The Talk and Back Talk of Collective Action: A Dialogic Analysis of Repertoires of Discourse among Nineteenth-Century English Cotton Spinners

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This article offers a critique of framing perspectives on collective action discourse and an alternative *dialogic* approach. The argument set forth is that the latter sees collective action discourse as a joint product of actors' agency and discourse dynamics, including its multivocal nature. Such discourse is a joint product of challengers' rational actions and the constraints of the discursive field. Challengers seek to appropriate and subvert the dominant discourses that legitimate power, creating discursive repertoires. To illustrate this, the contentious actions of English cotton spinners in the 1820s and 1830s are analyzed. The spinners produced a discursive repertoire drawing on mill owners' dominant discourses.

Culture is once again squarely on the agenda of social movement analysis from a variety of analytic perspectives, examining an array of issues, including identity, media, ideology, and cognition (Jasper 1997; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Taylor and Whittier 1995). While the range of analytic perspectives is large, the framing perspective dominates research informed by political process and resource mobilization models, as attested by recent writing (Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Klandermans 1997; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 1997). Frame analysis focuses on the social construction of meaning by social movement activists and organizations and on the media and the reactions between framers and potential supporters (Snow and Benford

1992; Gamson 1988*a*, 1992*a*, 1992*b*; Gamson and Meyer 1996; McCarthy, Smith, and Zald 1996).[2]

In this article, I engage what I see as several problematic features of the framing perspective and offer an alternative. I argue that rooted in an undertheorization of discourse processes is a series of linked problems concerning the theoretical depiction and reified empirical analysis of collective action frames and the framing process. As an alternative, I propose a *dialogic* analysis of collective action and social movement discourse. A dialogic analysis focuses attention on the production of meaning as essentially contested collective action that is motivated both by group conflict *and* the internal dynamics of discourse itself.

FRAME THEORY

The most central work on framing theory has been elaborated by David Snow, Robert Benford, William Gamson, and their associates. Snow and Benford define a frame as "an interpretive schemata that signifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action in one's present or past environment" (1992, p. 137). Frame analysts describe framing as the process of creating the ideational elements of persuasive communication essential for both the mobilization of consensus prior to collective action and as the cognitive process necessary for orienting and sustaining collective action (Benford 1997, p. 410; Gerhards and Rucht 1992, pp. 578–84; Klandermans 1997, pp. 38–43; Snow and Benford 1992, p. 136). They generally depict movement activists or social movement organizations (SMOs) as strategic creators of frames that provide a compelling sense of injustice and the collective identities for the protagonists and their targets. Frames offer a diagnosis and prognosis of a problem and a call to action for its resolution (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, p. 6; W. Gamson 1995, p. 90; Snow and Benford 1988, p. 199).[3]

Framing theorists maintain that the construction of frames is situationally sensitive, is keyed to interactive processes, and occurs in a recursive relationship with the dynamics of collective action and the broader cycles

[2] Frame analysts have devoted less systematic attention to the role of governmental authorities in these processes, though see Capek (1993).

[3] McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald suggest that framing has five principal facets for analysis: (*a*) the ways in which they are used as cultural tool kits by activists, (*b*) its strategic dimensions for collective action, (*c*) contests between challengers and authorities over frame meanings, (*d*) the ways in which the media are implicated in these contests, and (*e*) the impact that framing has in modifying the cultural tool kits available in the more general culture (1996, p. 17).

of protest that shape other social movement processes (Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994, pp. 191–92; Klandermans 1988, p. 176; Klandermans 1992, pp. 82, 99). Consensual unity among a group concerning the contents of social movement frames is thus variable (Benford 1997, p. 422; Snow et al. 1986, pp. 477–78). Others have also observed that framing is bounded by the larger political culture or public discourse within which social contention develops (Donati 1992, p. 141; Gamson 1988a, pp. 221–22; Gamson 1992b, pp. 135–36; McAdam 1994, pp. 37–38). Generally, frame analysts argue that frames are derivative of ideologies, which they depicted as being more complex and encompassing systems of beliefs (Snow and Benford 1988, p. 205; Zald 1996, p. 262).

Snow and his colleagues suggest that successful framing depends upon the extent to which frames resonate with the potential understandings of adherents and sympathizers, which in turn is a function of their narrative fidelity, experiential commensurability, and empirical credibility (Snow and Benford 1988, p. 208; see also Gamson 1988b, pp. 167–68; Gamson 1992b, p. 135). Resonance can be enhanced by alignment processes that bridge the frame's messages to adherents' structurally congruent ideas, amplifying a particular value or belief, extending a frames ideological message to a wider pool of potential constituents and adherents, and sometimes transforming the contents of the frame to articulate a partly new message given current exigencies (Snow et al. 1986). Constructing frames that resonate with potential constituents and adherents thus partly results from using symbols and discourse familiar to the target population (Gamson 1988a, pp. 222, 242; Gamson 1988b, p. 166; Gamson and Modigliani 1989, p. 3). Snow and Benford (1992, p. 138) also have suggested that a master frame, a relatively stable configuration of ideational elements and symbols, operates as a kind of grammar for the articulation of more specific collective action framing processes within social movements.

KEY PROBLEMS

As a dominant mode of analysis, the framing perspective has spawned criticisms, many of them in-house.[4] It has been variously critiqued as lacking in conceptual precision in its delineation of constituent elements and processes, as reifying a signifying process, as being excessively voluntarist and nominalist, as having an analytic bias toward the elite production of frames, and as creating epistemological ambiguity between reality and its representations (Benford 1997, pp. 412–13, 418, 422; Ellingson 1995, p. 103; Gamson 1992a, p. 70; Jasper 1997, pp. 75–77; McAdam, McCarthy,

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[4] I pursue this critique in more detail in Steinberg (1998).

and Zald 1996, p. 6; Zald 1996, p. 261; McAdam 1996, p. 340; Hart 1996, pp. 88, 95). I maintain that these and other problems arise from the perspective's lack of attention to what we can term the social semiotics of meaning production (Hodge and Kress 1988). This is manifest both in terms of a theory of meaning production in discourse generally and how meaning is ordered in narrative forms, though I will concentrate here on the former.[5]

As noted above, frame analysis depicts the framing process as a type of representational contest between actors. The focus of much of the writing from this perspective is on a somewhat reified *textual* level. Challengers and powerholders each proffer an ideological view of an issue through a discrete textual representation and seek to persuade others of its superior veracity. Thus, the discursive conflict focused on by current analyses is that which occurs *between* relatively modular and synchronic packages. Success depends on whether the arguments or expressed beliefs within the text have a logical coherency and congruity with the cultural understandings used by potential recruits and sympathizers to provide them with a real and compelling interpretation of the issue.

Implicitly, then, frames are depicted as relatively stable referential modes of representation. Frame analysts have been less interested in examining the production of meaning for the signifiers that compose a frame—the words, catch phrases, metaphors, and other symbols that are the vehicles of meaning. Moreover, they do not focus on the relations between these components both *within* a frame (or text) and between frames.[6] The underlying epistemology is that the transmission of meanings between actors is a largely uncomplicated process of sending and receiving messages. As Donati notes, frame analysis and many perspectives on political discourse "have adopted a positivist stance, considering language as a rational, denotational and neutral instrument; that is, as composed of words with specific and unique meanings" (1992, p. 157; see also Masson 1996, p. 78).[7]

[5] For a discussion of the role of narratives in social movements, see Polletta (1998). For discussions of the narrative construction of identity, see Somers (1994) and Somers and Gibson (1994). For theoretical approaches to the narrative analysis of hegemony and resistance, see Ewick and Silbey (1995).

[6] Even in their inaugural work on frame analysis, Snow et al. (1986) discuss the frame alignment process in terms of the manipulation of the "sentiments," "values," and "interests" contained in a frame and not the representational components themselves.

[7] Exemplary in this regard is the recent work of Gerhards and Rucht (1992) on the framing of a campaign against the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In analyzing what they term the "ideology of imperialism" frame used in these collective mobilizations, the authors represent the frame as a series of causal statements about the role of the IMF and World Bank in perpetuating global inequality, reducing them in fact to a schematic representation (1992, pp. 576–77). In doing so, however, they take as

In most current analyses, then, frame analysts ignore a foundational assumption of social semiotics, that is, that signifiers often can be interpreted in multiple, incongruent, and potentially divisive ways (Gottdiener 1995, pp. 19–22). In this sense, they do not wholly grapple with the *multivocality* of collective action discourse, the multiple meanings that can be conveyed and interpreted through any particular discourse. From a social semiotic perspective, meaning is produced in the *interaction* between social action and systems of signs (Hodge and Kress 1988, p. 6). As Carroll and Ratner cogently observe, "linguistic meaning may be said to have its sources both in semiotic relations among signs *and* in the contingent yet relatively durable relations that human practice establishes between signifiers and their referents" (1994, p. 15). On the one hand, this means that activists can never complacently assume that they can unproblematically convey a representation of an issue, since the words they use may be interpreted differently by their targets. As Roberto Franzosi notes, "There is never a single message uniquely encoded in a text; there are several messages ('a network of different messages') as decoded by different readers endowed with different 'intertextual frames' and 'intertextual encyclopedias,' and different reading codes" (1998, p. 533).[8] Frame analysts have paid insufficient attention to the ways in which such "networks of messages" themselves impose structured constraints on what can be represented. As I suggest below, the development of collective action discourses is both facilitated and limited by the ways in which claims and alternative visions can be represented within a larger discursive field. A social semiotic perspective focuses our attention on the inherent ambiguities in the representation of an issue and its resolution and the communication of such concerns between participants in contention. The multivocality of messages that actors (both powerholders and challengers) circulate leaves opportunity for claims and visions to be understood in ways that may be different from (and not necessarily congruent with) what they intend.

This lack of a basis in social semiotics leads to several underlying problems in frame analysis, one of which, particularly in the application of the framing perspective, comes in depicting the outcome of representational processes as reified units. As the metaphors of frame and package suggest, collective action discourse generally is conceptualized as a discrete set of bounded and linked issue statements. While frame analysts maintain that framing is a dynamic process of representation, in their analyses, they

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unproblematic the meanings of many keywords that are used in the construction of the frame, such as "capitalism," "imperialist order," "third world," and even "IMF."

[8] Anne E. Kane raises this point from a more structuralist perspective (1997, pp. 250–51).

tend to depict frames as relatively stable meaning systems, akin to modular texts or maps, which can endure for long periods of time (and in the case of a master frame, over several lengthy social movements).[9] While framing analysts argue convincingly that collective action ideology is circumscribed, few if any such studies have demonstrated through the analysis of collective action discourse that its practitioners produce this discourse in such stable and structured forms.[10]

Depicting a frame as a discrete and clearly bounded map of meanings abstracts disparate and discontinuous discourse processes that ebb and flow over a cycle of collective action, highlighting a frozen moment in the course of action or outcome rather than the processes themselves. As Gamson and Meyer have noted, "The degree to which there are unified and consensual frames within a movement is variable and it is comparatively rare that we can speak sensibly of *the* movement framing. It is more useful to think of framing as an internal process of contention within social movements with different actors taking different positions" (1996, p. 283; see also Benford 1997, p. 422).[11] Activists, participants, and opponents are capable of reading different, divergent, and potentially contradictory meanings from frames. As Ellingson (1995, p. 107), Donati (1992, p. 161), and others have noted, meanings are susceptible to change over the course of a cycle of action.

If collective action discourse is not manifest in such stable and coherent modules, then we should be wary of characterizing it as representative of a discrete and distinctive oppositional subculture, as some analysts argue (Johnston 1991, pp. 49–50; Johnston and Klandermans 1995, p. 7; McAdam 1994, pp. 45–46). While social movement discourse is certainly distinctive, Tarrow raises a poignant issue when he asks, "Why does it seem so difficult to construct truly oppositional symbols? " (1994, p. 125). The answer lies, I will argue below, in seeing culture itself as a terrain of struggle (Fantasia and Hirsch 1995, pp. 145, 158). Rather than positing exclu-

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[9] Gerhards and Rucht's carefully diagrammed analysis of the collective action frame of the IMF protest (discussed above) is exemplary in this regard (1992, pp. 576–79). Benford, in noting the "descriptive bias" of framing analysis, lists over 50 discrete frames identified by the literature. As he observes, this is not the original theoretical meaning or methodological intent of the framing perspective, which argues that framing is an emergent process and that a multiplicity of frames can apply to a particular situation. However, he also notes that the metaphor itself is imprecise and is generally used in a monolithic manner (1997, pp. 413–16, 422).

[10] The exception in this regard is the area of media studies where Gamson and his associates, and others who have followed their lead, have demonstrated discrete structures in the media presentation of social and political issues (Gamson 1992a; Gamson and Modigliani 1989).

[11] In this sense, frame analysts have neglected the importance of what Goffman termed keying and rekeying (1974, pp. 43–44, 88–89).

sive cultures and oppositional subcultures, we should analyze social movement culture more as an appropriation from a dominant culture (Voss 1993; Hart 1996).

A further problem is the degree of agency many frame analysts assume in their analyses of framing as strategic action. As McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald have recently emphasized, the conception of framing is of the "conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action" (1996, p. 6). Unquestionably, framing is strategic, but in the focus on calculation and persuasion, frame analysts have neglected the constraints and limits that discourse itself imposes on such agency. As Dominique Masson observes, discourse doubly constrains the way in which such agency is exercised: "Discourses limit both linguistic practices (the textual meanings that can be enunciated) and discursive practices as events (whether and how these events can occur)" (1996, p. 88).

A final issue, linked to the questions of agency, is that most current work on collective action discourse portrays frames as cultural resources and their production and dissemination as strategic action primarily orchestrated by movement activists and SMOs (Evans 1997, pp. 452–57; Johnston and Klandermans 1995, p. 8; McCarthy, Smith, and Zald 1996, p. 309). This conceptualization stems partly from the assumptions of rational action that underlie the resource mobilization and political process models. From this perspective, discourse is thus analyzed in terms homologous to material resources (Marullo, Pagnucco, and Smith 1996, pp. 2–3; McAdam 1994, p. 43; Williams 1995, p. 126).

However, this homology creates several conundrums. First, if collective action discourse is contextual, public, and emergent in the processes of mobilization and action, as most accounts suggest, then exercising control and distribution of it as a resource seems highly problematic. As even Fred Kniss, the most recent advocate of a modified version of this approach, notes, cultural resources are not commensurable, fungible, or divisible (1997, p. 135; Kniss 1996, p. 8).[12] Kniss also argues that such resources are more mobile, manipulable, volatile, and context dependent than material resources (1997, p. 136; Kniss 1996, pp. 9, 21; see also Jasper 1997, pp. 32, 46–47; Kane 1997, p. 254). Additionally, if discourse is deployed rationally, as are material resources, it is unclear how we can

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[12] In their early work on injustice frames, William Gamson and his associates carefully differentiated resources—objects that have clearly specifiable units and are fungible—from what they termed know-how—skills necessary for effective mobilization and action (Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina 1982, pp. 23, 83, 86–87).

square this depiction with the social constructionist tenets of the framing perspective.[13]

These last problems of agency may be symptomatic of the fact that the underlying epistemologies of constructionist and rational actor accounts of collective action discourse are not easily reconciled. It is problematic to characterize social movement framing as both an exercise in the reality construction of genuinely held senses of injustice and identity, while simultaneously holding that activists and SMOs strategically manipulate and align frames to mobilize consensus. This can create an excessive voluntarism, vitiating the understanding of discourse as a stock of contested codes and meanings that impose boundaries on the ways in which people understand and represent their lives (Hart 1996, p. 88).

The discourse theory of the Bakhtin Circle and emerging literature in rhetorical social psychology offer a theory of discourse and ideology that resolves these conundrums. Additionally, they provide the basis for a reorientation of our analysis of cultural dynamics of social movements.

THE DIALOGIC ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE

Frame analysis valuably focuses our attention on processes of ideological and cultural production for mobilization and action but undertheorizes the semiotic aspects of framing.[14] A dialogic perspective furthers our analyses of discourse dynamics, particularly in terms of its multivocality and the semiotic processes that underlie it.[15]

Dialogism focuses on discourse as an ongoing process of social communication.[16] It emphasizes the situational embeddedness of discourse and

[13] Polletta argues that this confusion stems from an underlying Parsonian division between instrumental and cultural action in the framing perspective (1997, p. 438).

[14] For works that highlight the ways discourse provides the structure by which actors fashion frames, see Ellingson (1995), Fine (1995), and Johnston (1991, 1995).

[15] As Sara Mills has recently observed, there is no simple definition for the term discourse (1997, p. 1). I take it to mean the process and product of socially situated and institutionally ordered ways people communicate their representations of lived and imagined realities. Discourse is most often, and most importantly, language in social use (though it can also be costumes, body language, pictures, and the host of other ways people communicate with one another). As Mills notes, "a discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but groupings of utterances or sentences, statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues in existence. Institutions and social context therefore play an important and determining role in the development, maintenance and circulation of discourses" (1997, p. 11; see also Macdonell 1986, pp. 1–3).

[16] This theory was developed by the Bakhtin Circle, named after Mikhail Bakhtin, a literature professor acknowledged as the intellectual center of this antiformalist group

its meaning as partly a product of social interaction and partly a product of how streams of language themselves interact. The analysis is thus both social and semiotic: social in that meaning is a function of the social interactions between people and the contexts in which these take place; and semiotic in that the languages themselves that people use and that are available to them to express their senses of the world limit of what can be expressed and understood (Bakhtin 1986, pp. 65–71, 122–27; Todorov 1984, pp. 41–54).[17] In the latter sense, dialogists emphasize that talk and texts people use in any specific exchange in part derive their meanings in relation to the wider sphere of talk and texts in ongoing communication. For Bakhtin, "The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideologic consciousness around the object of the utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. And not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to appropriation . . . many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien" (1981, p. 276; see also Bakhtin 1986, p. 87; Volosinov 1986, pp. 21, 86).

What actors understand when they communicate with one another is thus a product of intersecting streams of communication produced in specific historical situations (Todorov 1984, pp. 60–61). With reference to challenging groups in collective action, for example, discourses of injustice noted by Gamson to be the fulcrum for framing take their meaning in relation to other discourses used in ongoing communication that depict power, difference, and hierarchy. In this sense, dialogism theorizes meaning production as purposeful but bounded by the larger field of relevant discourses in which meanings are produced, thus providing a coherent epistemology of both agency and its limiting structures within this cultural process (Shotter 1992, p. 15).

In addition, dialogism also emphasizes that discourse is essentially *multivocal* (Bakhtin 1981, pp. 291–92). Many words, phrases, and utterances do not have one unambiguous meaning but often have *multiple* meanings given their particular contextual use with other words, phrases, and utter-

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(see Gardiner 1992; Morson and Emerson 1990; Clark and Holquist 1984). Many of their contributions were written in the 1920s and 1930s.

[17] For a similar appreciation of the contextual discourse strategies from a more pragmatist and interactionist approach, see the work of Gerald Platt and his associates on letters written to M. L. King, Jr. (Lilley and Platt 1994; Platt and Lilley 1994; Platt and Fraser 1998). Platt provides nuanced analyses of how both messages and social movement identification are constructed from within the particular sociocultural contexts of the writers, and how this is reflective of their multivocal capacity to rearticulate the meanings of movement discourse. For a more structuralist theorization, see Kane (1997, pp. 255–57).

ances and the knowledge and intentions of the actors involved. Meaning production is therefore a type of joint labor, a social production among and between actors that involves agreement, dissension, and ambiguity— sometimes minor, but at times considerable—which is always partly anticipatory, ongoing, and contains echoes of past usages (Burkitt 1998, p. 166; Shotter and Billig 1998, p. 16). And as Maria Shevstova reminds us, discourse is multivocal in part because it has socially diverse origins, the social divisions and hierarchies of the past and present being reflected and refracted in multiple interpretations (1992, p. 754; see also Barker 1997, p. 23).[18]

Often there is an ongoing struggle between actors trying to invest discourses with their preferred meanings, given their life experiences, situations, and their power to exert control over the meanings provided by words. As Bakhtin noted, "The word in language is half someone else's. . . . The word does not exist in neutral and impersonal language . . . but rather in people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own" (1981, pp. 293–94; see also Bakhtin 1984, pp. 121, 183; Collins 1999, pp. 139–40; Ponzio 1990, pp. 215–19, 253; Scott 1990, p. 177).

Bakhtin and many others since have emphasized that these struggles over meaning are often at the core of ideology in action. Discourse is ideological when the meanings it provides offer understandings about power, difference, and hierarchy that are claimed to be natural, accepted, or preferred. Dialogists have argued that discourse is ideologically saturated, particularly when it is used in group conflict. As Volosinov asserted, "The word is ideological phenomenon par excellence," and he tied discourse directly to contests of ideological power when he observed that, "The logic of consciousness is the logic of ideological communication, of semiotic interaction of a social group" (1986, p. 13; see also Bakhtin 1981, pp. 271–72; Medvedev and Bakhtin 1978, pp. 7–15). In this view, ideology does not exist outside of or prior to discourse but is created and structured in and through ongoing communication.

This emphasis has important parallels to the Gramscian theory of hegemony, which Snow and Benford reference in their early work as useful for understanding the framing process (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; see also Carroll and Ratner 1996). Bakhtin argued that power-

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[18] Goffman himself broaches this issue in a discussion of speech acts by noting transformations between situations and over time between the said, the normally understood, and what is understood on a particular occasion. However, his analysis is anchored in how situations and their definitions are responsible for such changes. He does not pursue this on the more semiotic level (Goffman 1981, pp. 64–65). Manning and Cullum-Swan in fact argue that Goffman's discussion of rekeying and reframing lacks a semiotic dimension necessary to understand such transformations (1992, p. 243).

holders can attempt hegemony through ongoing efforts to limit the way meaning can be structured within particular discursive terms, forms, and styles, as well as enforcing silence among the less powerful. They attempt to create in a "one-sided" exchange, more of a monologue than a dialogue. In practice, all communication has some attributes of monologue and dialogue to varying degrees, but much akin to Gramsci, dialogists emphasize that powerholders have the capacity to objectify meanings in discourse (Bell 1998, pp. 54–55). In such situations, as Masson notes, "Discourses also impose authorized 'ways of talking' about areas of knowledge or social practice on the broader institutional sites where they are hegemonic, and on the other actors wishing to intervene on these sites" (1996, p. 89). Such discourse becomes established as common sense and dampens the multivocal nature of social communication (Bakhtin 1984, pp. 189–90; Brandist 1996a, p. 103; 1996b, pp. 63, 70–71; Gardiner 1992, pp. 26–27, 164–65). This understanding of discursive hegemony adds to Snow and Benford's concepts of resonance, narrative fidelity, experiential commensurability, and empirical credibility. It suggests that which discourses are available to articulate injustice and its resolution, how they can be used in relations to other ways of talking about the world, and the degree to which powerholders and challengers can exert control over their meanings determine their experiential and empirical efficacy.

Dialogists argue that this process of objectivization and naturalization is partly produced and maintained through what Bakhtin termed "speech genres." Genres are "relatively stable types of utterance (with respect to content, linguistic style, and compositional structure) which in turn correspond to particular types of social activity. . . . Such genres mediate between sociopolitical and economic life on the one hand and language on the other" (Gardiner 1992, p. 81). They consist of the culturally and historically specific widely accepted sets of vocabularies, meanings, and rules of use, including social forms of interaction. Rather than conceiving a genre as a discrete system, dialogists identify it as "a kind of loose, multiform 'whole' " (Hoy 1992, p. 767). In this sense, as Ian Burkitt observes, the dialogic concept of speech genres is similar to Bourdieu's notion of generative schemes or structures of practice in that both refer to "a recursive pattern in social practices produced through socially instilled dispositions of agents that can be seen in abstract terms as a 'structure,' but which, in practice, subtly changes in each practical social context of activity" (1998, p. 165; see also Crossley 1999, p. 10).

Bakhtin and dialogists since have argued that in any period and society we can find a myriad of genres, from standard forms of casual street communication, to literary and scientific styles, and officialdom's highly formal language. All arise from and reflect back on institutionally organized

social processes. Powerholders, through institutional control and social standing, have the capacity to offer ideologically laden genres as popular common sense and as naturalized views of sociopolitical life (Bakhtin 1986, pp. 65, 79; Gardiner 1992, pp. 74, 81; Volosinov 1983, p. 116).[19]

Discourse is a conduit for hegemony, but discursive domination is prey to its own internal contradictions and thus is never complete. The multivocal nature of discourse provides an underlying instability in how it is interpreted, which can be highlighted by other discourses, traces of past usages that impinge on present meanings, or the cold realities of life that can demand an insufficient response through hegemonic discourse. Often, Bakhtin suggested, "a tense dialogic struggle takes place on the boundaries" of discourse (Bakhtin 1986, p. 143). Multivocality creates fragmentations and gaps in the production of a coherent and compelling common sense. It opens possibilities for contradictions of meaning and expression where once discourse enforced silence. Through these pressures on the solid facade of assumed meaning, challengers can see how other interpretations (and on rare occasions even other genres) might provide different and sometimes subversive ways of depicting their world, their struggles, and possible alternatives. As James Scott poignantly argues in the case of dominant discourses in what he terms the "public transcript," "We many consider the dominant discourse as a plastic idiom or dialect that is capable of carrying an enormous variety of meanings, including those that are subversive of their use as intended by the dominant. . . . For anything less than completely revolutionary ends the terrain of dominant discourse is the only plausible arena of struggle. . . . Any ruling group, in the course of justifying the principles of social inequality on which it bases its claims to power, makes itself vulnerable to a particular line of criticism" (1990, pp. 102–3).

It is this semiotic dynamic that informs a theory of how repertoires of contentious discourses are produced by powerholders and challengers in cycles of collective action. Rather than engaging in the wholesale process of pitting one discursive construction of social life and politics against a completely different alternative, challengers generally engage in a more piecemeal process of questioning certain meanings contained within a genre as the opportunity to problemize words and other representations presents itself.

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[19] This has parallels with James C. Scott's concept of the public or official transcript, the dominant and public discourses through which powerholders exercise ideological control. As he observes, "The official transcript of power relations is a sphere in which power appears naturalized because that is where elites exert their influence to produce and because it ordinarily serves the immediate interests of subordinates to avoid discrediting these appearances" (1990, p. 87; see also p. 45).

REFRAMING THE ANALYSIS OF CONTENTIOUS DISCOURSE

As outlined above, dialogism offers an alternative conception of discourse to that embedded in current work on framing. Rather than assuming communication as the sending and receiving of messages whose meanings are evident and unproblematic, it offers a model of discourse as a dynamic, conflict-ridden cultural terrain. Instead of initiating the analysis on a discrete series of frames (or a master frame), we should focus on how meanings within genres become open to reinterpretation and appropriation during conflict as collective actors use genres in combination to depict their understandings of justice, order, and equity. Many cultural and semiotic theorists argue that people cannot freely pick and choose such combinations and suggest there is a larger imposed structure that bounds this cultural action. They have conceptualized this structure in a variety of ways, but among the most widely used concepts is that of the discursive field (derived in part from the work of Pierre Bourdieu).[20] Such fields contain the genres that can be seen as contextually related when groups construct diagnoses, prognoses, and calls to action, and are partly structured in ongoing processes of hegemony (Crossley 1999, pp. 13–15; Gardiner 1992, pp. 74, 81). They are grounded products of ongoing social action (in this case contention). As Lyn Spillman argues, fields are a dynamic terrain in which meaning contests occur:

> Discursive fields do not simply determine meanings and values; rather, they form the limits within which cultural action occurs, and the tools for that cultural action. A discursive field forms the basis of all sorts of creative cultural work: it consists of the categories which make things mean, and not the meanings themselves. Within the discursive field, the particular meanings and values which emerge . . . exist in historically specific repertoires that we create and recreate: in this sense culture is contingent and creative. . . . But discursive fields are limits, as well as tools, because they are among the presuppositions which grant success or failure to mundane meaning-making. (Spillman 1995, pp. 140–41)

The construction of fields thus involves mutually recognized (though not always mutually accepted) cultural assumptions as to how and when a genre can be applied to a social situation, the extent to which it can relate to other genres, institutional rules for its use (especially in relation to other genres), and the relations between the actors themselves (particularly in terms of recognized hierarchies and power differences). As Nick

[20] Bakhtin discussed such intersections in terms of historically recurrent formations he termed chronotypes (Bakhtin 1981; Holquist 1990, pp. 108–15). However, Bakhtin's development of this concept for his "historical poetics" tended to focus on broad patterns of development within literary genres, and the concept remains relatively abstract and contradictory in his work.

Crossley observes, "each field presupposes certain abilities on behalf of those who engage in it and an appreciation of its rules, procedures and meaning structures" (1999, p. 14). The creation of fields thus has social, semiotic, and strategic dimensions that are all *relational* in nature: social in the sense that their use depends on some mutual appreciation of their applicability and interpretability and among actors, as well as a shared recognition of their capacity to use these genres; semiotic in that genres always achieve meaning in use with other genres; and strategic in that *within the limits* of the first two dimensions actors have reflective capacity and creative agency in meaning making (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, pp. 98–105; Burkitt 1998, p. 171).

Discursive fields are thus grounded in ongoing contention with institutional histories that define both the opportunities for and limits to the expression of injustice and its resolution through a type of fuzzy logic. As opposed to Bourdieu's use of the concept, however, I argue that the boundaries of a discursive field are never entirely fixed or clear. Because the structuring of genres has the three dimensions I noted above, how they are combined in a field, who is deemed as competent to use them, and when they are recognized as strategically appropriate is generally subject to some doubt and contention, often in modest but sometimes in central ways. Social movement analysts can provide us with many examples of these fuzzy boundaries from the "rights" discourses used in specific movement claims. For challengers seeking full inclusion in a polity, for example, rights claims often involve genres of law, citizenship, and nationhood within a widely recognized field in which these claims are raised. Yet challengers seeking full inclusion within a polity may also be structurally disadvantaged in many other ways, also involving contests over rights that do not readily fit into the generally recognized rules, practices, and meanings structures of a field that concerns political rights. The rights discourses involving access to employment and occupations, a "living wage," the practice of sexual preferences, or medical treatment can all raise issues of where the discursive field concerning rights claims begins and ends, as well as who is authorized and competent to define these boundaries.

The concept of a discursive field has some affinity with that of the master frame, since both provide for the identification of enduring discourses of contention within particular struggles, societies, and historical periods, but it also differs in a couple of critical respects. First, in their admittedly brief theoretical overview of master frames, Snow and Benford depict master frames as paradigmatic and generic systems of meaning: "master frames can be construed as functioning in a manner analogous to linguistic codes in that they provide a grammar that punctuates and syntactically connects happenings in the world . . . they provide the interpretive me-

dium through which collective actors associated with different movements within a cycle assign blame for the problem they are attempting to ameliorate" (1992, pp. 138–39). Their prime exemplar is the civil rights master frame initially developed by African-Americans in their struggles for equality in the 1950s and 1960s. In this definition, however, they elide the important distinction between signifiers—the words, phrases, and other vehicles of meaning—and the interpretations actors can plausibly make of them. Missing the multivocal nature of discourse, they pay insufficient attention to the ways that actors over time within a movement or actors from different movements can create distinctive meanings from the same words and phrases, meanings that might indeed stand in some tension to one another. Even though discourses can endure, dialogism pointedly reminds us that meanings can be altered significantly over time and between actors and situations. Second, the concept of the master frame is not specifically a *relational* understanding of meaning production as detailed by the concepts of genres and discursive fields, particularly in the social and semiotic senses discussed above. Contentious discourses are structured not so much by independent grammars of meaning, issue cultures, or some system of beliefs exterior to conflict; rather, they are determined by the ways challengers can combine genres, in particular, social struggles and the discursive fields often dominated by powerholders, in which this strategic action occurs.

The dialogic perspective also suggests an alternative metaphor for the depiction of collective action discourse. As opposed to a frame, we might more accurately conceive of movement- or action-specific discursive *repertoires,* akin to Tilly's notion of the collective action repertoire (Steinberg 1995a, 1998; Tilly 1995a, 1995b).[21] Tilly argues that "Repertoires are learned cultural creations, but they do not descend from abstract philosophy or take shape as a result of political propaganda; they emerge in struggle" (1995b, p. 42). In this account, repertoires are *relational* products of contention between challengers and powerholders, which limits both the strategic choice of performances as well as the conceptual mapping of possibilities for action. Moreover, "While contenders are constantly innovating . . . they generally innovate at the perimeter of the existing repertoire rather than breaking entirely with old ways. Most innovations fail and disappear; only a rare few fashion long-term changes in a form of

[21] Mooney and Hunt (1996) have recently suggested a similar modification of framing theory. As they note, "A repertoire of interpretations suggests that movement participants (re)interpret and (re)construct systems of meaning already present in their life worlds" (1996, p. 179). However, they argue that social movement participants are drawing from "several persistent master frames to (re)construct their ideological claims" (1996, p. 179), whereas I find the concept of the master frame to be more problematic.

contention. Only very rarely does one whole repertoire give way to another" (1995b, p. 44).

Akin to Tilly's notion, we can see that a central part of the development of discursive repertoires is done interactionally with opponents and targets through a process of conflict. Within the discursive field defined both by the conflict and its institutional histories, actors draw on those genres through which they saliently and compellingly can depict a shared understanding of injustice, identity, righteousness for action, and a vision of a preferred future. How challengers combine genres to create a repertoire is thus an outcome of past conflict, their strategic deliberations, and how genres within a field limit their possibilities.

This interactive emphasis on repertoire creation suggests a shift in our understanding of how actors produce oppositional culture. As opposed to pitting two distinct frames—or a subculture and a dominant culture— against one another, dialogic analysis focuses more attention on the ways in which challengers seek to delegitimate hegemonic genres within a field while appropriating pieces to inflect it with their own subversive meanings (Steinberg 1998).[22] As I noted above, the multivocal nature of discourse provides the means for challengers to find gaps, contradictions, and silences in this taken-for-grantedness of hegemonic genres. By exposing these, challengers can inject alternative meanings to articulate their sense of injustice and moral authority for collective action (Barker 1997, p. 22; Carroll and Ratner 1994, p. 6). This process is piecemeal— a kind of war of position keyed to struggle—and often initially provisional, since challengers do not have the institutional bases or social standing to legitimize their oppositional meanings (Hunt 1990, p. 314).[23] Innova-

[22] In this conception, I also diverge from James Scott's concept of the "hidden transcript," which according to his theory of infrapolitics is where we find the counterideology of subordinates. Scott certainly acknowledges that "the frontier between the public and the hidden transcripts is a zone of constant struggle between dominant and subordinate—not a solid wall" (1990, p. 14). Yet he also maintains that "ideological resistance can grow best when it is shielded from direct surveillance" (p. xii), and that ideological resistance is best nurtured in sequestered sites. As opposed to Scott, it seems to me that a dialogic theory places more emphasis on the public sites and discourses of ideological struggles. The critical moments of delegitimation and appropriation are in the end public, for that is when the struggle is fully engaged. Perhaps it would be fair to argue that initial processes of appropriation go on behind the backs of powerholders through public communication but in perhaps furtive and shrouded ways that have some parallels to Scott's concept of the hidden transcript. As Scott himself suggests, "what permits subordinate groups to undercut the authorized cultural norms is the fact that cultural expression by virtue of its polyvalent symbolism and metaphor lends itself to disguise" (p. 158).

[23] As Masson emphasizes, "Discourses are not omnipotent nor agentless. Rather, they draw their authority and social efficacy from the repeated utterance or performance of their elements by people speaking from particular socio-enunciative positions or institutions inscribed within a field of power relations" (1996, p. 76).

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tion, as Tilly suggests in the case of collective action repertoires, often comes at the margins. Moreover, such innovation develops both because of the contours and contents of the discursive field in which the struggles occur and the strategic aims of challengers and their targeted audiences.

As challengers develop discursive repertoires through this process, they also peer into the actions and histories of other challenging groups and their struggles to see what is available within their discursive repertoires. As Snow and Benford argue in the case of the master frame, borrowing oppositional schema from other challengers is a tried and true method of articulating a group's own injustice claims. They focus on how challengers borrow master frames to provide a movement or collective action frame for claims (such as the example of the civil rights master frame) or add arguments and language in the hopes of aligning other groups with their cause (Snow et al. 1986, 1992). However, such borrowing also can be a way of developing a discourse where a field fails to provide the words, catchphrases, language, and other symbols needed to articulate a sense of just opposition and all that it entails. Providing a cogent example in his work on the rise of the British mental health movement in the early 1970s, Nick Crossley notes that in their initial protest actions mental health patients referred to their organization as a "union" and their protest action as a "strike" because at the time this class struggle language was the most accessible to them to characterize their challenge. Further, while they first identified themselves as "mental patients" in these early actions, by the mid-1980s with the rise of the feminist antiviolence movement, they began to characterize themselves as "survivors" (Crossley 1999, pp. 6–7). In neither case were they seeking to necessarily cast their struggles in terms of these other movements, nor were they seeking alignment with other groups. Rather, facing a dearth of ways of expressing opposition within the discursive fields of psychiatry and law, they appropriated familiar terms from other movements to develop their own repertoires. As he astutely argues, challengers have a self-reflexive understanding through which they find that "their movement and struggle is, for them, akin to other specific struggles which they are aware of and belongs to a more generic and general typification of 'movements' and 'struggles.' . . . This establishes a possibility for the trafficking and transference of repertoires" (1999, p. 7). Dialogically, these typifications allow challengers to borrow discourse from other fields to be able to articulate identities, grievances, and goals where there are gaps and silence in the discursive field in which they are fighting their own struggle.

Throughout this process of repertoire development, we can expect that discursive and collective-action repertoires are roughly keyed to one another and can be mutually stabilizing, though if they diverge, the cogency of one or the other can be held up for scrutiny. Moreover, from the multidi-

mensional perspective described above, we should expect that there is some congruity and reinforcement of networks of actors and discursive repertoires within a cycle of contention. Strong ties between groups or activists create the social relations that can foster the shared production of meanings within a particular repertoire and field, while weak ties are more likely to allow for divergent production of meanings.[24]

Developing discursive repertoires obviously has a strategic dimension. However, in contrast to frame theory, a dialogic analysis suggests a way of squaring both its constructionist and instrumental aspects. First, while challengers consciously seek to appropriate and transform hegemonic genres, they are always partly captive to the truths these genres construct. Their version of the truth, after all, is in part predicated on the veracity of that which they appropriate, and social cognition is structured within discourse. Challengers and powerholders thus never stand completely outside the meanings imposed by dominant genres and fields, and framing is never simply a strategic process. Second, as an intersubjective process of meaning production for both the challenging group and for potential sympathizers, discursive repertoires must establish a requisite moral integrity. Challengers cannot simply readily and instrumentally manipulate discourses for their own cynical ends, for this undermines the foundations of mutual understandings that explain the justice of their claims and actions to themselves and others.[25]

Finally, this alternative perspective offers an argument against viewing collective action discourse as a resource. If challengers generally remain partly captive within hegemonic genres, then it is problematic to characterize that which is partly bounding and constraining as a manipulable resource.[26] As I have already argued, viewing discourse as a resource and as a mediator of social reality rests on contradictory epistemological as-

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[24] In their neo-Gramscian analysis of seven social movements in Greater Vancouver, Carroll and Ratner (1996) establish that such strong ties facilitated the shared meanings for a widely used "political economy" master frame.

[25] I discuss additional aspects of movement scope and temporality in Steinberg (1998). Rather than a master frame losing its potency for a movement, as Snow and Benford (1992) theorize, we can alternatively conceive of a growing dispersal of meaning over time. As group networks and numbers multiply, situated meanings for signifiers, vocabularies, and so on in a repertoire might as well. Cracks in assumed commonalties of meaning can then become increasingly exposed. This might be particularly true in terms of discursive constructions of "we" in identity movements, as noted by Joshua Gamson (1995, p. 397).

[26] As Diane Herndl observes in the case of feminist dialogics, the dilemma of critique is that challengers are never situated wholly outside of the dominant discourse. A feminist critique in the dialogic sense means a positioning that is partly "not-masculine" rather than something that can be unequivocally characterized as feminism (1991, pp. 16–17).

sumptions. Additionally, we can now see that discourse can never be exclusively controlled nor even presumed to have a stable value or utility, as do material resources. Indeed, this is precisely why hegemonic discourse can never be secure, nor why discursive repertoires are in and of themselves likely to be the fulcrums of success or failure. As Peter Hitchcock poignantly observes, "Strategies of language use, conscious or otherwise, are not in themselves the means to transform society," though they can play an important mediating role in facilitating social change (1994, p. 8).

Having outlined both a dialogic theory of discourse and its application to cultural processes in collective action, I now briefly illustrate the perspective through a look at the discursive repertoires of the cotton spinners of southeastern Lancashire in the later 1820s and early 1830s. I collected texts for analysis from all of the Manchester and Stockport commercial newspapers that covered the event (these being the principal cities in the strike region with presses), all newspapers published by the cotton spinners and their allied union associations for the period, tracts written by popular political economists specifically targeted at factory workers, and pamphlets, broadsides, placards, and summaries of public speeches concerning these conflicts available from archival sources.[27] All texts were in some way circulated in the public sphere, that is, none were for private union, employer, or state communication. The vast majority of the texts were directed toward striking spinners themselves or their working-class compatriots (many of whom were other factory workers idled by the strike). A few texts, such as the series of 16 weekly pamphlets produced by the Manchester spinners during their prolonged strike in 1828, also spoke to the general public to win support and responded to factory owners' assertions as well. However, as I have argued above, dialogic analysis suggests caution in focusing solely on the strategic targets of addresses: actors' intentions do not preclude them from communicating with others whom they do not target, and in ways they do not envision.

From this collection, I extracted those texts that provided some justification—moral, social, or economic—for the stance taken by each of the principals. Many texts from commercial newspapers provided brief accounts focusing on material demands of each side, issues of pounds and pence, or the specific actions taken in mobilization for or during strike

[27] As Roberto Fransozi (in press) astutely argues, all historical research based on this type of textual analysis suffers from sampling and validity biases. I can make no claims that this collection of texts is properly representative of all publicly circulated texts for these conflicts. However, all sources report on public events or are public commentary. I refer all readers interested in how dialogic analysis is used for complete records of discursive conflict to Barker (1997) and Collins (1999). Both papers analyze dialogic processes of conflicts based on transcriptions of contentious meetings.

actions, without provided spinners' or factory owners' justifications of claims or positions. In the case of the factory owners in particular, I have had to rely more heavily on more general public speeches and tracts produced by allied newspaper editorialists and political economists who directed their work at the spinners during this period. While the factory owners had confederations to oppose spinners' demands, particularly in Ashton where, as I detail below, 52 firms signed a pact binding themselves to a stated wage maximum, this group issued few public pronouncements and had no public spokespeople (with the possible exception of the factory owner and civic luminary Charles Hindley, whom I discuss below). However, the local commercial newspapers, widely read and accessible by all groups in the region, operated as the informal conduits of the factory owners. Whenever possible, my use of tract literature comes from reprinted selections from these papers, which frequently provided such excerpts as a didactic feature or quoted such tracts to bolster their own editorials on the general state of the cotton industry and the strikes more specifically. The spinners had both their own union papers and more visible union leaders, and both more directly and clearly annunciated the underlying logic of injustice that motivated their actions. To analyze their discursive repertoire, I have relied largely on these newspapers and supplemented them with pamphlet literature and accounts of meetings produced during strikes.

My mapping of the discursive field is thus a grounded product of the dialogues between the spinners and employers and their sympathizers that emerged over the course of contention. It focuses on recurrent discourses keyed to (though not limited by) the hegemonic genres in the discursive field. Within limited space, the analysis focuses on the structure of the discursive field, the hegemonic genres that importantly formed its boundaries, the principal discourses in repertoire developed by the spinners during contention, and the ways in which this repertoire was a relational product of discursive contention.

THE FACTORY OWNERS' AND SPINNERS' INTERPRETIVE REPERTOIRES IN A CYCLE OF PROTEST

From the middle of the 1820s through the beginning of the following decades, the cotton spinners of southeast Lancashire found themselves locked in a cycle of strike activity that pitted them against an increasingly powerful group of factory owners (Cotton 1977; Hall 1991; Kirby and Musson 1975; Sykes 1982). The spinners were the elite skilled male workers in cotton spinning factories whose workforces were disproportionately comprised of unskilled women and children (Catling 1970; Freifeld 1986; Huberman 1986; Lazonick 1979, 1981; Valverde 1988). Thus, at issue in

these contests were not only the piece rates but their collective identity as the male vanguard of the factory and their status in the communities in which they lived.

The spinners were the most highly organized of all groups of factory workers and among the most unified trades in all of Britain. By 1828, they had founded a union that formally united all local "combinations" through the United Kingdom, establishing a representative structure and a series of union papers (Catling 1970, pp. 148–49; Doherty 1829; Fowler and Wyke 1987, pp. 14–35; Turner 1962). In 1830, their secretary, John Doherty, led a campaign to establish a union of all trades throughout the country that drew considerable support from diverse trade groups in the industrial North and the Midlands (Kirby and Musson 1975).

Starting in 1825, with major strikes in Chorley and Stalybridge (two cotton towns in the hinterlands of Manchester), spinners sought to protect the deterioration of their piece rates and their control of the labor process. These strikes included highly contentious, protracted, and sometimes violent actions in Stockport in 1828 and Manchester in 1829 and culminated the cycle in a massive strike of 52 firms in the towns of Ashton-under-Lyne and Stalybridge in the winter of 1830–31 that idled some 20,000 workers (Cotton 1977, pp. 211–34; Hall 1991, pp. 101–12; Kirby and Musson 1975, pp. 31, 43, 57–58; 119–38; Tufnell 1834, pp. 18–19; Steinberg 1999, chaps. 8, 12). These strikes were generally prompted by factory owners' announced piece rate reductions, and in the case of Manchester, the underlying threat of the use of female and young male labor (British Public Record Office, Home Office Papers [hereafter HO], ser. 40, box 27, ff. 163–64, G. R. Chappell to Peel, Oct. 23, 1830; f. 342, Foster to Peel, Nov. 13, 1830; *Manchester Guardian* [hereafter *MG*], Dec. 18, 1830; *Manchester Times* [hereafter *MT*], Dec. 25, 1830, Feb. 26, 1831; *United Trades' Co-operative Journal* [hereafter *UTCJ*], Apr. 3, 1830; Doherty 1829, p. 51; Freifeld 1986, p. 334). A crisis of accumulation in the cotton industry in the latter 1820s put a severe squeeze on capitalists' profits, in what had earlier been an industry of rapid growth and fast fortunes (Baines [1835] 1966, p. 359; Howe 1984, p. 25; Sykes 1982, pp. 23, 123; British Parliamentary Papers [BPP] 1833, p. 652). Factory owners reacted to trade depressions and market gluts by organizing against increases in the price of raw cotton, opting for vertical integration of spinning and weaving, making pacts to work their mills at reduced hours, intensifying the labor process, and imposing piece-rate reductions on their workforces (Francis Place Collection of Newspaper Clippings and Pamphlets [hereafter PC], set 16, vol. 2, "Cotton," f. 73; *MG*, Dec. 11, 1830; *Stockport Advertiser* [hereafter *SA*], Jan. 29, Feb. 5, 1830; *Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle* [hereafter *WMC*], Feb. 6, 1830; *MT*, Sept. 12, 1829; BPP 1831–32, p. 430; BPP 1833, p. 685; BPP 1837–38, p. 252, 271–72; Baines 1835, p. 381; Catling 1970,

p. 54; Huberman 1986, p. 993). These reductions galvanized entire factory towns behind the spinners' efforts, for a severe depression in the late 1820s had left thousands of workers in these districts unemployed and threadbare. At stake were not just wages but cohesive communities and a quotidian working-class culture that had grown up in the shadow of the factories.

The spinners thus found themselves pitted against a fairly unified and ascendant group of capitalists who distinguished themselves by a distinctive "middle-class" culture.[28] Across a broad spectrum of ideas, social activities, and family histories, the region's mill owners fashioned a new bourgeois order. As Anthony Howe, a historian of the group, has observed, "The distinctiveness of the cotton masters, as a group, was the product not only of their particular social and economic formation, but also of their relationship to the dominant aristocracy and the nascent working class. . . . As a middle class—in terms of wealth, power, status, and culture—the cotton masters developed a separate identity and their own specific organizations" (1984, p. v).

A central facet of this social organization and collective identity was a hegemonic vision of the new order they saw themselves erecting. Drawing from genres of popular political economy, liberal politics, and notions of piety anchored in dissenting faiths, these master manufacturers sought to impress this vision not only on their middle-class peers and their aristocratic associates but on the mass of working people in the region as well.[29] As used in moral, political, and economic analyses and arguments by the manufacturers and their allies, such genres overlapped within the discursive field in which they attempted hegemony, not only in the manufacturing sector, but in political and social life as a whole. Importantly, this field was not a seamless, prescriptive set of strictures of what could be enunciated or argued within the ranks of elites and pundits. There were certainly contrarians who used theological discourses who argued against the principles articulated by political economists, for example (Horne 1990). However, the field exerted a strong influence on how genres could be conceived as linked in making claims and moral arguments both among powerholders and challengers.

By the 1820s, a loose set of discourses was being fashioned into a hegemonic repertoire. This became algorithmic for social, economic, and political analysis in the regions' commercial (middle-class) newspapers, including the *Manchester Guardian, Manchester Mercury, Manchester Times,*

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[28] This culture was not simply uniform. As John Seed (1982, 1986), R. J. Morris (1990), Theodore Koditschek (1990), and others have noted, there were divisive squabbles among merchant and industrial groups, particularly concerning religion.

[29] I pursue this line of analysis in detail in Steinberg (1999), chaps. 9 and 10.

and *Stockport Advertiser* and the more highbrow publications of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester, which had an important coterie of manufacturers and financiers.[30] Particularly by this period, capitalists within this industrial heartland had succeeded to a remarkable degree in setting the boundaries of the discursive field within which contention occurred. Reflecting on the course of class conflict, the Manchester Trades' Committee (a union group) observed in 1832 that "The exhortations of employers, have, for the last twenty years, kept up a perpetual warfare between themselves and the operatives" (*Union Pilot and Cooperative Intelligencer* [hereafter *UPCI*], March 10, 1832). Having been immersed in these battles, committee members were acutely aware of the master manufacturers' well-developed discursive repertoire in this "perpetual warfare." One of the dominant facets of the capitalists' repertoire for the spinners who battled them was construction of the economy and labor relations through the genre of popular political economy.

Popular political economists portrayed the economy as a great fiscal system subject to its own natural laws, with each class having an appropriate place (Berg 1980; Claeys 1985, 1987; Goldstrom 1985). As self-proclaimed disciples of Smith, they laid the foundations for this theoretical edifice in a labor theory of value. One of their more prolific pamphleteers, Charles Knight, in a tract devoted to the follies of unions written on the heels of the great strike in Ashton and Stalybridge, readily acknowledged that "All property is the result of labor" (1831, p. 7). Yet in the same breath, he quickly noted that "the accumulation of property is that which makes arich [*sic*] community superior in all accommodations of life to the poor" (1831, p. 7). Other such writers effusively noted the virtues of capital in this process of creating a society of benevolence and comfort. According to Thomas Hopkins, a popularizer who gave a series of public lectures in Manchester during the series of spinners' strikes, the fuel of the system was capital, "that portion of wealth which is used for the purpose of producing new wealth" (*MG*, Oct. 3, 1829). Capitalists and workers existed in a mutually symbiotic relationship through the use of capital in the great circuit of consumption and production it animated:

> A profit was paid to the owner of capital, on account of the productive power it possessed; and . . . the use of the capital increased the produce of the labourer to a greater extent than the amount of profit taken by the capi-

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[30] As Fetter (1965) observed, three of the four prominent national reviews (the contemporary equivalent to national magazines)—the *Edinburgh Review, Quarterly Review,* and *Westminster Review*—were also clearly espousers of some version of political economy, though the Tory *Quarterly Review* parted company with the other three on particular issues. These reviews were critical in establishing the discursive field for political debate.

talist for the labourer, and . . . the latter was consequently always benefited by the use of capital, although he had to pay the profit of it. . . . In a state of society where the whole of the capital was owned by a separate class, that class had to set the labourers to work with it, and . . . the rates of wages and profits were determined by the laws of nature, independent of the wills or wishes of either party. (*MG,* Oct. 3, 1829)

One of these laws, of course, was that the capitalist must obtain a certain return on his property. For both mill owners and political economists, the necessity and virtue of profits above all else was self-evidently given. Such was the position of Ashton mill owner Charles Hindley, a stalwart free trader, self-described champion of the laboring classes, and future member of parliament (M.P.) for the town. At a meeting of mill owners in Manchester in January 1830, called to combat the rising price of raw cotton, he employed this logic to flatly state their limited recourse: "The difference in price must come out of the pockets of the workmen. He lamented that result, but it was inevitable. . . . All capital was invested for the sake of profit, and if it did not yield that, the spinners must either stop their mills or lower their rate of wages" (*MT,* Jan. 30, 1830). In a tract written in the wake of the Ashton spinners' strike, Hopkins reiterated the importance of profits to this system in a section that was part reminder and part rebuke: "Let the journeymen weavers and spinners in any district consider what would be their situation if the capital which is now employed in setting them to work, were to be entirely withdrawn, and then they will have some conception of the important service that profit renders them in preventing such withdrawal" (1831, p. 8).

On the flip side of the equation, a cardinal assumption of manufacturers and political economists was that labor was no more nor less a commodity whose price was governed by these natural laws. As correspondent "H. H." observed in his letter to the *Guardian,* commenting on a recent address by the general secretary of the spinners' union, "labour is just as tangible and marketable as any other commodity, and will, in the same way, find its real value and level" (*MG,* Dec. 19, 1929). As we shall see in the analysis of the spinners' discursive repertoire, the multivocal nature of this and other terms in the discourse created substantial potential for appropriation.

Derivative from the above law, of course, was the axiom that working-class mobilization and action to raise wages were in the long run futile and misplaced efforts, because they could not change the total amount available for the wage fund. As the *Guardian* commented during the Ashton strike, "Nothing is more certain than that turns-out never did and never can produce any permanent advance in the rate of wages. This must necessarily depend on the amount of capital applicable to the employment of labour, compared with the number of labourers wanting work" (*MG,*

Dec. 18, 1830). Whether emphasizing Malthusian dictates or focusing on the shifting dynamics of the market, the bottom line was that workers could only demand what the system would bear. As an enervated Staly-bridge master manufacturer wrote to the *Stockport Advertiser* during the Manchester spinners' strike of 1829, "A temporary turn-out can do no good, there must either be a permanent reduction in the quantity manu-factured, or prices cannot rise. Is it not, therefore, madness for the opera-tives to attempt to get what is out of every body's power to give them? Do they suppose their masters are made of money, and can give them as much as they demand? Trade is uncontrollable either by masters or men" (*SA*, Jan. 23, 1829). Within the discourse of political economy, agency over market forces was eviscerated, denying the manufacturers of culpability and the workers a rationale for collective action.

Of equal certainty was that whatever follies workers might pursue, the inviolable nature of the capitalist's property was to be maintained by force of law at all costs, not only for their benefit but for the society as a whole. It was at this point in the manufacturers' discursive repertoire that the discourse of political economy was wed to that of political liberalism. Un-der the rallying cry of free trade, factory owners and political economists constructed a vision of both polity and civil society centered on the sanc-tity of the individual (rather than the collective), negative rights, and a minimalist state. The author of *A Short Address to Workmen on Combina-tions to Raise Wages* (published not long after the end of the Ashton strike) broadly and unequivocally defined freedom, oppression, and justice in these terms: "The principles and laws of a government founded on justice . . . must ensure to the individuals who compose a nation an entire security for personal freedom, and an unfettered use of their property, labour, and industry. With all unnecessary restriction on these two essential points, tyranny commences; every interference with these objects not sanctioned by law, or when sanctioned by law not founded on the public and general good, is oppression. These principles hold universally" (*MG*, Jan. 21, 1832).

The imagined community of the nation within this liberal discourse was one of a compact of individuals in which the collective good was defined as the mutual recognition of private interests. In a companion volume entitled *The Rights of Industry,* the author reminded working people that the defense of private property was thus by natural law synonymous with the very security of society itself: "The rights which are most open to at-tack from ignorant and designing persons, are the rights of property. Upon the upholding of these rights depend your own security, your own free-dom, your own certainty of going steadily forward to the improvement of your condition. . . . Nothing can destroy our ultimate peace and prosper-

ity but a violation of the great principles of natural justice, by which property is upheld for the benefit of all (*MG,* Dec. 3, 1831).[31]

Within this nascent hegemonic genre was an unremitting vision of progress carrying forth the ideal 18th-century notion of *doux commerce* as a civilizing force in all facets of society (Hirschman 1986). This is perhaps captured no better than by Charles Hindley, the Ashton factory owner whose storied public career as both M.P. and civic advocate led him to campaign for a host of liberal causes, including (perhaps perversely) factory reform legislation (Follows 1951). Speaking at a public dinner shortly before the Ashton strike in 1830 (in which his own workers were to participate), Hindley presented a broad image of unfettered trade as *doux commerce,* a system inextricably connected to and promoting of all liberal and religious causes championed by his fellow manufacturers.

> And in the name of common sense, which refuses to return to the destitution of a barbarous and savage age—in the name of reason, which proves the restrictive system to be absurd—in the name of experience, which has found it to be impossible—in the name of morality, which deprecates falsehood, and abominates slavery and war—and, above all, in the name of religion, which teaches us that God has made of one blood all the families of the earth—in the name, I say, of common sense, reason, experience, morality, and religion, I propose unrestricted free trade . . . "Free Trade all over the World." (Hindley 1841, pp. 15–16, 24)

Hindley's speech suggests the broad ideological terrain within which struggles between capitalists and workers were fought, one in which a dominant field mapped the contours and interconnections between social, economic, and political life. As we will see below, these hegemonic genres prompted a corresponding repertoire by the spinners throughout the cycle of collective action.

Finally, all of these genres mapped an understanding of gender relations onto social and economic life and, therefore, the conflicts as well. Within popular political economy, the implicit gendering of all actors was masculine.[32] This was both because of the constructions of gender and domesticity that were hardening into a discourse of public and private spheres in this period for all classes, and because all concepts of ownership and con-

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[31] The *Manchester Guardian* similarly pronounced the imperative of protecting private property at the commencement of the Ashton strike: "But to the accumulation of capital, a peaceable state of society, and security to property, are absolutely and at all times essential. No country can prosper, no numerous body of labourers can long exist, without a full protection is given to that property which constitutes the fund for their maintenance" (*MG,* Dec. 18, 1830).

[32] Carole Pateman (1988) has traced the lineage of this embedded masculinity in her analysis of the development of the Enlightenment thought on politics and economy.

trol within legal discourse were masculine (Hall 1992; Rose 1992, 1993). Women of course were a majority of the labor force in the cotton factories, and they were active supporters of the spinners during their strikes (many of course being related in one way or another to them). Yet the masculine coding of voice, power, and agency within all of these hegemonic discourses created a space of silence for women, which was reciprocally reinforced within the social relations of the factory, home, and community (a point to which I will return).

THE SPINNERS' DISCURSIVE REPERTOIRE

As I noted in introducing this case, the spinners throughout the late 1820s and early 1830s engaged in a series of reactive actions to stave off piece-rate reductions. Much of their public claims making centered around the particulars of piece-rate variations between both regions and factories. Underlying these claims, however, were larger depictions of their labor and its value, their contributions to civil society and their collective identity within it, and the role of government in validating and protecting all of these. Given the contiguous genres available within the discursive field as partly mapped out by the manufacturers' hegemony, the spinners' repertoire varied to a certain extent with each particular campaign. Recurrent themes can be found undulating through these specific actions. From a dialogic perspective, we can see these themes emerging through a counter-hegemonic process, as the spinners developed their repertoire in interaction with and response to the hegemonic field. The field in which they developed their repertoire was significantly defined by the genres of powerholders, though it was also partly circumscribed by a vibrant campaign for Parliamentary reform that was concurrent with these strikes, which fostered a powerful political radicalism. Having overlapping sets of collective actors and clear issues of power and its discontents, and the social and semiotic relations between these campaigns, provided the potential for appropriating discourse. Thus, the spinners sought to both legitimize their claims within the discursive field of their conflicts and expose the power-laden nature of its representations through their depictions of economy, polity, and society. Their repertoire was shaped both by their own agency in interaction with their nemeses and targets and the contours of the discursive field that provided possibilities for meaning.

A principal part of this repertoire was developed through the appropriation of popular political economy. As Noel Thompson argues (1984, 1988), a nascent socialist economic discourse that emerged during the 1820s and 1830s was partly developed through a reshaping of political economy (hence the often-used label of "Smithian" socialism). However, other genres of economic discourse composed the genre assumingly available

to working-class actors such as the spinners. Indeed, a well-developed discourse of Owenite cooperative socialism was widely diffused by the late 1820s (Claeys 1987, 1989; Thompson 1984). There were several working-class periodicals available to the spinners, which emphasized Owenism, and indeed periodicals connected to the spinners such as the *United Trades' Cooperative Journal* and the *Voice of the People* contained favorable articles that discussed the principles of cooperation. However, cooperationist discourse, or indeed any other alternative economic discourse not appropriated and derived from popular political economy, was absent from the spinners' discursive repertoire, for perhaps three overlapping reasons. First, the spinners were engaged in a highly reactive campaign against wage reductions in a field dominated by a bourgeois political economy. It was perhaps as important for them to delegitimate factory owners' discursive constructions of the mill economy as it was to offer a viable alternative. Second, Owenism would be received sympathetically by other workers in the region but would have far less credibility among potential middle-class sympathizers who could exert pressure on the factory owners. Finally, one of the hallmarks of Owenism itself was that it offered a concept of production and distribution that provided an alternative to a wage-based economy. In an ironic sense, it offered the spinners only silence when it came to constructing their claims for a "just" wage.

The spinners instead seized upon the concepts of labor and property so central to political economy in constructing their repertoire. In so doing, they sought to legitimize their claims to what they perceived to be a "living wage" with the manufacturers' claims for profit. John Doherty, the secretary of the spinners' union, drew on the labor theory of value to assert the paramount sanctity of their piece-rate demands in the face of the manufacturers' intransigence during the strike of 1829: "Labour must give value to everything, and they who would reduce the price of labour were enemies of the country" (*SA*, Jan. 30, 1829). The Manchester spinners drew on the labor theory of value to disengage their claims for a just wage from the political economists' depictions of inexorable market fluctuations and reframed it as a matter of robbery. One of their weekly strike pamphlets noted,

> It is a simple principle of natural justice . . . when one part of the community are [sic] wallowing in wealth, which they can scarcely consume or find use for, every other should be at least well fed, well clothed, and comfortably lodged. No class can better deserve these things, than those who produce *all* that is employed by the whole. The value of money may fluctuate. Its amount may be augmented or contracted at the will of a few. But these circumstances should have no influence on the condition of the labourer. There should be a fixed and understood quantity of food and clothing which every labourer should require for his family; and that whenever they come short of that quantity of food and clothing, they should look upon it, as so

much taken from them, and never cease their exertions until it be restored to them again. (PC, set 16, vol. 2, "Cotton," f. 72)

The labor theory of value was also turned into a vehicle for delegitimating the manufacturers' defense of their profits. In "The Cotton Spinners' and Power-Loom Weavers' Lesser Catechism," a biting commentary penned by an Ashton factory worker a few months prior to their great strike, the profit taking of manufacturers was depicted as an act of mammon worship and robbery. In this instance, the particular trope of the catechism exemplifies another facet of this dialogic process since, as I have noted, dissenting theology was part of the hegemonic discursive field.[33]

Q. What does thou chiefly learn in these articles of belief?
A. First, I learn to believe in the power of wealth, which giveth me all that I covet and not so to the rest of the world; secondly, in the accumulation of wealth by the application of other people's industry for my own ends. (*UTCJ*, May 22, 1830)

The spinners used these appropriations and redefinitions of the labor theory of value and the concept of property to develop another facet of their repertoire, their rights claims as productive members of the polity and society. With the manufacturers having defined the defense of property as part of the public good, working people could seize upon this argument and make a parallel case for their wage claims. In part, this discursive appropriation transformed these claims from private and individual matters conducted in the market to collective and public concerns. Doherty countered the attacks of the *Manchester Guardian* and *Stockport Advertiser* on the Ashton union and its strike through such an analogy: "They have been turned away for simply doing what the masters say they are doing, namely, protecting their property. The masters attempt, by a formidable combination, to take from the men a portion of that property they were then in possession of" (*Voice of the People,* March 5, 1831).

The spinners linked these rights claims to another facet of their reper-

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[33] In the Ashton region, the factory owners' efforts for the betterment of working people focused largely on the organizing and underwriting of a number of Sunday schools (Rose 1969, pp. 12, 14–15; Hill 1902, pp. 110, 115–16). For many observers, the rationale behind this support was transparent. As Thomas Daniel, a Manchester mill owner, remarked, "I think the instructions given at those Sunday-schools are for the very purpose of making those children as humble and as obedient to the wishes of the manufacturers as possible" (BPP 1831–32, vol. XV, p. 327). By the mid-1820s, there were over 1,900 such child scholars in the Stalybridge and 4,100 in Ashton (Baines 1824, p. 556; Butterworth 1841, p. 104). By the early 1830s, from half to over three-quarters of all Ashton children were exposed to this Sunday edification, and it became almost a communal rite of maturation for working-class youth (BPP 1835, vol. XLI, pp. 80, 87, 422). The use of the trope itself can thus be seen as part of the counterhegemonic nature of the discursive repertoire.

toire, their discursive construction as productive citizens of a cherished nation. In their version of imagined community, workers were the bedrock of the citizenry, since as a banner carried during many of the Ashton strike parades proudly inveighed, "The labour of the nation is the wealth of the nation" (*Manchester Mercury* [hereafter *MM*], Dec. 21, 1830; *WMC,* Dec. 18, 1830). This parallels Doherty's nationalistic allusion to "enemies of the country" above and demonstrates the ways in which discourses concerning production could be linked to those of patriotism within the contemporary field.[34] The early 19th century was a period in which the constructions of national identity and patriotism were hotly contested, and even the image of the loyal plebeian "John Bull" was subject to spirited symbolic struggle (Colley 1992; Cunningham 1981; Taylor 1992). Asserting their status as the productive bedrock of the polity, they portrayed themselves as "true Britons," deserving of government protection from oppression.[35] The Manchester spinners even made a homological link between the functions of the state and that of the union (or "combination" in contemporary parlance), equating the purposes of governance in the two cases: "Government and Law is, or ought to be founded upon the PRINCIPLES of defending the weak and honest, against the powerful and unjust; and every well regulated community is a Combination for that purpose" (PC, set 16, vol. 2, "Cotton," f. 51). In doing so, emphases on individuality, negative rights, and minimal governance become displaced by those of collectivity, positive rights, and state activism for the communal good.

Two final pieces of the spinners' repertoire, their metaphorical and analogical incorporation of the discourse of the abolitionist movement and of radical republican politics, exemplify how the social and semiotic dimensions of possibilities within the discursive field shape the ways in which

[34] As I have argued in the case of the Spitalfields silk weavers for the same period, the discourse of citizenship was part of the discursive field that could be drawn upon to assert rights claims in production (Steinberg 1995*b*).

[35] In a similar vein, the Stockport spinners, commenting on the assistance of the nearby Hyde factory owners to their Stockport brethren by docking the wages of their workers who contributed to the Stockport strike fund, proclaimed, "Why then should they come forward, with a tyrannical impudence, never assumed by the worst despotism, and tell the free people of England, now working at Hyde, that they will fine them?" (PC, set 16, vol. 2, f. 48). During this period, such discussion of the "free people of England" was part of a contested discourse of English Constitutionalism that was central to political debates, and can be seen as contiguous in the discursive field to constructions of "freedoms" in the market (Belchem 1981, 1988; Epstein 1994). Manufacturers of the region often emphasized the need for their own town M.P.'s through such nationalist discourses as well; for they proclaimed themselves as linchpins in the construction of Britannia around the world because of the role of cotton exports in creating British global markets.

challengers can make claims. In each case, we see the complexity of the social, semiotic, and strategic relationality of discursive contention.

While England had itself abolished the slave trade in 1807, there were periodic campaigns within the country for a transatlantic abolition movement in the first decades of the 19th century. While drawing on a broad base of popular support, working-class radicals and factory reform advocates increasingly were agitated at what they perceived as the duplicity of the liberal monied ranks who ardently supported the cause of slave emancipation but generally remained cool, at best, to campaigns for working-class suffrage and factory reform legislation. Indeed, some vocal critics of factory reform in parliament were also champions of antislavery legislation (Drescher 1987, pp. 144–54; Hurwitz 1973, p. 43; Hollis 1980). As all three movements mounted petition campaigns and mass meetings in 1830–31, during the apex of the spinners' strikes, working-class radicals and union activists were quick to turn the discourse of antislavery against its liberal bourgeois advocates, among them Charles Hindley, as represented in the quote above. As David Turley observes of the discourse of abolitionism after the Napoleonic Wars, "Especially important were the growing certainties of liberal political economy and the theme of antislavery as expressing the national interest and, as an important moral component, the sense of national duty the British people owed the world and themselves" (1991, p. 18). Abolitionist discourse was thus constructed within a discursive field tied to popular political economy and the developing nationalism just noted.

With manufacturers such as Hindley and many prognosticators of political economy being vocal advocates of abolition, there was potential to appropriate a discourse of their exploiters, which highlighted issues of freedom and justice for laborers.[36] Factory workers thus often compared themselves and the slaves, and the "freedom" within abolitionist discourse was used to displace the "freedom" of the market in political economy. Ashton spinners' leader, J. J. Betts, argued that the slave had much greater freedom from want than the factory worker: "The only real difference is, that the negroes are slaves in name, while hundreds of thousands of our poor countrymen, here, are slaves in reality. There the slaves are comfortably housed, wholesomely fed, worked to the best economy of their health and strength, and I dare say sometimes overworked. Here,

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[36] As David Turley observes of the abolitionist discourse and its uses among radicals and working-class critics of the factory, "In the case of radical critics of 'factory slavery' it was also a language sometimes used *against* abolitionists, illustrating the expansive and protean character of such language" (1991, p. 184). Abolitionist discourse was also strongly tied to evangelicalism and increasingly to nationalism during the 1820s and 1830s (Hurwitz 1973, pp. 40–43).

the slaves are miserably lodged, starved, beggarded, abused, despised, ne-glected, and overworked, always, and at all times without pity, without mercy, without hope" (*UTCJ,* May 8, 1830, p. 78).

Playing on the idea of the importance of fixed capital, a worker inge-niously explained why the slaves were in a superior position. The "free" labor of the market was transformed into a system of enslavement. Here again, we also see how the discourse of citizenship is also turned against the manufacturers: "The proprietor of the slave has an interest in his wel-fare. The return required on the capital sunk in the purchase, will induce him to feed and clothe him in such a way as to get the greatest amount of profit from his labour. . . . But there is no such motive to influence the conduct of the British capitalist. Those who employ thousands of 'free-born' British artizans have no interest in their welfare beyond their labour of the day" (*UTCJ,* Apr. 3, 1830, p. 98).

In the late 1820s and early 1830s, England was rife with agitation for radical political reform, a cycle of protest that Tilly (1982, 1995*b*) depicts as the rise of the first social movement. Among working people, and espe-cially factory workers in the North, there was broad support for radical political reform of Parliament and a deep-rooted cultivation of the dis-courses through which such claims were made. Factory owners were also champions of reforming Parliament, as many of their towns lacked direct representation. More generally, they chafed at their lack of influence rela-tive to what they perceived as the rotted social and political foundations of aristocratic control, and as advocates of liberal reform, they railed against the illegitimate control of the lords. But there was often consider-able dissension within these manufacturing districts, between manufac-turers and factory workers, over the extent and pace of reform, with the former often arguing for property qualifications and the latter advocating universal manhood suffrage.

This marked political contention between factory owners and many of their workers created an opportunity to link political genres to industrial contention. Spinners' leaders, particularly in Ashton, creatively drew upon the discourse of radical republican politics to metaphorically justify their contentious (and sometimes violent) actions, a discourse that was part of the local established contention with manufacturers over the limits of parliamentary reform. The district was well known for the wide work-ing-class support of radical politics (Cotton 1977, pp. 107, 109–11, 117–21, 127, 138, 141, 143; Hall 1989, p. 437; *MM,* Nov. 9, 30, 1830; *MT,* June 20, 1829, Nov. 27, 1830, Jan. 29, 1831; Lancashire County Record Office, DDX/880/2, Bowring to Lamb, Dec. 30, 1830; HO, ser. 40, box 26, ff. 46–50, Shaw to Bouverie, Aug. 29, 1830). The Ashton spinners' strike at the end of 1830 occurred not only at a time of tremendous agitation for parliamentary reform, but also concurrently with recent well-publicized

revolts against the monarchies in Poland and, more emblematically, France. The admonitions of two spinners' leaders at a large preparatory demonstration outside of Ashton provide an exemplary case of the ways that both contentious social relations and the boundaries set by discursive fields determined the ways in which actions could be framed. At this event, the leaders, Betts and Buckley, constructed the logic of righteous contention against the "Cotton Lords" through metaphorical appropriation and analogy, as the overthrow of aristocratic and theocratic tyranny provided the logic for the overthrow of economic tyranny:

> Betts observed that Trades Unions and Political Ones were now so intimately blended together that they must be looked upon as one. He proceeded to state that we lived under the Worst, the most Rascally, Despotic, Tyrannical Government that ever existed. He told the meeting of the Glorious Victory that had been achieved in France by only 8,000 Men over Tyranny and said there were more than 80,000 men ready for a similar proceeding in England. He then sat down apparently exhausted by the Efforts he had made and was followed by a person of the name of Buckley who resides in North Street near this place. . . . He stated that every Master was a Tyrant, that they had a right to participate in whatever property any Man had, that they must down with the Cotton Lords who had no right to any such profits, that they were Omnipotent in power, that if they would be United no Force could stand against them and that they must repel Force by force; they must rouse from their Apathy and let their Despotic Tyrannical Masters know theirs was the power and that they would use it. Betts again addressed them assuring them he fully concurred in the Sentiments of the last Speaker, he told them that this and other Meetings in the Villages were only preparatory to the great Meeting which would be held shortly in Staley Bridge or Ashton. He told them to recollect their Power was Omnipotent that they must shortly use it. . . . He hoped that they would be united, that they would be determined to be Free. Let Liberty or Death be their Cry and Spreading out a small Flag with various Devices on it, told them that that was the Tricoloured Flag under which they must Act, that they must be Firm or this Opportunity would be Lost, and concluded with hoping that they would be united and All attend the meeting at Staley Bridge or Ashton as placards were to inform them, that all the Factories would Stop on that Day, and on that Day he intimated a Decisive Step would be taken. (HO, ser. 40, box 27, ff. 338–39, Nightingale to the Home Office, Nov. 8, 1830)[37]

During this turbulent time in November, the rebellions on the continent and domestic political agitation provided the spinners with analogies for

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[37] The summary of this speech is a good example of the multivocality of discourse and its varying interpretations when it reaches actors to whom it is not intentionally directed. Nightingale, the author of the letter to the Home Office, was a minor excise officer who was traveling through the area and happened on the large open-air meeting. Not being fully apprised of the circumstances, he anxiously wrote a summary of the speeches to warn government officials that workers in the district were plotting revolution.

and exemplars of success. They reasoned their contest was paralleled to these revolutions, and the 80,000 members of their general union of all trades were spiritual kin to their rebellious brothers and sisters in France. The French tricolor was to be a standard symbol of the local unionists throughout the ensuing bitter strike, and the alarm of local authorities and the regional army commanders was piqued by its ubiquity. The tyranny of the "Cotton Lords" (as manufacturers were frequently termed) must be defeated just as that of the aristocracy. The relationality of the participants in contention and the available discourses within the discursive field allowed for a fertile hybridization of the critique of power. Local contention between liberal factory owners and working-class radicals over the pace and extent of political reform was mapped onto this economic conflict, which contained parallel fissures and opposing camps.

The spinners ultimately lost this and all but a few of the strikes to defend against piece-rate reductions. In the end, factory owners could afford to outlast their feisty underlings. Their defeats are a cogent reminder that success in collective action frequently hinges on material resources and access to the legitimate forces of repression, and that these two talk louder than words in the battle to determine who has the final say.

DISCUSSION

The spinners' discursive repertoire represents several facets of the dialogic perspective. First, we have seen that it was a relational social, semiotic, and strategic product. Their choice of representations and their attempts to convey a sense of injustice were significantly structured both by who their adversaries were (and their relations with them outside of this specific contention) and the structure of the discursive field dominated by these manufacturers. Though the spinners lived in well-knit and cohesive communities known for their distinctive working-class cultures, the discursive repertoire they fashioned was not an independent product created largely within their own subcultural networks. This is most apparent in their efforts to construct concepts of economic injustice. Rather than deploying a distinct economic discourse against political economy, or employing an alternative such as cooperationism, the spinners struggled within this hegemonic genre to establish the legitimacy of their claims. Contention was thus not between predominantly two distinct discourses or frames, but rather within a discursive field largely not of their own choosing.

Second, and relatedly, the spinners' construction of injustice and its resolution was not anchored in a single underlying collective action or master frame. Instead, the spinners produced a discursive repertoire within the discursive field largely defined by their employers and the au-

thorities and pundits who supported them. This repertoire was dominated by a selective appropriation of political economy, political liberalism, nationalism, abolitionism, and other genres through which factory owners mapped out a hegemonic vision of a social order. It also drew on the critique of power available from radical republican discourse in part because of the particular conjunction of the strike with contemporaneous political agitations. The repertoire was, following Franzosi, more of a "network of messages" whose coherence was developed over a series of contentious interactions with the factory owners and their allies (particularly the commercial newspaper editors).[38] In and of themselves, there was no necessary link for the spinners between the appropriations of the discourses of abolitionism and dissenting theology, and as I have noted, in other contexts, working-class radical activists indeed were cool to middle-class proselytization for both. Rather a complex flux of social, semiotic, and strategic relations determined how spinners fashioned their repertoire over time. Moreover, as I demonstrate elsewhere (Steinberg 1999), the predominance of all of the discourses in the spinners' repertoire ebbs and flows with the course of contention and related events in the political environment.

Third, the spinners' case demonstrates the multivocal nature of discourse and the ways in which the development of a repertoire is significantly an exercise in counterhegemony. The processes of appropriation through metaphor and analogy in which the spinners engaged highlight ways in which challengers, faced with a discursive field significantly not of their own choosing, sought to subvert powerholders' discursive dominance by exposing the interest-laden nature of their words. "Property," "rights," "freedom," "slave," and other key signifiers passed back and forth between the mouths of workers and employers, and in transformative processes of meaning.

Finally, the case of the spinners illuminates why it is problematic to draw analogies between discourse and material resources. Throughout their struggles, the spinners had no claims to exclusivity over the words they used to express injustice, nor did they exercise substantive control over them. Indeed, discursive conflict was dialectical, for in the process of making claims, the spinners also reinscribed themselves as partly captive to the truths of their opponents. In appropriating the discourse of political economy, for example, the spinners valorized their status as producers but did so by accepting the broad contours of political economy that legitimized a status for capitalists in the production process and the

[38] In Steinberg (1999), I demonstrate more extensively how this repertoire shifted over the course of these successive contests.

polity. The words they used were also prey to reappropriation by factory owners and hostile commentators, who could and did turn them back around against their working-class antagonists. The appropriation and belittling of a discourse of Christian piety also served to mark the spinners as suspicious atheistic radicals in the eyes of middle-class observers who might otherwise be sympathetic to their cause. Moreover, the use of the discourse of radical politics as an analogy for their contention was often misconstrued by local and national authorities as marking the spinners and their advocates as harbingers of political revolution (Steinberg 1999, chap. 9).

In addition, as I have noted above, some within the community who stood silently behind these words, particularly women factory workers, had their subordination *re*produced in other respects. The male spinners' interpretive repertoire reaffirmed the gendered hierarchy of the factory and community. Within its contemporary construction, the discourse of political economy structured a masculine coding of production and property. As Anna Clark (1992, 1995) notes in her analyses of working-class radical activism in the 1830s and 1840s, the vital support provided by women was often given at the expense of being subordinated through discourses that both explicitly and implicitly reinscribed their subordination. Indeed, as a variety of studies have recently shown, the explicit use of the feminine in factory agitation and labor struggle was keyed to a distinctly subordinate understanding of the role of women in the workplace and the economy (Gray 1996; Kodtischek 1997; Malone 1998; Rose 1992; Valenze 1995; Valverde 1988). For the female supporters of the spinners, therefore, the latters' struggles offered a distinctly mixed blessing.

CONCLUSION

Frame theory and its constructionist approach to contention has opened up the study of collective action to cultural analysis. In doing so, it has problemized the concept of interests and identity, broadened our understanding of mobilization, and brought the talk and back talk of contention centrally into our analyses. As I have suggested, however, despite such achievements, it only takes us part way to understanding the interactive relationships between social structures, cultural processes, and situational conjunctures. A dialogic analysis of interpretive repertoires surely does not provide us with all the answers, but I think it points the way to a more encompassing approach. In general, the spinners' case illustrates the advantages of this approach to cultural contention. The analysis of their discursive repertoire shows how such contention is keyed both to material situations and to structures of cultural meanings and codes that bound it.

Discursive repertoires are strategic, but collective actors are partly captives within the discursive fields that they seek to manipulate. Cultural codes do have a logic within which collective actors struggle, but accessing and transforming these codes is affected by structures and events beyond the noosphere of information. Only by understanding the causal interactions between social structures, situated action, and culture can we fully appreciate the way any one of this triad bounds the course of contention.

In this approach, we should analyze the duality of culture in contention, the ways in which it serves as a map for struggle, but also, as Fantasia and Hirsch (1995) have argued, as a contested terrain as well. This means, as Johnston and Klandermans (1995) suggest, that we must move beyond the analysis of social movement culture as reified codes or texts. Only when we see cultural processes as part of the action, as part of what is quintessential both in formation and at stake, can we fully appreciate the cultural dimension of collective action. To do so, as I have argued, we have to deepen our theoretical perspective on the importance of talk and back talk in contentious action. Dialogism offers a specific framework for a more dynamic analysis of collective action discourse contextually keyed to ongoing hegemonic struggle. It focuses attention on the discursive repertoires produced by challengers, how these repertoires often are fashioned through an ongoing interaction with the powerholders' genres, and the continual uncertainties and challenges that these repertoires pose for all involved.

The back talk of power's discontents often is an effort to refigure truth, redefine justice, and usurp powerholders' own moral authority by snatching their words from their mouths. "There is neither a first nor a last word," noted Bakhtin (1986, p. 166). Dialogic analysis shows how this insight informs our understanding of contention, both in terms of how the powerful use the word to create truth, and how challengers reach within the word to turn it around toward a better, if uncertain, future.

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