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The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements, New and Updated Edition. Edited by David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Holly J. McCammon.

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[CT]**Tactics and Strategic Action**

[AU]BRIAN DOHERTY AND GRAEME HAYES

[H1]**Introduction**

[FT]In this chapter, we discuss the dominant approaches to the analysis of social movement tactics and strategies. If there is broad agreement among scholars about their importance to the performance and understanding of collective action, there is considerably less consensus on how best to explain the decisions over tactics and strategy that social movements make, the extent to which decisions reflect individual or group preferences, or the importance that should be accorded to the micro and macro levels of analysis. The debates concerning these questions provide the main focus of our discussion, from contentious politics to actor-centered and interactionist approaches.

[H1]**Repertoires of Contention**

[FT]The dominant approach to the study of social movement tactics remains Tilly's "repertoires of contention." Tilly adopted the term to denote the "established ways in which pairs of actors make and receive claims bearing on each other's interests" (1993a: 265). In so doing, he emphasized the extent to which episodes of public claims-making are sets of interactions that constitute a public performance. Perhaps his primary insight was to identify how limited and regularly repeated these performances are. When social movements engage in public displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment (and for Tilly 2008, these displays *are* the social movement), they do so following scenarios, or approximate scenarios, whose staging is analogous to the performance of a piece of jazz, improvisational theatre, or dance. As Traugott (2010: 20) stresses, repertoires are structured around routines: though formally unscripted, participants collaborate in a joint production, adopting stock roles, and prescribed behaviours.

[BT]Tactical forms are therefore constrained, culturally saturated, relatively stable sets of potential ways of acting; the “repertoire” is the “set of performances available to any given actor within a regime” (Tilly 2003: 45). At the macro level, these forms reveal the wider structural patterns at play within a polity during a given period, underscoring the role that the “protest histories of individual populations” play within national political cultures (Imig and Tarrow 2001a: 5). At the micro level, collective actors choose tactical forms on the basis that they *already know how to perform them*. For Tarrow, the repertoire is “at once a structural and cultural concept, involving not only what people do when they are engaged in conflict with others but what they know how to do and what others expect them to do” (1998: 30). As such, they become routinized and institutionalized (Tilly, 1978: 158). This codification process reduces uncertainty for participants and observers alike, both enabling mobilization and the communication of the significance of any given mobilization (Conell and Cohn 1995: 367).

[BT]As such, the repertoire is a historicized concept. Studying the development of repertoires in France (1986) and Great Britain (1993a, 1993b), Tilly identified a “hinge moment” between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. A series of profound social structural transformations (the industrial revolution, urbanization, the rapid expansion of state institutions, the nationalization of markets and of electoral politics) generated new social and political demands, expressed in new tactical forms: petitions, demonstrations, national associations, strikes, rallies, public meetings. These new tactics replaced localized and typically violent protest as the central forms of claims-making. Early modern protest was concentrated in a single local community, targeted offenders directly, and characterized by detailed routines which varied greatly by issue and locality; that is, in Tarrow’s (1998) analysis, it was *parochial*, *segmented*, and *particular*. In contrast, modern forms establish relationships between claimants and nationally significant centers of power, often refer to interests and issues spanning multiple localities, and are readily transferable from setting to setting; that is, they are *autonomous*, *cosmopolitan*, and *modular*.

[H2]Modularity

[FT]In this reading, protest tactics are produced by the organization of the modern state, which enables their rapid diffusion between and within similar polities. Modularity, of course, does not mean uniformity: tactics are open to adaptation as they move across political cultures (indeed, it is because of their adaptability that modular forms are so prevalent, though how

they are adopted will depend on the local conditions of reception (Chabot and Duyvendak 2002; Wood 2012). Once particular protest tactics become recognized parts of public life, they can be taken up by other movements in different ways, and with different aims: demonstrations, boycotts, petitions, and the like can all be used by a given movement, but also by its opponents in a counter-movement.

[BT]This capacity for “tactical travel” can in large measure be explained by the fact that tactics are not only historically conditioned, but are already interactively co-produced by social movements and public authorities: they do not therefore “belong” to any one group. Hayat (2006), in his reading of the development of the street demonstration in France, underlines that its evolution into a legitimate form of public claims-making in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the result of a double movement: on the one hand, the definition by the Republican regime and its coercive apparatus of acceptable forms of conduct; on the other, the emergence of social agents – unions, political parties – that could police and maintain the boundaries of permissible and prohibited conducts. This double movement also served to legitimize the role of leaders within these organizations, conferring on them the authority to represent and negotiate. In other words, the demonstration as an action form is produced by the intersection of strategic rationalities, of the regime, on the one hand, and social movements, on the other. While apparently in competition, these rationalities are in fact mutually constitutive, each recognizing and dependent upon the legitimacy and ordering power of the other.

[H2]Contentious Politics

[FT]The birth of the social movement and its associated tactical forms thus presented a further epochal shift: from direct to indirect forms of action. In the “contentious politics” model (McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007), social movements are quintessentially organized around indirect tactical forms, designed to force public authorities to intervene. The modern state is therefore central to the contentious politics approach: precisely because it is the primary target of social representation, the state can channel protest toward forms it recognizes as legitimate. Major strategic decisions for social movements are most likely to be shaped by the political opportunities available to them, whether as a result of short-run variations in the configuration of power within a given polity (particularly in North American scholarship’s conceptualization of political process theory, e.g. McAdam 1982), or

of long-run institutional differences between states (particularly in comparative analysis and European scholarship, e.g. Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi *et al* 1995).

[BT]The contentious politics approach thus holds that dominant forms of public claims-making develop in limited clusters, produced through and by the political and institutional arrangements of state power. As such, work on tactics in this vein has predominantly analysed repertoires at the aggregate level. Methodologically, though some studies aim to do this through qualitative interview data (e.g. Kriesi, Tresch, and Jochum 2007), most have been based upon large n data sets, drawn from general population questionnaires and surveys of political participation (Barnes *et al.* 1979; Dalton, van Sickle, and Weldon 2010; Caren, Ghoshal, and Ribas 2011; Painter-Main 2014), and surveys of NGOs and interest groups (Dalton, Recchia, and Rohrschneider 2003; Binderkrantz and Krøyer 2012), or via protest event analysis (PEA), whether drawn from activist media (Wood 2004; Doherty, Plows, and Wall 2007) or national mainstream media reports (Kriesi *et al.* 1995; Imig and Tarrow 2001b; McAdam and Su 2002; Rootes 2003; Soule and Earl 2005; Walker, Martin, and McCarthy 2009; Johnson, Agnone, and McCarthy 2010; Ratliff and Hall 2014; Ring-Ramirez, Reynolds-Stenson, and Earl 2014; Evans 2016).¹

[H1]Tactics as Particular Events

[FT]This approach has a series of consequences for how we understand tactics as analytical constructs. Leaving aside potential problems of selection and description bias when using data derived from mainstream media reporting (Earl *et al.* 2004; Hutter 2014), large n comparative work inescapably involves a coding and aggregation process. Coding involves two operations: the prior definition of types of action (such as demonstrations, marches, blockades), refined during data collection as a result of experience; and the identification of events as particular instances of these categories. This process enables the development of external validity across cases, and thus comparative analysis (over time, across issues, between polities, between targets).

[BT]However, coding also inevitably reduces complex events to categories, and flattens the variety of actions that can occur even within familiar categories. It necessarily leaves out non-protest electoral and institutional tactics (Goldstone 2003; Kriesi *et al.* 2012; McAdam and Tarrow 2013; Heaney and Rojas 2015; della Porta *et al.* 2016). Most importantly, it cannot answer the question of how social movements make tactical choices, or imbue them with

meanings. Of course, there are epistemological difficulties here: if we understand tactics to be intentional, the result of deliberate choices made by social movement actors (Taylor and van Dyke 2004), it is often difficult to ascertain who makes choices and how; activists may be more interested in articulating narratives of self-justification or developing popular legitimacy than in giving accurate accounts of how decisions emerged, or why specific tactics were adopted, while post-hoc qualitative data collection may inevitably be influenced by problems of recall or attribution. Decisions by groups on how to act are collective and, in informal, non-bureaucratized (dis)organizations, it is often unclear who decided what and when. Yet if we are to develop understandings of protest tactics which have internal analytical validity, we need an ontology which focuses on how social actors enact, appropriate, and construct the meanings of their tactics. This inescapably involves the detailed study of particular interactions.

[BT]As noted above, Tilly consistently stresses that tactics are the result of *interaction*: the repertoire does not belong to any one set of actors, but is produced through the encounter between different sets of actors. But this is a curious form of interaction, because – setting aside the archival descriptions of individual episodes of contention which punctuate and give life to his accounts – it is an interaction without particular actors, or rather where particular actors are analytically inconsequential. The repertoire is an aggregate construct, structurally produced through the relationships between historicized social forces. As such, the relationships between individual performances and specific interests and identities are (at best) of secondary importance (Tilly 1993a: 267–268); particular stagings are of interest only in so far as they weigh upon the general rule. As Offerlé (2006) points out, there is a tension in this position: it is precisely because repertoires are produced in interaction that the development of legitimized tactical forms cannot be separated from the social agents that construct them (discursively and operationally), from the meanings that they ascribe to them, or from the attendant processes of delegitimization of alternative and competing action forms that accompany them. Crucially, “every performance is the object of multiple investments” (Offerlé 2008: 189). Thus, even though action forms may appear similar, the significations given to them, the understandings by actors of them, the public and political spaces occupied by them, may be highly divergent.

[H2]Claiming Space

[FT]A tactic is not just a form, therefore. A given demonstration is not just one more example of a contentious gathering in a chain of contentious gatherings: each iteration enjoys a separate and specific symbolic power, drawn from its context, design, enactment, reception. A demonstration has symbolic power because it integrates the individual into the group, enacts collective forward movement through urban space (the onward march of history), and has obvious metonymic potential (“class unity,” “social transformation,” “revolution”). This generic power also opens up a given demonstration for all manner of conversions, diversions, and subversions: such as when groups stage die-ins or sit-ins, or break away to graffiti buildings, or assert alternative narratives and identities within an action (as when global justice protesters organized themselves into different colors according to political identity, strategy, and repertoire in protests against the IMF/World Banks summit in Prague in 2000; see Chesters and Welsh 2004). These are what Goffman (1981: 133–134) would call “subordinate communications”: the actions and interactions that routinely pepper demonstrations and are seldom reported per se (save perhaps where they involve disorder, arrests, bodily violence, property destruction); and yet are central to the character and experience of the event. Equally, the symbolic power of a demonstration is specific to the particular conditions of its staging. It is not simply a display of unity, or a vehicle for carrying demands: it invests, appropriates, and configures urban space, drawing meanings from and applying new meanings to it.

[BT]This type of dynamic was apparent during the demonstration organized by climate justice networks for the final Saturday of the COP21 climate conference, in Paris in December 2015. This “red lines” action, undertaken by about 5000 activists, was co-produced by the state of emergency declared by the French government following terrorist attacks four weeks previously. Under these circumstances, a highly complex plan to carry out a mass civil disobedience action at Le Bourget airport, where the conference was being held) was effectively rendered impossible.²

[BT]Further, any action would be undertaken and received under a climate of tension, where gatherings of more than two people were considered a political mobilization and banned, and where police had reacted repressively toward a peaceful demonstration two weeks previously. Plan B was to stage a demonstration on the west side of the Arc de Triomphe. In briefings the day before the action, activists were repeatedly advised to be non-violent, to avoid property destruction, to arrive in pairs, to memorize contact numbers of lawyers, and so on; those who

did not respect the “consensus of action,” would “no longer be part of the action.” Only at the last minute did the authorities permit the demonstration; on the morning of the action, many activists we spoke to were still uncertain how the police would react, and were prepared for police violence. In the event, although riot police mobilized in large numbers in side streets, they did not intervene.

[BT]In such circumstances, the capacity of activists to “own” their choice of tactic is highly circumscribed. In a state of emergency, and lacking the resources to bargain with the authorities and the central organizational capacity to regulate action, organizers enjoyed little strategic power. Wahlström and de Moor (2017), indeed, note that the public authorities were able in two ways to forestall the ambitions of activists to stage a civilly disobedient direct action: by forcing them to abandon their initial Le Bourget plan, and by finally permitting the alternate action, rendering it formally non-disobedient.

[BT]Yet the relocation of the action into the “space of national sovereignty” (Tartakowsky 2010) around the Arc de Triomphe also enabled activists to occupy a space which lay, according to one of the French organizers, between the “expression of military power and the expression of the financial power of multinational corporations [at La Défense].” As a prominent British activist put it:

[EXT]The Arc de Triomphe is a monument to war and empire. La Défense is also an arch which represents war and empire, but this empire is the empire of corporate fossil fuels. We will create a red line between these two empires![EXTX]

[FT]Organizers were nonetheless able to create a movement narrative of action, establishing it as a collective and counter-hegemonic appropriation of an ideologically determined space, that of military and corporate power. Moreover, the prohibition of the demonstration in the days preceding it enabled organizers to already define the action as “doing disobedience,” and place it within a movement tradition of action, drawing on both shared ideological positions and shared understandings of how activists within climate justice networks *act*, “making red lines with our disobedient bodies.” Claiming the protest as civil disobedience was important for participants, irrespective of whether it fitted the normative category of civil disobedience, because doing so was seen as appropriate to the type of action one takes as a climate justice activist.

[H1]An Actor-Centered Approach

[FT]In an actor-centered approach, the choice of tactics, and, crucially, how movements stage and pursue them, the roles they play in the development and expression of collective identity at the group level, the meanings they appropriate and give to them, must be accounted for with reference to movement ideas, cultures, and traditions (Doherty and Hayes 2012, 2014). In aggregate, tactical forms may appear similar, belonging to a single category of collective action. But for each particular action or set of actions, if they differ according to their precise circumstances, they also differ according to the way participants give rein to their creative instincts, not just through banners, placards, chants, and so on, but through their comportments, clothing, movements. Of course, in seeing all actions as displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment (WUNC), Tilly places the expressive qualities of action at the center of his analysis. But for Tilly, expression is defined by values: worthiness, unity, representativity, commitment. These values are transferable, are not the property of any one group, and are power-oriented; in other words, the expressive nature of action is recognized only in so far as it has instrumental value, despite the fact that the instrumental purpose of protest can be hard to discern.

[BT]Precisely because tactics are always negotiated through interaction, the relationship between actor and action must be central to our understanding of the contours and meanings of any particular event. As Jasper underlines, “Tactics are rarely, if ever, neutral means about which protestors do not care. Tactics represent important routines, emotionally and morally salient in these people’s lives. Just as their ideologies do, their activities express protestors’ political identities and moral visions” (1997: 237). Tactics are thus always expressive of identity claims (Rupp and Taylor 2003; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004; Smithey 2009). The analysis of protest events and repertoires uncovers the incidence and range of tactics that gain most public attention; but this focus needs to be complemented by analysis encompassing how claims-making incorporates and reveals the collective identities, emotions, and ideas of activists. This involves detailed attention to the conducts of activists, to the way they appropriate spaces, narrate actions, maintain subordinate communications, and express preferences.

[BT]Regime-challenging protests in Chile and Argentina provide an illustrative example. In Santiago, in December 1971, in *La Marcha de las cacerolas vacias*, 5000 women took to the

streets, banging empty pots and pans in protest at the lack of basic foodstuffs. The March was a pivotal moment in the development of opposition to Salvador Allende's socialist regime, as the *cacerolas vacias* became an important symbol of failing economic governance. Thirty years later, in December 2001, as Argentina's President de la Rúa declared a state of emergency in the face of imminent economic collapse, the balconies of Buenos Aires similarly rang with the beating of pots and pans, to be followed by over 2000 further *cacerolazo* protests across the country by the end of March 2002 (Villalón 2007).

[BT]In both cases, the protests had a strong middle-class composition. But what is most striking about them is their gendered character. In Chile, the *cacerolas vacias* were a crucial way for women to express domestic grievances within the public spaces of street and politics, enabling them to “assert their autonomy from the political parties and even to articulate an incipient vision of feminist identity” (Baldez 2002: 82). In Argentina, *cacerolazos* spoke similarly to the gendering of the routines of daily life, and the divisions between public and private spheres. Eltantawy argues that the key aspect of these actions was performative, as the banging of pots and pans publicly displayed a militant motherhood, which worked precisely because it relied on traditional gender roles. These actions thus constituted a radical affirmation of women’s access to public space:

[EXT][They] allowed women to access the public sphere and shame policymakers for their suffering; they endowed women with a new identity – namely, a powerful, autonomous, and fearless identity – that enabled them to take over where the government fell short; and they also allowed women to experience the power of collective action.

[SRCE](Eltantawy 2008: 55)[EXTX]

[H2]**Tactical Continuity and Innovation**

[FT]Actor-centered approaches to tactics accordingly stress the social-psychological significance to collective actors of detail and nuance in tactical choice, emphasizing the importance of the precise contours of public conducts for the group’s moral vision and its internal cohesion. Not only is tactical choice important to the group, but, equally, it is important to the individual activist, disposed to adopt behaviors they feel comfortable with. In Jasper’s parlance, this is a question of “taste in tactics”; to explain tactical choice, “we must first explain the available repertory, the selection of tactics from within that repertory, and the

subtle choices made in applying those tactics. All three are affected by internal movement culture as well as external constraints and opportunities” (Jasper 1997: 250).

[BT]Given the intimate relationship between tactical choice and collective identity (for a fuller discussion of collective identity, see Chapter 24 by Flesher Fominaya, in this volume), this approach accordingly stresses tactical consistency over the lifespan of a constituted group or defined collective. At the meso-level, it is not easy for groups to change their tactics, because they reflect moral commitments and shared histories; tactics are thus subject to a collective rationality, and are inherently stable at the group level. Thus where repertoire approaches explain consistency through structures of cultural availability – actors do what they already know how to do, from a pre-constituted and limited range of available means – actor-centered approaches explain consistency through collective agency, as actors choose means which express, consolidate, and sustain their personal and collective identities and group reputations.

[BT]Actor-centered approaches therefore assume preferences for specific ways of acting to be an expression of identity, and a prior condition of group affiliation (Melucci 1989). The dynamic properties of this approach center on the capacity for agency that it ascribes to collective actors: tactical creativity is central to interaction, because collective actors are able to strategically “deploy” their identities in multiple forms in order to further their political goals (Bernstein 1997; Einwohner 2006). Tactical evolution is therefore possible despite the path dependency of initial choices; indeed, it is likely at the micro-level of action, as groups seek to modify and renegotiate the precise contours of their conduct, as a result of a normative valuing of creativity, an instrumental need to resist predictability, and a situational drive to flexibility. Tactical change thus takes place over the course of repeated encounters, with emphasis on the various abilities to harness collective agency, surprise one’s opponent, and adopt contextual conducts, but to do so within an overall framework of moral or ideological consistency.

[BT]Of course, the capacity for innovation is also central to the repertoire model; but there are key differences. Repertoire theorizing pays little attention to the relationship between identity and change, privileging instead reflective learning based on “what works.” McAdam, in his discussion of innovation in the US civil right movement, argues that it proceeds by a “chesslike” process of mutual offsetting, such that actors consciously evaluate and adapt to

each other's tactical developments (1983: 736). The emphasis is therefore on rational, instrumental thinking, rather than on expressivity and identity. Otherwise, the pace of innovation is usually slow, not least because performances involve other participants, who also learn what to expect. Although theorizing in this tradition therefore allows for the micro-level processes of choice and expression, its principal concern is with the wider structural patterns at play within regimes.

[H2]Long(er) Histories

[FT]In the repertoire approach, new forms can emerge, evolve, and stabilize in times of crisis (“moments of madness”; Tarrow 1993), but major tactical transformations are epochal (the separation between pre-modern and modern action forms). This emphasis on epochal shifts privileges analysis of forms over meanings; it also privileges historical discontinuities, rather than connections across time. If the repertoire approach has had surprisingly little purchase among social historians, this may be because, as Navickas suggests, most have rejected the “quantifying approach ... of ‘repertoires of protest’ that first unsatisfactorily separated types of action that may have been connected, and second implicitly denigrated ‘pre-industrial’ collective action as disorganized and unsophisticated” (2011: 197).

[BT]Borman's discussion of the boycott is intriguing in this respect. The boycott is a quintessentially “modern” repertoire form, taking its name from community resistance to an absentee landlord's agent in late nineteenth-century Ireland, where it marked “a decisive step in the development from rough, violent social intimidation to nonviolent but politically more effective [protest] practices” (te Velde 2005: 212), and correspondingly “a crucial step forwards in the efforts on the part of the state to monopolize the physical use of force” (Taatgen 1992: 167). Through multiple acts of diffusion, adoption, and adaptation (Chabot 2000; Mansour 2014), the boycott has since developed into a key practice in consumer and labor movement action (Seidman 2007; Balsiger 2010), and is closely associated with what McAdam and Sewell (2001) identify as the “master template” of modern tactics, as developed by the US civil rights movement (Morris 1984).

[BT]Rather than historicizing the boycott in terms of its particular forms, however, Borman places it within a “long social tradition of intolerance,” alongside forms as ostensibly diverse as rough music, the general strike, and electronic denial-of-service attacks. What connects these tactics is that they aim to enforce the norms of a community's “moral economy”: for

Borman, “to boycott is to refuse passive acceptance of, or complicity with, parasitism’ (2015: 14). Consequently, he argues, the key task for movements such as Occupy, and the global justice and environmental movements, is “to identify and regenerate the appropriate level of community on which their opponents depend, within which they are vulnerable, and to refuse to tolerate that dependence or parasitism” (ibid.: 15).

[BT]In this light, we can see *cacelorazos* in Latin America, the *búsáhaldabyltingin* which culminated in January 2009 in the resignation of the Icelandic government (Bernburg 2016), and the *manifs casseroles* of student protests against increased tuition fees in Quebec in 2011–2012 (Spiegel 2015) not simply as an epiphenomenal resurgence of pre-modern forms. Rather, they point to continuities, placing the expression of community identity at the heart of resistance to neo-liberalism, and appropriating and reclaiming privatized space as public space. Other tactical forms that emerged in Europe following the 2008/2009 economic crisis similarly challenge the division between private and public spheres of action. In Spain, activists carried out *escraches*, holding demonstrations outside the headquarters of the banks and the homes of the politicians held responsible for housing evictions (Romanos 2014; Flesher Fominaya 2015a); in France, workers threatened with factory closures forcibly detained company CEOs, HR directors, and plant managers for periods of up to 48 hours in a series of “bossnappings” (Hayes 2012). Beyond their distinct instrumental aims and cultural histories, these actions share common purpose and symbolism: the desire to confront the liquidity of capital with the bonds of social relations, forcing corporate and political decision-makers to participate in a counter-hegemonic public theatre (Hayes 2017).

[H1]Strategic Action

[FT]If strategy denotes longer-term thinking connecting action with overall goals, while tactics are the particular means chosen to advance them (Rucht 1990: 161, 174 n.5; Popovic 2015: 191–192), how we understand each will depend on our interpretation of the scope for movement agency. North American scholars in particular have paid increasing attention to the concept of strategy in recent years, partly in response to disagreements about explanations of action that relied on structural categories. Early formulations of political opportunity were sometimes defined as structures (Tarrow 1994), and some defined the approach as structural because of the focus on state institutions to explain movement strategies (Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi et al. 1995). Culture can also be seen as structural when it is viewed as an external

constraint on movements. Yet when both institutions and culture are used to explain movement strategies, little room is left for agency (Goodwin and Jasper 1999).

[BT]As a consequence, in recent years there has been more interest in relational approaches, focusing on strategic interaction between social movements and other actors, as in Fligstein and McAdam's account of *strategic action fields*. In their formulation, strategic action is "the attempt by social actors to create and maintain stable social worlds by securing the cooperation of others" (2011: 7), and is most often located in specific sub-fields (the religious field, the political field, and so on). Accordingly, interaction "is best analysed as an ongoing game where incumbents and challengers and members of political coalitions make moves and countermoves" (ibid.: 14).

[BT]The metaphor of players and games has also been used by critics of the structuralism of contentious politics. Rather than taking place in fields, which rely on rules that all players know, Jasper and collaborators locate *strategic interaction* within arenas. Unlike fields, and other abstract categories such as structures and institutions, arenas are real physical places, such as parliaments, courts, and marketplaces, where actual events can be observed (Jasper 2015: 17–18). At issue here is the relationship between reason and action: Jasper seeks to move explanations of strategy away from structural categories, which he sees as reducing the agency of activists, toward an approach that assumes that action is rational in the broadest sense, explicable by feelings as well as by cognitive reasoning about interests. Movements are diverse, and individuals carry multiple and sometimes incompatible goals. Accordingly, he argues for an empirical focus on studying what activists do, and the reasons they give for their actions – a perspective which accords with the fluidity of action and diversity of experience found in social movements (Duyvendak and Fillieule 2015: 303; Jasper 2015).

[BT]Consequently, analysis focuses on the processes by which groups decide what to do, which always involve dilemmas and trade-offs, and accepts that other players (the police, counter-movements, bureaucrats, editors, judges) also make their own choices, and are not simply the "structural context." This interest in understanding the motivations and reasons activists give for their actions separates Jasper's "cultural" approach from Tilly's, who argued that – given the impossibility of getting inside the heads of the subjects of study – it was better to focus on the observable relations of interaction between different groups (Mische and Tilly 2003).

[BT]Because structure and agency are at issue in these different approaches, it is perhaps inevitable that they are seen as overemphasizing one at the expense of the other. For example, if we concentrate on identifying the dilemmas that actors face, we might be led to ask why the same dilemmas tend to recur systematically, if not because of structures. A second area of debate concerns whether game-based approaches can explain how strategy changes, without falling into the trap of privileging an instrumental logic based on winning. In game-based analysis, the focus is on explaining the rationality of the moves and interaction of various players, given the goals they seek (Goffman 1970); but missing from this approach is how movements might learn, and even gain some control over, the conditions of the game (Hay 2002: 133). For example, in contentious politics approaches, movements might gain access to the state, but are incorporated within it, rather than transforming it.

[BT]To move beyond the limits of strategy (understood as goal-oriented action) requires a different sense of what movement strategy is. An alternative way of viewing strategy sees movements as simultaneously engaged in interpreting and changing the social world through action, and makes reflexive learning about structures an element of strategic action. A central achievement of many social movements is to make us see the social and political world in a different way, to reveal as constructed what is considered “natural,” such as in the way that LGBTQ activism challenges sexual and gender norms. If movements are searching for an understanding of the potentials and limits of social change in the worlds they live in, then “the investigation of the strategies and goals of movements are opportunities for insights into the nature of domination in contemporary societies” (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 82). Strategy is then understood as part of the process through which social movement actors define their world, including asymmetries of power and the potential means to change them.

[BT]Strategic action is thus not merely the action that takes place when collective actors plan protests, or choose tactics; it is also present in intuitive form, when their ways of doing things become routinized, as habits, repertoires, traditions. This intuitive aspect of strategic action also helps explain the apparently “spontaneous” decisions made in the heat of the moment by movement actors. For Snow and Moss (2014), even though they take place in compressed time, spontaneous actions are still decisions, often best explained by the combination of cultural priming, ambiguity about the script for an event, and lack of hierarchy within movements; Flesher Fominaya (2015b) argues that claims to spontaneity fulfill a narrative

function in mobilization, conveying novelty, but often without acknowledging their debt to previous action forms. Even though they are intuitive, these ways of acting have developed because they are seen as appropriate conduct for shared aims, in shared contexts. This does not mean that they are not also open to change based on reflexive analysis.

[BT]This approach is implicit in some work on lifestyle movements, or movements that aim to make material interventions in everyday life struggles (Haenfler et al. 2012; de Moor 2016). Lifestyle movements are not necessarily even social movements in the terms of contentious politics, if they do not engage in public campaigns and even in more cultural approaches, they have been seen mainly as an abeyance between bigger public mobilizations (Taylor 1989) or as a base from which protest can be organized (Polletta 2002; Maeckelbergh 2011). But since the 1960s, many movements have experimented with less-hierarchical ways of living, and less-consumerist forms of consumption. While such practices have been acknowledged as part of the lifeworld of movements, as subcultures, or as expressive modes of action, they have not usually been seen as strategic (with the important exception of Melucci 1989). In his analysis of the movement practices of social centres in Barcelona in the early 2000s, Yates shows that they can be seen as pre-figurative actions, in the sense that they are experimental forms, which intervene materially in society, enable reflexive debate about their meaning, and communicate “messages of dissent, collective force and the existence of political alternatives” (2014: 12).

[BT]Analysis of strategic adaptation by left-libertarian movements in Sweden illustrates the process of reflexive learning (Jacobsson and Sörbom 2015). After riots at the June 2001 European Council meeting in Gothenburg, activists undertook a process of strategic adaptation (Koopmans 2005; McCammon 2012), away from confrontational mass protests and toward more concrete micro-projects. This was not simply a cyclical process following the tailing off of a major and polarizing series of protests, but a deliberate decision to change strategy. Activists saw the global justice movement as having provided greater coherence than the more single-issue politics of the 1980s and the 1990s, but importantly their move toward local, community-based material struggles was based on deliberation and debate within the activist community and an attempt to learn lessons from the past (in Italy, Zamponi and Daphi 2014 note a similar process). Analysis of this kind of reflexive learning process within movements is difficult, as it tends to rely on intensive observation and interview techniques that are costly and challenging. However, analysing movements from the “inside out”

(Flesher Fominaya 2015a) is important because it takes the agency of movements as interpreters of social worlds seriously.

[H1]Conclusion

[FT]Protest is firmly entrenched as a familiar feature of political participation in liberal democracies and many semi-democratic states, while in recent decades it has been a vehicle for regime change in many authoritarian states (Chernoweth and Stephan 2011). Yet, in an age where protest seems to be ubiquitous, our understanding of the decisions that activists make about tactics and strategy remains underdeveloped and disputed. Given the centrality of these concepts to all major theories of social movements (Mueller 1999), it is perhaps unsurprising that there is still uncertainty about so many key questions.

[BT]In this chapter we have argued that the dominant model of explanation, repertoires of contention, has limitations. Its strength is in the quantitative aggregation of large numbers of events, demonstrating important changes in form over time. But this process of aggregation necessarily reduces events to instances of particular types, and takes us away from examining the particular meanings that actors invest in particular tactics. Decisions over tactics reflect not only collective identities and tastes in tactics, but also a strategic sense of how the social world works, which differs substantially in different movements, even within the same polity. In this sense, internal movement cultures and external macro-structures are linked through strategic analysis.

[BT]We have argued that qualitative analysis is essential to an adequate understanding of decision-making within movements. Qualitative studies are also necessary to unpicking the intuitive, or taken-for-granted, features of strategic action within movements and its outcomes; this is perhaps one of the reasons why case studies of particular events and campaigns remain prevalent in social movement research, though they bring with them the attendant problem of systematization across cases, and the difficulty of developing comparative analysis. The application of fuzzy-set methods to movement tactics is one potential response to this problem (Ragin and Sedziaka 2013). In making the case for qualitative analysis, we are not arguing that movements are expressive rather than instrumental: just as structure and agency are inseparable elements of explanation in social science, movements and their tactics cannot be reduced to the purely instrumental or purely expressive. Movements vary in the specificity of their goals, but even those most concentrated

on campaigning for particular goals, such as changes in the law, also presuppose an understanding of what is legitimate and appropriate conduct that reflects ideological and moral positions.

[BT]This accumulates in movements as traditions and cultures that allow action to be taken in ways that are intuitive as well as explicitly planned. Thus areas for further study include the interrelations between goal-oriented decision-making and legitimated conduct, and more longitudinal analysis of strategic change on issues which spill over between movements, or across different movement generations, such as confrontation with opponents or pre-figurative institution-building. Finally, as this chapter also reflects, the study of protest tactics and strategies remains resolutely centered on the Global North, even while movements proliferate in the Global South: future analysis is likely to be much less Northern-dominated.

[H1]Notes

- 1 While PEA is conducted using various media sources, the *Dynamics of Collective Protest in the U.S. 1960–1995* dataset of protest events reported by the *New York Times* has been particularly influential. For a summary of and links to key activism datasets, see the Digital Activism Research Project, available at: <http://digital-activism.org/resources/open-access-activism-data-sets/>
- 2 These and subsequent data are derived from fieldnotes taken at activist briefings in Paris on Friday, December 11, 2015, at “Le 104” social center (English) and La Bourse du Travail (French).

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