practice can be outlined. The paper will illustrate that EDA involves a multiplicity of individuals, philosophies and tactics, orientated around two main themes: personal responsibility for political action, and personalised “ecocentric” values (O’Riordan 1981). From this basis the paper will argue that EDA is politically significant because it has entered into a dialogic relationship with the state over space, and has done so on its own terms. The paper will then trace some key interactions between EDA and the UK State that meaningfully contribute to our understanding of how spatial power relations are played out in political practice.

**A Space of EDA: The Anti Quarry Campaign at Ashton Court**

The EDA campaign at Ashton Court Estate near Bristol sought to prevent the expansion of an existing limestone quarry on the periphery of the park. The estate itself was a legacy to the people of Bristol from the wealthy Smyth family who had owned the area since the 1500s. It was to be managed in their name by Bristol City Council under the premises that, “no portion of the Park should be set aside for … site works which would prejudice the citizens’ enjoyment”. As a material amenity, Ashton Court provided local citizens with a space for golfing, cycling, horse riding, and rambling recreation, and the location for annual community music, balloon, as well as kite festivals. The estate
itself was valued as a ‘green lung’ for the city, providing an opportunity for residents to get in touch with nature. As an ecological entity the estate functioned as a habitat for “many uncommon species” and included a “grassland community of regional importance” (www.gn.apc.org/cycling/ashtoncourt.html); this grassland was home to rare botanical species such as green-winged and bee orchids, broomrape, yellow rattle and adders’ tongue fern. Known as ‘Top Park Field’, this area homed skylarks and provided the foraging site for badgers, as well as six varieties of bat (including the rare ‘Leisler’). The meadow enjoyed the official designation of a ‘Site of Nature Conservation Interest’, and was nominally protected under the Avon Structure Plan. It was this area that was threatened by Durnford quarry extension.

To many locals the case of the quarry extension exemplified the lack of access and representation that environmentally concerned citizens enjoyed in the spaces of politics ascribed by the State. A conventional campaign against the extension was made by a number of local groups, but they systematically failed to get their political voice listened to and acted upon through these routes (see Anderson 2000). Despite their mandate to manage the estate in the interests of the public, Bristol City Council stated they would, “use their best endeavours” to support any planning application made by Pioneer Aggregates, the quarry company in question (see http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/steenson/ashton/topfield.htm). When a group of Bristolians sought a judicial review over this stance the Court pronounced that since they were merely citizens of the city they had no clear property or financial right over the area, consequently they did not have sufficient legal status to object to Pioneer’s proposal (see ibid.). This conventional campaign against the quarry extension led many to question citizens’ capacity to have a say in the political system, as one local stated:

The ongoing battle to save Top Park Field has thrown up a whole range of issues, one of which is the rights of the public in a supposedly democratic society. It would seem that the planning system and the legal system have evolved with the rights of business, landowners and developers in mind. The rights of the rest of the population seem to be of minimal importance (http://www.gn.apc.org/cycling/ashtoncourt-democracy.html).

The quarry extension also highlighted the perceived lack of control locals enjoyed over their environment and resources. The decision to displace a local amenity was eventually made by a County (North Somerset), rather than the City Council, and financially benefited not the local population, but Pioneer Aggregates, an Australian corporation. The disenfranchisement felt by many locals from the liberal
democratic spaces of politics was tangible, and fuelled speculation over the legitimacy and accountability of conventional decision-making:

The issue has less to do with Pioneer’s actions (an inherently local company, with local concerns—in Australia) than the Council’s allowing for future quarrying to be given carte blanche years before it was to happen … all its business should be made public … but the lack of publication of the terms of the lease is suggestive of underhand dealing. (This is it! 1999:2).

The case of the quarry extension also highlighted the apparent absurdity of UK mining policy in relation to the recycling of aggregates. According to the Bristol Friends of the Earth (http://www.gn.apc.org/cycling/ashtoncourt/who.html) only 4% of high-grade aggregate is recycled in the UK each year, with virgin ore cheaper to use for temporary tracks on construction sites than builder’s rubble. The controversy over this issue was made more acute at Ashton Court for a number of reasons. Durnford Quarry extension was just one of a number of unpopular mining cases in Southwest England during the 1990s, with Whatley Quarry in Somerset and Dead Women’s Bottom in the Mendip Hills two of the more notable. The aggregates to be mined from Top Park Field were also to be used for the much-debated Avon Ring Road on the other side of the city, itself despoiling a further area of common land. With the case of the Batheaston bypass (a key site in the anti-roads struggle, see Evans 1998) still fresh in many memories, the prospect of further landscape and amenity despoliation was unwelcome.

The anti-quarry campaign at Ashton Court thus effectively functioned as a microcosm for a diverse range of issues. Top Park Field came to symbolise the difference in priorities between much local opinion—which wished for the preservation of valued local places, enfranchisement in the mainstream spaces of politics, and sustainable decision-making; and elected representatives and corporate power brokers—whose decisions appeared to be weighted towards capitalist and technocratic philosophies, and failed to identify with issues concerning local knowledges and environmental sustainability. To paraphrase the words of Roszak (1989:10), the state of health of Ashton Court was seen as both a symptom and a symbol of the state of health of society, and those who identified with just one or all of the entangled issues involved found a grounded focus for their discontent.

EDA: Alternative Spaces and Paradigms
As Thrift states, “space is … the stuff of power” (2000:274), it is the arena in which power is made manifest, the domain in which we see its effects. By “taking place” groups, businesses, cultures or nation states politicise space in line with their own socio-cultural norms,
visions and customs (Jackson and Penrose, 1993), and as claims and significances are attached to it, conditions are established that valorise certain actions and ways of being whilst marginalising others. As Saward has noted, due to the lack of scope for political articulation in the mainstream spaces of liberal democracy, those affiliating with environmental interests, “require … a new space and paradigm for their [political] expression” (1996:82). In line with many other cases in the UK and abroad this new space was created at Ashton Court through the practice of EDA. By directly occupying land adjacent to Top Park Field (it was felt to be nonsensical to occupy the wildflower meadow, the area they wished to preserve), activists successfully created a new space for the articulation of their identities.

By politicising space in this way activists provided for themselves their own form of public space, a platform from which they could not only articulate their political viewpoints, but also recruit interested parties.3 Their EDA camp became a “homeplace” (after hooks 1990), a safe haven where the languages, customs and behaviours were familiar and through simply existing reinforced and refuelled an individual and collective sense of empowerment.4 As such a “homeplace” the camp attracted a diversity of inhabitants and supporters. These included many of those locals who became radicalised following the mainstream campaign against the quarry extension, including many from the groups “Friends of Ashton Court” and “Bristol Friends of the Earth (FoE)”. These groups also provided practical support (in terms of water, food, moral and financial backing), “phone tree” contacts, and in the case of Bristol FoE, use of office facilities in the city—essential for activist produced publicity about the campaign (in both printed and cyber-word) (Cathles 2000). Newcomers to the campaign were also attracted to the camp, including local students, city workers, those from the “alternative” scene—from the squat/café “Kebele” in the city centre, as well as individuals active in the arenas of animal liberation, and the local cells of “Reclaim the Streets” and “Earth First!”. Ashton Court also became a focus regionally as people active in the “Mendip Hills not Holes” anti-quarry campaigns passed through the camp, as well as politically minded festival goers travelling through from gatherings such as Glastonbury. The camp also became part of the network of EDA communities existing at the national and international level, with activists participating from Manchester Airport, the Birmingham Relief Road, the holiday centre at Lyminge Forest, Kent, and from European protests in Ireland, France, and Poland. Activists attracted to the anti-debt and anti-capital protests focused at the G8 summits (held at the time in Birmingham, but also latterly in cities such as Seattle and Gothenburg; see Clark and Rose 1999; Dodson 2002; Taylor 2002) also spent time at the site. Ashton Court thus became a local site with a diverse international population,
a parochial issue with supra-national interest. The range of issues and their implications that intertwined together in this particular place was thus not limited by political boundaries but had a resonance and symbolism that transcended national borders and drew sympathy, support and solidarity with groups and individuals beyond the local.

As a consequence of the diversity of activists at Ashton Court the camp became a space in which ideas, tactics and philosophies concerning politics, environmentalism and action were disseminated and cross-fertilised. Many of the individuals who initially came to the site out of curiosity, or for its social “bonhomie”, mixed and engaged with the other actors and were often seduced and politised into EDA. As “Jelly” remarked at the M11 protest and an entry from my field diary recalled:

All different types of people would come down. You’d get a lot of nutters, but there was a complete mixture ... What I loved was that loads of people had gone there for the so-called “Wrong Reasons”, not political, not trying to save anything; they were there to meet friends or girlfriends, for social reasons maybe, whatever, but they’d end up being active. They’d end up climbing up stuff and chaining themselves to it, trying to do their bit. (Jelly, in Evans 1998:40)

For Ned and Baz, Ashton Court is the first site they’ve been to where they have been personally aware of the specific “politics” involved in it, ie the mechanics of why the meadow is being destroyed. Before they’ve just had a general sense of what was going on—they were there because it was a “laugh”. But at AC they seem to be more connected; like Baz says, “you either have a meadow or a hole in the ground, and I don’t want it to be a hole in the ground.” (Author’s “field” diary)

Just as activists at Ashton Court originated from many places and became involved for a variety of reasons, they also displayed a range of philosophies that motivated their participation. Few activists conformed to a rigid ideology that motivated participation, and as Baz’s remark suggests, for many the complex issues concerned actually boiled down to quite simple choices. Some activists however attempted to develop some form of personal philosophy in regard to their action; in the words of Stanley, they tried to “theorise their own experience” (1991:208).

you come out here and you meet all these different people, and most people are probably anarchists, and then you get some socialists, and there are all these words with “-ist” on the end. And I thought I’d better start reading all these books and see what best describes me … cos I like to know what I’m arguing about, and not just turn
up and camp and go, “oh it’s shit, they’re digging a quarry”, I wanted to know about all the issues and about this that and the other …

(Activist interview)

In many cases the philosophies and theories created by activists were amalgams that complemented each activist’s own individual preferences, as Plows states, “I continued to develop a spiritual awareness—my own brand of Jungian archetypal symbolism and paganism” (Plows 1998:6). The philosophies underlying EDA are thus pluralistic and eclectic in nature, ranging from those associated with mysticism and shamanism, to academically renowned environmental ethics (a number of Oeschlager texts were present at Ashton Court). Although no one monolithic philosophy can be attributed to EDA, and despite it being rarely referenced directly, I have found it useful to think of the many positions adopted as complementing or reflecting “ecocentric” values (O’Riordan 1981). As its prefix eco suggests, “ecocentrism” has at its root the science of ecology. This science informs us that there is no genuine division between human and non-human species, all exist on the planet in a closed “web” of connectivity. This view serves to outmode and transcend the root ontological divide between the human and non-human world established through renaissance science, and compares favourably with the holistic approach to the world that characterised pre-Enlightenment thought. This ecological yet often abstract connection between human and non-human species finds resonance at the level of the individual through a deeper “re-feeling” of this relation. Many EDA-ers develop a strong feeling for the environment that goes beyond any economic or instrumental attachment. A number of theorisations attempt to express these feelings, and have notable similarities to the notions of “deep”, “transpersonal” and “social” ecology (see Devall and Sessions 1985; Fox 1995; Bookchin 1990, respectively). However, since most EDA-ers prefer to create their own idiosyncratic value-system, the specific ways and degrees to which the human and non-human communities are integrated together into a moral and political constituency are individual in nature.5

Due to the myriad of people and philosophies at Ashton Court, this space of EDA also exhibited a range of direct action tactics. Based around the fundamental strategy of taking place to contest the mainstream designation of Top Park Field, the anti-quarry protests can be seen as a practical embodiment of the diversity of actions chronicled in EDA manuals such as Road Alert!’s Road Raging—Top Tips for Wrecking Road-Building (1997) or Eco-Defense: A Field Guide to Monkey-Wrenching (Foreman and Haywood 1987). From demonstrations at Pioneer headquarters, to kiddies’ fun days, midsummer solstice festivals, quarry occupations, leafleting, criminal damage, land spiking, lock-ons, and tunnel habitation, the activists at Ashton Court participated in a
diversity of activities dependent upon perceived utility, as well as individual skill and philosophy.

Like those at many EDA sites the overwhelming majority of actions at Ashton Court were perceived by participants to be non-violent in nature. The non-violent position, according to one activist, seeks to “consciously minimise intimidation or fear” for all those involved with the action (Activist, personal correspondence). Although ecocentric philosophy urges non-violence (as one activist states, “There is no debate. We are a non-violent movement” (EDA-er, in Berens 1997:7)), many EDA-ers postulate a difference between violence towards living things (which is unacceptable), and violence towards property (which is acceptable). As described above, actions at Ashton Court involved violence towards property (also known as “monkey-wrenching” or “ecotage”) such as taking down fences, sabotaging quarry equipment and spiking the meadow (to damage the machinery used to translocate the turf). Such action normally occurs in secret and at night, and its aim is to cost those destroying the environment the maximum amount of capital, as well as delaying, perhaps even stopping the development in question. Ecotage is generally justified in terms similar to the following:

When you look at the damage the Government is doing to our countryside, a few diggers going up in flames pales into insignificance. The diggers can be replaced but our environment can’t. The more we hit the contractors in their pockets, the more reluctant other companies will be to bid for new road schemes in the future. (Joe Birch, in Berens 1997:6)

Monkey Wrenching [or ecotage] is direct action at its purest. If I stand in front of a digger then I may get hurt and the security guards may get hurt. But if I sneak out in the dead of night and decommission a piece of machinery, I’m not injuring anyone. I’m simply costing the company the maximum amount of money. (Jai, in Honigsbaum 1994:15)

Although deemed to be an acceptable activity by many EDA-ers, the state in the UK has recently codified such practice as acts of “Terrorism” (following the Terrorism Act 2000, see http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/00011-b.htm#1). Indeed much EDA activity now falls within this classification, further decreasing the numbers of activists who are likely to claim public responsibility for their actions—and thus be openly accountable in the civil disobedience tradition (Bedau 1991). Where conventional civil disobedience involves the transparency of action and activist (thus helping to supplement the perpetrator’s moral position), with EDA it is likely that an activist will seek to anonymously get away with law breaking wherever possible. (Only if arrest occurs will it then be used to the
activist’s advantage, by highlighting the perceived injustice of the act.)

EDA’s affiliation with accountability (as defined by the state) is thus a
c contingent one, as one activist comments on the subject of arrest
outlines:

It is a fact of life and it is sometimes necessary, but it isn’t the point
and you don’t try to make it happen for its own sake. (Voices from
Earth First! 1998:36)’

The multi-faceted and diverse nature of EDA is facilitated and
couraged by its mode of organisation. The organisational structure
of EDA can be characterised by an absence of hierarchies, with a
“chaotic” structure defining proceedings (Prigogine and Stengers
1984), as the quotations from Justice’s web page, and Lee’s work on
Earth First! go some way to illustrate:

Earth First!ers’ beliefs prevented them from adopting the formal
organisational hierarchy—organisational hierarchy was the hallmark
of the industrial monolith, it stifled wildness and diversity. (Devall, in
Lee 1995:60)

Who Are “Justice?”—the people who squatted the Courthouse and
brought you the Squatter’s Estate Agency. The collective who’ve
been arrested more times than they’ve had hot dinners. It’s an identity
for a collective of people who are disgusted by things like the powers
of the state and the destruction of the environment; it’s a resource to
make things better. It’s not a clique. Nobody is a ‘member’, you won’t
be given a membership form to fill in, and nobody tells you what to
do. Well, they do, but when they’ve finished ranting, we ignore them
anyway. There aren’t any leaders. But most of all, don’t just read
SchNEWS, get out there and get active! (Justice? http://www.
cbuzz.co.uk/SchNEWS or http://www.schnews.org.uk)

In contrast to the more rigid, linear organisational structures of the
modern state, the spaces of EDA can be characterised by “ordered
disorder” or “creative chaos”. To paraphrase Zakin, EDA-ers contend
that, “… the key to organising [is] giving people the chance to do
things they want to do anyway. Being in a tribe mean[s] that you share
a worldview—but it also mean[s] that you ha[ve] the freedom to
choose how to put it into action” (Zakin 1993:141). This “chaotic”
form of organisation, or “dis-organisation” (McKay 1996:76) has many
benefits. The ethos of individual autonomy inherent within this struc-
ture not only encourages an innovative and highly dynamic move-
ment, but also removes the need for formal leaders to figurehead
individual and collective campaigns.

Reflecting its multifarious motivations and tactics, those involved in
EDA also express desires for a diverse range of political goals to be
secured as a result of their spatial practice. Brass and Poklewski
Koziell (1997) argue that EDA can be understood as a reformist practice, as a form of homeostasis mechanism for liberal democracy, and although many activists refute this (Voices from Earth First! 1998:140), the key point perhaps is that the goals of EDA can be read in a number of ways. *Some* EDA-ers choose this form of political activity simply as a tactic to prevent a specific environmental destruction, whereas others see it as part of a wider, more long-term strategy that attempts to create a sustainable society based on ecocentric premises.

EDA can thus be seen an imbroglio of premises, practices and identities, coupling with (material) places and modes of organisation that in a variety of ways asserts its difference to those of the liberal democratic system. It is a spatial practice that experiences a continual internal dialogue between its various actors, practices and philosophies which results in diverse affiliations with a multitude of groups and creative disorder both strategically and spontaneously. EDA is thus not simply about “sitting in front of a bulldozer”; it is a host of practices that directly contest space and look to gain comparative advantage for “ecological” communities over “other” modes of societal organisation.

EDA is thus a useful example of a struggle for space that is also a direct struggle for political power. EDA has not conformed to accepted political spaces, or been restricted by modes of political articulation ascribed by the State. It has opted to speak in its own language, one that the State does not control, or even fully understand. As a result EDA is indicative of a spatial practice that challenges the values and customs of the State, and transfers its own meanings and significances not only to specific environmental issues but also eco-politics more broadly—as Vidal has claimed, EDA has changed environmental politics in the UK “out of all recognition” (1994:24). As a result of these new values and rules of engagement, the State has found EDA difficult to comprehend, predict and counter. After time, the UK State in particular has been able to offer resistance to EDA, but herein lies another facet of EDA’s significance. By being inventive and almost infinitely cross-fertilising EDA has been able to adapt quickly and effectively to these new conditions—it has been able to re-group and re-counter the resistance of the State. EDA has proved to be significant because it has been capable of successfully reiterating its difference and continually re-challenging the spatial practices of the State.

**Understanding the Struggle for Political Space**

As stated above, EDA has entered a dialogic relationship with the State through contesting material geographies. It has entered a power
struggle for space where each party attempts to gain comparative advantage and (temporarily) structure space in line with its own political and cultural preferences. In some cases this comparative advantage is created by using the rules of engagement as codified by the existing actors (ie beating competitors at their own game). However, it is also possible for players to transfer their own momentum, spin or strategy to the issue, re-directing its political intent and effect. One example of this is the “ju-jitsu” strategy identified by Sharp (1973) where players use the momentum of their opponent for their own ends (this is discussed further below). Spatial practices can also result in moments of comparative disadvantage as strategies or tactics backfire. Thrift has identified this, noting that every practice carries with it the potential for its own subversion (2000:269). This potential exists immediately (in the spatial practice itself), but it is most likely to be actualised following the next move in the dialogue, as the subsequent spatial practice highlights and seizes upon any weaknesses in the preceding move. Such a description may seem to presuppose the rational practices of each actor, but this is not necessarily the case, as the struggle for political space is played out in a dialogic relationship that is influenced by a range of factors (place, identity, custom, philosophy, organisation, resources etc).

By engaging in this contest for political space the actors involved are often seen to be in direct opposition to one another. In this case, their spatial practices can be configured dualistically, with one perceived as “dominating” and one as “resisting” (Sharp et al 2000). Dominating practices are usually understood as those controlling both geographical space and the development of the political issue, with resisting practices operating in the margins. As Abu-Lughod (1990) has noted, this duality frequently involves a concomitant moral dimension, with resisting (or underdog) activities viewed romantically and dominating activities viewed with perhaps a begrudging admiration. However, drawing from the work of Foucault (1980), each spatial practice could be at once both dominating as well as resisting (again see Sharp et al 2000), and from this position the moral dichotomy is also (con)fused. As stated above, EDA spatial practices not only enter into a dialogic relationship directly with the state, but also internally with the diverse groups, customs and individuals that go together to form this organic movement. As a result, this internal struggle for the geography of EDA can also be traced, and the ways in which dominating power relations can be re-inscribed into the de-centred forms of EDA (dis-)organisation can be illuminated. Configuring the internal dialogue within EDA and the external dialogue between EDA and the State in the ways stated above helps us to understand and trace the ongoing struggle for political space in places such as Ashton Court. As I have argued earlier, EDA is significant because it has challenged the spatial
practices of the State and contested its preferred designations of politics and the environment. By taking and making material space EDA has drawn the State into a geographic dialogue, and by using its own rule of engagement it has been able to successfully compete. In what remains of this paper I will use selective empirical examples from Ashton Court as well other cases of EDA to illustrate how this struggle for political space has played out in practice and how the tactics and resulting (dis)advantages of each of the players involved can be compared.

The Struggle for Space: EDA as Spatial Politics in Practice

As stated above, the protests originating at the M3 extension of Twyford Down, Hampshire can be cited as EDA’s first significant incursion into the struggle for political space. At this site, as at Ashton Court some years later, EDA developed out of a long-term conventional campaign against the proposed development, and could be seen as a last resort tactic after the mainstream spaces of politics failed to listen to and take account of the cultural values of many local people (Bryant 1996). A number of locals, alongside others wishing to preserve the Down, set up camp on Iron Age trackways in the area, and taking their name from them (they called themselves the “Dongas Tribe”), took and made political space on their own terms to stop excavation of the motorway cutting. By taking and making their own political space at Twyford Down, EDA can be seen as directly engaging with the UK State in a struggle for political space. Operating in the niches overlooked by the practices of the Government, EDA can be understood as participating in “resisting activity”. As Pile suggests, resistance is anything that “stands in implacable opposition to ‘power’ held by an elite, who use oppressive, injurious and contemptible means to secure their control” (1997:1). By taking and making their own space, EDA-ers countered the actions of the State and set up their own arenas for political engagement, albeit in the margins of political space. Instead of being imbued with a cultural language and rules of engagement that the State understood, EDA’s political spaces were saturated with their own philosophies and engaged in the struggle for geography on their own terms. As Monbiot suggests

direct activists seem slowly to be leading themselves out of the wilderness of disenfranchisement … they have begun to engage with politics on the only terms they find acceptable—their own. (1996:15)

EDA’s actions throughout the later months of 1992, not only revealed the lack of commitment of mainstream environmental groups to stop the eco-destruction (Vidal 1992), but also the bankruptcy of the mainstream political system to legitimately account for and value important
environmental sites. The campaigner’s actions put a mirror up to the strategy of the State and showed it to be capable of manipulating the democratic system to serve its own political affiliations. (In this case the UK State marginalised dissent at the public inquiry stage, overrode environmental planning legislation and procedure, and fudged European directives; see Anderson 1995). EDA brought attention to the “contemptible means” used by the State to secure their preferred use of space, as well as the enclosures used to control conventional spaces of politics (such as the public inquiry system). EDA highlighted how the State was effectively limiting and defining potential resisting acts by establishing its own terms for political debate and constructing a situation where any resistance could be easily controlled and “made and be seen to fail” (Pile 1997:3). As a consequence, EDA posited a challenge not only to the State’s hegemony but also to its authority. EDA drew the UK State into a geographic dialogue, prompting a response to counter its spatial challenge.

At Twyford Down, as at subsequent EDA sites across the UK and Europe, the State chose to use tactics of intimidation, coercion and violence to remove activists from their newly created political space (Bellamy 1993; Vidal 1994). Such tactics, alongside media images of the police force clothed as “Third World Militia” (Mayne 1994:23) facilitated the public perception that the State and its agencies were acting as a dominating power. In the words of Sharp et al, the public perception grew that the State was attempting to “control or coerce others, impose its will upon others, or manipulate the consent of others”, they were attempting to “asserts the[ir] interests … at the expense of others” (2000:12). It can be seen that the tactics of EDA helped to engender this public perception. By opting for non-violence, particularly towards people, activists were shown to be in sharp contrast to the often aggressive and armed security forces. Activists’ “manufactured vulnerability” (after Doherty 2000) encouraged the romanticisation of their activity in stark contrast to the “nastier cast of characters, the private detectives, the bailiffs, [and] the evicting climbers” (Griffiths, in Evans 1998:2). EDA had set up a conflict situation, where their strategic use of vulnerability and non-violence emphasised the oppressive and aggressive activities of the State (Pork Bolter 2000). This asymmetrical situation acts an example of “political ju-jitsu”, of EDA exploiting the State’s tactics to their own advantage. To paraphrase Sharp, EDA-ers were able to apply something like jiu-jitsu [sic] to their opponent, throwing him [sic] off balance politically, causing his repression to rebound against his position, and weakening his power. Furthermore, by remaining non-violent while continuing the struggle, the actionists … help to improve their own power position. (Sharp 1973:109–110)
As Sharp implies, by opting not to play by the State’s rules of violence and putting themselves in a position of vulnerability, EDA was able to exploit their opponent’s supposed superiority. By using the State’s own momentum to their advantage, EDA was able to transform the State’s strength into a weakness. In so doing EDA also improved their own position by caricaturing themselves as romantic idealists, upholding long-held traditions of public protest against an enclosing enemy (Tyme 1978). This process also occurred in relation to other State strategies that attempted to regain control of political space. The introduction of legislative acts, such as the Criminal Justice Act (or CJA, 1994), served to effectively criminalise the taking and making of political space (Liberty 1994; Rowell 1996:337). Again, however, this dominating act actually played into the hands of EDA. Not only did it unite groups that up to that point had been disparate (McKay 1998), it also reinforced the image of EDA-ers as romantic resisters, as The Guardian commentator John Vidal put it:

Poor Michael Howard [the then Home Secretary]. Those he has successfully criminalised for damaging blades of grass, whom he wants to put on the same level as hijackers and manslaughterers, and whom he is even now bugging and spying on as if terrorists, are being revealed as rather peaceful, happy and balanced people who still have a few ideals about what country, land and justice are. (Vidal 1997:12)

The 1994 incarnation of the CJA was thus unsuccessful in controlling EDA, indeed it backfired as a tactic as it politicised many disenfranchised groups to become active in EDA. The direct action campaign at Ashton Court was one of those protests that proliferated following this legislation. At this and other sites EDA introduced a repertoire of tactics to maintain and reiterate its claims to political space, including protest camps, tree-house communities, street parties, and tunnelling. The tunnelling tactic is a useful example of the comparative advantages a single practice can secure for the actors involved, as well as the “spin” each can successfully put on the political issues in question. Tunnels were integrated into the protest repertoire of EDA most famously at Fairmile (at the A30 protests) and at Manchester (against the Airport’s extra runway), and they were also used at Ashton Court. Here, activists used a jackhammer to excavate a lengthy tunnel under Top Park Field and planned to secure and inhabit it, thus preventing heavy machinery from being used above ground for fear of tunnel collapse. This strategy was influenced by other EDA tactics which had proved successful by placing activists in positions of weakness (again using the tactic of “manufactured vulnerability”, see Doherty 2000) and calculating that the other parties involved would not voluntarily injure them.

At Fairmile and Manchester this tactic worked well: it left the State with few retaliatory options (short of injuring activists or creating
martyrs for the EDA cause), and could only be stopped by the concession of the activists involved. Tunnelling was thus a tactic that not only took and made political space on the terms and conditions of EDA, but was also a tactic that could only be terminated in the same way. Furthermore, tunnelling was a practice that was successful in putting EDA's own spin on the respective entanglement of political issues involved. By generating publicity (alongside the dubious reward of the iconisation of a number of activists, including “Swampy” and “Animal”, see Vidal 1997; Young, 1997) it was relatively successful in highlighting the Design, Build, Finance, & Operate (or DBFO) policy associated with the A30, and the environmental costs of air travel linked to Manchester's extra runway.

However, these comparative advantages for EDA-ers were not replicated at Ashton Court. In this case, the local councils, Pioneer Aggregates and the translocation company (Alaska Environmental) openly questioned the existence of the EDA tunnels, effectively calling the bluff of those activists who were intent on inhabiting them. With regular dynamiting of the nearby quarry, and heavy machinery operating directly above the tunnel, activists soon withdrew from the tunnels, trading their safety for continued competition with the State on these terms. The tunnelling tactic thus exemplifies how EDA can be successful in taking and making political space, reasserting activists' political identities, gaining media coverage, and achieving an element of success in re-defining the political issues in question. However, it is also an example of how a tactic’s effect can be undermined, in the case of Ashton Court through the State employing the ju-jitsu strategy and using EDA's vulnerability against itself. By using the momentum of EDA's vulnerability, and retaining its own threat of violence, the State and corporations were able to transform EDA's apparent strength into a practical weakness.

The case of the tunnelling tactic is an effective example of how, in the struggle for political space, no spatial practice however inventive or apparently comprehensive ever stands completely outside the capacity for sedition—it can always be undermined, subverted or deflected. This conclusion places the spatial practices of EDA and the State within what Sharp et al (2000) call a “Foucauldian dyad”. Here each resisting or dominating practice is, in effect, a mixture of both, as Sharp et al explain:

The Foucauldian dyad of “domination/resistance” … acknowledges that domination and resistance … are thoroughly hybrid phenomena, the one always containing the seeds of the other, the one always bear[s] at least a trace of the other that contaminates or subverts it. (Sharp et al 2000:20)

This position claims, therefore, that domination and resistance are fused together into every spatial practice. In Nietzschean terms, every
spatial practice seeks to extend its sphere of influence, both at once resisting and dominating those that may prevent it from doing so or are a threat to it (Gane and Chan 1994:85). This conclusion not only (con)fuses the simple romantic dichotomy of “good” and “bad” associated with dualistic relations of power, as practices are now at once both productive and repressive, but also confirms Said’s claim that we can never be “outside or beyond” the struggle for political space (1994:6), wherever there is an act of domination there will always be one of resistance. In this spatial dialogue, comparative advantage is thus the only achievable goal, and this is an objective that can only be harnessed temporarily. On this criterion EDA has proved successful as it has constantly responded to the spatial practices of the State and continued its role in the geographical struggle. This is due in no small part to its internal dialogue. As stated above, EDA is (dis)organised and orientated around multiple groups, philosophies and tactics. As a result, it is constantly cross-fertilising and inventing new ideas and tactics to gain moments of comparative advantage. In the final section of this paper I will briefly trace a number of examples where this internal dialogue has secured such moments.

During EDA at Ashton Court I participated in a number of activist gatherings where internal dialogue was actively encouraged. During one of these gatherings an activist commented on a potential weakness of EDA camps, suggesting they could become “hostages to action”. By this it was meant that activists become so seduced by the positive aspects of the camps that all resources were oriented to their continued existence, rather than other elements of EDA.9 It was argued that an alternative strategy to camps would be to do an action then “fade away and squat on the hoof” (Author’s field diary). It was thought that such a strategy would pose a new problem for the State and security forces as they were learning “how to handle a camp” (Author’s field diary). Uptake of this suggested strategy is clear to see in the practice of ecotage, as well as the realm of urban “subvertising”.

Dialogue is also occurring within EDA concerning how it can effectively monitor who is permitted onto a camp. Although in most cases an “open-door” policy is practised, in line with the tolerant and non-hierarchic organisational structure, in some cases activists have to prevent a few from undermining the overall purpose of the campaign. Such a case occurred at Ashton Court when a number of local homeless people were attracted to camp. In normal conditions the homeless were welcome, but in this case it was clear to all those active in this space that these individuals had no wish to consider, or contribute to, the activities on site, and were not open to evolving their political practice toward an ecocentric orientation. It was also considered that their presence would do little for the smooth functioning or public image of the camp, as their continual consumption of alcohol and
littering of the site threatened the space as a functioning entity. As a result, whilst these individuals were comatose, a decision was arrived at to eject them from site, and their bags and belongings were taken to their known haunt in town. The next day the individuals followed them voluntarily and did not return. The decision to eject these individuals was not arrived at through a formal meeting; a number of activists simply took their bags away. This incident is a useful example of how EDA dynamically develops in place, attempting to secure comparative advantage by sustaining the camp, but at once altering its “open door” policy for more stringent conditions. This incident also illustrates that EDA’s spatial practice is not simply one of resistance, but also in its way one of domination—coercing individuals into certain ways of behaviour (ie “You will behave ecocentrically!”), then imposing punishments if they fail to do so. Such a perspective reinforces the Foucauldian dyadic position where resistance and domination are fused together in every spatial practice (see above), whilst also illustrating how EDA’s actions can be at once both productive and repressive. This dyadic position better complements the notion of spatial dialogue as a continual struggle, with each set of actors using their opponents’ tactics to their own benefit wherever possible, dominating and resisting (dis)advantage everywhere and everywhen.

**Conclusion**

This paper has explored the style and substance of the spatial practices of EDA. It has argued that EDA is an imbroglio of premises, practices and identities that intertwine with places and modes of organisation to directly contest space and look to gain comparative advantage for “ecological” communities over “other” modes of societal organisation. As such EDA has entered into a struggle for political space with the State, particularly in the UK. This paper has argued that in this battle each party seeks to gain control of space for their own cultural vision. It has shown that EDA has employed its own rules of engagement to this end, openly contesting and conflicting with those of the State. As a result a dualistic relation can be configured between the two players, with EDA seen as “resisting” and the State “dominating”. In this scenario each player looks to exploit the opponent’s strategy, and both have been successful in doing so through the use of political ju-jitsu—using the momentum of their opponent to their own advantage. This paper has also shown that spatial practices be seen in dyadic relation, that is as both dominating and resisting (ie one act as “domination/resistance”), and that the strength of one practice can also be its weakness (ie one strategy as “strong/weak”). Using the example of EDA and the UK State, this paper has also highlighted that struggles over political space are never complete, wherever there is domination, there will always be resistance, and that the only achievable goal is
temporary comparative advantage. The political significance of EDA is that it has entered this ongoing geographic dialogue, and by using its own rules of engagement and cultural preferences has been able to continually reiterate its difference and contest its political power spatially.

Endnotes
1 As stated in the ‘Ashton Court [Anti] Quarry Campaign’ literature. This web-site is no longer active, for further information contact Bristol Friends of the Earth (http://www.joolz.demon.co.uk/contact.html).
2 As Bristol City Council’s own web-site states: “Breathe a sign of relief! … You have arrived at the wonderful world of Bristol’s Parks…. Most people in Bristol both young and old already escape to the parks to experience a natural environment that is green, spacious and provides an opportunity to get in touch with nature … so come and explore some of it with us!” (http://www.bristol-city.gov.uk).
3 The camp functioned as a site for the “mobilisation, validation and enlargement” of EDA, where its difference to the mainstream could be articulated, publicised and strengthened (after Gamson and Wolfsfield 1993).
4 As one activist at the A30 states, “The best thing about [the camps were] that the camps lasted for so long. The fact that we were there for two years, squatting Department of Transport land and having a right good laugh, doing whatever we bloody well felt like, I think is much more Up Yours and making much more of a statement. Day to day living a life of resistance …” (in Evans 1988:147).
5 It could be suggested that many activists create what Naess (1989) has called their own “Ecosophy”, with their chosen preferences and biases demarcating their ecosophy as “Ecosophy ‘X’, ‘Y’ or ‘Z’”.
6 EDA-ers’ tactical or philosophical relation with non-violence often correlates with their personal ecocentric understanding (Naess 1989; Scarce 1990).
7 An exception to this general rule involves the actions of “Ploughshares” activists. Here the law is often broken strategically, thoughtfully and deliberately and activists hold themselves accountable for their protests. An example of this occurred in January 1996 when a group of four women broke into a British Aerospace base in Warton, UK, attacking a Harrier Jet with hammers before decorating it with flowers. The Harrier was due to be sold to the Indonesian government to be used in the then alleged genocide in East Timor. The women committed £1.5 million worth of damage, but left video and written evidence at the scene to publicise their action. At a subsequent trial, they were found innocent of causing criminal damage.
8 See Evans’ account of the M11 eviction (1998:44), the evictions at Bangor in Wales (Warwick 1998), Merrick’s account of Newbury (1997), as well as anti-capital protests at Gothenburg and in Italy (Clark and Rose 1999; Dodson 2002; Taylor 2002).
9 As one activist puts it, “camps demand loyalty from those who defend them, spending time or resources on more offensive tactics (office occupations, site invasions, sabotage) can be seen as abandoning the camp, almost to the point of treason” (Do or Die 1999:155).

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