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Re-Framing Social Movements.
Margins, Meanings and Governance.

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Abstract

This paper addresses issues of the location, form and content of the ‘grass roots’ with reference to global social movement. The paper re-visits frame analytical approaches used in social movement studies and originally derived from Goffman’s work *Frame Analysis*. Through a consideration of Bateson’s work on framing it is argued that established uses of frame analysis require significant modification in order to address the role of movement cultures in pre-figuring and framing social and political change. In particular the micro-processes transforming individual frame to collective and master frames have been insufficiently explored.

It is argued that attention to these micro processes provide both an empirical means of addressing Melucci’s approach to the negotiation and consolidation of collective identity and a theoretical means of engaging with the process of movement capacity building. This process is termed reflexive framing and address key social, cultural and technological transformations accompanying globalisation that have major implications for frame analysis developed within the context of nationally defined political opportunity structures.

These points are illustrated by reference to qualitative data from an ESRC funded project on the Prague IMF/WB ‘anti-capitalist’ action in September 2000. The paper concludes by addressing the question of whether such movement capacity is inescapably ‘of the margins’ or can be incorporated within approaches to grass roots governance.

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Introduction

This paper addresses the relevance of frame analysis to the high profile episode of global social movement that has been dubbed ‘anti-capitalist’ and is typified by a number of dis-organisations. Theoretically the paper is informed by a reading of the original works underpinning social movement frame analysis and empirically by a study of the Prague

IMF/WB action that took place in September 2000. Frame analysis has become one of the key means of analytical engagement with new social movements. Pioneered by Snow et. al. (Snow, Rochford, Worden & Benford 1986) and developed extensively by Gamson (e.g. 1996), frame analysis draws centrally upon the work of the American interactionist sociologist Ervin Goffman (1974) who in turn was influenced by the British social anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1973/8). Within the social movement literature a primary objective of frame analysis has been the process of frame alignment by which individual interpretative schema become translated into collective ones through the work of Social Movement Organisations (SMOs) (Snow et. al. 1986:464). This schemata has generated a number of terms useful as descriptors (e.g. frame alignment) for processes by which SMOs establish and progress particular issues within prevailing political opportunity structures (POS). The tendency for these descriptors to become accepted as analytical categories has, we believe, confined frame analysis to addressing the evolution of comparatively durable movement agendas, or frames, represented by social movement organisations, many with full time employees.

The prescriptive language of social movement frame analysis emphasising the importance of frame alignment, frame resonance and so on has become the subject of a small but growing critical literature (e.g. Fischer 1997, Zirakzadeh 2000). This paper seeks to extend these critical reflections and argue that the global movement milieu is the site of a process we term ‘reflexive framing’ that is distinct from both Goffman’s and social movement literature uses. The advent of ‘reflexive framing’ marks the harnessing of new techniques facilitating the sense making capacity of individuals and collectivities in relation to strips of activity¹. Beyond this, reflexive framing represents a return to some of the central concerns of Bateson and Goffman that have been subordinated by the cognitive approach that has dominated social movement frame analysis. The dominance of such cognitive concerns has emphasised frames and framing processes regarded as originating in substantive forms of rationality that leave social movement frame analysis poorly placed to engage with the cultural and political significance of ‘affect’². This is particularly important in assessing the importance of cultural domains in relation to the political, ideological and discursive where existing approaches have tended to add culture to the analytical mix as another resource (e.g. Johnston &

¹ . ‘Strip of activity’ was Goffman’s way of identifying the object of frame analysis ‘The term “strip” will be used to refer to any arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of ongoing activity, including here sequences of happenings, real or fictive, as seen from the perspective of those subjectively involved in sustaining an interest in them. A strip is not meant to reflect a natural division made by the subjects of inquiry or an analytical division made by students who inquire; it will be used only to refer to any batch of occurrences (of whatever status in reality) that one wants to draw attention to as a starting point for analysis’ (Goffman 1974/86:10).

² . The emphasis on substantive rationality within the movement milieu can be understood as part of the necessary process of redressing previous associations with deviance and mental illness.

Klandermans, 1995). An important consequence of this is a dominant focus on social movements impacts in pursuit of rational grievances on and through substantive political processes and evidenced through mainstream media reportage (e.g. Kriesi et.al. 1995). As Zirakzadeh (2000:9) points out, Gamson warns against identifying a problem or grievance with a non-human force, like the international market, on the grounds that this intensifies a sense of powerlessness. We would argue that the targeting of neo-liberalism through key global institutions including the IMF, WTO, G8 and EU illustrates a movement capacity to simultaneously engage with capitalism as both highly abstract and institutionally specific.

Limits to Framing within Social Movement Literature

A primary limitation of the social movement literatures' use of framing is the assumption that all social movement activity is aligned towards the prevailing political opportunity structure in an attempt to introduce new grievance foci within existing forms of nationally constituted interest representation. This assumption is questioned on seven related grounds.

First, since the Seattle action 1999 the previously submerged, or latent, period of social movement engagement at the global level became apparent within the public sphere through mainstream media representations³. This decisive rejection of the influential 1980s environmentalist slogan 'Think Global: Act Local', that left the global level effectively unopposed and dominated by political and business institutions and a limited number of established SMOs' dating from the 1970s, represents a fundamental shift marking the elevation of the global as a site for an antagonistic engagement in Melucci's (1996) sense of the term.

Second, the global phase of social movement activity has been facilitated by a number of network actors that do not resemble SMOs typical of the 1970s and 1980s movement milieu. Groups such Earth First! (EF!) (Wall 1999) and Reclaim The Streets (RTS) (Jordan 1998) exist as networks and self classify as 'disorganisations' for example. There is thus a question of how applicable an analytical focus based on established SMOs can be in relation to such actors.

Third, political opportunity structure approaches emphasise action through existing 'strong channels' neglecting the significance of Granovetter's (1973) seminal paper '*The Strength of Weak Ties*'. Summarised somewhat brutally this paper argues that the diffusion of information across a society occurs most effectively through 'weak ties. . . between *different*

³ . By the summer of 1996 the aims and objectives of the 1999 Seattle action had been formalised and were a topic of network negotiation (Welsh 2000a).

small groups' (Granovetter 1973:1376), that networked word of mouth is central in moving people to act upon issues reported in mainstream media and in the attribution of trust to individuals in positions of leadership (1973:1374)⁴. Understood in this way apparently marginal actors assume a position of considerable transformatory potential within contemporary societies in a global age (see also Castelles 1996).

Fourth, that in a global world of more or less real time media coverage the 'symbolic multipliers' generated through such weak ties raise problems of legitimacy for established political leaders whom can no longer rely on actively shaping media agendas through tried and tested means such as the carefully selected and timed press release. Media demands for instantaneous comments from political figureheads represent a key part of the 'compulsory visibility' and the 'new and distinctive fragility' of political leaders noted by Thompson (1995:141 see also Chp. 3).

Fifth, that the use of frame analysis in the social movement literature has tended to emphasise the role of 'master frames' as central organising schema embodying the prevailing political opportunity structure and its ethos and towards which movement frames must be fine-tuned through a process of 'frame alignment'. These 'macro frames' thus represent the datum point around which movement actors framing actions revolve. We suggest that compared to this incremental fine tuning to achieve resonance with prevailing master frames attention to micro and meso level framing activities reveal both the potential of individual and movement actors frames to transform or displace master frames and create parallel political milieu outside conventionally understood political opportunity structures. Rather than long term, incremental progression towards enhanced alignment with a comparatively durable master frame we are suggesting that, in relation to the movement phenomenon studied here, framing is much more contingent, not necessarily directed towards POS, severely perturbates or disrupts established frames, resonates within movements and across sections of public sentiment rather than being fine tuned to achieve press and broadcast coverage as Gamson implies when he describes movement activists as 'media junkies' (1995:85).

Sixth, we are sympathetic to Fischer's' claims that despite the massive literature on framing and frame analysis there is no clear agreement about what a frame is, how a frame is identified, recognised or used (1997:2), that the boundary between frames and other elements

⁴ . According to Granovetter 'the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterise the tie'. (Granovetter 1973:1361). This is immediately redolent of the affective domain we are seeking to include within our approach to framing.

of discourse have become blurred (1997:5), that key scholars do not make plain how they analytically identify frames (1997:6) and that forms of textual analysis used by Gamson and Johnston do not necessarily reveal actors frames (1997:7-11).

Seventh, and more fundamentally we would argue that it is important to escape the ‘cage of text’ created by discourse and conversational analysis and which Goffman’s frame analysis preceded in order to access elements of framing – the making sense of a strip of activity by individuals – that are central to the translation of individual frames into small scale and then larger scale collective understandings or frames. Such sense making is dependent upon a variety of non-textual signs such as tone, rhythm, facial expression and so on that forms part of the process of reflexive framing.

In order to pursue this work it is vital to introduce the key elements of Bateson’s work on framing that has remained substantively ‘black-boxed within the movement literature and requires ‘unpacking’.

Bateson, Framing and Frames.

Despite Goffman's acknowledged debts to Bateson (e.g.1974/86:10) we are not aware of any detailed treatment of Bateson’s work within the social movement literature on framing. We believe that such an examination of Bateson's work reinserts the importance of an affective dimension to framing; underline the limits of text based approaches and represents an important intellectual resource for understanding and interpreting the work of both Goffman and Melucci (1996). For the sake of clarity we will draw all our comments on Bateson together here where space will force us to limit our treatment to elements central to this paper.

Bateson’s contribution to frame analysis arose from his life long pre-occupation with the question of how social change occurs and is possible against the need to secure social order. Bateson introduced the notion of ‘frame’ as a psychological process through which individuals situate themselves in relation to a range of phenomenon based on an engagement with a domain of ‘metacommunication’. Bateson’s use of frame is thus a means by which individuals make sense of their world by using an ‘outer frame’ that delimits ‘the ground against which’ interactions occur as a means of ‘avoiding the paradoxes of abstraction’. (Bateson 1973:161). In other words, individuals adopt a frame that results in the ‘bracketing out’ of enough ‘abstraction’ to leave them ontologically comfortable and able to operate and interact in a given situation⁵. *For our present purposes the important point is that individual’s*

⁵ Ontological security has been identified as an important basis for citizenship in a global age when a safe environment, cultural rights and ethnic identities are seen as replacing state centric measures of citizenship based on the worker citizen, warrior citizen and reproductive citizen (Turner 2001).

capacity to deal with abstraction varies widely. An adequate theory of framing must thus address a range of levels of abstraction both theoretically and empirically

Applying Frames at Home

Bateson was amongst the first anthropologists to argue for the importance of applying anthropological techniques ‘at home’, recognising that the analytical importance of culture, cultural codes, practices and customs are not confined to the ‘foreign’. An important part of this need arose from the danger of ‘habits of mind’ (Bateson’s term for a paradigm) blunting social, political and policy ‘flexibility’ in the face of changed circumstances, particularly those posed by the environmental challenges, such as climate change, which was becoming evident in the early 1970s. Bateson identified the dominance of: us *against* the environment, other men; the primacy of the sub-global actors (e.g. me, my firm, my nation etc), control over the environment; perpetual belief in the frontier mentality, economic determinism and reliance on technology as key elements of the habit of mind to be avoided (Bateson 1973/78:468)⁶. Bateson considered this dominant habit of mind so dangerous as to threaten the future of human civilisation. Against this Bateson advocated an ‘ecological habit of mind’ based in the acceptance of a universal human subject interacting with both social and natural realms⁷, arguing ‘that we should trust no policy decisions which emanate from persons who do not yet have that habit’ (Bateson 1973/78:437). Bateson's postulated *Ecology of Mind* is complex and this complexity has no doubt contributed to the paucity of commentary upon his thinking within the social movement literature. Another factor here, is the sense that many of the emergent processes addressed by Bateson have taken twenty to thirty years to begin to take on recognisable material forms and expressions.

Bateson builds a model of human behaviour far more complex than rational actor models by melding cognitive capacities and process within the affective domain such as emotion. In so doing he argues that the signs and symbols associated with formal rationality are cultural criteria selected on the basis of affective aesthetic preferences. He thus warns against accepting the formal logic of **any** culture or civilisation as expressed in ‘hard laws’ too readily, noting the risk of such laws ossifying past frames and preferences which may have become threatening. This argument is advanced through a consideration of behavioural science which Bateson saw as setting out to find equivalent concepts to those used in the

⁶ G. W. Bush’s assertion of the sanctity of ‘the American way of life’ and ‘America’s economic interest’ as grounds for not ratifying the Kyoto climate change protocols stands out as one particularly clear example of a decision embodying this ‘habit of mind’. The need to avoid such mindsets within contemporary environmental education is particularly important (see Orr 1999)

physical sciences such as mass and length. Against this he argues for a model within which energy plays a central part in determining human behaviour. Energy is used in a variety of senses by Bateson from notions of metabolism (1973/78:28) to more emotional states of being that become patterned through culture and represent ‘the emotional setting of all the details of behaviour’, the affective domain is thus perceived as central to ‘satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the individuals’ in a group (1973/78:39). Collectively this gives rise to an ethos ‘*a culturally standardized system of organization of the instincts and emotions of the individuals*’, (1973/78:81)⁸.

Understanding how changes in the prevailing ethos occur in a cybernetic system became one of Bateson’s lifelong challenges. He is in no doubt that ‘a sense of individual autonomy, a habit of mind somehow related to what I have called *free will*, is an essential of democracy’ (1973/78:138)⁹. Individual autonomy and free will become aggregated as collective actors through culture that is vitally constituted through acts of communication that enable the creation of shared meaning and solidarity. Bateson emphasises the increasing sophistication of human communication that subordinates responses to hard-wired, chemical messengers (such a pheromones) to the socially selected ‘mood signs of another’ (such as perfume). Individuals become aware of such communicative signs as a signal ‘which can be trusted, distrusted, falsified, denied, amplified, corrected and so forth’. (1973/78:151) thus outlining the basis for Goffman's subsequent notions of the keying and reeking of such signs within strips of activity. It is the notion of communication that requires attention for our present purposes, however.

Bateson’s emphasises the range of communicative means at human disposal and the variability within each means. There are a number of modes of verbal communication that portray more than the same string rendered as text for example. Communication thus becomes a multilayered activity that communicates both substantive rational meaning and affect. Tone of voice, pace of delivery, rhythm, accompanying facial expression and so on are vital components of the communicative process shaping behavioural responses by stimulating energy. Word and text apart he recognised that ‘our iconic communication serves functions totally different from those of language and, indeed, performs functions which verbal

⁷ This is redolent of the notion of a ‘self’ and a ‘Self’ introduced by the deep green philosopher Arnie Naess (19) and performs similar work by positing a human capacity to perceive both social and natural domains whilst recognising the inescapable interdependence of these realms.

⁸ . Bateson’s approach to framing thus extended to a societal level through a consideration acts of communication achieving forms of consciousness. By contrast Goffman asserts his intention not to address social processes and structural domains by applying frame analysis to the individual and regarding it as a ubiquitous practice within social interaction.

⁹ . This distinction is analogous to the one drawn by Touraine between an individual and an actor (Touraine 1995).

language is unsuited to perform’, commenting that ‘The logician’s dream that men should communicate only by unambiguous digital signals has not come true and is not likely to’ (1973/78:388). Given the centrality of communication to individuals framing it thus follows that *an adequate theory and empirical means of investigating framing cannot rely on textual sources alone*¹⁰ and must endeavour to engage with the multi-layered nature of the framing process as it occurs in relation to particular strips of activity

Finally, Bateson argues, via Kant, that the primary ‘aesthetic act is the selection of a fact’ (1973/78:456) which he combines with insights drawn from Jung to argue that ‘difference’, the recognition of which is vital to the identification of fact, ‘is an idea’ (1973/78:457). Difference, the ability to communicate difference, to recognise and respond to difference, become crucial to the establishment and healthy maintenance of homeostatic systems for Bateson¹¹. Bateson’s preoccupation with this complex terrain arises from his scepticism of political, administrative and economic elites with immensely powerful technologies and techniques at their disposal to recognise and optimise the systemic collective interest due to their pre-occupation with entrenched ‘facts’ (e.g. the primacy of economic growth) selected on the basis of now inappropriate preferences. He illustrates this by pointing out that the deeply sedimented notion of the survival of the fittest, complete with its implicit separation between organism and eco-system, continues to prevail despite the obvious wisdom that to survive the fittest organism must also secure the continuity of an appropriate environment. He writes ‘The unit of survival is *organism plus environment*. We are learning by bitter experience that the organism which destroys its environment destroys itself’ (1973/78:459).

Bateson’s take on framing then, is a wide-ranging and systemic one that relates to both individual processes of psychological framing and the collective consequences of these frames that select certain differences as categories of fact that structure human activity on the basis of both cognitive and affective processes. His commitment to anthropology at home lead him to identify the importance of groups with distinct (sub)cultural identities as bearers of ‘an ecology of mind’ capable of recognising and reconnecting feedback loops necessary to break the negative impacts of the ‘habits of mind’ so dominant within the prevailing political opportunity structure. His limited prescriptive thoughts in this area included holistic philosophies eschewing the dualism between ‘man’ and nature and the actions of sections of

¹⁰ . This is particularly important as a redress to the very strong claims that have been made within the social movement literature based entirely on the analysis of newspaper clippings as if this represent the entirety of the movement domain.

¹¹ . These elements of Bateson’s work represent particularly coherent expressions of themes that later become formalised through Lyotard’s notion of the differend (Lyotard 1983), the increasing importance of autopoiesis argued by Luhmann, and the importance of aesthetics in relation to reflexive modernisation (Lash 1994, Jowers, 1994, Welsh 2000).

the then contemporary youth engaged in protest against the Vietnam war, amongst other things. Areas where Bateson is substantially silent include the question of how groups communicating important messages promoting flexibility can be recognised and their 'signal' differentiated from the background noise. It is in this sense that we seek to develop an 'ecology of action' to compliment Bateson's 'ecology of mind'. For our present purposes then we will use Bateson's work as recounted here to concentrate upon a frame as:

1. an individual's means of making sense of a particular strip of activity by establishing a level of abstraction that leaves them ontologically comfortable and able to be an actor in a given situation.
2. a sense making device that can be communicated through a variety of human expressive media.
3. that can only be fully comprehended by exposure to the relevant range of communicative signals.
4. the basis of forms of social solidarity.

We now turn to explore the implications of our reading of Bateson for Goffman's development of frame analysis.

Goffman, Frame Analysis and Movements

Goffman's *Frame Analysis* is the subjects of a formidable secondary literature (see for example Burns1992, Ditton1980, Drew & Wootton1988) The marked disparity between social movement analysts' uses of frame and those of Goffman have been outlined by Zirakzadeh (2000) who emphasises Goffman's insistence on the ubiquitous nature of frames, framing processes and the capacity of all citizens to frame events. After acknowledging Bateson, Goffman denotes frame as 'definitions of a situation' being built up 'in accordance with principles of organization - at least social ones - and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify.' (Goffman 1974 10-11). Frame analysis is 'a slogan to refer to the examination in these terms of the organization of experience.' (Ibid). It is worth dwelling on what is subsumed under the words 'as I am able to identify' as a way of making some general points relevant to the remainder of the paper here.

Goffman's recognition that his ability to identify frame is inevitably partial and limited is evidence of a certain reflexivity vis a vis the academic and their research material and

practice. Beyond this it is worth reflecting upon some of the limits on Goffman's ability to identify elements of the framing process, particularly those which have come about through new developments and techniques. Goffman's text is typified by the use of the unthinking collective that globalisation, if not Foucauldian sensitivity, has done much to banish. Goffman writes unproblematically of 'our society' and 'we' whilst simultaneously recognising that multiple meanings and competing retrospective characterizations of particular strips of activity are commonplace. One consequence flowing from this observation is the inescapable tension between the apparently durable social conventions surrounding touch, nudity and performance (Goffman 1974:31-38) and the creative ability of individuals to actively move from one frame to another – a process dubbed keying and re-keying. Frame analysis thus becomes one way of assessing the relative power of actors to frame events by reading a prevailing set of 'motivational forces, and through the use of certain 'extreme measures' disrupt them. For Goffman the ability, 'to alter this balance sharply at will is to exert power: that is one meaning of the term.' (Goffman 1974:447).

We will suggest that rather than a 'Battle of the Brands' (Klein 2000) the anti-capitalist movement embarked upon a 'Siege of the Signs' in 1996 by setting out to discredit the master-frames of the neo-liberal geo-political economic order through the use of symbolic legitimation stripping activities harnessed to the deployment of symbolic multipliers. Whilst *part* of this strategy was based on gaining access to main stream media to discredit key institutions of neo-liberal globalisation in the public arena it would be a mistake to focus on this as the entire modus operandi of the movement¹². Another important feature of this movement is the way in which it underlines the point that once a direct action phase is underway the initiating social movement organisations effectively lose any control they may have once had over events (Welsh 2000). Core movement intellectual, entrepreneurs remain important but their capacity to shape movement frames, agendas and repertoires of action become much more attenuated. Newcomers to the movement milieu can exercise profound influences *without* becoming central actors within movement organisations. In this way the strength of weak ties become central to rapid processes of innovation that reconfigure the historically sedimented repertoires noted by Tarrow (1994)¹³. By paying careful attention to multi-layered qualitative data we can begin to demonstrate how individual frames and

¹² An e-mail from July 1996 detailed a multi point programme including educational, research, out reach work in the Southern hemisphere and global network meetings to develop the strategy initially sketched in NW Europe and America. Importantly direct action was an intentional tactic from the beginning rather than the tactic of 'last resort' associated with failure in sections of the social movement literature.

¹³ These new forms arise amidst sedimented traditions. On the streets of Prague for example there was ample evidence of national repertoires being acted out e.g. the North American tradition of sitting down and chanting sometimes in inappropriate contexts.

framing start to be aggregate into a group frame and ultimately a collective frame. Perhaps more importantly we can demonstrate that this process is not one dominated by established movement entrepreneurs or intellectuals but one in which recent arrivals with very little movement exposure can contribute to significantly.

In our account of the Siege of the Signs we will emphasise elements of Goffman's work on frame analysis that have been substantively neglected within the movement literature. In particular we would emphasise his widely acknowledged use of dramaturgical analogy, best known through the notion of front and back stage performance and the associated idea that the spectator or audience is affected by a strip of activity and are not a passive, untouched observer.

Goffman's *Frame Analysis* contains an extraordinary wide range of examples of frames, framing processes and conventions drawn from a range of sources including inter alia newspaper stories, literary genres, film, radio and stage. Frame Analysis thus melds a number of expressive forms that have subsequently become subjects of 'discourse and conversational analysis' that analyse them all as 'text' irrespective of the very different modes¹⁴.

Goffman emphasises the inevitability of all witnesses to a strip of activity becoming 'deeply involved' through a process of immersion. This reliance on 'frame immersion' implies that the actor is submerged in a timeless state of total absorption rendering the process atemporal. Reflexive framing demonstrates how actors associated with the strip of activity constituted by the Prague IMF/WB action carry multiple frames engaging in a wide range of pre and post-event framing activities relating to Melucci's insight that 'movement are media' (Melucci 1996:36, Atton 1998, 1999).

Media and Frames

The prevailing level of media technology represented one limitation on Goffman's development of frame analysis. At the time, the mass broadcast age was at its height and the limitations on live outside broadcasts were formidable (Thompson 1995). The subsequent spread of video and digital recording equipment has revolutionised this situation producing both the proliferation of television channels and a massive increase in surveillance. The parallel communications revolution has begun to integrate these visual media through satellite based systems making 'real time live' coverage something of a network broadcasting gold

¹⁴ . This produces complex methodological issues. Not least of these are issues of coding and data analysis. The increasing use of 'virtual ethnography' (Dicks & Mason 1998) Video diaries (Threadgold 2000), and the need perform 'inter-textual' analyses (Kress 1998) has begun the process of innovation, development and refinement that this paper contributes to.

standard. For our present purposes this ensemble of technologies and techniques have a profound impact upon the ability of a networked individual to make sense of strips of activity that have been intensively 'recorded'.

Recorded Milieu, Framing and Reflexive Subjects

Particular sites of conflict and contestation by the anti-capitalism movement have become increasingly recorded milieu in the obvious sense that they have become a primary focus for state and international intelligence agencies¹⁵. This is a process that has been in train since the collapse of the cold war in the UK with MI5 being one of the first stage agencies to officially include social movement groups (other than CND) as part of its remit¹⁶. This typically includes covert intelligence gathering and heightened monitoring of communications.

In terms of an engaged individuals ability to make sense of the strip of action the recorded milieu also operates in the opposite sense. The capacity to record then individually or collectively, watch, re-watch and interrogate a strip of activity has typically been the privilege of the policing and surveillance organs of the state. The widespread use of recording media by activists' results in a number of forms of individual and collective reflexivity through the viewing, re-viewing and discussing recorded material. The 'objects' of reflection in this process range from personal life narratives to strategy and tactics. In Goffman's terms, the potential for 'multiple channel effects' (Goffman 1974/86:146-7) to be incorporated within a particular understanding of a particular strip of activity is amplified by the new technical means at the disposal of individuals within the activist milieu. The framing process becomes much more sophisticated and, we would suggest, differentiates between a number of frames operating simultaneously within a particular site, often at very different levels of abstraction. In terms of the understanding of and meaning attributed to an event by a vital consequence is the intensification of both 'a shared' identity and awareness of the specificity of the multiple identities that constitute the shared or 'movement' identity. This consciousness is illustrated neatly by the slogan 'Unity in Diversity'¹⁷, a frame which performs a wide range of 'work' within the movement milieu, including the facilitation of solidaristic sentiments.

¹⁵ . Surveillance gives rise to briefings such as the Canadian Security Intelligence Service report 2000/08 *Anti-Globalization – A Spreading Phenomenon* (downloaded from http://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca/eng/miscdocs/200008_e.html). These are widely distributed and read through social movement networks. Such intelligence relies heavily on mediated sources. Of the nineteen endnotes supporting the document detailed here 15 were from a range of newspaper and broadcast sources, 3 were references to Naomi Klein (2000) and one from a law centre intelligence report.

¹⁶ Geographical sites are subject to intense video and stills image capture. In London on May Day 2001 the Metropolitan Police 'kettled' protestors in Oxford Circus before photographing and identified each one by name and address as they were allowed to leave. Wider surveillance is intensified in the period prior to an event and in the aftermath.

¹⁷ . Interview, Subject 'B', March 2001.

Researching the Anti-Capitalist Milieu

We will now present a concise account of the empirical and methodological implications of an approach to the framing processes of activists involved in what has become widely known as the ‘anti-capitalist movement’¹⁸. One reason for the widespread use of notions of frame and framing is the term’s potential to bridge the micro – macro divide that has dominated social sciences since the second half of the 20th century. The micro macro / structure agency divides require an effective account of meso level processes that constitute social forces in an era of accelerating capitalist globalisation. Whether such meso forces are constituted through the creation of enduring social movement organisations (strong ties in Granovetter’s terms) or the consolidation of new social actors through the negotiation and consolidation of collective identities (weak ties) remains one of the central tensions of the social movement literature (e.g. Melucci 1996). In what follows we argue that the separation between core movement participants and general publics may be less clear cut than has been assumed. In other words some variant of Tarrow’s (1994, 1996) postulated ‘movement society’ is emerging.

The Research Process

The research involved the gathering of video and photographic data during the Prague action in September 2000. Following Holy (1996) one objective was to record street slogans, chants and graffiti, another was assembling conversational interview data on the streets. Researchers attended the ‘convergence centre’, accompanied one element of the march gaining video and still coverage of both process and conflict during interactions with Czech police and security forces. This front end was followed up by open ended interviews with key participants from the UK, Czech Republic and the USA. The interviews varied in length with language and cultural differences inevitably resulting in marked differences between Czech and anglophile transcripts. Tapes were transcribed verbatim and coded independently by two of the researchers using a tripartite classificatory schema outlined below. These codings were then merged to produce a long list of frames intended to represent as definitive an account of actors’ interpretive repertoires as possible. Initial interviews were gained through researchers existing contact networks within groups such as UK Earth First! and Reclaim The Streets with the intention of conducting an interview within each of the prominent collective participants in the Prague event. The primary objective was to assess the pre, event and post-event frames of these individuals. Inevitably the research process raised issues not initially foreseen and the more compelling of these lead to a limited number of further interviews.

¹⁸ During the Genoa conflict in July 2001 the term ‘anti-globalisation movement’ was also used by sections of the mainstream media.

The interviewing process also gained us access to video material shot by actors covering the pre, event and post-event period. This proved a particularly valuable resource in that it enabled a degree of triangulation between interview accounts and events as well as providing multiple video takes on key 'strips of activity' within the event itself. The interrogation of this material was an extremely time consuming but rich process from which emerged the tripartite approach to 'reflexive frame analysis' advanced below.

In academic terms these three levels can be referred to as ontological, epistemological and aesthetic. These terms relate broadly to the established categories of meta, meso and micro that already have currency within the nsm literature. In order to avoid possible misunderstandings we will delineate our use here before contrasting it with some established formulations.

Meta frame we take a meta frame to be an individuals' level of abstraction enabling them to assume the position of an engaged actor within a strip of activity. In this case we take the strip of activity to be the ensemble of social interactions that defined Prague as a site of movement conflict, defined the nature of that conflict and interpreted the significance of that conflict. Individuals meta frames shape the perception and selection of 'facts' that become the basis for 'rational' negotiation. An example of a meta frame from within our interview data would be the widespread invocation of universal humanism as an explanatory device for certain kinds of behaviour and action. This use of meta frame is thus quite distinct from notions of meta frame referring to POS *as if* this highest institutional level orientates individuals' action frames.

Meso frame we take a meso frame to be an individual's perception of relevant institutional, organisational and processual features occurring within a strip of activity. In Goffman's terms this relates to the process of and capacity for keying and rekeying. Meso frames include many elements currently incorporated under notions of political opportunity structures, action repertoires and so on.

Micro frame this we take to be an individuals' awareness of affect, the quality and or intensity of feeling evoked within a particular strip of activity. Micro frames thus relate most directly to an emotional life world where identity and meaning are negotiated and sedimented through experience that is a product of both abstraction and practice. Respondents' micro frames included fear, elation, and despair.

Relations Between Frames

Our interview data suggests that meta frames do not establish an overarching set of meanings that orchestrate other levels of framing at all times. We would suggest that the framing

process can also be driven from the micro level up. Understood in this way the meso level, relating broadly with conventional use of POS, is in effect sandwiched between competing pressures from both meta and micro levels. In Bateson's terms there is competition between appeals to universals such as humanism and intensely experienced individual affects. Such competition is vital to maintain flexibility and prevent ossification. What is important for our present purposes is that the active negotiation of meta and micro frames by individual actors to arrive at collective meanings is absolutely central to this process. We would emphasise that there is an internal process of movement consolidation here that parallels the orientation of a movement towards its' declared adversary. The majority of academic effort has focussed upon the latter, frequently through the use of secondary sources such as press reports (e.g. Kreise et. al. 1995). Here we are focussing primarily upon the former using direct observation and qualitative techniques that give access to levels of meaning simply precluded by reliance on more mediated data. Through this work it is possible to elaborate the processes and relations underpinning Melucci's work on movements.

Melucci Planetary Action Frames

Melucci's *Challenging Codes* makes one reference to Bateson (1996:394) to underline the point that scientific facts reflect aesthetic preferences and processes. Beyond this citation it is possible to identify a number of shared analytical concerns particularly their mutual emphases on communication, identity (p. 186), complex systems, feedback loops, flexibility (institutional, political and individual) (p.37) and transformative energies (p.211). Compared to his earlier *Nomads of the Present* (1989) his 1996 work shows some marked shifts to accommodate critics. There is, for example, a marked emphasis on the need to create durable social movement organisations compared to his previous emphasis on movements occupying the margins. For our present purposes this results in a degree of ambiguity through the simultaneous prioritisation of a social and cultural domain that is *prior to* formal political process and institutions (1996:187)¹⁹ and the building of movement organisations capable of intervening within the formal political sphere.

Melucci, Communication and Movement Consciousness There is a certain intensity of experience involved in participating in direct action milieu. Melucci stands out as the sole major theorist of social movements to recognise the central importance of emotional investment within such movements. In the terms of this paper 'affective communication' is

¹⁹ This point is frequently misunderstood. Melucci recognises that by the time an issue has been raised onto a mainstream political agenda 'a certain reduction of the multidimensionality of the issue,' (1996:187) has already taken place. Bateson's' terms issues have been translated into a form recognisable by the 'habit of mind' sedimented within the political opportunity structure.

vital to an effective direct action movement. Trust and solidarity is built around not just verbal exchanges but the myriad affective exchanges expressed through facial expressions, extent of pupil dilation, tone and rhythm of voice amongst other things. This ‘vocabulary’ of trust and solidarity gives rise to a particular movement consciousness that is not, in terms of the post-structuralist canon, entirely ‘shaped like a language’²⁰. The anti-capitalist movements’ reliance on direct action prioritises the active negotiation and communication of trust relations through proximate facework exchanges in pursuit of a movement goal and the extension of a movement milieu dedicated to contesting core institutions of the neo-liberal global project²¹. The expenditure of emotional energy within this domain is quite distinct from the expenditure of emotional energy within the negotiating forums inhabited by members of formal social movement organisations at a global level.

Since the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 such representatives of ‘the’ environmental movement have expended their energy agreeing the ‘text’ of the various treaties²² within this formal arena. This involves the expenditure of similar energies but the primary objective is an agreed text. Lest we be misunderstood here this in no way demeans the importance of these efforts which are a vital part of reconfiguring the formal political agenda and have been central in elevating issues of governmentality and governance and the role of civil society in a global era. The important distinction for our present purposes is that the movement dubbed anti capitalist constitutes a vital ‘outside’ expressing, often in a semi formalised even inchoate manner, interests and issues not represented within such forums. In Melucci’s terms this is a vital part of ‘declaring the stakes’ to society and defining ‘planetary action frames’.

In this sense the ‘anti-capitalist movement’ is an ‘antagonistic movement’ engaged in a conflict that is simultaneously defining and challenging ‘symbolic stakes’ as well as the ‘production of society’s resources’ the way they ‘are produced’, the ‘goals of social production and the direction of development as such’ (Melucci 1996:35). In Bateson’s terms such conflict is necessary to redefine the prevailing ‘gestalt’, to stimulate flexibility. As Melucci notes the natural tendency of ‘dominant groups’ is to ‘deny the existence’ of such conflicts (Ibid) an insight that does much to explain the dominance of images of violence associated with this movement²³ and politicians insistence that the choice facing society is between elected representatives and an unaccountable, violent anarchist minority. The

²⁰ This is of course Lacan’s term.

²¹ The inclusion of elements of the labour movement reflects this commitment to extension

²² The majority of these treaties are in effect subordinate to the institutions of global neo-liberalism, such as the WTO, that the anti-globalisation movement contests.

²³ Events in Genoa in July 2001 have complicated this characterisation at least in terms of UK print media where despite the high profile coverage of violence have also elaborated *in extensis* the wider

tendency for prominent figures such as British PM Tony Blair to resort to such stark polarisations reflects the vulnerability of politicians when confronted by mediated symbolic stakes over which they have little or no control.

In terms of Thompson's definition of 'symbolic power' the anti-capitalist movement has demonstrated the 'capacity to intervene in the course of events, to influence the actions of others and indeed create events by means of the production and transmission of symbolic forms' (Thompson 1995:17). Arguably this has contributed to the 'new and distinctive kind of *fragility*' imposed on politicians by the 'compulsory presentation of self' to 'distant others whose allegiance must be constantly nourished' (Thompson 1995:137-141). Melucci is thus correct to argue that movement are media, and particularly important media when they act as symbolic multipliers. The centrality of the media to the consolidation of nationalism and the nation state is widely acknowledged (Anderson 199), and one can arguably suggest that the opposite process is underway in the early twenty-first century.

Symbolic Resources and Antagonistic Movements

The notion of antagonistic movement developed by Melucci simultaneously contests both material and symbolic relations. Just as limited technologies constrained Goffman's ability to engage with a strip of action social movements have hitherto been dependent upon mainstream media for the production of symbolic resources. The advent of digital techniques and the invention of Indy Media, an un-censored movement media accessible via the internet, have done much to reduce movements' reliance on mainstream output. The importance of such independent media is underlined by the consistent targeting of these movement resources by state police and military agencies (Welsh 1997)²⁴. Such media also represent an important part of the enhanced capacity for symbolic production within and across societies. The increasing interplay between mainstream media and elements of the Indy Media milieu represents a major turn, particularly in the broadsheet print media. Not only are major stories based on milieu sources but the URLs of significant sites are reproduced, providing a gateway for readers to access further material²⁵.

The publication of these symbols of sites of resistance during the pre-event phase of a mobilisation flies in the face of previous American custom and practice which precluded the

issues of governance raised. As one interviewee commented UK press coverage of events involving violence that takes place outside this country are generally more reflective.

²⁴ The violent Italian police action against the Indy Media office in Genoa serves to underline this point.

²⁵ . Some indication of the scale of dissemination achieved by such means can be gained from Seattle where the independent media centre was 'getting a million and a half hits during the week of the WTO protests' dwarfing 'even CNN' (Sellers 2001:83)

publication of parade routes for instance (Shudson). The primacy of information as a resource and notions of freedom to information as a universal characteristic of contemporary advanced societies thus becomes part of a generalised domain of contestation as state actors seek to monitor electronic means of communication that have become almost ubiquitous. The invasion of the private sphere becomes more complete rendering power more visible to more people and reinforcing the importance of face-to-face relations as a basis for trust.

Margins, Meanings and Governance

One of the first responses to the emergence of the anti capitalist movement in Seattle came from the then US President Bill Clinton. In his view there was a need for the protestors to be invited inside so that their views could be incorporated. This inclusionary stance reflects the general tendency to align movement actors *with* the prevailing political opportunity structure, existing institutional forums and agendas. Whilst this *may* be a valid role for established social movement organisations it is our argument that such organisations represent particular issue foci but not the constitutive cultural domain that give movements ‘social force’ contributing to a process of movement ‘capacity building’ (Welsh 2000).

To paraphrase Marx there is a need to differentiate between movements in themselves and movements for themselves. Given the prevailing and widespread assumption that governance initiatives are required to re-engage publics with established political processes through a range of participatory practices, increased transparency and more open institutions this argument assumes a position of some importance given the argument presented here. In Bateson’s terms *if* existing political opportunity structures and institutions are suffused with a habit of mind that lacks the flexibility needed to respond to the fundamental changes associated with the environmental, economic and social impacts of globalisation these innovations, welcome as they are, remain part of the problem.

This is a stark statement but one offered as a means of directing attention towards a process clearly evident in the interview data gathered during our research into the Prague action. At the level of global social movement, core activists were quite clear that the highly visible conflictual engagements at selected venues represented but one small part of a much more complex process of networking resulting in shared identities and meanings. These initiatives go back at least as far as 1996 and represent a parallel domain that is invisible through media based approaches. The networking involved spans several continents forging links between apparently disparate groups. The better know connections include those between the

Zapatistas and environmental and social justice groups from a range of other countries²⁶. Other significant network linkages include those with the Indian sub-continent where Vandana Shiva is particularly prominent²⁷. There is a conscious attempt to include the ‘Global South’ and give voice to groups and issues frequently silenced within debates structured around substantive forms of rationality (McKechnie and Welsh 2001). The founding of the Peoples Global Alliance (PGA) represents a global network facilitating the spread of ‘weak ties’ between apparently disparate groups and interests constituting ‘frames’ that resonate weakly, if at all, with established ‘master frames’.

In particular there are strong expressions of autonomy, participatory democratic forms, respect for and promotion of diversity and the primacy of the local decisional forums. These are familiar themes in the critique of forms of development based on monocultures backed by market forces neatly illustrated through the agricultural use of genetically modified organisms in both the developing and developed worlds (Welsh 1999, Purdue 2000). These are key elements of the democratic deficit that underpins contemporary debates on citizenship and governance.

In terms of Melucci’s category of antagonistic movement, contesting both symbolic and material stakes relating to the production of society’s resources, there is a simultaneous attack on the legitimacy of key political institutions and processes combined with a critique of prevailing forces and relations of production. Given the complexity of this terrain there is, not surprisingly, a range of stances resulting in significant tensions within the ‘anti-capitalist’ movement. Our initial data analysis suggests that one key divide here is between actors emphasising an environmental or ecological ‘frame’ such as Earth First!²⁸ and actors emphasising a social and or political ‘frame’ such the Italian group Ya Basta. The notion of ‘unity in diversity’ is a key movement frame that promotes a ‘common identity’ and sense of meaning in the face of this and other differences.

What has been dubbed an ‘anti-capitalist’ or ‘anti-globalisation’ movement is both less and more than either of these unifying titles suggest. The movement is less in the sense that not all the constituent actors would reject all elements of capitalism or globalisation whilst articulating hostility towards neo-liberal free market variants. The movement is more in the sense that other elements reject participation in established forums preferring to build parallel

²⁶ Interview, subject ‘B’ March 2001.

²⁷ Interview subject ‘D’.

capacity within autonomous zones that have been theorised as both temporary (Bey 1996) and permanent (Purkiss 2001). It is our contention that it is precisely in such zones that reflexive framing addressing cultural and symbolic resources as they relate to productive material practices takes place.

Within cultural and media studies it is accepted that issues raising complex stakes for societies are frequently addressed through humour as an initial means of 'safe' engagement. The interview data generated by this project is rich in statements referring to the importance of play and performance as expressive means through which complex stakes can be addressed in ways that communicate across cultural and linguistic barriers. Significantly these statements are made in a variety of modes ranging from those making explicit intellectual links back to Dadaism and the Situationist International to autobiographical insights. In the strongest case autobiographical micro interpretations produced highly significant innovations in terms of both movement repertoires and 'frames' giving rise to 'Tactical Frivolity' as a significant movement identity and strategy (see Chesters 2001). In this case newcomers to the 'anti-capitalist' movement produced a significant 'frame', drawing heavily upon micro influences that went on to become a collective focus within the movement and a major focus of external media attention. In terms of internal movement dynamics this particular emphasis on non-violent confrontational forms represents an area of ongoing importance and discussion (see *Do Or Die*, Issue Nine, 2000).

This is an example of the complex cultural coding of issues that Melucci sees as being stripped away prior to entry into the formal political arena. The case of Tactical Frivolity relates centrally to a confrontational way of being that confounds prevailing norms and practices within protest zones and recognises the impact of the resulting imagery upon audiences. By juxtaposing 'pink fairies' and Kevlar clad riot police a contrast is achieved that profoundly challenges the acceptability of state policing practices. It is but one indication of a much more diverse process.

Another area relates to freedom of choice as an expression of both positive (freedom to) and negative (freedom from) rights. In this sense movement members desire a range of negative freedoms that are seen as denied by the combined actions of the political and economic domains and where prevailing political opportunity structures are seen as contaminated by the habit of mind condemned by Bateson.

²⁸. Whilst linking Earth First! with the environmental and ecological this is not to exclude the groups' links with the organised labour movement which some EF! members see as a more 'natural' ally than 'greens'.

Ecological Contestation Frames

A longstanding EF! 'frame' has been freedom from the tyranny of the car (McLeish & Welsh 1996). This is an area where the dominance of petro-chemical and automotive multi-national capital is perceived as contributing to the failure to produce any significant reduction in car use or the contribution of the transport sector to greenhouse gas emissions. In political cultures where the freedom of the open road became idiomatic of liberal democracy political parties have been reluctant to act for fear of an electoral backlash seen as pre-figured by the 'fuel protest' social movement in the UK (Bagguely 2000). The response of car manufacturers, such as Ford UK (on Ford see Luke 2000), has been investment in a new generation of diesel engines despite the fact that the majority of transport induced deaths occur due to particulates from diesel engines. What is significant here is the ready mobilisation of movements and counter movements around an issue that only a few decades ago would have remained within the confines offered by the prevailing political opportunity structure – in this case in the UK the Public Inquiry. The readiness of a diverse range of citizens to have recourse to movement mobilisation reflects the arrival Tarrow's movement society. We would suggest that in part this is a reflection of the spread of certain movement sensibilities outside the movement milieu in ways that are ideologically problematic.

Social Contestation Frames

Whilst EF! have been presented as a predominantly ecologically orientated movement actor the Italian group Ya Basta have a much more clearly social orientation. Ya Basta's praxis includes the application of symmetry to elements of neo-liberal ideology as a means of applying them in other contexts in the pursuit of other ends. One key example of this is Ya Basta's appropriation of the neo-liberal doctrine of freedom of movement for capital and goods and it's symmetrical extension to freedom of movement for people (as labour or otherwise). As there can be no national barriers to free trade so there can be no national barrier constraining the free passage of human subjects.

A more fundamental reinterpretation of neo-liberal doctrine is used to critique the whole development paradigm promoted by the WB / WTO / IMF nexus. Hayek famously declared the sanctity of individual choice against all forms of central planning in *The Road to Serfdom*. The argument has been central to the assault on public services the world over. The assertion of indigenous peoples rights to choose not to have centrally planned systems of production, ownership and exchange imposed upon them by external agencies represents a logical extension of this position. The centrally planned agendas of the national and international government funded GM laboratories gives way to the globally co-ordinated marketing strategies of MNC.

The tendency to address debates such as GM in terms of rational categories such as improved yields, better food values, risk and so on diverts attention away from the more basic issues of freedom of choice. Adoption of GM crops means the elimination of non-GM varieties through cross-pollination for example and the associated intellectual property rights regimes favour Multi National Corporations at the expense of indigenous peoples (Purdue 2000).

This is another example of Melucci's culturally defined 'multidimensionality' (see fn. 17) applied to material production that is stripped out, or marginalized, by the time the issue is raised within mainstream political agendas. Further, we would suggest that there is a generic tendency for the question of grass roots governance over 'the production of society's resources' to be excluded through putatively objective debates about efficiency and risk addressed through a discourse of progress and modernisation. The widely perceived association between governmental and corporate interests in this area detracts from the legitimacy of prevailing political opportunity structures within this movement milieu. A primary focus of such critiques reflects the absence of any significant degree of citizen influence over the content of future developments as distinct from responses to established issues (Irwin 1995, Purdue, 1999, Welsh 2000). In this context public participation and consultation, two of the most prominent elements of contemporary concerns with governance, remain empty vessels until meaningful social inputs to on going agendas are sought and acted upon (see Welsh 2000 Chp. 8).

The Anatomy of Contestation

Melucci's notion of antagonistic movement clearly applies to the main arenas of contestation associated with the anti-capitalist movement addressed in this paper. For clarity it is worth summarising the anatomy of the domains of contestation we have been arguing for.

1. Symbolic Stakes and Multipliers: The anti-capitalist movement has the capacity to declare the stakes through the creation and autonomous broadcast of symbolic multipliers reflecting an 'authentic' iconic praxis generated through direct action as a primary form of intervention²⁹.

2. Forms of Representation: There is a pervasive commitment to autonomy and the right to have autonomist positions represented symmetrically in relation to other interests. This is consistent with the widely drawn distinction between an individual and an actor within the European tradition of social movement theory (e.g. Touraine 1995). The sophisticated use of electronic means of communication within the movement milieu does not support the label of

²⁹ Authentic iconic praxis is used to differentiate such imagery from iconic forms created in response to focus group sessions that inform SMOs such as Greenpeace which pictures will yield maximum public support.

luddites that has been applied by prominent politicians in the UK. Contra this we would suggest that one part of the signal obscured by background noise is that the potential of citizen based electronic politics represents a significant challenge to the prevailing system.

3. Material Production: As indicated through the examples of genetically modified organisms and automobiles the global movement dubbed anti-capitalist produces critiques of the prevailing modernisation agenda. Through its less visible parallel channels, such as the PGA the movement also develops a proactive agenda.

4. Networking and Weak Ties The global networks involved produce a plethora of ‘weak ties’ that maximise flexibility and the innovatory potential of the movement milieu. The case of Tactical Frivolity serves as a particularly strong example of how such weak ties can exert considerable influence within the movement milieu.

Some Implications of Reflexive Framing and Global Movement

It has been argued that reflexive framing significantly changes the resources available to movements through which sense can be made of a strip of activity. Further, it has been argued that these resources also re-configure the ‘reach’ of a movement’s message which can impact upon a much wider range of ‘spectators’. This increasingly sophisticated range of techniques combined with a commitment to direct action not only enables the ‘anti-capitalist’ movement to engage with abstract issues of economic and political justice but does so in a way that has generated significant symbolic multipliers.

We would suggest that there is a break with two elements of established frame analytical approaches here. There is some evidence that the ‘anti-capitalist’ movement is a movement in and for itself. Significant elements of the movement do not seek access to state space nor mainstream media representation. Aligning movement agendas with the master frames central to a prevailing political opportunity structure is not a major pre-occupation here. The new disorganisations are also a response to a movement milieu originating the 1970s and beset by ‘habits of mind’. The multitude of weak ties entered into through active networking serve to breach the habits of mind of movement intellectuals that reproduce time honoured national repertoires of action. In terms of governance we are thus arguing that there is an active and cumulative process of withdrawal from the formal channels of political interest representation that is evidenced in both the increasing public participation within an extended movement milieu and the declining public participation in electoral politics.

Withdrawal as Conflict

As Fox-Piven acknowledges (Manchester 2001) withdrawal is a standard means by which subordinated groups engaged in conflict with a superior opponent. Certain kinds of

withdrawal are relatively straightforward to recognise such as workers withdrawing labour power, others are much more difficult and ambiguous. Faced with an apparently hegemonic and monolithic social formation citizens of the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and the nations of East and Central Europe pursued a more existential form of withdrawal, continuing to act out expected roles but with no inner conviction or belief (Tickle and Welsh 1998, Havel 1986³⁰). It is one of our contentions that faced with the apparently hegemonic dominance of global neoliberalism a similar process of public withdrawal parallels the more visible process of contestation (McKechnie and Welsh 2001, Holy 1996:16). The prevailing POS through the mouths of global statesmen such as ex US President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair declares that There Is No Alternative (TINA) to capitalist globalisation shaped by Multi-National Corporations offering a future based on the latest innovations such as genetic engineering and the primacy of free market relations over the social. As numerous commentators have pointed out this leaves the question of what role is left for politicians' if the MNCs are so influential (e.g. Klein 2001)?

We acknowledge the difficulty in operationalising an approach towards conflictual social change where withdrawal represents one of the key elements because withdrawal cannot be measured through positive indices. There are no press accounts of social withdrawal to be monitored and coded. Apart from the decline in electoral participation rates there are some other indicators however. The increasing numbers prioritising free time over full time participation in the labour market is one indicator that the prevailing levels of socially necessary labour time within developed nations is increasingly out of alignment with citizens aspirations. The appearance of analytical concerns with the work rich / time poor reflect this shift.

In America it has been estimated that 26% of the population, some 50 million people, are broadly aligned with the 'ecology of mind' envisaged by Bateson (see above) but individually remain unaware of how many others share such views (Ray & Anderson 2000). Whilst survey based work, such as this, must be treated with the necessary circumspection we offer it as one indicator of the latent volatility of apparently stable social formations³¹. Another UK indicator is the massive number of people belonging to environmental organisations which easily dwarfs combined membership of all political parties. In a strong sense we might even go as

³⁰ This is most prominently argued in the essay *The power of the powerless* (1986: 36-122). It is important to recognise that Havel regarded capitalist societies as 'as struggling with the same problems' (1990:14), albeit in different forms as communist societies. During the July 2001 summit in Genoa citizens exercise passive power by continuing to suspend 'washing' over the streets in defiance of Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi's edict banning the practice (Chester's personal observation).

far as suggesting that the much bewailed failure of a green politics to emerge through green parties reflects a pervasive public recognition that political parties are part of the problem not part of the solution through their inescapable alignment with the global economic agenda of multinational capital. The inability of green parties to make any significant electoral impact is intensified by the tendency for their natural electoral constituency to contain a higher than average proportion of people recognising the limited ability of formal political channels to address issues with time frames that far exceed those of electoral cycles.

In these circumstances we would be alert to the possibility that the highly abstract and playful articulation of basic power relations expressed by the ‘anti-capitalist’ movement may have more resonance with general publics than more narrowly focussed rational grievance claims. Individuals experience globalisation at a day to day mundane level where it appears in a variety of guises that include lost jobs (capital migration), declining public services (IMF/WB loan conditions), increased bureaucratic burdens, limits of competitive pricing (e.g. within privatised utilities and services), increasing levels of surveillance, a suddenly devalued pension plan and so on. These are all issues contested by the new disorganisations addressed in this paper.

It remains to answer the question of whether such critique and innovation is inescapably of the margins. Whilst there can be no definitive answer to such a question it is an area where some of our data is particularly clear. Asked whether there were any key resources that would enhance the movement’s capacity for action a respondent answered

I think there’s a really important principle to bear in mind, the real issue is beyond bypasses, beyond Third World debt, beyond capitalism. It’s about power. It’s about the devolution of power back to a certain human scale. . . if you, somebody, comes up with shit loads of money, or if someone comes in with legal expertise and things like that, you’ve got the power structure building itself. And the great thing is it teaches people to organise for themselves, to find information for themselves. I know there is an organisation in Europe who’ve been doing a lot of great work but they’re being funded by the EU and they’ve got used to it and they’ve got paid workers and the EU are pulling their funding and they’re collapsing. You can’t do that to Earth First because the money comes in dribs and drabs from tiny sources . . . We’ve learnt how to do very well on very little financial material resources and we’ve learnt how to get what resources we need.³²

Given the sentiments expressed here it seems likely that there will always be liminal spaces from which autonomist voices will issue. Through reflexive framing it may be possible to

³¹ It is reported that Ralph Nader’s ‘Democracy Rising organisation has set out to tap into this latent body of opinion seeking to mobilise one million people prepared to devote 100 hours and \$100 p.a. to direct democracy initiatives (The Guardian 08.08.01 p.11, web site democracyrising.org).

³² Interview ‘A’ pp 19-20.

offer translations of such voices that begin to differentiate between signal and noise in the ongoing siege of the signs. For this to be possible much more systematic attention needs to be paid to the micro and meso level framing processes present within the movement milieu as it from here, rather than well articulated 'master frames' that the significant innovations come.

Here we are in complete accord with Tesh when she argues that 'frame theorists move too quickly and directly to the ways movement organizations use frames, skimming over their production and promotion.' (Tesh 2000:126). As Tesh notes 'A social movement frame is not just lying around someplace, available to be picked up and used . . . The frame has to be created' (ibid 124).

Conclusions

Goffman considered his original formulation of frame analysis 'too removed from fieldwork' (1974/86:13) and recent commentators have criticised the lack of transparency in the way that frame analysis has been applied to the movement milieu (e.g. Fischer 1997). These shortcomings reflect a deeply systemic problem faced by all the social sciences when they are confronted by the task of predicting significant dimensions of social change. Urry argues that this systemic lack of capacity, originating from the tendency to aggregate 'millions of individual iterative actions' under the notion of structure (Urry 2000:206), has been intensified by the 'non-linear, large scale, unpredictable and partially governable' constitution of the global level (Urry 2000:208). Urry notes that academic innovation arises through 'mobility' across disciplinary divides producing 'creative marginality' and that this innovation is parasitic upon a range of social movements producing new public spaces within which new thoughts born by new actors are formalised (Urry 2000:210-11).

This paper has argued that reflexive framing offers both a theory and empirical means of engagement with this phenomenon within the social movement literature by approaching frame analysis not as a linear technique for assessing the alignment of movement aims, objectives and aspirations with the prevailing political opportunity structure (emphasis on strong links) but engaging with internal movement frames between groups (weak links). Attention to internal framing reveals significant innovatory processes of withdrawal and submerged parallelism as well as the highly visible sites of contestation and conflict.

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