Moving Beyond Movement;
 Resistance Beyond, Behind and Before “Social Movement”
 A Meaning-Centered Approach

A Field Statement
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Introduction

Traditionally, social scientists interested in social movements have examined only the most visible forms of contentious politics. Great strides have been made toward explaining the emergence and successes of social movements, and experts have suggested that fortuitous opportunities, a wealth of resources combined with strong “framing” and effective mobilizing structures to produce the ideal situation for the emergence of a social movement.

In recent years, the main practitioners this approach have acknowledged a few of its original shortcomings, noting that the framework has become overly mechanistic (McAdam, 1999). New terms have been introduced, such as “dynamics of contention,” (Tarrow) in an attempt to lend fluidity to the framework. Unfortunately, those within the field¹ have retained the structure, and goals, of finding causal explanations for the emergence and development of social movement. This framework, then, still (and only) focuses on visible forms of contentious politics, and therefore is limited to the analysis of politics in the street. This limitation prevents prevailing social movement theories from understanding and considering the non-visible moments and elements of political and social movements.² As such, conventional social movement theories ignore cultural politics, identity formation, discourses of movement, and covert forms of resistance. These blind spots in the literature not only damage understandings of what social movement means for the actors involved, but also assume A) that all social movements can be explained by “visible” factors, that B) all that is needed to engender social movement are favorable conditions and intelligent planning, C) that social action means the same things for all actors in all movement, and perhaps most importantly, D) that only movements that

¹ field, in this sense is used intentionally to connote both the academic field of social movement theory, and the implications the word carries in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, implying that the field limits the available movements of the subjects within it.
exhibit the four primary factors are indeed movements. The delineation of what can be called a social movement not only limits the considerations of social movement theories to visible forms of contention, but also silences other, less clearly visible forms of contentious politics. Furthermore, this approach essentializes political subjects across time, space and culture which creates and perpetuates false assumptions regarding political situations and subjects throughout the globe which do not fit into the liberal democratic framework.

A broader perspective is needed to understand how actors relate to, and act in contention with, the world in which they live. Questions of why and how, in addition to when and to what end, individuals and collectivities in late modernity position themselves vis-a-vis dominant cultural codes, and in the face of often repressive states, need to be considered. This essay will attempt to assess a range of theoretical perspectives to suggest that less-visible and putatively non-“political”\(^2\) actions and interactions play a crucial role in social movements and politics.

In ignoring the theories of New Social Movements, networks, subcultures, and forms of cultural expression such as music, many practitioners of social movement theory limit the bounds of what can be considered, and advance a narrow and hegemonic definition of “social movement” which not only limits considerations of academics, but can also structure and limit the options and considerations of on-the-ground actors. Through considering a wider theoretical body by including theories of discourse, cultural politics, subculture, identity and music, I will suggest that cultural, “invisible” and discursive elements of collectivities are indeed important, political, and central to social movements. By focusing on aspects of social (movement) life that are beyond the scope of the prevailing framework introduced above, I hope show that although

\(^2\) thanks to Sonia Alvarez for this assertion, which comes from both conversations, and the forthcoming introduction to *Feminisms in Movement*.

\(^3\) Where “politics” is limited to the interaction of states, elites, and movement actors as merely the struggle over materials, or the struggle for “power.”
contentious politics certainly take place in the streets, they also take place in the café, the concert venue, on the corner, and between the ears.

Theories of networks and movement, for example those of Jane Mansbridge, will demonstrate one manner in which groups maintain “solidarity” through discursive ties, networks, in this case function as tools of maintenance and negotiation of identity for collectives and movements. This maintenance and negotiation of identity is politically important because it functions to keep a movement “moving” even when the wheels seem to have stopped rolling (after everybody has gone home). Communicative networks, then, function to remind members of collectivities of their membership, to strengthen commitment to the group in the absence of face-to-face conversations, and can extend the collective benefits (both material, and mental) of membership in a political community over space and time. Networks will be the first tool to suggest the existence of social movements in situations in which movement actors are not engaged in overt political actions, and as such are important in broadening the scope of existing social movement theories.

Theories of networks directly lead to considerations of discourse and discursive fields. Networks can be viewed as one expression of discursive fields which subcultures and movements inhabit. Pierre Bourdieu’s notions of fields, and Foucault’s works on discursive individuation will be added to the idea of networks to suggest that collectivities create and negotiate shared political identities, which are involved in political action even when they are not engaged in manifest protests.

Discursive individuation and the fields on which it takes place flow into the work of Alberto Melucci, the grandfather of the term “New Social Movements.” Melucci’s work on new social movements will further enrich the combination of discourse and networks to suggest that
certain positions in relation to master cultural codes exhibit enhanced opportunity to create social “action.” Melucci considers meaning making, in opposition to master codes, to be a form of social action. He argues that in an age where identities are created and negotiated through master cultural codes, or the dominant discourses of a particular culture, when actors can create alternative meanings and alternative identities we should consider this a form of social/political action. Melucci considers certain positions vis-à-vis these dominant codes to be most equipped to create alternative meanings, and therefore most able to act socially. The groups which he points toward (youth, women, and ethnic minorities) experience the contradictions (and impossibilities) of master codes more dramatically, and therefore are located in disadvantaged positions for assimilation into master codes, and advantaged positions to challenge these codes.

Select groups within these positions will be examined in terms of “subculture”. Theories and examples of subcultural groups will be examined to provide examples of alternative meaning making (in Melucci’s terms, “action”), and these demonstrations will provide a link between subculture and social movement. Subcultures, because they exist in the margins of the marginalized groups Melucci identifies, should exhibit an even deeper involvement in the re-negotiation and recreation of meanings and identities vis-à-vis master cultural codes.

By considering issues of meaning making and negotiation, we deepen the understanding of forms of political action available to actors, and thus our conception of social movement is enriched. In this essay, the concept of meaning making and the process of its negotiation will be examined through the consideration of music. Music, in combination with subculture, becomes an additional conduit for alternative and political meaning making in relation to master codes.

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4 Below, Melucci’s argument will be developed further, and linked to Bourdieu’s notions of heretic discourse.
5 Master codes can be read as those discourses which most shape the lives and identities within a given culture. We can find these codes anywhere from MTV, to the pledge of allegiance; they are the discourses which shape our lives, tell us who we are, and keep us from being who we are not.
Musical subcultures are engaged in a *louder* (more instrumental?) and more resonant meaning construction. In addition certain musics actively disrupt dominant codes through the music itself. The example I highlight in this is that of punk and hardcore. My final section will develop an argument that in addition to the meaning making (action) that takes place within musical subcultures, the music *itself* strengthens this meaning making by *adding* to the alternative meanings and by *disrupting* the reception of master codes for those members within the musical subculture (or, perhaps for all listeners of these musics).

My goal herein is modest; to pose, and attempt to address the question: How do we understand and explain aspects of life that are surely political, but which do not take place in the union hall or at the demonstration? How do we find everyday resistance to a dominating and repressive reality in the absence of protest, revolution, or agitation? Finally, what resources (material or otherwise) do marginalized and dominated peoples have in the absence of political movement? To answer these questions, we need to turn to cultural forms of politics, identity construction, and contestation.

*Mainstream Social Movement Theory*

As introduced above, the dominant theories of social movements take four factors to be most important in the consideration of social movements: resource mobilization, political opportunities, framing processes, and organizational structures. Doug McAdam, in his critique of this approach (which is, interestingly, the approach that he helped pioneer) reduces these factors to three; political opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing processes (McAdam 1999, ix). Put succinctly, these are explained as “1) the political opportunities and constraints confronting a

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6 Questions regarding the possibility that Melucci is overly essentialistic in his theorizing will be considered below.
given challenger; 2) the forms of organization (informal as well as formal) available to insurgents as sites for initial mobilization; and 3) the collective processes of interpretation, attribution and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action” (McAdam 1999, viii). Although these three factors exist in relation to one another, they will be considered separately below.

“Political opportunity structure” describes the relations of a given group to outside constraints in the political environment. Sidney Tarrow defines political opportunity structure as consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national—signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements. The most salient kinds of signals are four: the opening up of access to power, shifting alignments, the availability of influential allies, and cleavages within and among elites (Tarrow 1996, 54).

Political opportunity structures, then, are linked directly to the ties that the powerless have with the powerful, and the conditions in which these two groups can find allegiance. The topic, however, has not gone untroubled. As Doug McAdam notes,

the earliest formulations of the concept were, without exception quite vague. Any environmental factor that facilitated movement activity was apt to be conceptualized as a political opportunity. The term “political opportunity” “threatens to become an all-encompassing fudge factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for political action” (McAdam 1996, 25).

In its best moments, political opportunity structure demands that the analyst of social movements pay attention to not only internal factors of movement, but to external political context as well. At its worst, however, political opportunity structure, seems not only to serve as a catch-all explanation for movement, but also creates a causal chain that points always toward elite manipulations for the explanation of movement emergence and success.
Mobilizing structures, the second of the big three, describe the “structures” which engender and encourage the mobilization of movement actors. McCarthy describes these structures as,

those agreed upon ways of engaging in collective action which include particular “tactical repertoires,” particular “social movement organizational” forms, and “modular social movement repertoires”…include[ing] the range of everyday life micromobilization structural social locations…[such as] friendship networks, voluntary associations, work units, and elements of the state structure itself (McCarthy 1996, 141).

Although this definition is extremely broad, Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) seem to be the most dominant in the considerations of social movements. Mobilization structure is the focus on how particular movements, and their organizations, are arranged and structured to get their activists into the action. While consideration of political opportunity structures examines how movements interact with outside political contexts and elites, mobilizing structures considers how movement elites and organizations relate with their members. Framing processes describe how movements relate to themselves (present themselves to themselves).

Framing processes are the third, and final, aspect of the dominant approach to analysis of social movements. Framing is the process a movement goes through to define itself to its members, and to the outside world. The introduction of framing into the literature on social movements is a response to critiques of social movement theory’s ignorance of cultural factors, and their effects on movements. “Mediating between opportunity, organization and action are the shared meanings, and cultural understandings—including a shared collective identity—that people bring to an instance of incipient contention” (McAdam, x). Framing processes are those which encourage and create theses shared meanings in social movements, and which project these meanings into mainstream society (Zald 1996, 262-264).
Although I have summarized (very briefly) these aspects of mainstream social movement theory separately, it would be wrong to assume that each exists in a vacuum. In fact, these three aspects are relational and, according to social movement theorists, each factor provides both constraints and opportunities for movement emergence. Sidney Tarrow suggests that contentious politics is triggered when changing political opportunities and constraints create incentives for social actors who lack resources on their own...When backed by dense social networks and galvanized by culturally resonant, action oriented symbols, contentious politics leads to sustained interaction with opponents. The result is the social movement (Tarrow 1998, 2).

That is to say, according to mainstream social movement theory, social movements emerge when they gain opportunities, have strong SMOs, and have created frames which validate and perpetuate their claims.

Critiques of this approach are manifold, many coming from the pioneers of the field. Doug McAdam, a founder of the approach described above, has argued that the approach has become overly mechanistic, and the study of social movements has been reduced to theorists searching for signs of political opportunity structure, POS, and framing to place in boxes in order to explain movement phenomena (1999, vii-xv). He suggests, further, that “what once was conceived of as a structural/constructionist account of movement emergence has become a structurally determinist one,” which places much to emphasis on structures of opportunity, rather than the relation between opportunity and perception, and that this “is a structuralist conceit that fails to grant collective meaning-making its central role in social life” (McAdam, xi).

This sort of critique is an admirable step in the right direction, one that is aimed at loosening up the mechanisms of explanation in social movement theory. McAdam suggests that not only has the study of structure become overly dominant, but that the approach has become “movement-centric”, and has begun to ignore the reactions of opposition groups and the state to
movement emergence (xiv). Furthermore, he has suggested that social movement theorists have
neglected the often international level of constraints and opportunities (xv), and that the model
has become overly static.

For all the support that the triad of opportunity/organization/framing currently
enjoys among movement scholars, it should be obvious that this framework in no
way constitutes a dynamic model of movement origins. Indeed, it is little more
than a static listing of general factors presumed to be important in the
development of collective action. But how these factors combine to trigger initial
mobilization and by what intervening mechanisms is less clearly specified in
movement literature (McAdam, xv).

McAdam suggests that social movement theory needs to add cogs to the machine of movement
analysis. These new factors should relive the tensions that have been built into the triad of
opportunity/organization/framing, and provide room for a “dynamic model.” Despite its laudable
attempts to reform social movement theory, McAdam’s conclusion that this reform is limited to
adding more variables to the equation is somewhat troubling, for it may indeed be this equation
itself that is truly flawed. As Melucci notes, while the traditional approaches to social
movements ignore how social movements and movement actors act, mobilization theories, such
as those of McAdam, McArthy, Zald and Tarrow, ignore the why of social movement (Melucci
1989, 22).

Melucci goes on to note that both political mobilization theories of social movement, and
their predecessors (the Marxists and social psychologists) commit a grave error in considering
social movements as unitary subjects acting on the stage of history. “The term social movement
continues to be used by many researchers in a naively descriptive manner to refer to a
supposedly unified ‘subject’, such as the ‘youth movement’, the ‘women’s movement’ or the
‘ecological movement’…” (Melucci, 1989, 29 emphasis added). Treating movements as unified
actors is problematic on its face, for not only does this approach assume a unitary (rational)
actor, at the same time ignoring the internal dynamics of the movement, but the approach also “postulates a process of actors’ construction of their identity, without, however, examining this process” (Melucci 1989, 34).

Furthermore, this approach exhibits what Sonia Alvarez has called a bias of mobilization (forthcoming, 15). It is this bias that shapes the concern of many social movement theorists, and sharpens the focus on a limited set of political actions and movements. This set, then, is limited by the bias of mobilization to only those sections of movements that appear mobilized. Indeed, the concept of mobilization itself feeds this bias, for it assumes only overt forms of political action signal cohesion, mobilization and movement. McAdam (1999) acknowledges this bias, however his proposed solutions merely add in factors that affect the outcome of mobilization itself. The formula he proposes is still focused upon, and limited to, the explanation of mobilization and movement emergence, rather than on the understanding of how social movement actors move in political ways (even while they are not on the streets), and what outside factors structure these movements.

The focus on emergence itself, furthermore, creates its own tautology (in many of the same ways in which the bias of mobilization does). By aiming to explain movement emergence, mainstream theories posit an identifiable “answer,” (for, the assumption goes, something must explain the variable). It is hardly surprising that this answer is, far more often than not, one of the three main factors that this approach posits as needed for social movement emergence. This perspective, and search for positivist answers, then, results in a tautology that neither advances

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7 Of course, movements are always a set of complex negotiations within, as well as without.
the understanding of how and why people act politically, nor helps groups understand which conditions may be fortuitous for their own actions.\(^8\)

Mainstream social movement theory is limited by its view of “politics” and “political action”. In this version, politics and political action are limited toward outward, manifest, “traditional” forms of political action such as the strike, the meeting, the rally, and the lobby. This traditional view of politics, when applied from without, toward social movements blinds theoreticians and activists alike to the complex relationships and negotiations that take place within even traditional social movements.

Today’s social movements—even those that take place solely in the public arena—do not restrict themselves to traditional political activities, such as those linked to parties and state institutions. Rather, they challenge our most entrenched ways of understanding political practice and its relation to culture, economy, society and nature (Alvarez and Escobar 1992, 7).

The narrowness that the above quote counters may be explained in several ways, but perhaps the two most important are: the ignorance of the politics of culture, and the inadequacy of conceptions of meaning, and meaning making (discourse). On the other hand, despite its flaws, the prevailing social movement theories should not be discarded, for they represent a major step beyond traditional explanations of social protest, and some of their concepts may, in fact, inform and enrich ideas which greatly deepen the understanding of political action and social movement.

It has become common, and indeed pertinent, for late (or post) modern theorists to criticize notions of rationality in the study of politics and culture. With these critiques come a deep criticism of rational actor theory.\(^9\) This critique surely extends to mainstream social

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9 Roland Barthes (1972) points out that one of the main tasks of bourgeois ideology (in his words, myth) is to create and perpetuate the myth of the “rational” bourgeois subject, and make him appear “natural”. For more concrete critiques, see also: Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social*
movement theories, which posit rational actors on both the collective and individual level. The rational actor, as it were, is a discursively created subject who is shaped and constrained by disciplines and norms (Foucault). It follows that this individual is not the autonomous, rational being acting solely in his (for the concept of rationality is, indeed, masculinist) own best interest. Prior to the relevant critiques of the rational actor, however, the insertion of rationality into theories of social protest represented an important and somewhat radical reinterpretation of why people protest in a democratic society.

The traditional answers to this quandary, coming mostly from social psychology, suggested that when the “system” was working incorrectly, it created “structural strain,” “social isolation,” and “status inconsistency” (McAdam, 7-8). This misfiring of the political engine created psychological disorder, alienation and social confusion (cognitive dissonance), which in turn led to social movement (political unrest) (McAdam, 6-9). All of this, then, is a fancy way for Classical Social Movement theorists to suggest that social movements were the result of irrational people acting irrationally. Of course, in modernity, the label “irrational” is a powerful and convenient method of de-legitimating and excluding whoever has the misfortune of being labeled irrational. For Classical Social Movement theorists this label worked in the same way. To suggest that social movements were the result of irrational people meant that the movements themselves, and the claims they made were, in turn, irrational, and therefore these claims were illegitimate, and could be excluded. For the social movement theorists that have now become prevalent to insert rationality into the mix, then, represented a radical acceptance of the validity and importance of social movements and contentious politics, and illustrated a huge step beyond the de-legitimating practices of Classical Social Movement theories. Even if it has recently come

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to limit the further advancement of the study and successes of social movements, students of social movements, and perhaps more importantly, social movement actors themselves, have greatly benefited from this conceptual move.

Furthermore, the conceptual framework provided by prevalent social movement theory can be adapted in two important ways which help social movement theory retain its relevance, and which advance the understanding of social movements and political action. The adaptation takes the study of social movements in two directions: from organization, and the focus on SMOs, we can move toward an understanding and consideration of both formal and informal movement, and/or identity-based, networks and from the examination of framing we can move toward a consideration of discourse and meaning-making. Networks and discourses, grafted onto social movement theory, represent not a break with prevalent social movement theories, but an advancement of these theories.

*Paths from Resource Mobilization*

Social Movement Organizations, (SMOs) are generally considered as the concrete manifestation of a given movement. In this formula, the movement (and its actors) is reduced to its organizational face. If we loosen this definition, however, to include informal organization, we can adapt the notion of SMO to a more fluid notion of movement and their organizations. Through the metaphors of organizational ties, and mobilizing links, we can adapt the notion of organization to include both less formal and more ephemeral links within a social movement. First let us imagine the concrete, but informal, links that *could* be considered social movement organizations (but that would most likely be ignored by prevailing social movement theories).
The case will be developed below that musical subcultures can be considered, at least partially, social movements. If we take this point for granted for the moment, music-based subcultures can provide an example for the above informal organization that mobilizes movement. Musical subcultures, especially punk subculture, communicate not only through outward signs, but also through print media such as fanzines, flyers and magazines. These print media alert and transmit messages regarding bands, concerts, and current debates within the subculture. Furthermore, they link and call the members of the subculture to the meeting places of collective participation; the concert venue. This linking interacts with a set (but flexible) network of physical locations (concert venues/clubs) that provide space for meetings (concerts). None of these links are formal in the sense that SMOs are traditionally thought of. They do, nonetheless, link and mobilize members of the subculture (movement?) to meetings and actions.\(^\text{10}\) This “organization” maintains cohesion discursively, and can be considered a network.

Jane Mansbridge (1995) suggests that the feminist movement’s “organization” is better understood as a discursive web that creates and enhances solidarity and involvement in the movement through the discursive ties that link members of the movement. Mansbridge states, “The entity—‘women’s movement’ or ‘feminist movement’—to which they feel accountable is neither an aggregation of organizations nor an aggregation of individual members but a discourse. It is a set of changing, contested aspirations and understandings that provide conscious goals, cognitive backing and emotional support for each individual’s evolving feminist identity” (Mansbridge, 29). That is to say, for Mansbridge, what holds the feminist movement together are discursive ties, \textit{rather than} formal organizations. These ties serve to create and strengthen

affective bonds between movement activists. The essays in *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (2001) offer tangible links between movement networks, and affective bonds.

Social movement theorists often consider movement networks as the transmitters of information, but as Sharon Erickson Nepshed and Christian Smith note, networks “must be looked at not merely as conduits of information, but as transmitters of various values that in turn shaped emotional responses” (2001, 173). This formula provides the tangible link, then, between concrete movement networks, discursive ties, and the affective bonds that both engender.

Social movement scholars have long recognized the potential importance of social networks for movement recruitment, communication, the coordination of activities, resource mobilization, and collective identities. What has been less remarked upon is the way in which networks—especially face-to-face intimate ones—offer moral support and encouragement to activists in high-risk movements (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001, 287).

Networks, then, can be grafted onto the more formal notion of the SMO to provide a picture of how, even in the absence of formal organizational ties, movements maintain cohesion, actively debate, mobilize, and nurture solidarity. Furthermore, these networks are the building parameters for collective and political identities. Networks, because of their discursive nature, provide an essential link to points that will be developed below, in regards to meaning making and political action. For the moment, however, let it suffice to point out that for Alberto Melucci,

Contemporary collective action, in his words, “assumes the form of networks submerged in everyday life. Within these networks there is an experimentation with and direct practice of alternative frameworks of meaning, as a result of a personal commitment which is submerged and almost invisible” (Escobar 1992 73, *emphasis mine*).

Melucci also acknowledges networks’ importance for mobilization itself,

*Recruitment networks* play a fundamental role in the process of involving individuals. No process of mobilization begins in a vacuum, contrary to the theory of mass society (Kornhauser, 1959), isolated and uprooted individuals never mobilize. The existing networks of social relationships facilitate the processes of
involvement and decrease the cost of individuals’ investment in collective action (Melucci 1989, 31).

Although networks are presented here as a conceptual adaptation of organizational ties, it should not be assumed that all networking is the work of social movements (or that the work of social movements is only networking). In fact, as Castells points out, networks have become the organizational form of both late capitalism, and late modernity (2000). Castells suggests a different interaction between networks and individuals, reversing the formula presented above, and points out that,

People increasingly organize their meaning not around what they do but on the basis of what they are, or believe they are. Meanwhile, on the other hand, global networks of instrumental exchanges selectively switch on and off individuals, groups, regions, and even countries, according to their relevance in fulfilling the goals processed in the networks, in a relentless flow of strategic decisions…Our societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net[work] and the self (Castells 2000, 3).

In the above quote, Castells suggests that networks are indeed utilized as mobilizing mechanisms, but this mobilization is at the hands of capital, and the “masters” of the network. Castells suggests that this is why social movements have become “fragmented, localistic, single-issue oriented, and ephemeral” (3). This view, for the analyst of social movements, is overly determinist and pessimistic. Although it is plausible, as Baudrillard (1981) suggests, that in late capitalism, networks and communication itself has been subsumed by the commodity fetish and exchange, and therefore communication becomes commodified and is utilized by Power, this does not mean that these same discourses and networks cannot be utilized for resistance.

Networks, as presented above, are discursive constructions, and as such, directly effect the construction and negotiation of collective identity. Therefore, networks provide an important

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11 Networks are used in two different manners here, but the links should be clear. In my other field statement, I will use networks in a third way to suggest the personalized role of networks for both identity, survival and political maneuvering in contemporary Russia.
bridge between the two notions taken from resource mobilization theories that this section is attempting to modify. Networks can be seen as analytically similar to (informal, ephemeral) Social Movement Organizations, but because of their discursive/communicative nature, they can also be linked to the notion of framing. As suggested above, framing is the process by which a movement presents itself to itself, and to others. Framing is inherently discursive, but as an analytical tool, discourse is much broader, and goes much farther in suggesting the sets of constraints within which collective actors in movements represent themselves to themselves. This process, from the standpoint of discourse, takes place within dominant sets of meanings, and is a process of negotiating and creating alternative meanings in the face of these dominant discourses (Melucci, 1989, 1996).

Framing, for resource mobilization theories of social movement, is a conscious process through which a movement presents itself to itself, and to the “outside” world. “While social movement literature on ‘framing processes’ has analyzed how ideas are packaged, distributed, or even marked by ‘movement entrepreneurs’ in ways that inspire and legitimate collective action, I maintain that the (counter)discourses…are much more than ‘action frames’” (Alvarez, forthcoming, 21). That is to say, not only does framing take place within structured discursive limitations, the renegotiation of meanings that framing suggests, in turn restructures these limitations and frames. Framing processes, then, are much less (and much more) than the conscious presentation of images by movement activists; it is always already a complex set of negotiations, redefinitions, and creations of alternative meanings.\(^\text{12}\) Indeed, movements do frame

\(^{12}\text{In fact, the degree to which these alternative meanings challenge dominant meanings is, for Melucci, paramount to the analysis of the contention and resistance exhibited by movements. Cf. Alberto Melucci, Nomads of the Present, London: Hutchingson Radius, 1989. 29, 30, 40-45, 47-48.}\)
themselves, that is, they construct images, identities, symbols and myths but they always do so while embedded in both networks of capital (Castells), discursive networks of power (Melucci), and their own organizational networks; both concrete, and ephemeral.

All too often, in the consideration of social movements, social context is ignored. Without an examination of both culture, and identity, a study of social movements runs the risk of theorizing a reified entity, existing in a vacuum. The study of social movements, then, must consider both culture, and identity if it to avoid this risk. It is to these areas that this essay now turns.

Culture

The study of culture arrived, in the eyes of many, like a disease to the social sciences. Many treated the study of culture, especially in its semiotic mode, as a contagion to be resisted. Others, however, astutely insist that the consideration of culture is of the utmost importance for the understanding (if not explanation) of social and political outcomes, situations and contexts. Culture, broadly defined, is the set of understandings, norms, and practices that provide identity to a group of people. “History and culture are fundamental aspects of the fabric of everyday life.

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13 My usage of myth, here, is related to Roland Barthes’ notion of myths and mythology. The jury is out, however, on the correctness of Barthes’ assertion that, in fact, myth-making is only at the hands of the “right” (bourgeois/powerful), and that “left” myth-making is always futile. Cf. Roland Barthes, Mythologies, New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.

14 See for instance: Brian Palmer, Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990. Palmer represents one of the most virulent anti-discourse/culture writers in the field of History. His favorite opponent, on the other side of the debate, is Joan Scott, a pioneer in the use of discourse studies and cultural history. See her: “On Language, Gender and Working-Class History,” International Labor and Working-Class History, Spring 1987 no13. It is interesting to not that the debate between Palmer and Scott is within the field of Labor History, and yet many social scientists locate the origins of the “linguistic turn”, as this type of consideration of culture, in exactly the field of Labor History, starting with E.P. Thompson’s The Making of the English Working Class. On this, see: Ronald Grigor Suny, “Beyond and Back: The cultural turn in Social Science” colloquium lecture to the Politics Department, University of California Santa Cruz. April 12, 2002.
They help to give us our sense of identity, telling us who we are, where we are from and where we are going” (Jordan & Weedon, 1).

Raymond Williams outlined four usages of culture: culture as a value, as a way of life, as practice, and as “the signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored”. (Williams, 1981, p.13)” (Jordan & Weedon, 6-9). The latter two aspects of culture (as practice and a signifying system) are most important for the politics of culture. Culture is, in this sense, both the everyday practices of individuals, and the transmitted discourses which structure the understandings of these practices. Conventional social science’s consideration of culture, however, has missed this important point, and has instead considered culture as merely “static—embedded in a set of canonical texts, beliefs, and artifacts,” and this has “contributed greatly to rendering invisible everyday cultural practices as terrain for, and source of, political practices” (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998, 3). With the rise post-structuralist and post-modernist theoretical work, culture has come to be better understood as “involv[ing] a collective and incessant process of producing meanings that shap[e] social experiences and configur[e] social relations” (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar, 3). As evidenced by Williams’ two definitions, there is, as Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar note, a tension in the understanding and study of culture between the discursive/textual, and the material, everyday practice (5). This tension points to the fact that culture can never be understood through purely (merely?) theoretical work, but nor can it be analyzed without theory.15

Perhaps we should take a step back, and ask the important question: why should the student of politics study culture? How is culture political? Culture is political because it contains
within it the categories of knowledge, practice and understanding that define experiences and identities. With this power, comes, as Foucault notes, discipline (1977). Discipline is that which *individuates* the subject; that is, through discourse (culture), discipline (Power), creates, structures and *names* the individual. This naming places the individual as either normal or abhorrent, legitimate or illegitimate, sane or mad, powerful or powerless, etc. The power transmitted through culture consists of, “the power to name; the power to represent common sense; the power to create ‘official versions’; the power to represent the legitimate social world” (Jordan & Weedon, 13). This power structures what it means to be an individual in a particular culture, and what aspects of the individual are valued and disvalued (exorcised). Therefore, culture creates subjects, and places them according to their values; it creates the meaning behind “woman,” “worker,” “white,” “non-white,” “male,” “homosexual,” etc., and places these categories hierarchically according to value. These positions are then *surveilled* in a manner—Foucault calls this the panopticon (1977)—which is so ingrained as to make the subject surveil herself. This discipline, this surveillance, is transmitted through culture, and structures society in to power-relations.

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15 This is a strong call for good, theoretically informed, ethnographic research being required for both a deep understanding of a particular culture and a particular group or movement. Because of this essay’s theoretical nature, and its goal of preparing the ground for fieldwork, empirical evidence will not be introduced at this point.


17 The panopticon, originally Jeremy Bentham’s plan for a circular prison which creates the feeling of constant surveillance of the prisoner, according to Foucault, has become universalized in Western culture, moving from the prison into society as a form of discipline. “Discipline may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology. And it may be taken over either by ‘specialized’ institutions (the penitentiaries or ‘houses of correction’ of the nineteenth century), or by institutions that use it as an essential instrument for a particular end (schools, hospitals), or by pre-existing authorities that find in it a means of reinforcing or reorganizing their internal mechanisms of power (one day we should show how intra-familial relations, especially in the parents-children cell, have become ‘disciplined’…” (Foucault, 1977, 215).
As such, culture becomes political for, at the very least, it is the sight of transmitting power relations, but more, it is the sight of struggle over these relations. As Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar note,

Culture is political because meanings are constitutive of process that, implicitly or explicitly, seek to redefine social power. That is, when movements deploy alternative conceptions of woman, nature, race, economy, democracy, or citizenship that unsettle dominant cultural meanings, they enact a cultural politics.

In addition, Jordan and Weedon note,

The legitimation of social relations of inequality, and the struggle to transform them, are central concerns of CULTURAL POLITICS. Cultural politics fundamentally determine the meanings of social practices and, moreover, which groups and individuals have the power to define these meanings. Cultural politics are also concerned with subjectivity and identity, since culture plays a central role in constituting our sense of ourselves (Jordan & Weedon, 5).

This then, is cultural politics, or why culture should be considered by the student of politics, and should be considered political. Alvarez et. al. note that while this is cultural politics, cultural politics differ from political culture.

Political culture, rather than being the struggle over culture, is the cultural struggle over the “political.” “Political culture [is] the particular social construction in every society of what counts as ‘political’…political culture is the domain of practices and institutions, carved out of the totality of social reality, that historically comes to be considered as properly political” (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar, 8). In this formula, we receive two differing, but overlapping concepts; Cultural Politics are those struggles to (re)define dominant meanings within a culture, and are therefore political, and Political Culture is the struggle to define what is political, and is therefore cultural.

As noted above, culture is both the transmission of (dominant) meanings in a given society, and the everyday practices that are signified by these meanings. Several scholars have
pointed to the ways in which even everyday practices hold forms of resistance. James Scott, in his seminal work *Weapons of the Weak; Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, notes that organized, formal political opposition is normally the tool of the middle class, and that to find resistance among the truly powerless, we must look for “everyday forms of peasant resistance—the prosaic but constant struggle…the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so on” (Scott, xvi). In addition to these concrete forms of resistance, Scott points toward a more ephemeral resistance taking place communicatively. For example, “if bandits and poachers are made into folkheroes, we can infer that transgressions of elite codes evoke a vicarious admiration” (Scott, 41). Scott finds that peasants in a Malay village struggle against dominance both physically and discursively:

If, behind the façade of behavioral conformity imposed by elites, we find innumerable, anonymous acts of resistance, so also do we find, behind the façade of symbolic and ritual compliance, innumerable acts of ideological resistance. The two forms of resistance are, of course, inextricably linked (304). These “acts of resistance and thoughts about (or the meaning of) resistance are in constant communication—in constant dialogue” (Scott, 38).

This is, in its own right, Cultural Politics for, as Scott notes, this form of resistance demonstrates a site of struggle over the meanings of social practices. In this way, an understanding of culture and the politics of culture, opens our eyes to a much broader array of politics and resistance, one that resource mobilization would either miss, or miss-label (both of which would be to blind the analyst interested in resistance and politics toward non-formal resistance).

Nancy Ries adds to James Scott’s description of daily resistance by describing daily forms of resistance in the conversations (this is purely discursive resistance) of Russians in *perestroika*-era Russia (Ries, 1997). “Cultural or ideological oppositions, such as those inherent
in constructions of gender, power, status, and value are both resisted via acts of speaking and reconstituted through them” (Ries, 38). She notes that in their conversations, Russians invert relations of power, labeling those in power as “bad” and the people (powerless) as “good.”

In Russia talk has always been powerful. Numerous Russian texts, folkloric, literary, and historical, have attested to both the sacred and the sinister potential of the word in Russia. In the process of commenting on this power, such texts, of course, also produce and reproduce it... but [the] most crucial point to make about Russian folklore is that it reveals a primary mechanism of discursive resistance: the symbolic inversion of official hierarchies of value in Russian peasant culture (Ries, 157).

The consideration of culture, and of the politics of culture, then, affords us the opportunity to see those forms of resistance, both ephemeral and concrete, rare and common, to which most social movement theory, particularly resource mobilization theory, is completely blind. Furthermore, as Escobar notes, “Social movements must be seen equally and inseparably as struggles over meanings as well as material conditions, that is, as cultural struggles” (Escobar, 69). Consideration of culture also allows us to engage in our own form of struggle over political culture in an attempt to broaden our own understandings of what is legitimately seen as “political” within the study of politics. Within culture, of course, exist individuals. Culture has profound effects on the identity of these individuals, the consideration of culture, then, is undeniably linked to the examination of identity.

**Identity**

If culture can be seen as the set of meanings circulating in a society which structure the way everyday experiences are understood, identity can be considered the receiving end of this

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18 Ries makes the very interesting observation that women’s discursive resistance usually took the forms of litanies of suffering, where male resistance was communicated through tales of mischief. In these mischief tales, men resist not only ordered society, but the symbolic manifestation of this order: women.
flow of information, and the embodiment of understanding of experience. Culture and identity, therefore, are inextricably linked both physically and analytically.

Just as politics and culture have (at least) two faces; political culture and cultural politics, identity and politics have (at least) two combinations; identity politics, and the politics of identity. Wendy Brown has offered a thoroughgoing and rigorous critique of the politics of identity. She suggests that because identity politics focus on a particular, victimized identity, and strive for the acceptance of that identity alone, identity politics recreates Nietzsche’s ressentiment, by advancing the slavish formula “they are evil (they have victimized us), therefore we are good.” Brown suggests that identity politics often creates “a politics of recrimination and rancor, of culturally dispersed paralysis and suffering, a tendency to reproach power rather than aspire to it, to disdain freedom rather than practice it” (Brown 1995, 55). Nonetheless, as Castells notes, “Identity is becoming the main, and sometimes the only, source of meaning in an historical period characterized by widespread destructuring of organizations, delegitimation of institutions, fading away of major social movements, and ephemeral cultural expressions” (Castells 2000, 3). Identity, then, is our next major arena of consideration.

Perhaps the most influential contemporary theorists of the control-side of identity is Michel Foucault. Foucault’s works go extremely far in demonstrating the extent to which identity is a form of control and power. For Foucault, the creation of subjects (of identity), what he calls individuation, takes place throughout modern societies. “Foucault suggests that complex societies are characterized by the homologation of behaviour patterns: by the manipulation of information and of cultural codes which are the basis for consensus and communication” (Melucci 1989, 48). This individuation is a discursive operation that is embedded in
communications, practices and understandings. For Foucault, discourse is *Power*, and it is Power which creates individuals, and identity. “Power produces knowledge…;that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault, 1977, 27). Through the discursive creation of knowledge (power), then, and discourse’s play on individual bodies, Foucault suggests the method by which individuals, and their identities are created in late modernity (Althusser calls this process *interpellation*).

On this reality reference [individual’s body], various concepts have been constructed and domains of analysis carved out: psyche, subjectivity, personality, consciousness, etc.; on it have been built scientific techniques and discourses, and on the moral claims of humanism. But let there be no misunderstanding: it is not that a real man, the object of knowledge, philosophical reflection or technical intervention, has been substituted for the soul, the illusion of the theologians. The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A ‘soul’ inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body (Foucault, 30).

That is all to say, in the discursive creation of a supposedly “free” and “rational” subject, each body is, in fact, imprisoned within an imposed subjectivity. On the other hand, however, although Foucault accounts for the creation of subjects in modern society, his analysis appears as an assertion of the universal effect of discourse on individuals.

To temper this universalism, we move toward Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu’s argument regarding the creation of individuals is similar to that of Foucault’s, but Bourdieu introduces the term *habitus* to suggest the particular ways and situations in which individuals confront

19 It is important to note, that as identity has become more important, it has concomitantly become more commodified, controlled, and ideological. See: Jean Baudrillard, Toward a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, (1979), and Max Horkheimer & Theodore Adorno, The Dialectic of Enlightenment, (1987).

20 Let it not be forgotten that, for Foucault, knowledge is purely discursive.
discourse. “The habitus is a set of *dispositions* which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are ‘regular’ without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any ‘rule’” (Thompson 1991, 12). Language is the backbone (the delineation and the transmission) of habitus. “‘Languages’ exist only in the practical state, i.e. in the form of so many linguistic productions of these habitus” (Bourdieu 1991, 46). An individual’s habitus, then, is the conventions (linguistically structured, but nonetheless social) which have been inculcated from an early age, which structure her behavior and understandings.

Furthermore, each individual (and each individual’s habitus) is situated within what Bourdieu calls a *field* or an *action field* (Bourdieu, 1991). The field is a set of structured positions, and their relations within the field.

Hence particular practices or perceptions should be seen, not as the product of the habitus as such, but as the product of the *relation between* the habitus, on the one hand, and the specific social contexts or ‘fields’ within which individuals act, on the other... A field or market may be seen as a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by different kinds of resources or ‘capital’ (Thompson, 14).

Capital, for Bourdieu, is much more than monetarily available resources, but includes the advantages provided by positioning within social and cultural fields. Whereas habitus may be considered the most important thing to glean from Bourdieu for the consideration of culture, and cultural-symbolic capital may be most important for the study of identity, action fields can be viewed as centrally important for the consideration of social movements.22 Sonia Alvarez,

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22 None of these aspects, however, can be taken as separate from the others, as Bourdieu’s approach is essentially *relational*. This fact, hence, strengthens the general argument that the consideration of social movements must be relationally involved in the study of both culture and identity (and, indeed, the culture of politics/politics of culture, as well as identity politics and political identity).
utilizing the notion of field to expand the possibilities for feminist social movement theories
notes,

The notion of fields aims to convey the idea that, though now more widely dispersed, feminist activists continue to inter-relate through multi-layered webs of communication and varied forms of articulation…Individuals and organizations situated in an array of dominant and alternative publics who identify with a given movement’s demands, advocacy goals and ethical-political principles reinvent and renegotiate their political identities and practices in dialogue or conflict with, but always in relation to, other actors who identify with that particular field. Movement fields, then, are forged dialogically and relationally (Alvarez forthcoming, 22-23).

Movement fields provide an important link between the examination of individual identity and group identity (as field allows us to see identity as a relational position, where individual identity is defined within the field of relationships of a given group).

While considering an individual’s identity may be an exercise in discovering the power (domination) inherent in subjectivation, collective identity provides us an area to look for a collective negotiation of meanings (therefore politics, in the sense offered above with culture). For the student of politics, resistance, and social movement, however, identity and the politics of identity are best considered in terms of collective identity. Melucci notes, “collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place” (Melucci 1989, 34). Furthermore, collective action is a process. “I call collective identity the process of ‘constructing’ an action system. Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by a number of individuals” (Melucci 1996, 70). Collective identity, considered as suggested above as networks of meaning and meaning-making, becomes, for Melucci, the seminal point of social action. Again, for Melucci, the negotiation and re-creation of meaning that takes place within (and in order to create)
collective identity, is an action system. Action systems are both the discursive and concrete; containing both the rhetorical creation of meaning, and the understandings/practices which are colored by these meanings.

“Today’s social movements contain marginal counter-cultures” (Melucci, 1989, 49). This is, in effect, the creation of micro-cultures (counterculture/subculture) within the dominant culture. Action systems of collective identities can symbolically invert the hierarchical naming that culture endows on subjects within the culture. One of the many important contributions to the consideration of social movement that Alberto Melucci is his insistence that the analyst shift attention toward regarding collectives and collective identity as a continuing process of negotiation and creation of meanings vis-à-vis dominant and dominating cultural, discursive and symbolic codes.

The study of culture and identity, then, brings us directly into the realm of New Social Movement theory, and beyond.

Everyday life involves a collective act of creation, a collective signification, a culture. It is out of this reservoir of meanings (that is, a “tradition”) that people actually give shape to their struggle…daily life is located at the intersection of processes of articulating meaning through practices on the one hand, and macro processes of domination, on the other. Struggles over meanings at the level of daily life—as feminists and others do not cease to remind us—are the basis of contemporary social movements (Escobar, 71).

Because meaning and meaning making, and thus discourse, is so central to the formulations of both culture and identity provided above, a discussion of discourse analysis is useful before turning toward New Social Movement theory.

A Methodological Aside; Discourse Analysis
The above approaches to culture and identity are essentially discursive, where discourse and language, and ultimately meaning structure and delineate the creation, negotiation and options within cultures, for individuals and groups, to be defined, and define themselves within society. As Murray Edelman states, “politics is the struggle over meaning” (Edelman 1988). This approach is theoretically sound, but provides difficulties for the social analyst. How, for instance, is the student of culture/identity/social movements/politics to inquire about these meanings, which are said to structure the lives of real people? One of the best methodological approaches to this problem is that of discourse analysis. Of course, even the field of discourse analysis is diverse and divergent. Discourse analysis, generally, considers meaning to be embedded within or behind the surface of texts. Despite the numerous approaches to discourse analysis, it is safe to say that no discourse analyst considers the meaning of a text to be on its surface (this naïveté is reserved for political science approaches of content analysis).

How, then, does discourse analysis help? And how should it be performed? The former question may be answered much easier than the latter. Discourse analysis provides the opportunity to look behind texts to find the embedded meanings being transmitted through the texts themselves. It allows the analyst to see that a shaving cream commercial is not about shaving cream, but more likely about images of desirability, masculinity, femininity and the values that are associated with these things. Discourse analysis allows the observer to find these deep cultural codes being transmitted in text; it allows the analyst to discover the meanings of

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23 Although this is certainly not the only avenue to the discovery of meanings, it provides an important building block. It may, however, ignore the meanings ascribed by social actors themselves, and therefore may be more adequate for discovering the meanings transmitted by dominant discourses, than the analysis of alternative meanings offered by subcultures/movements.

24 For an interesting example of content analysis posing as discourse analysis see: David Laitin, “The Cultural Elements of Ethnically Mixed States: Nationality Re-Formation in the Soviet Successor States in State/Culture; State Formation after the Cultural Turn, George Steinmetz ed., Ithaca: Cornell, 1999., where the tabulation of different forms of the word “Russian” is used by the author to “analyze” nationalism in post-Soviet cultures. Content
texts, and suggests ways in which these meanings shape the lives of those receivers of the meanings.

Discourse analysis is the struggle to determine, or understand meanings, and therefore to identify politics. Discourse analysis allows the analyst the opportunity to find politics where it is otherwise obscured. Furthermore, insofar as “contemporary movements operate as signs, in the sense that they translate their actions into symbolic challenges to the dominant codes” (Melucci 1986, 12), discourse analysis is essential for analyzing and understanding the semiotic and symbolic actions of social movements and the dominant codes with which they struggle.

The methodological question remains, however: how does one do discourse analysis? Answers to this question are varied. There is no one way to do discourse analysis, and approaches vary from a deep analysis of particular texts, to attempts to grapple with larger discourses. As such, the following will serve merely to provide examples of some attempts which seem particularly salient and helpful to the student of both discourse and politics/social movements, and which seem to best enrich a meaning-centered approach to the study of these areas.

A particularly interesting and rich approach follows from the methods developed by A.J. Greimas in *Structural Semantics*, (1984). These approaches can be broadly labeled actantial. Greimas suggests that all narratives can be analyzed as folktales, and that through this analysis the narrative, and text, can be reduced to a model which demonstrates the folkloric nature of the underlying tale (Greimas 197-214). The actantial approach allows the analyst to reduce a given text to the actantial model of folkloric tales. Greimas identifies six positions within the folkloric mode of communication with which to analyze discourse. These are: the sender, the object, the
receiver, the helper, the hero and the opponent. A text that has elements that can be identifiably linked to these positions can be analyzed, then, as a folkloric tale (regardless of what the particular text portends to be).

Michael Urban convincingly utilizes this approach, arguing that much of official Soviet speech adheres to folkloric models, and as such is trapped in what he calls the “mythic” realm of political communication (Urban 1988, 90). He notes that, “to the extent that a society lacks the capacity to articulate, discuss, learn and act upon common problems,” the opportunities for political solutions are reduced, and private solutions are sought (Urban 1988, 91). The Greimasian actantial model allows Urban to analyze texts in order to detect their folkoric nature, and validates his claim that because of this mode of communication, “politics” is impossible within Soviet society.

The second tool which we can glean from A. J. Greimas is called the semiotic square (or rectangle). The semiotic square is used to identify the possible meanings and oppositions of a certain term. Greimas suggests that each term, when used in discourse, implies three relational terms: its opposite, its inverse, and the inverse of its opposite. Each signifier simultaneously signifies all four of these possibilities. Frederic Jameson suggests that the semiotic square (he calls it a rectangle) allows the reader to arrive at the borders of ideology:

Seen in this way, the semiotic rectangle becomes a vital instrument for exploring the semantic and ideological intricacies of the text…because it maps the limits of a specific ideological consciousness and marks the conceptual points beyond which that consciousness cannot go, and between which it is condemned to oscillate (Jameson 1968, 46).

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25 In this formula, the sender represents the ultimate authority who calls on the hero to perform a task, which is the object, in order to help the receiver. In the process of the monumental task, the hero is helped by the helper and opposed by the opponent. See Appendix “A” for visual example.
26 See Appendix “B” for visual example.
27 This is directly linked to the idea that language has a binary nature, where each term immediately refers to its diametric opposite.
That is to say, because the semiotic square demonstrates all of the relationships of a particular
signifier, it also demonstrates the limits of its meanings. The receiver of this signifier cannot, as
Jameson notes, move *beyond* these possible meanings. The semiotic square allows discourse
analysis to not only to understand the limits of meaning, but to posit a dialectical movement
*within* a given meaning. Jameson goes on to state that the inverse of the opposite of a given
signifier is its dialectical, and therefore liberated, state (Jameson 1974, 166).

Again, Urban provides us a more concrete example of the semiotic square in use. By
analyzing sets of injunctions and prohibitions in late-Soviet speech through identifying terms in a
speech which fit all four corners of a semiotic square of injunction, Urban suggests that late
Soviet speech was at once hollow and non-referential to “reality.”

When meaning is regarded as a structured set of relationships [this is what the
semiotic square does] rather than as atomized units of semantic content, we may
well discover, as we have here, that what is actually being said bears little direct
resemblance to immediate verbal appearances…At the level of surface structure
we can read the text as one which enjoins the addressee to experience the present
state of affairs as one of wellbeing. At the deep structure…there seems to be but
one message—have patience with things as they are (Urban 1987, 203).

The speech analyzed, on its surface introducing reforms and calling for action, through analysis
with the semiotic square, is reduced to the dictum, “keep doing the things which have not
worked” (ibid, 204). A.J. Greimas, and authors adapting his approaches, allow the discourse
analyst to discover ways in which texts are limited, ideological, and mythical, and to discover
ways in which discursive modes determine and structure meanings transmitted and received.

Where Greimasian methods look at, and *behind*, texts in order to determine meanings
below the surface, Discourse Theory looks *beyond* texts to examine Discourses in their larger
guise. Discourse Theory comes directly from the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe,

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28 It is important to note that Roland Barthes suggests that myths are those texts which make concepts and ideas
which are in reality dominating appear natural.
particularly their seminal work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2001). Discourse theory concerns itself, more broadly than the work of Greimas, with *meanings* in general. “The *discursive* can be defined as a theoretical horizon within which the being of objects is constituted. In other words, *all* objects are objects of discourse, as their meaning depends upon a socially constructed system of rules and significant differences” (Howarth and Stavrakis 2000, 3) wherein “empirical data are viewed as sets of signifying practices that constitute a ‘discourse’” (ibid, 4). Discourse theory provides an important addition to discourse analysis by insisting that “discourses and the identities produced through them are inherently political entities that involve the construction of antagonisms and the exercise of power” (ibid, 9). Methodologically, discourse theory is varied, with practitioners constructing their individual theoretical bodies fluidly to suit the project at hand. All, however, share the assumption that discourse serves to construct *hegemonic* formulations, and that discursive struggles are struggles for hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe 2000).

*Identity formation and Mobilization; New Social Movement Theories*

Although Alberto Melucci would resist being labeled a theorist of New Social Movements, his work is perhaps (for my work) the most pertinent and theoretically fertile. His *Challenging Codes* provides myriad original insights, and has been extremely influential in the formulation of this essay. Melucci insists that in complex societies (those of late modernity), conflict and movement not only concern struggle over “antagonistic conflicts,” but includes “social relationships, symbols, identities and individual needs” (Melucci 1996, 99). Furthermore, complex societies are no longer managed through controlling “the workforce and by transforming natural resources; more than that, it requires increasing intervention in the
relational processes and symbolic systems on the social/cultural domain” (ibid). As dominance shifts into the realm of the symbolic and cultural, so does the struggle of social movements. Now more than ever, social movement and struggle takes place in the realm of meanings. As suggested above, meanings deeply affect identity (if not define it), and therefore struggles of late modernity increasingly engage directly identity.

In order to be able to produce and consume, social actors must recognize themselves in terms of an identity which they themselves can construct, or in terms of a definition imposed on them by the multiple social memberships and the systems of rules that govern their everyday life. A society of apparatuses imposes identity by defining the sense and direction of individual action through the tightly-woven networks that transmit its symbolic models (ibid, 100).

As discourse and cultural codes permeate the constitution of the self, renegotiations of meanings (and identities) becomes the primary site of struggle. “Conflicts thus shift towards the new goals of reappropriation and reversal of the meaning produced by distant and impersonal apparatuses” (ibid, 101). New Social Movements, then, are the struggles where “individuals claim back the right to become themselves” (ibid), and “what is at stake in the emergent conflicts is the possibility for reappropriating the meaning and motivation of action” (ibid, 109).

New Social Movements, then, appear as elusive, fragmented groups. “Movements in complex societies are hidden networks of groups, meeting points, and circuits of solidarity which differ profoundly from the image of the politically organized actor” (ibid, 115). Movements can no longer be seen as single, unitary, rational and coherent actors. Rather, movements appear in the traditional guise momentarily and infrequently:

This [movements] is a hidden or, more correctly, latent structure; individual cells operate on their own entirely independently of the rest of the movement, although they maintain links to it through the circulation of information and persons. These links become explicit only during the transient periods of collective mobilization over issues which bring the latent network to the surface and then allow it to submerge again in the fabric of the daily life. The solidarity is cultural in character and is located in the terrain of symbolic production in the everyday life.
To an increasing degree, problems of individual identity and collective action become meshed together: the solidarity of the group is inseparable from the personal quest and from the everyday affective and communicative needs of the participants in the network (ibid, 115).

This quote provides the linkages between the preceding sections of this essay. Melucci suggests that in late modernity, social movements are only sometimes what mainstream social movement theories suggest they are. When they are not acting as traditional social movements, they still exist in the folds of society. As Melucci notes, culture, networks, identity and group identity become increasingly linked and coherent (just as the movements they describe become incoherent). Melucci allows us to, in fact insists that, we see the invisible links between culture, identity, meaning and social networks, and highlight the networks and discourses which link these seemingly diverse and separate phenomena.

One final point enshrines Melucci’s centrality for the purposes of this paper. Within the framework introduced above (where movements and social action takes place primarily within the realm of symbolic negotiation of meanings), Melucci points toward certain groups, inhabiting certain positions, that may be more equipped to perform the re-negotiations of meanings which he considers social action (movement). Melucci points out that certain segments of the population experience the contradictions of late modernity more acutely than others; these contradictions are experienced as disparities between dominant discursive codes, and the realities they enforce. The groups that experience these contradictions (between the identities created by cultural codes, and the desire to be one’s self) most acutely, Melucci suggests, will be most equipped to engage in the struggles over meaning which social movement entails. For instance, Melucci suggests that youth experience these contradictions as disparities between symbolic possibilities and concrete realities (Melucci 1996, 126). Because of their marginal position (not children any longer, but not yet admitted to the full subjectivity of adulthood), “youth”
experience the contradictions of modern society in a more dramatic sense than do others. “Delayed entry into the adult roles is not just freedom, but reflects also imposed and lived marginality,” experienced as, “bogus and controlled from the outside” (ibid, 120). This artificial freedom and all-to-real marginality positions youth as primary social actors.

Young people therefore become actors in conflicts, since they speak the language of the possible; they root themselves in the incompleteness that defines them, and they call on the society at large to create its own existence than merely endure it. They demand the right to decide for themselves, and in doing so they demand it for everyone (ibid).

Melucci’s suggestion is, then, that youth inhabit a particular position vis-à-vis dominant codes which uniquely endows them with the possibilities (and the desire) for a meaningful re-negotiation of meanings, and thus social movement. Melucci, in turn, suggests that not only youth, but also ethnic minorities and women inhabit similar positions. For this reason, in Melucci’s formula, youth, ethnic and women’s movements provide the most impetus and potential for change. The possibilities of this formulation, are in fact also its weaknesses. At times, Melucci appears nearly essentialist in his suggestion that groups en masse experience things, and react, the same way. For this reason, it is important to temper Melucci’s far (perhaps too far) reaching claims with the idea that certain groups within these marginal positions may be more attuned to the contradictions in dominant discourses, but there is no reason to insist that all members of Melucci’s groups receive, and act, uniformly. By adapting Melucci’s argument thusly, we are one step closer to the consideration of specific subcultures (within the above positions).

For this essay, Melucci appears as the primary theoretician of “New Social Movement” (NSM) theories but within the more mainstream social movement literatures, it is Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato that are considered the paradigmatic theoreticians of New Social Movement
theory. In their monumental tome, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (1992), Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato outline their theory on NSMs. They describe new social movements as movements where the collective actors’ goals are centered around the negotiation of identity, and expansion of (or inclusion in) civil society. “Contemporary collective actors see that the creation of identity involves social conflict around the reinterpretation of norms, the creation of new meanings and a challenge to the social construction of the very boundaries between public, private and political domains of action” (Cohen and Arato 1992, 509). Cohen suggests that this formulation is a fruitful blend of Anglo-American (resource-mobilization) and European (identity) theories of social movement (Cohen 1985, 664). New Social Movements, for Cohen and Arato blend traditional movement goals, such as access and reform, with new desires, such as legitimation and inclusion of contested identities. “Moreover, they target the social domain of ‘civil society’ rather than the economy or state, raising issues concerned with the democratization of structures of everyday life and focusing on forms of communication and collective identity” (Cohen, 667). New Social Movement theory allows the student of social movement to both include aspects of social struggle which resource mobilization is blind towards, and bring “political” (formal) aspects and considerations to a field of theory that may, to some, appear apolitical and merely concerned with identity.

New Social Movements, Cohen and Arato insist, are “in some significant respects ‘new’. What we have in mind, above all, is a self understanding that abandons revolutionary dreams in favor of radical reform that is not necessarily and primarily oriented to the state” (Cohen and Arato, 493). They call this aspect “self limiting radicalism” (ibid) (Cohen 1985, 664). Self limiting radicalism can be seen as the shift from traditional forms of revolutionary action, whose primary target is the state, to a less revolutionary, more reform-oriented form of action, whose
target is civil society. On the one hand, this concept is quite useful for it allows theory to look past the state, which has for so long tempted analysts into “thinking the state” (Bourdieu 1999, 53). Their notion of “Self limiting radicalism”, however, highlights Cohen and Arato’s continued privileging of the concrete political, and highlights their assumption that, despite the inclusion of identity into mobilization theory, the most radical politics still adhere to traditional forms of revolutionary action. Furthermore, their focus on civil society (and their reliance on Habermas) limits their analysis to attempts to create a more ideal “speech situation” (in effect, the reform of civil society). Cohen and Arato’s overwhelming focus on civil society is particularly troubling for the analysis of social movement and identity formation in society where civility is absent. Can New Social Movements exist in a location that does not enjoy a civil society (such as Russia)? Cohen and Arato would seem to suggest “no”. Unfortunately the monumental combination of identity and mobilization has been obscured equally as much by the debate regarding NSMs, as by Cohen and Arato’s own theoretical limitations.

The debate around New Social Movement theory has been, regretfully, limited primarily to debating the newness of New Social Movements.

The problem of the ‘novelty’ of the ‘new movements’ has been discussed extensively and criticized in this literature. However, the debate focuses on a false problem. ‘Novelty’ is by definition a relative concept, which functions initially to emphasize some comparative differences between classes of phenomena (in this instance between the traditional forms of class conflict and the emergent forms of collective action). But if sociological analysis is incapable of transcending this conventional definition and cannot discern the distinctive features of the ‘new’ phenomena, the stress on the ‘novelty’ ends up concealing an underlying conceptual weakness (Melucci 1989, 42).

Bourdieu suggests that this “Thinking the state” is the process by which the overwhelming focus on the state in effect recreates and strengthens the state, and perpetuates the blinding of that which exists beyond the state. See: State/Culture, George Steinmetz, ed. Ithaca: Cornell, 1999.

Although much is made in the literature of this debate regarding the newness of New Social Movements, with some suggesting that the aspects which appear as new (focus on identity) have are indeed not new, the debate seems to be misplaced. Melucci suggests that the continuing focus on the novelty of new social movements leads to the “myopia of the visible” which ignores the underlying cultural codes and networks of meanings that are, indeed, new (in late modernity) (Melucci 1989, 44). Furthermore, Melucci suggests that this continued debate is reductionist insofar as it assumes that social movements are unitary, coherent actors (ibid). Ultimately, whether or not New Social Movements are actually new, New Social Movement theory is (was) a new way of considering social organization, mobilization, and movement. The theoretic newness of New Social Movement theory should not be underestimated.

The true potential of New Social Movement theory is that it allows the analyst to see that NSMs need not be regarded as unitary actors, and that in fact many actors can be considered as making up one social movement. New Social Movements, it is theorized, exhibit both focus on identity, and on material grievances (Cohen 1985; Johnston, Laraña and Gusfield 1994). Because of their internally diverse nature, it is possible to image different individual members of a NSM acting in one or the other of these spheres (as primarily concerned with identity, or movement). It is also possible to conceive of actors being concerned with both of these two aspects of the NSM, but at different times. Because of these possibilities and conceptual flexibility, it can be suggested that members of a collective identity group (a subculture) can be either cultural actors OR movement actors, or both at the same time, or both at different times. This is the vast potential that is inherent in New Social Movement theory. It furthermore leads this essay directly to the consideration of subculture.

31 In this way, Melucci disagrees with Cohen and Arato when they suggest that new social movements are not necessarily linked to a new stage of history.
Dick Hebdige suggests that punk subculture, in the late 1970s, enacted guerilla warfare through the subversion of signs, in effect creating new meanings from the signifiers they dressed themselves in (Hebdige 1979). This semiotic subversion re-defined, if temporarily, gender roles, ideas of fashion, music and politics, all through discursive inversions. His study deals primarily with punk subculture (indeed, much of subculture studies are primarily concerned with punk and, more recently, rave subculture). Subcultures should be read as the location where Melucci’s youth enact the social movement of meaning negotiation. As such, subcultures are a primary site of social action.

Subcultures, then, can be seen as the site where certain identities and groups arrange themselves in relation to society, and social codes (discourses). Below, it will be argued that music is a primary locus point of the negotiation (and interruption) of these discourses, but musical signifiers are not the only signifiers that subcultural agents dress in. Style goes beyond music (although music performs this style). Subculture exists as a sort of mirroring (a distorted and negotiated mirror, of course) of society. In the case of British working class subcultures, Dick Hebdige states,

Subcultures are, at least in part, representations of these representations, and elements taken from the ‘picture’ of working-class life (and of the social whole in general) are bound to find some echo in the signifying practices of the various

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32 Punks, it seems, enacted Baudrillard’s dictum that “even signs must burn” (Baudrillard 1979).
34 It is not my intention to suggest that subcultures only exist among youth populations. The literature on subculture, however, is heavily, although not exclusively, focused on youth subcultures. This may show a weakness within the field of subcultural studies, but because my research is focused on youth, this weakness does not overly taint my work. Youth subcultures have also been linked directly to movements. For instance, Ednie Kaeh Garrison describes the ‘riot grrl’ subculture as an important part of the third-wave feminist movement. (Garrison, 2000).
35 In personal communication, Sonia Alvarez has suggested this reflection is perhaps better described as a refraction: the reflection of a reflection, and therefore twice removed. Baudrillard might agree, calling it instead a “simulacra”, which is the simulation of a simulation (Baudrillard 1994).
subcultures...The typical members of a working-class youth culture in part contest and in part agree with the dominant definitions of who and what they are... (79).

This sentiment is echoed by Melucci’s work on youth movements. In calling youth a mirror of society, he suggests that youth provide a picture of the limitations of the possible and the negotiation of codes that youth, by there positioning in society, are forced to undergo. Thus, they provide a picture of a possible future, and a different now.

By addressing the problem of passages, the problem of choice, uncertainty, and risk, young people live for everyone, as sensitive receptors of our culture, the dilemmas of time in a complex society. By challenging the dominant definition of time the youth announces to the rest of the society that other dimensions of human experience are possible (Melucci, 128).

Youth, and subculture (they are not always the same, but most likely are often at least overlapping), should be seen as the ground of negotiations for the future. In defining themselves, and thus consuming codes that are, both with and against the dominant codes/society, youth provide a telling picture of the problems with the current situation, and often suggest alternative paths.

Hebdige takes the point farther than Melucci in this case. He suggests that subculture represents an assault on language itself, “an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation” (Hebdige, 90). This has the effect of exposing the brutality and arbitrary content of master codes by assaulting the codes themselves (ibid, 91). “Subcultures represent ‘noise’...”(ibid, 90). It is unclear whether Hebdige intends the link to noise in the sense that Jacques Attali means it, but the resemblance is striking. For Attali, noise is that which represents the sacrifice, for Hebdige, noise (subculture) is that which sacrifices the system of codes. Both have the taste of the temporary absence of signified meaning, and both, therefore have the seeds of resistance.
This resistance, or disruption of the master codes, is accomplished through the *conscious* consumption of signs, as opposed to the unconscious consumption of the “masses”.

They [contentious subcultures] *display* their own codes (e.g. the punk’s ripped T-shirt) or at least demonstrate that codes are there to be used and abused (e.g. they have been thought about rather than thrown together). In this they go against the grain of a mainstream culture whose principal defining characteristic, according to Barthes, is a tendency to masquerade as nature...(Hebdige, 102).

This conscious manipulation of codes is, then, what gives the subculture its disruptive power. This power is most certainly performed in the music of that particular subculture. Conscious manipulation certainly parallels with Melucci’s claim that collective identity involves the collective construction of meaning, and relation to codes. Subculture, then *is* collective identity, and *is* collective action. If collective action, in Melucci’s sense of the terms is political, then the participation in subculture *is* collective politics. Further, if subcultural identity is seen as contentious (which it should be due to its conscious subversion of signs) then it should be seen as contentious politics.

Not all agree, however, on the accuracy of Hebdige’s studies on subculture. Muggleton (2000) notes that Hebdige’s arguments regarding the *meanings* of subcultural styles represents far too great a separation from the interpretations of meanings by subcultural actors themselves. In effect, Muggleton argues that Hebdige too freely interprets the signifiers worn by punks in order to over-emphasize their disruptive properties. Furthermore, Muggleton suggests that in post-modernity signifiers and signs worn by subcultural actors (that is, style) does not accurately delineate membership in a subculture. In other words, other factors have come to define membership in subcultural identity. This change has been so important that it leads Muggleton to suggest that, along with post-modernity, we see post-subcultures.

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30 Melucci, 127.
With the increasing atomization of post-modern society, the argument goes, individuals no longer identify with groups based on particular style.

In postmodern society, lifestyles are understood to be infiltrated increasingly by ‘tribalism’; the self-sufficient individual as the subject of the creation of lifestyle in modern society is thereby undermined (Maffesoli 1996, 97). Postmodernity, Maffesoli argues, is characterized by the formation of fluid micro-groups that do not connect individuals to a particular community in a relationship of ‘belonging’ (Pilkington 2002, 15).

This fluidity, it is argued, has extended into (for my purposes) one of the most important aspects of subcultural identity; music. “It has been suggested that at the end of the 1990s fixed identifications with a single musical genre were rare and style bore not homological relationship to musical preference” (Pilkington 2002, 222). If these assumptions are correct, then the argument I will soon develop, that music and subcultural identities combine to create a musical subculture which serves as one of the most potent points of Melucci-style social action, is crippled. However, Pilkington (2002) demonstrates that this assumption is highly biased and emanates from western academics studying western subcultures. The problem is compounded by the fact that one subculture (rave) is used to make the lion’s share of the arguments regarding post-subculture. The on-the-ground fact is that many people still identify as punk, or as hippy etc., especially outside of the West (Pilkington 1996, 2002).

Despite Muggleton and the debate that he sparked regarding post-subculture, it nonetheless remains to be proven that the nature of subculture and identity has strayed from the original formulations of Hebdige and the Birmingham school. For purposes of this essay, subculture should be viewed as a primary site of identity formulation and negotiation. In the words of David James (1999), subcultures form a sort of “un-Popular Culture.” Subcultures are the site where alternative identities are created, and thus where meanings are received, recycled, and re-made. Subcultures may indeed represent the locations in society where youth politics, and
social movement (in the eyes of Melucci) take place. Furthermore, music plays a central role in subcultural meaning-making, and for those subcultures that are arranged around a common musical genre (which I call music-based subcultures), music combines with style to become the major location for political action and meaning-making. If subculture and style represent the face of alternative identities (and therefore, politics of identity), then music provides the soundtrack for this politics.

*Instrumental Reasoning; Music and Social Movement*

Before considering the links between music and identity, and music and discourse, it is important to briefly examine how previous studies of music have considered music as political. The approaches to music and politics are varied, but most often music is considered at the surface level of either lyrics, musicians, or fans. With the exception of Frankfurt school aestheticians, rarely is music itself considered in a manner that attempts to understand music, meaning and politics.

Nonetheless, black music has been analyzed as political. Angela Davis convincingly argues that blues women of yesteryear represent a driving force in political black feminism (1998). David Kelley suggests that the spirit of funk music drives the black movement through its insistence of a better (albeit ephemeral) world:

> It [black music] created a world of pleasure, not just to escape the everyday brutalities of capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, but to build community, establish fellowship, play and laugh, and plant seeds for a different way of living, a different way of hearing (Kelley 2002, 12).

Generally, music is either considered as a text, by musicology, or as an instrument of politics. Musicology rarely attempts to consider politics in musical text, and the few examples that do,
fail to move beyond musical texts and consider music’s relations with identity, discourse and more conventional definitions of politics. One of the best examples of musicology’s treatment of music and politics is Susan McClary’s *Conventional Wisdom; The Content of Musical Form* (2000). McClary’s work is a rare and valuable example of musicology considering external conventions (norms) in music, and the mutual relations between musics and norms. On the other side of the coin, non-musicologists (generally sociology of music folks) most often neglect significant aspects of the musical texts themselves (the sounds), and reserve the analysis to a) lyrics, b) musicians, c) respondents’ comments about a musical genre or d) consider music abstractly, as art, yet ignore music concretely. To fully and fruitfully incorporate these two approaches is to incorporate analysis of music itself with music’s effects on and relations with the societies, cultures, identities and politics that receive, shape and are in turn shaped by music.

Currently, there is only one source that attempts to link music and social movements. Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison’s *Music and Social Movements* is important insofar as it is an attempt to link music and social movement. Unfortunately their efforts are marred by an inadequate conceptualization of music and its links to identity and meaning. Eyerman and Jamison make several mistakes in their approach to music in relation to the American left. Despite a promising beginning (in theoretical perspective), suggesting that the student of social movements need to examine the relation of music to social movements and the suggestion to conceive of this relations as a “collective learning process...[as a part of] what we have previously called the cognitive approach” (Eyerman and Jameson, 7). Their approach has the effect of ghettoizing music, and making several fundamentally reductive moves in their

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37 The journal *Popular Music and Society* is a particularly illustrative example of the consideration of music being reduced to either the study of members of musical subcultures, or lyrics, but rarely (if ever) the consideration of the music itself. See: Michael Hoover and Lisa Strokes, “Pop Music and the Limits of Cultural Critique: Gang of Four Shrinkwraps Entertainment,” *Popular Music and Society*, Fall 1998 v22 i3. and John Charles Goshert, “‘Punk’ after
treatment of music. Their attempt to examine “the ways in which social movements contribute to processes of cultural transformation, particularly in relation to music” (ibid, 10) frames music as an effect of social movements’ ability to “transform culture”. This position seems to take identity as a static given, and places it in a causal chain that proceeds from grievance to mobilization. In placing music at the end of the causal chain, Eyerman and Jamison ignore music’s creative aspects, and its effects on identity formation itself. Eyerman and Jamison, furthermore, do not consider music a subversion of signs, or a collective creation of meaning, but take its meaning as given.

This reduction has multiple detrimental effects on Eyerman and Jamison’s work. Perhaps most importantly, it leads them to the assumption that music of the ‘60s (or earlier) can be imported into the completely different social reality of the present to re-awaken collective action similar to that of the ‘60s. Songs,

are also channels of communication for activists—within movements, but also between different movements, and indeed, between movement generations. Music enters into what we have called the collective memory, and songs can conjure up long-lost movements from extinction as well as reawakening forgotten structures of feeling (ibid, 161).

At first glance, this seems reasonable, but if one analyses the argument for Eyerman and Jamison’s assumptions of meaning in music, its problems become apparent. For music to be a communication for activists (across time and space), it would necessarily have to have either an autonomous meaning, or a broad enough ambiguity to travel. For Eyerman and Jamison do not consider any ambiguity but instead look for specifically political meanings in lyrics. The assumption, then, is that music will mean the same to differing interlocutors, across time and space.

There is absolutely no reason, however, to assume that “The Times They are A’ Changin” is going to mean the same thing for SDS activists in 1968 as it will for Weathermen in 1968, much less for AFL-CIO activists in 2002. Furthermore, to import a song from the past to the present, is then to reinterpret it through the specific intertextual lens of the songs that have come since the original protest song. This creates an even more complicated situation to disentangle because it is possible at this point that “The Times They Are A ‘Changin” must now be read not only against the paradigmatic songs from its day, but against specific contemporary paradigmatic songs as well.\textsuperscript{38}

Nonetheless, they assume, “the original meaning is in the song, however, and even if it cannot command the same force as it did in its original context, this original meaning and intention…demand to be taken into account” (ibid, 169). This assumption brutally mars an otherwise valiant attempt at assimilating the ephemeral into concrete politics. Finally, Eyerman and Jamison limit their analysis to specifically political movements and songs, and thus completely miss the nuances that both Melucci and Hebdige introduce into the field of cultural politics. *Music and Social Movements*, and the logical shortcomings found within serve as a resounding warning to the analyst of music, and social movements to have a well-developed theory of the links between music, identity, meaning and politics. It is to the construction of this theory that we now turn.

The link between music, identity and politics, is the same linking factor that ties the majority of this essay together: that of discourse and of meaning, where the creation and negotiation of meanings is conceived of as social action, and identity formation. Due to space constraints, this essay cannot offer a comprehensive treatment of music, nor of how I propose

\textsuperscript{38} Dylan must, then, be read against the Sex Pistols or the Clash in addition to The Weavers and Peter Paul and Mary…
music should be considered. Rather, the remainder of this essay suggests two ways of considering music which lend themselves to the approach I have attempted to outline. These are: the link between music and identity and, as such, music as a site of meaning negotiation and creation.

Above, I suggest that group identity, and social action, is cultured through the shared creation and negotiations of meaning. Music provides an excellent avenue for this process, and thus is an extremely important location for the creation and development of group identity, that is, the creation and negotiation of meanings, and the transmission of codes.

"Music not only represents social relations, it also and simultaneously enacts them"; and too often attempts to relate musical forms to social processes ignore the ways in which music is itself a social process…the question is not how a piece of music, a text, ‘reflects’ popular values, but how—in performance—it produces them (Frith 1996, 270)

Values in this case, can be read as codes. Music therefore, is itself both an interpretation of codes, and an enactment (producer) of codes. Music, it seems, is the conveyor of codes of identity. Furthermore, to quote Frith again,

music gives us a way of being in the world, a way of making sense of it: musical response is, by its nature, a process of musical identification; aesthetic response is, by its nature, an ethical agreement. The critical issue is, in other words, not meaning and its interpretation—musical appreciation as a kind of decoding—but experience and collusion: the ‘aesthetic’ describes a kind of self-consciousness, a coming together of the sensual, the emotional, and the social as performance. In short, music doesn’t represent values but lives them (ibid, 272).

If we can hear music as social codes, we approach the power of music for identity. Music, again, is a “social construction which provide[s] keys to the ways in which we, as individuals, present ourselves to the world” (ibid, 273). In participating in a musical performance (certainly we should consider listening as an integral part of performance) we are simultaneously proclaiming, and participating in a collectivity (ibid). Being a member of a taste community (Gracyk 2001)
based around a musical genre (Frith), engenders the definition, and borders, of collective identity. As a respondent of Michael Urban’s remarks,

> you will meet someone like that and ask what kind of music he likes and that person will tell you, “I like Grunge” or “I like Metal.” And the reply is something along the lines of, “Well, you’re a fine person but you’re not my brother”…and you meet another and you say, “What music do you listen to?” And he might say, “The Rolling Stones, John Mayall, Leadbelly, Otis Spann.” You think right away, “You’re my brother.” (Urban 2002, 423).

Music, and the membership in a musical community (subculture) provides that immediate marker that creates affective bonds with other members, and delineates the boundaries for those who may be merely “a fine person”. In other words, music is the avenue to identity because “identity comes from the outside, not the inside; it is something we put on or try on, not something we reveal or discover” (Frith, 273). Music provides, therefore, access to the gowns of identity signs and listeners actively dress accordingly.

> Music constructs our sense of identity through the experience it offers of the body, time, and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives…Identity is necessarily a matter of ritual: it describes one’s place in a dramatized pattern of relationships—one can never really express oneself ‘autonomously.’ Self identity is cultural identity (Frith, 275).

Music in general, like the work of Alberto Melucci, provides this essay with an essential link between the seemingly disparate areas of culture, identity and social movement. As argued above, the essential link here is that of meaning, and its transmission and negotiation. Often this meaning is transmitted through what I have called discursive networks, and in the case of subcultures, through outward style. Music represents another location for the transmission of meaning, but it should not be assumed that music will always merely transmit dominant codes (discourse).
Rather, music *itself*, provides for not only the transmission of dominant meanings, but also the opportunity for the recreation of, perhaps, liberatory meanings. Through a combination of aesthetic theory and discourse analysis, we can approach a stronger understanding of *how* music and meaning interact, and how music is both the transmitter of dominant meanings, and the site for their subversion. If music is to be read as a possible site of the struggle over meaning (politics), issues of meaning and music must first be addressed. Certainly, music means. *What* music means is the subject of debate. To approach the “what” when considering musical meaning, we must affirm the following: that musical meaning is socially constituted; structured by rules of genre, the social situation of its reception, and its position in society.\(^{39}\) On the other hand, music *itself* does mean. The music (voice, instruments, and their performance) *combine* with social setting to create meaning. More concretely, musics’ meaning is signified, through discourse, in social settings. Discourse *ascripts* meaning to music, but that meaning comes from the music *in* the social situation.

To suggest that music cannot be read in a vacuum, is to insist that it be analyzed as a “material social practice,” which implies a “socially grounded criticism. [which means] ‘interrogating’ the implication of any contemporary music criticism in politics” (Horner, 159). What this forces the analyst interested in music to consider is, therefore, not a singular *meaning* in music, but what kind of signifier music acts as in a *particular, historically situated moment* and to *specific, materially situated groups*. Thus, music expresses and embodies systems codes.


\(^{40}\) See: Theodore Gracyk, *I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001. Specific intertextuality is an idea used by Gracyk to admit that every text refers to other texts, but is a move that reduces the radical relativity of meaning posited by the idea of intertextuality. *Specific* intertextuality suggests that texts refer only to certain other texts. When used to consider musical texts, this idea shows that musical texts refer to other texts *within* the specific genre/tradition of music. For instance: punk texts don’t refer to *all* other
It provides both a paradigmatic example of the purchase of meaning, and a telling instance of the importance of signifiers for identity.

The “meaning” of music describes, in short, not just an interpretive but a social process: musical meaning is not inherent (however “ambiguously”) in the text…”Both experience of the music and the music’s meanings themselves change complexly in relation to the style-competence of the (listener), and to the social situations in which they occur…music can never be played or heard outside a situation, and every situation will affect the music’s meaning” (Lucy Green, in Frith, 250).

This is, implicitly, if not explicitly, a call to consider the contextual meaning of music. To do this one must, in addition to the obvious context, consider what meanings are being consumed in a particular situation, what these signifiers say (how they differentiate, perpetuate or otherwise interact with the dominant code) and how their meaning is “worn.” One must not only look at the specific music, but examine the type of music (genre) the situation in which its meaning is being consumed, the relationship it has to master codes, and the non-musical signs associated with that particular group/style/situation.

This begins to look like a quagmire of context, where meaning in music is radically variant across time and space, where any context can conjure any meaning. Context is key, and music does vary across space and time, but some key concepts are relevant to help pull us out of the relativist trap we are nearly in. Specific intertextuality and paradigm, provide a way to avoid relativism. Broadly, intertextuality “is a blanket term for the idea that a text communicates its meaning only when it is situated in dialogue with other texts” (Gracyk, 56). This idea is overly broad, and in fact only increases the risk of falling into relativism (if any text can and must be read through all other texts, specific meaning is surely lost).

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40 Context can also be read as “positionality” in relation to discourse.
From the viewpoint of general intertextuality, an Eddie Van Halen guitar solo means basically the same thing as a Steve Vai guitar solo, and the Who’s destruction of their instruments in live performance means the same as Nirvana’s. General intertextuality thus warrants closer scrutiny. It does make a difference for much of the audience whether Eddie Van Halen or Steve Vai came first (ibid 58-59).

Specific intertextuality brings us closer to an understanding of a musical text. To understand the music’s message (its differentiating move) a listener must understand that it refers to some previous musical texts. “In practice, the interplay of texts is always, for each musician and member of the audience, interplay between specific texts” (ibid, 59). A listener could make no sense (or perhaps different sense) of Screeching Weasel without being at least summarily familiar with the Ramones. Further,

Texts are not puppies, frolicking together even when the humans are away; texts cannot engage in intertextual play in the absence of an audience. The audience provides the requisite self-reflexive turn by becoming explicitly aware of signifying practices employed in the construction of the text. Meanings arise as audiences make connections between one text and others. However, if the audience must do the work of deciding which connections are the relevant ones, then the text cannot position the audience (ibid, 63).

Several important factors arise from this quote. Firstly, although Gracyk argues that the text does not position the audience, he fails to realize that the text does in fact orient the audience (point them in a direction). Without referring to at least a musical genre, audience interpretation of the music would slip again into the general intertextuality that Gracyk warns us against. On the other hand, the implications of the quote also save us from relativism.

The listener (consumer) of music interprets the meaning of the music through a framework of other specific texts. These specific texts can travel across time and space, and thus, can exist in multiple contexts, and add to the interpretation of music in these multiple contexts. In referring to specific texts, the subject is also purposely not referring to other texts. Meaning is

41 Screeching Weasel is a band that imitates the Ramones in a reverent yet ironic manner.
being built not only by the referent to similarities, but also by referring to differences. Considering the meaning of music, then, is not an exercise which can focus on musical texts outside of social settings (discursive positions). When considering social setting, the analyst must also consider the web of specific intertextuality that is created around the music, and which helps to shape the social setting, and therefore, the meaning of music.

These arguments take us closer to the point where we can analyze musical texts and search for meanings. Because music is a social practice, it can be seen as a transmitter of master codes (in the sense that Yuri Lotman suggests, where all texts transmit codes, and all codes are constituted of and by texts). Furthermore, it is situated in its own codes, which refer to both the genre of the music, and the paradigmatic texts within that genre. It would seem, then, that music simultaneously transmits social codes, and codes which are specific to a musical genre, or subculture.

But, does music merely transmit codes, or can it disrupt dominant codes? If Yuri Lotman is correct, texts themselves serve to constitute codes as they are transmitting them. But does music go further than this play on master codes? There are two ways in which we can answer “yes”. The first comes from Baudrillard’s *Toward a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981). Baudrillard, while critiquing the exchange of signs (and therefore, meaning) as a part of ideology (the transmission of dominant meanings), introduces an *outside* to this commodification of meaning. His notion of the *symbolic* is perhaps the most important link between music and meaning for the analyst interested in music’s liberatory potential. Music, unlike language, has an element of the ephemeral. Music is not only the sum of its text, something in music falls outside of its meaning. Because music has the mysterious power to

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43 ibid.
move a listener, it has more than “meaning.” Music somehow reaches something of the primordial, that which is outside political economy (the system of meaning): the symbolic. Symbolic exchange implies a “transgression of the economic,” (Baudrillard 1981, 124) which reinstates consumption as, in Georges Bataille’s words, “the gift of an offering [that] makes it pass precisely into the world of abrupt consumption” (1992, 49). Immediate consumption, in this sense, is free of the implications of signification because consumption, in this case, is meant to be read as consuming the way a fire consumes: it is a sacrifice, a destruction. Baudrillard reserves the idea of the symbolic (which Bataille refers to as the Impossible: that which cannot be, and yet there it is) as a non-commodified (and thus, non-signified/codified) form of communication.

Music represents the possibility of the impossible; the momentary grasp of the symbolic. Because it is impossible to describe in words what the symbolic in music is (if it were possible, it would not be symbolic), the explanation rests on emotive adjectives.

Music does not have a content—it can’t be translated—but this does not mean that it is not ‘an object of the understanding.’ Or, to put it another way, the gap in music between the nature of the experience (sounds) and the terms of its interpretations (adjectives) may be more obvious than in any other art form, but this does not mean that the pleasure of music doesn’t lie in the ways in which we can—and must—fill the gap (Frith 264-265).

The gap, therefore, between the effect of music, and the human ability to explain this effect is proof of its existence beyond, or outside of the sign exchange economy. The gap points toward the aspect of music that cannot be signified; cannot be given discursive meaning. This gap is up for grabs. It can create the opportunity for a symbolic (immanent) experience, or it can be filled

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44 It is also possible that its meaning is its symbolic.
46 By immanent I mean what Bataille does: the explosion of the separation of subjects, the irradication of transcendence. This is the moment of Eros, where identity ceases, and beings are truly together. See Bataille’s *Theory of Religion* (1992), *The Accursed Share* vol2-3 (1991), *The Unfinished System of Non-Knowledge* (2001), On
by meaning, which is in the signification process. Perhaps both can take place simultaneously. This is not to bemoan the process, for even Baudrillard (and with him Bataille) realizes that the symbolic is the moment, the vacuum that exists at the time; the gap of music.

It is also interesting to note how close this is to Jacques Attali’s notions of Noise and therefore implies his fourth (liberatory) mode of music: Composition. These (im)possible elements of music provide an aside to the search for meaning in music. They suggest a shared experience of music, which does not need to fall under the rubric of meaning, if we understand meaning as only that which is discursively ascribed within social settings and positions vis-à-vis dominant/dominating codes.

Furthermore, music, being more than language, maintains elements that are beyond discourse. It is in music’s link to art that this “beyond” belongs. Art, for Murray Edelman, as well as for the Frankfurt school aestheticians, and many others, provides the possibility to both counter dominant discourses, and the moment of (radical) transcendence. “Art is worth attention as an antidote to political mystification because works of art depend for their power upon properties that contrast revealingly with the characteristics of political language. Art helps to counter banal political forms and so can be a liberating form of political expression” (Edelman Nietzsche (1990) and Guilty (1988). It is interesting to note that this is exactly the opposite of Musicology’s attempt to posit the transcendence of music as that which takes the listener out of her body (Adorno included). See: Alastair Williams, Constructing Musicology (2001).

47 Paul R. Kohl, Reading Between the Lines: Music and Noise in Hegemony and Resistance,” Popular Music and Society, Fall 1997 v21 i3 p3. In this example, Attali conceptualized noise as the first of four stages in musical progression (all of which are present in contemporary music). Noise is the music of preindustrial exchange (and therefore directly linked to the symbolic). It is the music of the sacrificial ritual. “Harnessing this noise, in part, is one of the ritualistic functions of music: ‘the whole tradition of musicology analyzes music as the organization of controlled panic, the transformation of anxiety into joy, and of dissonance into harmony’ (Attali 27)” (Kohl 2). The final, liberatory stage is composition. “Composition is a return to personal usage and meaning in music, an escape from the economic and political structures that have arisen around music in the previous 500 years. It is not a return to the ritual of the past, however, but an escape from all prior codes” (Kohl 3). Noise then is the contemporary existence of the symbolic in music, and composition is the future possible of musical life fully saturated with the symbolic.
126). Furthermore, Theodore Adorno and Herbert Marcuse greatly add to the insistence that art and music provide moments of resistance.

In theorizing the gap of music, I have suggested that this gap could be the moment of Bataille’s eminence (immanence/sovereignty/freedom). Adorno adds to this notion when he suggests, “music finds the absolute immediately, but at the moment of discovery it becomes obscured, just as too powerful a light dazzles the eyes, preventing them from seeing things which are perfectly visible” (Adorno 1998, 4). In the final words of Adorno’s chapter “Music and Language,” (in Quasi una Fantasia) he theorizes the gap again:

But if musical structure or form is to be more than a set of didactic systems, it does not just embrace the content from outside; it is the thought process by which content is defined. Music becomes meaningful the more perfectly it defines itself in this sense—and not because its particular elements express something symbolically. It is by distancing itself from language that its resemblance to language finds its fulfilment [sic] (ibid, 6).

This is exactly the gap between a meaning conveyed (the effect of music) and the signification (description) of this meaning. Meaning, for Adorno, is embraced from within music. To say that its content does not come from outside, Adorno is strengthening the suggestion that music can (if it is not already) be free from dominant codes and discourses of power.48

The gap can also be discussed in aesthetic terms. For this discussion, we turn away from Adorno, and toward Marcuse. Phantasy is an access point by which we can use Marcuse to suggest that music’s gap is a link or path toward a (momentary?) freedom, or outside of

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48 As with any use of Adorno, I am not suggesting this is always what Adorno suggests. Just as he is comfortable with contradictions, a fruitful use of Adorno cannot be intimidated by the glaring contradictions that are provided by some of his other works and theories of culture and music. Nonetheless, contradictions abound. Take for instance the following, written a mere 6 years after the chapter employed above: “In the spirit of our time, the sole remainder of the autonomous artistic language of music is a communicative language, and that does permit something like a social function. It is the remnant that is left of an art once the artistic element in it has dissolved.” (Adorno, Introduction to the Sociology of Music, E.B. Ashton trans., New York: The Seabury Press, 1976. 40.) In this formulation, music does not carry the separation and autonomy from language or signification, and in fact, is only a withered shadow of the music discussed in “Music and Language”. In the absence of a philosophical system, the author assumes the right to selectively employ from the disparate elements of Adorno’s writings.
ideology. In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse argues that phantasy is one of the last realms of the subject that is outside of the performance principle (which is, of course, the capitalist face of the reality principle).\(^{49}\)

Freud singles out phantasy as one mental activity that retains a high degree of freedom from the reality principle…Phantasy plays a most decisive function in the total mental structure: it links the deepest layers of the unconscious with the highest products of consciousness (art), the dream with the reality; it preserves…the perpetual but repressed ideas of the collective and individual memory, the tabooed images of freedom (Marcuse, 140).

Phantasy, then, is the faculty that links art (and thus music) with the memory and desire for freedom. In essence, through phantasy, art *expresses* freedom.

The aesthetic form, for Marcuse, then becomes the veil for imagination’s memory of the “harmony of sensuousness and reason” and the protest against domination.\(^{50}\) Marcuse finds his own formulation, that art is opposition, somewhat problematic. Because of contemporary capitalism’s depth (what Marcuse calls “total mobilization”\(^{51}\)), Marcuse suggests that art’s opposition only carries on where it, “cancels itself, where it saves its substance by denying its traditional form and thereby denying its reconciliation: where it become surrealistic and atonal” (Marcuse 1966, 142). Later in his life, Marcuse still employed this notion of phantasy, art, surrealism and revolution.

…the dream [phantasy] must become a force of changing rather than dreaming the human condition: it must become a political force. If art dreams of liberation within the spectrum of history, dream realization through revolution must be possible—the surrealist program must still be valid (1972, 102).

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\(^{49}\) Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization; a Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1966. The performance principle could surely be added to the above section on commodity, ideology and the subject as yeat another instance of capitalism’s work on the subject.

\(^{50}\) ibid, 141.

\(^{51}\) ibid, 142.
In his “Art and Revolution”\textsuperscript{52}, Marcuse suggests that, indeed, art itself can find a \textit{new} communication, that art is the “effort to find forms of communication that may break the oppressive rule of the established language” (ibid, 79)\textsuperscript{53}

Music’s extra-linguistic nature, then, is its political power and potential. The “gap” in music, which I have been discussing above, is akin to what Roland Barthes calls the “third meaning” (1977, 54) Barthes contrasts the third meaning with what he calls the second, or “obvious” meaning (ibid). The obvious meaning is “that which comes to seek me out” (ibid). Translated to the above framework, the obvious meaning is the meaning that transmits codes. In opposition to the obvious meaning is, “the third, the one ‘too many’, the supplement that my intellection cannot succeed in absorbing, at once persistent and fleeting, smooth and elusive,” Barthes calls this third meaning, “the \textit{obtuse meaning}” (ibid). The third meaning, like the gap is, “greater than the pure, upright, secant, legal perpendicular of the narrative, it seems to open the field of meaning totally, that is infinitely…opening out into the infinity of language, it can come through in the eyes of analytic reason [and like Bataille’s sacrifice] it belongs to the family of pun, buffoonery, useless expenditure” (ibid, 55). Barthes’ third meaning speaks directly to the possibility of a part of music existing outside of dominant codes (language). “The obtuse meaning is outside (articulated) language while nevertheless within interlocution” (61). “Obtuse meaning appears necessarily as a luxury, an expenditure with no exchange. This luxury does not \textit{yet} belong to today’s politics, but nevertheless \textit{already} tomorrow’s” (63).

These factors, endemic to music, are what makes the study of music not only interesting, but politically important. While music interacts with discourse, and often serves to produce, reproduce and transmit codes (dominant discourses, power, etc.), it also has the potential to

\textsuperscript{52} ibid, 79-128
\textsuperscript{53} On the next page, Marcuse specifically states that in saying art, he includes literature and music.
interrupt this flow of codes through its leftover meaning (its meaning outside of meaning; its gap; its third meaning). Music, then, at different moments both transmits and interrupts codes. It makes both meaning and non-meaning. When music makes non-meaning, it makes room for the re-creation of meaning, and therefore again provides space for the construction of identity, and through providing the opportunity to recreate meanings, engenders Melucci’s social action. As music plays, the social moves, and this is the sonic manifestation of a musical action system.

When the Music’s Over: Conclusion

We arrive, finally, at a picture of social movement which is made up of seemingly disparate elements, those of culture, identity, subculture and music, which are bound together by a single process: that of meaning and meaning making. In this essay I suggest that mainstream, resource mobilization focused, social movement theories privilege visible forms of contentious politics, and that this privileging blinds them to more subtle, often semiotic, forms of contentious politics. I suggested that politics and social movement takes place, not only on the streets, among elites, and in the lobby, but also in pubs, on corners, on the bodies of subcultural actors, on records, and between the ears of political subjects. I suggest that the consideration of social movement must take into account the various functions of culture (the politics of culture, and cultural politics), identity, especially group identity, and the processes of alternative meaning making in the face of dominating cultural codes and discourses. I suggested, then, that both subculture (through style and group identity) and music represent powerful locations for the alternative meaning making processes that this essay contends are representative of social action. The creation of contentious meanings, in this formulation, is contentious politics.
In this essay I have argued that discourse analysis represents an important methodology for the analysis and understanding of political contexts because it allows the analyst to understand and describe the meanings transmitted in cultural texts, and point towards ways that these meanings structure the recipient of discourse. Discourse analysis, furthermore, lends itself to the understanding and analysis of the alternative meanings which this essay insists take place in social movement. Discourse analysis, however, should not be the only method used in the study of social movement and contentious politics. Particularly in the analysis of music-based subcultures, ethnography, coupled with discourse analysis, provides the researcher the deep knowledge and understanding of a particular group of social actors, their discourses, and their politics. The combination of ethnography and discourse analysis, with a consideration of macro-political and social factors within a given culture, should provide the opportunity to create scholarship that advances the understanding of both the *how* and the *why* of social movement, contentious politics, and the formation of oppositional identities.
Appendix A:

Sender \(\rightarrow\) Object \(\rightarrow\) Receiver

\(\text{(Axis of Communication)}\)
\(\text{(Value)}\)

DONOR

Helper \(\rightarrow\) Subject \(\leftarrow\) Opponents

\(\text{(Axis of Conflict)}\)
\(\text{(Protagonist)}\)

Appendix B:

\(S_1\) \(\rightarrow\) \(S_2\)

\(S_2\) \(\rightarrow\) \(S_1\)

\(S_1\) \(\rightarrow\) \(S_2\) \(\text{presupposition}\)

\(S_2\) \(\rightarrow\) \(S_1\) \(\text{contradiction}\)
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